

Publisher's Views

We Shouldn't Allow Armenia's Diplomats To Live and Work in Destitute Conditions

By Haru Sassounian

Given the continuing economic difficulties in the homeland, the Armenian embassies and consulates around the world are finding it almost impossible to survive on the meager budgets provided to them by the Foreign Ministry.

As a result, many of Armenia's diplomatic representatives in various countries have not received for months their minuscule salaries. They have been unable to pay the rent or the operating expenses. In a few countries, local benefactors or community organizations have come to the rescue either by donating a building or by providing free office space thereby saving the embassy the on-going burden of paying the monthly rent.



Instead of concentrating on the difficult job of defending Armenia's interests in foreign lands, many of these diplomats have had to worry about where their next meal is coming from.

In some countries where there is only a small number of Armenians, it is quite understandable that they could not provide much help. However, how can we explain the financial difficulty of the Armenian Consulate in Los Angeles, home of the largest Armenian community in the world outside of Armenia?

Fortunately, the Consulate is able to pay some of its operating expenses from the fee it charges for visas. Community groups organize an annual fundraising banquet to help the Consulate. The landlord of the building where the Consulate is located has generously subsidized a portion of the rent during the past five years.

Next month, on February 20th, the community will be celebrating the Armenian Consulate's fifth anniversary. This may be an opportune time to consider doing something much more substantial than just raising a few more dollars for the Consulate. On the one hand, it is unfair and unrealistic to expect the current landlord to continue, year after year, single-handedly subsidizing the rent. On the other hand, even the portion of the rent paid by the Consulate each month is an on-going financial burden.

The time has come to provide the Consulate with its own building, this should not be a very difficult task given the large number of wealthy individuals and community organizations in Los Angeles. They could either donate a building that they currently own or provide the funds for the purchase of one. To make it tax-deductible, the donation could be made to a community organization that would be the legal owner of the consulate's building.

Regardless of how it is done, each one of our communities has the moral obligation to lessen the financial burden of Armenia's representatives stationed in our cities. We should not allow our young and dedicated diplomats to work and live under destitute and humiliating conditions. Let's not forget that while they represent Armenia in the United States, they also serve as an umbilical cord linking the local Armenian community to the homeland.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if someone could get up on February 20th, during the celebration of the Consulate's fifth anniversary, to announce a donation of a small building to the Los Angeles Consulate? This would be the best gift we could provide to Armenia as well as to ourselves!

Ankara University Establishes Armenian Chair

The Ministry of Education of Turkey made the surprising announcement last week that it plans to establish a "Chair for Armenian Language and Literature" at Ankara University.

Prof. Ali Erkan Eke, the Vice-Rector of the University said that a book by the name of Seyit Sertcelik, has been sent to the University of Petersburg to specialize in the Armenian language. He is expected to complete his studies in six months and return to Ankara to head the new Chair.

This surprising development leads one to wonder about the motivation of the Turkish government to fund the teaching of Armenian language and literature. Have the Turks all of a sudden developed an academic interest in Armenian or do they have a more sinister objective, such as the training of agents who can infiltrate Armenia under the guise of businessmen and tourists?

Let's keep a careful eye on this Chair, in terms of its teachers, students and course material. I don't know if Armenia has a similar Chair in Turkish Language and Literature. If it does not, it should!

Ex-Ministers on Trial for Murder, Embezzlement

YEREVAN - Two former prominent ministers from the administration of ex-president Levon Ter-Petrosian on Jan. 10 were again faced with the possibility of lengthy jail sentences, standing separate trials on charges of contract murder and corruption.

The former interior minister Vano Siradeghian listened to the final part of prosecutors' indictment that accused him of ordering the murder of seven individuals while in power. In another court hall in Yerevan, the former minister of education, Ashot Bleyan, went on trial for an alleged abuse of power and embezzlement of public funds.

Siradeghian, who was one of Ter-Petrosian's closest associates, was last year charged with a string of grave crimes, including the killings of a local government chief, the head of Armenia's railway network and two police officers during the period between 1992 and 1995. He is also accused of accepting a \$40,000 bribe while in office. The ex-minister formally pleaded not guilty to all of the charges after the indictment was read by the prosecutor. Siradeghian and his former ruling Armenian Pan-National Movement (HHSh) have repeatedly condemned the criminal proceedings as politically motivated.

Law-enforcement agencies allege that some of the crimes in question were committed by a death squad set up by Siradeghian in the early 1990s. A group of nine men led by Armen Ter-Sahakian, a former police officer, is alleged to have made up an interior ministry "gang" and have been standing a separate trial.

