

THE SPEAKER

2000 06 19

NUMBER 4 37

2000 05 25

THE ARMENIAN LOBBY ABROAD

ROOBEN SHOOGARYAN

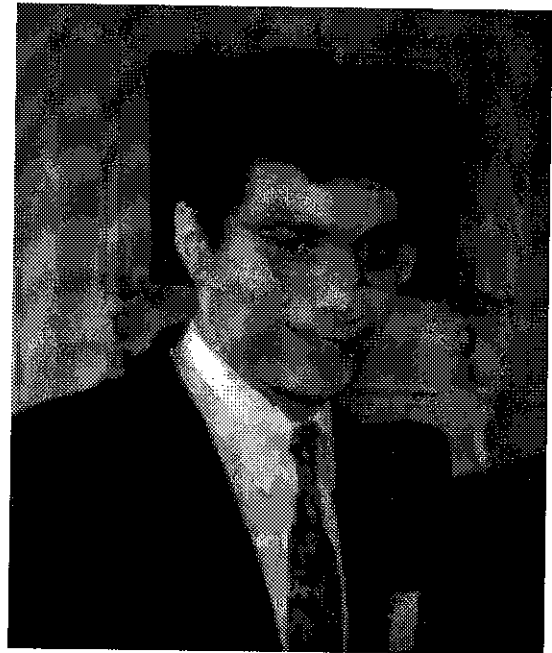
Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia

The theme is lobbying in general, but I will speak mainly about the Armenian lobby in the USA because lobbying as such was born and is currently most developed in the USA. I shall also touch on the Armenian lobby in European countries and in Russia.

The Armenian lobby developed in three phases: one phase before independence, and the last two, after it. Before independence, the main objective of the Armenian lobby was to obtain recognition of the Armenian Genocide. This had brought about quite a powerful reaction both in the USA and in European countries. Perhaps this was the process during which the Armenian lobby was shaped. Every year, the US President would make announcements on April 24; various discussions would take place in committees of both the Senate and the Congress. The Armenian lobby was primarily established in Washington, DC.

After independence, we had two phases. The Genocide remained as one of the main and most important issues, but in the second phase, the activities of the US Congress concerning Azerbaijan and Turkey were added to it. As a matter of fact, the Armenian lobby was targeted in one direction during the first two phases: it was aimed to counter either Turkey or Azerbaijan. Of course, this was done to protect the interests of Armenia; however, it was done in one direction. As a result of this, we managed to become known in the USA during those years, especially in the period from 1992 to 1995. Our success was partially determined by the joint or separate efforts of two lobbying organizations, the Armenian Assembly and the Armenian Cause Group. This was a period in which we made numerous enemies in the US Congress, R & D centers, and the authorities. Prior to 1991, the image and rating of Armenia was presented in very simple and uniform terms:

We are currently the second most powerful lobby in the USA (the first one being the Jewish lobby).



we are a nation that always faces tragedies and is a victim.

Our success in the Artsakh process in the period from 1991 to 1993, however, was reflected in our lobby. It changed the perception some had of Armenia. Others

began to think of us not only as a nation constantly facing tragedies, victimized and needing support, but also as a serious regional element. As I pointed out, we gained numerous enemies, which is the law of lobbying: enemies always come about in the first phase.

They began to respect us more -- they paid more attention to us (but mainly in the negative sense). Nevertheless, events concerning Armenia and Artsakh became increasingly important in official and unofficial Washington.

In the second phase that followed independence, we started to work with the enemies that had appeared in the earlier years. We tried to establish relations with them. Before 1998 and 1999, our organizations succeeded not only in improving the situation, but also in becoming an important factor in the USA: so important, that we

managed to enter a civilized dialogue even with the Jewish lobby organizations.

