

FAX TO: Dr. Mihran Agbabian
FROM: Robert Tembeckjian, in Yerevan -- 011-7-8852-151048 (fax)
CC: Dr. Michael Kouchakdjian
DATE: April 16, 1994
SUBJ: Books for AUA; Reply to Editorial in Armenian Reporter

Dear Mihran:

Greetings from AUA, our home away from home. I am writing for two reasons: to show you a copy of a letter I am sending to The Armenian Reporter, in response to its editorial that AUA should be closed, and to inform you about a \$1,200 book allowance I have from the Fulbright Board.

Book Allowance: The Fulbright Office informed me that, in addition to the books I brought with me and donated to the AUA library, I have \$1,200 additional which I can spend, which should be done before my return to the US in early June. There is no limitation on the type of books, *ie* they need not related to my particular courses. Indeed, there is flexibility on the use of funds; they would allow a computer or fax machines, for example, or other educational supplies. I would be pleased to have you and/or Michael Kouchakdjian decide how to spend the money. (I've already advised Michael.) I suggest that the books be bought (and shipment arranged) by AUA in California, and the bill sent to me, so I can submit it to Fulbright. (Their policy is to reimburse, not forward the money in advance.) As with everything else in this world, time is of the essence. (Last year, by the way, there was no book money available in the Fulbright Program. Obviously, they have some unspent grant money this fiscal year.)

Letter to the Editor: You may have seen the enclosed (and incredibly narrow-minded) editorial in the Armenian Reporter. I got it yesterday, and wrote the following reply, a copy of which I'm sending to you. I think you will appreciate my references to both the spirits of cooperation and friendly competition between AUA and YSU! See you in May!

Sincerely, **Bob Tembeckjian**

To The Editor:

I was most disappointed in your editorial of April 9, which urged (1) that the American University of Armenia (AUA) be closed, in view of the severe economic condition of Armenia, and (2) that diasporan funds going to AUA be sent instead to Yerevan State University (YSU). As a general principle, it grieves me that an important voice like the Reporter would argue that Armenia's educational diversity should be limited. *Especially* in difficult times such as these, Armenians in and out of the Motherland need to show their confidence in Armenia's future by expanding opportunities, not closing up shop with a defeatist attitude that says, in effect, Armenia is worth only one institute of higher education.

I am writing this letter from Yerevan, where I am teaching at both universities, on a Fulbright Scholar Grant from the US Government. Without question, Armenia needs both YSU and AUA.

Support of one does not mean disrespect for the other. Both universities serve valuable and, in many respects, different services to the Armenian Republic.

In some areas, the two institutions cooperate magnificently. For example, I and my Fulbright colleague Charles Garoyan are based at different universities (Charles is at YSU, I am at AUA), but we are each giving lectures at the other. US Ambassador Harry Gilmore has scheduled meaningful visits to both universities through the Fulbright program. Several undergraduate students at YSU are attending my courses at AUA, getting a head start on their future studies and demonstrating that they can't get enough education. *More than anything, that spirit of achievement is what will save the Armenian Republic, and it must be encouraged, not cut off.*

In other ways, the two institutes are engaged in lively and productive competition. AUA, for example, was just awarded a major grant from the US Agency for International Development, to establish a public policy institute for economic affairs. Meanwhile, YSU and US representatives are discussing support for a public policy institute with a more social/cultural orientation. Since one of the parameters of US foreign aid is that US financial support not be concentrated in one Armenian organization -- indeed, spreading the eggs in many baskets is the way of most Western governments assisting Armenia -- the existence of both AUA and YSU, and the competitive spirit between them, is critically important. In fact, with business activity in many sectors of the Armenian economy controlled by virtual monopolies, AUA and YSU may be the only major institutions in the country effectively engaged in a productive, healthy, spirited competition -- and both are benefiting from it. (Imagine Harvard without Yale, or Democrats without Republicans!)

Moreover, there are certain important activities underway at AUA that are just not happening anywhere else in Armenia, and that would not necessarily continue elsewhere if AUA were closed. For example:

- The Center for Business Research & Development has issued business and economic assessments that are superior to anything available from the various international organizations operating in Armenia.
- A new program desperately needed in medically disadvantaged Armenia, concentrating on preventive health care, is scheduled for the fall and is attracting doctors, nurses and others already in the health field.
- All students must demonstrate proficiency in accredited Western exams (such as GRE or GMAT), to show that they can compete with their foreign contemporaries -- a skill that is essential if Armenia is to have meaningful interaction with the outside world.
- An international visiting faculty has been assembled, with professors of various nationalities such as American, Egyptian, Belgian and Israeli, giving AUA a professional diversity and vitality that most other organizations lack.

In part because of the stimulating environment created by these and other accomplishments, important international conferences have been held at AUA, on energy and the economy, with the active and enthusiastic participation of the Armenian government. Thus, even those government officials who were educated at YSU have seen the immense value of AUA and have encouraged its activities.

Incidentally, your fear that AUA is training people to leave Armenia, or that it is spending too much money on too few students, is grossly mistaken. First of all, the government reports that, in the last two years, more than 300,000 citizens have left Armenia, which is probably an underestimate. Even if all 210 currently enrolled AUA graduate students left, the effect would be inconsequential. However, the evidence is that AUA graduates are using their brain power to benefit Armenia. AUA graduates are working in both the national and local governments, for example. One group of last year's graduates has just organized a new, independent radio station in Yerevan. Several have pursued other small business or educational career opportunities in Armenia. As to AUA's size, surely you would not expect a new university anywhere in the world to have thousands of students in its first few years. (Even Harvard began with only a handful of students!) Indeed, given the harsh economic realities of Armenia today, it is remarkable that AUA, in less than three years, has awarded 44 two-year post-graduate degrees, has established a significant research and development capacity, has expanded from engineering studies to business, political science and health, has more than quadrupled its student population, and has attracted positive attention from the worldwide educational and economic communities, led by the University of California (which co-founded and co-sponsors AUA).

AUA, and education in Armenia, are growth industries, of the type that are essential for Armenia to survive and flourish in a diverse international environment. AUA is one of the few places in Armenia where the atmosphere is upbeat, the energy is palpable, and the future of the country is hopeful. Shutting it down, or even stunting its growth, would be an unmitigated catastrophe.

Respectfully, *Robert Tembeckjian*