Also tried with Siradeghian are 11 other defendants. Among them is his former deputy and commander of Armenian interior troops, Vahan Harutiunian. Harutiunian effectively admitted that he was responsible for the murder of two police officers in 1995 after they had allegedly failed to carry out Siradeghian's order to kill a Moscow-based Armenian businessman.

"There were people shot dead, and only on that count am I partially guilty. Apparently, it was possible to somehow prevent that," he told the court. Defendant Sahak Balian, who is said to have personally killed the two policemen, said he had "only executed orders," while most of the other defendants pleaded not guilty.

The reading of the indictment left the court entering the next stage of what is likely to be a lengthy trial: the questioning of the defendants, witnesses and the "victims" of Siradeghian's alleged offenses. The judge hearing the case, Razmik Tovmasian, said earlier that at least 230 individuals are due to be questioned.

The court proceedings that got underway last September have been slowed down by a frequent change of Siradeghian's defense counsels. The prosecution and some defendants have accused him of obstructing the trial. But his lawyers say that he has acted in accordance with the law.

Meanwhile, the former education minister Bleyan demanded his release from jail for the duration of his trial which opened on Jan. 10.

Bleyan is the chairman of the small Nor Ughi (New Path) party, the only Armenian group advocating Nagorno-Karabagh's return under Azerbaijani control. The party claims that the charges leveled against its leader are trumped-up.

Kocharian Appoints Three Ambassadors

YEREVAN - Armenian President Robert Kocharian appointed three new diplomatic representatives for service abroad.

Armenian Ambassador to France Edward Nalbandian has been appointed to act also as the Armenian Ambassador to Israel (residing in Paris).

Similarly, the Ambassador to Argentina Ara Ayvazian was appointed as the Ambassador to Uruguay, and the Ambassador to Turkmenistan Aram Grigorian was appointed as the Ambassador to Tajikistan.

Letters to The Editor

Dear Sir:

My name is Stavros Stavridis of the Greek Australian archive at RMIT University in Melbourne, Australia. I have specialized in Modern Greek History with my main emphasis on Asia Minor 1919-23 and also have an interest in the Armenian genocide.

Friends of mine in the Pacific North West in Seattle, WA sent me an email of an article which you published on 23 December 1999 regarding a Turkish man who paid compensation for the Armenian genocide.

When I started reading your article I got really excited about the whole matter. In fact I thought that your article was so important that I immediately contacted one of the Greek radio stations 3AB (Radio Ethnos) here in Melbourne to arrange an interview. The current affairs presenter was impressed with your article.

I am wondering whether you can provide us with additional information about this matter because I think it has major relevance for Greeks whose origins are from Asia Minor.

Now that Turkey has been accepted as a candidate for eventual European Union membership, they will have to address the ghosts of the past in recognition of the Armenian genocide.

I am [also] interested in finding out about the petition that was delivered to the Turkish Parliament.

Stavros Stavridis

AUA Seeks Applicants for New Dr. Mihran S. Agbalian Professorship

OAKLAND, CA - The American University of Armenia (AUA) is now accepting applications for the Mihran S. Agbalian Professorship, the AUA announced last week.

Dr. Agbalian is President Emeritus of the University and its founding President. In selecting the recipient of the Agbalian Professorship, preference will be given to individuals who are beginning their academic career, the AUA said.

Candidates should be interested in spending one to three years at AUA to participate in the teaching and research programs as well as the projects of the AUA Centers.

Applicants must possess excellent academic credentials in any one of the major disciplines of the AUA. Recruitment for the Professorship will be widely publicized and will be competitive. Recipients of the Agbalian Professorship may be appointed for a term of up to three years. Interested applicants should send their curriculum vitae to Marie Westbrook-Takhounts, Coordinator of

Faculty Recruitment, American University of Armenia Corporation, 300 Lakeside Dr. 4th Floor, Oakland, CA 94612.

The American University of Armenia (AUA) was founded in 1991 as a graduate university based on the American model of higher education. It is formally affiliated with the University of California.

To date, the University has grown to provide six Masters' level programs in Industrial Engineering and Systems Management, Business Administration, Political Science, Public Health, Teaching of English as a Foreign Language, and International and Comparative Law.

The mission of the AUA is to provide teaching, research, and service programs that prepare students to address the needs of Armenia and the surrounding region for sustainable development, in a setting that values and develops academic excellence, free inquiry, scholarship, leadership, and service to society. Further information is available on the AUA website at www.aua.am.

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