I can list numerous examples of comparison between our lobby in the USA and that of others. Traditionally, the Armenian lobby was the fourth or fifth in the USA in terms of how powerful it was. The more powerful ones were the Jewish, Greek, Polish, and sometimes even the lobbies of the Baltic States and the Ukraine. I believe that in the period that followed independence, we have gradually moved up this list and we are currently the second most powerful lobby in the USA (the first one being the Jewish lobby). Of course, the Jewish lobby is above any competition. Nevertheless, the Armenian lobby has become an important factor. It is not accidental that in 1998, a cartoon in one of the largest political magazines of the USA pictured American foreign policy as a ship with the Israeli and Armenian flags at each end. I think that it is the best compliment we could have received.

In the second phase, we started to work with some oil companies (which defended Azerbaijan and used to be our opponents) and certain Jewish organizations. We developed cooperation and coordinated our activities with them. The Armenian organizations (the Armenian Assembly of America and the Armenian Cause Group) managed to combine their efforts and help each other in achieving some success. To date, our most successful achievement has been Section 907 that the US Congress adopted in 1992. This formula prohibits aid from being given to Azerbaijan, because it blocks the path of US humanitarian aid to Armenia. At each passing year, keeping this formula became more difficult. In 1997 and 1998, it turned into an extremely difficult job. We had found a very careful formula that fully complied with the law. This was a formula that we used to coordinate the activities of the local Armenian organizations.

To date, our most successful achievement has been Section 907 that the US Congress adopted in 1992. This formula prohibits aid from being given to Azerbaijan.

Back in 1997, the administration, as well as the White House, the Congress, and many R & D centers, clearly announced that Section 907 would be removed during that year because it was against the interests of the USA. Nevertheless, we managed to keep the formula by a margin of 51 votes. Our opponents in this matter were twelve oil companies, five Jewish organizations, as well as several Turkish and Azeri lobby organizations. We managed to preserve the formula primarily because we were working in an organized manner, and there were no conflicts amongst Armenian organizations: they did a perfect job.

Of course, the Jewish lobby is the strongest in the USA, and so the question arises: how did we manage to overcome them? One should not forget that the Jewish lobby is the strongest when it is lobbying for the interests of Israel. When it is renting its lobby out or donating it to somebody else, then we have a better chance of overcoming it, because we know much better what we are struggling for, and we also know the strengths and weaknesses of our opponent better. Our second victory was perhaps the one that which got the "Silk Road" pact to fail in being adopted. Seven countries were pushing for a motion by Senator Premack, by which the "Silk Road" would be restored without making any reference to solving the problems of Armenia's blockade and the Artsakh issue. The only argument we had was that such a formula could not be adopted when the borders are closed between the countries in question. It was very difficult for us to get this point across because in this case, we had to deal with the American Senate where we have fewer friends than in the Congress – especially after Senator Dole's absence. Nevertheless, our attempts were successful. We gained a new situation in which many people understood that in order to promote American business interests, they must talk to Armenia,



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In 1993, Rooben Shoogaryan was granted the diplomatic rank of ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary. Since 1999, he is the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia.

Rooben Shoogaryan is fluent in Armenian, English, and Russian. He is married and has three children.

rather than speak to oil companies or use ethnic groups to put pressure on the Congress. Our country must be involved in the processes. The seven countries that the "Silk Road" idea involved (the Central Asian countries, Georgia, and Azerbaijan) also understood this. We are not against cooperation, as long as regional problems are solved.

All of this comes to prove that we carry out our lobby mainly by means of confronting some other countries. Naturally, this cannot go on for long. We need to search and find common interests. It is now necessary to get our opponents interested, and a foundation has already been laid out for this. Currently, we have quite good cooperation with Jewish organizations. We discuss together all the issues that concern our Diaspora, and this proves that they have accepted the notion of Armenia's weight in Washington.

There is another area of lobbying -- the positive lobby -- that we underestimate. I believe this matter has to be dealt with in the third phase, although some attempts to touch on it had been made in the first two phases. The positive lobby mainly seeks common interests with certain states and various ethnic groups to solve problems. For example, I believe that Armenia has many issues that it can solve in the USA together with the Ukraine. Having powerful Diasporas, our countries can successfully cooperate by continuing what has already been started (in particular, in the areas of atomic power safety and many business projects).

Let me give you another example of the positive lobby that is not aimed against any country (in other words, a lobby that only intends to protect the interests of Armenia). We are currently involved in two projects. One is called the Sesame Project. UNESCO is planning to install an accelerator in Armenia or elsewhere. We are collaborating with the Armenian Institute of Physics, and we are lobbying in many countries to have the accelerator brought to Armenia. This is a project that will create new jobs and help us become a regional center in terms of high technology. This is very difficult work because the accelerator was initially designated for post-conflict rehabilitation of the Arab-Israel confrontation. Considering this, we tried to present ourselves under a better light than the ten Arab countries that were involved. We proposed our project, and Armenia was one of the two countries (the other one being Jordan) that were left in the final stage of the selection process. Our success in this matter was determined by our positive lobby in various countries. I must mention that in the USA, for example, we collected the signatures of 50 congressmen and 15 senators for this purpose. We have done a lot of work with Israel, Greece, Cyprus, and other countries. Of course, it is a very difficult project and I can say with confidence that a lot of competition is to be expected. Perhaps, the project ultimately becomes a joint one between Armenia and Jordan. In any case, this process has marked a new stage in our lobby.

There is another area of lobbying -- the positive lobby -- that we underestimate.

There is a similar project involving the German government. It centers around the requirement for 20 000 software experts. Of course, this idea is mainly for India because it is quite developed in terms of computer technology. The project also covered countries of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. We reacted quite efficiently, and by means of direct negotiations with various governments (including that of Germany), we presented a note in which we suggested our formula. According to the project, 20 000 experts are to be taken to Germany to work. They will receive salaries in Germany, provided that their families remain in their home countries. We suggested that instead of paying higher salaries to these experts, they could do the same work by means of the Internet -- while remaining in their home countries. Time will show how the discussion of this matter (in which we are lobbying in a new way) goes.

Back in 1994, our lobbying efforts allowed us to sign an agreement with the USA. The agreement was unique in that none of the former Soviet Union countries had such a result. It was an agreement with the National Institute of Health (NIH); considered to be the most developed health institution in the world. To reach this agreement, we used individual lobbyists rather than organizations. It might seem quite simple at first sight. The agreement created an opportunity for the treatment of the so-called "Armenian Disease" (also known as the "Mediterranean Disease") that is a problem in both the USA and Israel. This is another example of a positive lobby that helped us have an agreement since 1994. We now have experts that go to the NIH every year and work there. I could bring a number of other examples from the science sector.

Turkey and Azerbaijan hire lobbying organizations that cost around three to five million US dollars a year. Does Armenia need this type of lobby or not? We actually tested this type of lobby in 1993 when we hired (for a very small amount of money) a company called "Jefferson Group", which was quite powerful in Washington. The Group worked for us for about seven months: they opened many doors for us, and we parted on good terms and with gratitude. The wealth that we have within Armenian organizations is quite sufficient for us to successfully lobby. Another aspect, however, is that it is sometimes necessary for American surnames to appear in newspaper articles. There are problems that cannot be solved right now, and perhaps more power is required to do it. Even if we were to try to solve them, we would have to be very careful and do it only for a limited number of projects. This is because in purely political terms, no ethnic group can substitute ours. The experience of Azerbaijan and Turkey proves this.

Starting from 1994, Turkey has carried out its lobby mainly in the Pentagon, attaching less priority to the State Department and the Congress. They have been concurrently working in American universities to create Turkish studies departments there. Numerous students and professors have been sent to the US from Turkey,

and they have managed to be somewhat successful. However, the Turkish lobby in the USA does not have any significance as compared to the Armenian one.

I would like to say a few words about the particularities of the Armenian lobby and the Armenian organizations. I mentioned the names of two organizations, but we have numerous individual lobbyists that have great opportunities. It is significant that Armenians have reached high posts and positions mostly through the Republican Party. Some examples of such individuals are: Ed Jerejian (former US ambassador to Israel, Syria, and former deputy State Secretary, currently the director of the Baker Institute), George Deukmejian (former Governor of California), and Beriz Ordyan (former speaker of the National Council of the USA and Deputy Ambassador of the USA to Korea and Vietnam). Recently, positive trends have been noticed among Armenian democrats, as well. In general, both Armenian democrats and Armenian republicans are registered in California, which is quite a good and potentially helpful phenomenon. We need to appear in the USA not only through our national character and with our national issues, but also as people with American ideas. If we do not prove that the Armenian Diaspora in the USA is an important part of the internal political life there, then we cannot expect tangible results.

As far as democrats go, I would like to mention Rooben Terzyan from Chicago. He has wonderful connections and has helped us a lot in many areas. Another person is Ani Tota, who is currently in the election campaign of Vice-President Gore.

I believe that we can become, and we are already becoming, an important factor in Washington. If we look at the Armenian embassy, for example, we can see its significance in Washington and its excellent connections with the embassy of Russia. We have so far been successful in areas where we have had clashes of interests. We must prove that other countries like the Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Bulgaria can come to the Armenian embassy, or approach Armenian organizations, and cooperate with them in terms of mutual consulting and so on. We already have precedents of this kind.

I believe that lobbying is a very delicate job, and our state must always remain at a certain distance from lobbying -- something that we have been able to do so far. However, keeping this distance does not prevent us from participating in certain activities. Perhaps, we should not be telling our organizations what they should do. Instead, we can do what we think needs to be done. I have been often asked to influence these organizations in having "nicer" or "milder" hearings of certain matters in the Congress. I always answered in the same way: "They are citizens of your country, and it is your job to talk to citizens of your country." This is the principle that we have applied. We can tell them what they can do, but we cannot tell them what they may not do. This is the law of lobbying.

I would like to briefly tell you about our activities in other countries, which have so far not been noticeable. Currently, lobbying is thought of as an American phenomenon. Nevertheless, the Armenian lobby is becoming very powerful in Russia owing to the Diaspora. Numerous steps have been taken, and the recognition of the Armenian Genocide by the Russian Duma (Parliament) and the re-commissioning of the Armenian Atomic Power Plant are clear example of the success of the Armenian lobby in Russia. I believe that the Armenian Diaspora in Russia is doing more intensive experiments related to the Artsakh issue and some economic problems. Attempts are also made in France -- a different country that has a much more negative attitude towards lobbying than any other country. We must be careful here and, perhaps, move more slowly and cautiously in France than in other countries. We cannot ignore the peculiarity of France. We can work very actively in Scandinavian countries; we have already had some success in the Swedish Parliament.

In order to have a successful lobby, we must have a concept on our foreign policy. We work mainly on the basis of either existing information or speeches and general directions given by the authorities. We will not be able to think about progress unless we have integrated concepts on the foreign policy and national security of Armenia. Currently, some attempts are being made, and I hope that we will soon have documents

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

- As far as I understand, you are raising two very important points that contradict each other. It is not a secret for anyone that, even considering the money spent by oil companies and by Turkey, it is very difficult to overcome our lobby. This is because the Armenian Diaspora in the USA votes in an organized manner, and votes are very important for any congressmen and senator. On the other hand, you pointed out another important problem that, in the political life of the USA, members of the Armenian Diaspora must have their own place just as any other citizen of the USA. Given this

background, how do you envisage the solution of these two problems?

-The only possibility that I can see is that the Diaspora is not told what to do, while they develop politicians who may occupy high posts. The two problems have to be treated concurrently; our main lobbyist fronts remain the Armenian Cause Group and the Armenian Assembly of America. They are after uniquely Armenian interests. In some cases, the Armenian Assembly of America tries to combine Armenian and American interests. However, there is another alternative: the Armenian Diaspora can be presented as an

important element of the internal political life of the USA. We already have a large number of Armenian democrats and republicans who promote Armenia's interests in their organizations in much more delicate ways. They explain to others that the interests of Armenia and those of the USA are not contradictory. In some cases, even, they coincide. They want to convince the others that if everything is explained in terms of oil pipelines that are referred to as "oil pipelines of peace", then tomorrow, they can be referred to as "oil pipelines of war". They want to prove that it is not correct to attach such a high importance to economic and oil-related issues and determine all the other issues (including those of national security) through them. In this case, we see another type of lobby that is carried out both in the Democratic, and in the Republican parties. I would like to point out that the members of the Armenian Assembly of America and the Armenian Cause Group are also members of political parties. These things have to be combined. I believe we must work in two directions: we must promote purely Armenian interests as voters, and we must present these interests in a more delicate way as ones that match American ones.

-- Section 907 allows the President of the USA to make exceptions on the basis of the national interests of the USA. This is something that Turkey constantly makes use of. In this sense, are not we overestimating the importance of Section 907?

First of all, I must mention that this formula has already been in force for eight years, and the US President has never utilized the right that you pointed out. This is a situation in which the President would have to send the amendment back to the US congress, which would have to adopt it by a two-thirds majority. The US President has not done this yet, despite the fact that this caused a worsening of the relationships with Azerbaijan (which is actively working in this direction).

As for Turkey's humanitarian corridor, there are two issues here. First of all, Turkey is an important factor and an ally for the USA, which is why the President did what you pointed out. Second, in the USA, they understand very well that Section 907 is a much more important formula for the Armenian Diaspora than the Humanitarian Corridor Act as it relates to Turkey.

-- The so-called "Armenian National Council" of the Armenian "Dashnaktakan" party and the Armenian Assembly of America compete abroad. Does the Government of Armenia agree that non-state institutions present the position of Armenia during lobbying, especially considering that these institutions are often not friendly with each other?

First of all, there are no contradictions related to issues that concern the national interests. These organizations have already been closely cooperating in many matters for around four years.

As far as the second part of your question goes, only the Armenian Ambassador or an employee of the Armenian embassy who is authorized by the Ambassador may speak on behalf of Armenia in the USA. Indeed, neither the Armenian Cause Group of the Armenian National Council, nor the Armenian Assembly has the right to speak on behalf of Armenia. They can express their opinion about internal life or foreign policy, but it will only be their opinion, which is very well understood in the USA.

- Don't you think that the lack of the concept of what it is to be Armenian may cause the Armenian lobby to fail?

As I already mentioned, we need to develop concepts both for our national security and for our foreign policy. These concepts ought to include all the issues related to the point that you raised.

- How do you see the future of the Armenian lobby, considering the activities of purely Armenian political parties (like the "Dashnaktzootyoon", "Ramkavar", etc)?

If you are speaking of political parties, you cannot forget that they do not deal with lobbying. For example, the Armenian "Dashnaktakan" party does not deal with lobby; it is the Armenian Cause Group, a branch of this party, which does so. The same thing is true for the Armenian Assembly of America, which is an apolitical organization.

As for the "Ramkavar" (Democratic) or "Hntshakyan" parties, they do not have any organizational structures that deal with lobbying issues. However, they have excellent individuals that do so. This is a unique case, in which it is necessary to get registered as a lobby organization, and parties cannot act as such organizations because of legal reasons.

-- If the Armenian lobby is so strong, why can it not influence the presidential candidates that promise (during their campaign) to help Armenians to obtain recognition of the Genocide, and once elected, they forget their promises? A good example of this is George Bush Jr. who has promised, in his electoral campaign, that he will support both Armenians and Turks.

-- It is very natural. First of all, the Armenian lobby is undoubtedly strong. However, I pointed out that these are relative points. When I was comparing us with the Jewish lobby, I said that we won because they were competing against us to protect the interests of a third country. If they were protecting the interests of their own country, they would definitely be much stronger, and we would have given in. It has all become very obvious.

As for the recognition of the Armenian Genocide by the USA, I believe that in this kind of lobby, we must remember that we do not want only the President to recognize the Genocide. This is more of a supporting factor. Of course, it would be very nice if the President of the USA recognized the Armenian Genocide, and I am sure that there will be a day when s/he will do so. This touches the National Security of the USA, and no lobby can go against these interests. If there is something that stands lower than these interests, we are likely to be successful in it.

Speaking of this issue, I must point out that we are generally used to traditional approaches. We think that we first need the president of a country to recognize the Genocide, after which we need the parliament to do the same, and so on. Of course, this looks very good, but when we raise the issue of the recognition of the Armenian Genocide, then we must work only from the legal perspective. What is the legal perspective? In 1915, large American insurance companies worked in Turkey and insured the property of the Armenians who lived in Turkey. The largest one of these organizations is currently one that has billions of dollars and is called "New York Life". We must work with these organizations. There are numerous documents held both by individuals and by organizations. We

can use these documents in the same way in which the Jews used some documents against Germans, when they started court cases related to Swiss banks in many different courts. This is the serious way of approaching the lobby.

-- How do the Turkish and Azeri lobbies collaborate?

They collaborate in the same that the embassies of Turkey and Azerbaijan collaborate: very closely. They are actually one organization. The Turkish lobby is quite serious; it has a background of 26 years dating back to the time when they started their lobby in the Pentagon and expanded to cover universities. Azerbaijan's lobby has a history of just four or five years. The Turks do most of their work for them. As opposed to the Turks, Azeris do their lobby in the State Secretariat. No one may lobby there. It is neither accepted, nor can it possibly be successful.

-- What is the impact of the unstable internal political situation of Armenia on the Armenian lobby?

A more stable internal political situation, a stronger Armenia, and more precise outgoing signals will facilitate the activities of those abroad. An unstable internal political situation in Armenia and inappropriate developments in our country will have an impact on the Armenian lobby. Lobbying can be just like diplomacy, which often precedes foreign policy and determines the latter. However, an unstable country with problems will have a negative impact on the lobby and destroy its important guiding principles.

-- Is trade-off possible between the Armenian lobby and its opponents? For example, is it possible that Section 907 be given up in exchange for more aid to Armenia?

Of course, it is possible. Such a transaction has been offered to us numerous times, but we have never accepted it. This possibility is often discussed in different

contexts, but we will exchange certain things for equivalent ones. We cannot exchange quality for quantity. We cannot lose an important factor in negotiations for something like more aid. However, if we were realistic, we could notice that Section 907 has already lost some of its important provisions (due to some "losses" of ours). Provisions have been lost because exceptions have been made for OPEC, the Exim Bank, and the TDA, which are large American quasi-governmental organizations that already operate in Azerbaijan.

-- Don't you think that it is a severe blow to our lobby that the Exim Bank has refused to provide 50 million US dollars to "General Motors" for a factory in Armenia and explained its action by the instability of the region? This was done despite this bank's readiness to provide a larger sum for the Baku-Jeyhan pipeline. Please elaborate.

First of all, "being ready" does not mean anything. They are ready, but they have not provided any funds. As for "General Motors", what happened was a result of the internal situation in Armenia, rather than a "loss" of our lobby. It was a "loss" for all of us. We do not provide any investments, so we should not blame the lobby for everything that happens. This was a result of our internal situation.

-- Did the speech on the Armenian Genocide, which was delivered to the UN by the Armenian President help or hinder the Armenian lobby?

I believe that our lobby had started to deal with this issue much sooner than our state. The President represents the state and expresses its position. However, lobbying is a more difficult mechanism that is delicate in many ways. I believe that this activity will continue regardless of what heads of state say about these issues in their speeches.

THURSDAY, 22 JUNE

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LUCY DER MANUELIAN

*Professor, Department of Art History,
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**Armenia: A Historian's Treasurehouse-
Mountains, Monuments, Manuscripts and
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Thursday, 22 June; At 6:30 PM
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AN ILLUSTRATED TALK

**Armenia: A Historian's Treasurehouse-
Mountains, Monuments, Manuscripts
and Miracles.**

BY

LUCY DER MANUELIAN

*Professor, Department of Art History,
Tufts University, USA*

Thursday, June 22, 2000 at 6:30 PM

American University of Armenia,

Small Auditorium, 5th Floor

The lecture will be given in English with simultaneous translation
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