

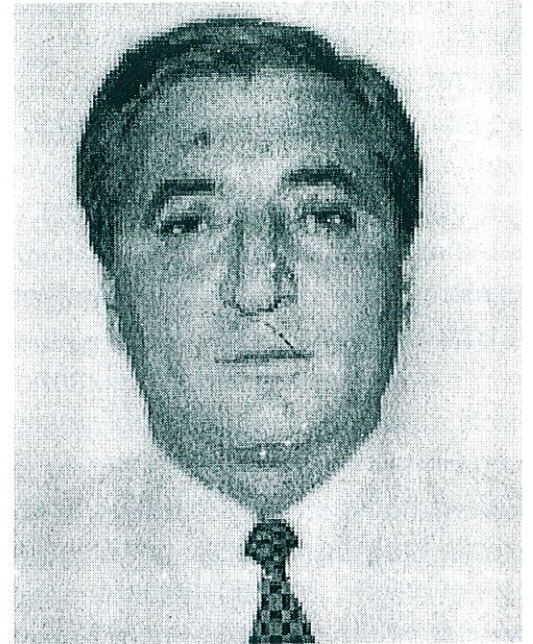
THE SPEAKER

JUNE 25, 1998

NUMBER # 18

PROSPECTS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF YEREVAN

SOUREN ABRAHAMYAN
Mayor of Yerevan



Yerevan, just as the whole country, has very limited land resources to implement an urban construction policy. This is the result of an incompetent approach that was implemented some time ago. As a result, 40% of Yerevan's land is now at the disposal of various companies, state enterprises, and organizations. If, for example, any serious problems of urban construction and development arise, we will have to change the legal situation so that City Council may put these lands at its disposal and have rights concerning these areas. Thus, in my opinion, the most important issue for the development of Yerevan is the establishment of a structural system

... The most important issue for the development of Yerevan is the establishment of a structural system and the creation of a legislative basis within which this system may operate.

and the creation of a legislative basis within which this system may operate.

Presently, the city is divided into 12 districts - each led by an elected person. The Mayor coordinates the work of these 12 persons. Unfortunately, when working on important tasks for the city's development, the efforts of these community heads and those of the

Mayor sometimes do not really match. While the activities of the district heads are conditioned by legislation (the community has its own budget based on land, property, income, and other local taxes) and thus have a realistic basis for their work, the Mayor, despite being

the head of the city's management, has no budget. The Mayor's activities are governed by presidential decrees.

To better explain the illogical nature of what I have mentioned let me use, as an example, the situation concerning the city's roads. There are two types of road in Yerevan:

some of them are of local community importance and others are of metropolitan significance. All buildings that provide living quarters are also differentiated along

local and metropolitan lines. I would like to mention here that often these distinctions are not based on optimal legal principles. In my opinion, Yerevan, with its all problems, should be one single organism.

If we are not able to somehow regulate those distinctions in urban policy and construction, we will soon face not only serious contradictions between the central parts of the capital and its outlying districts, but also antagonisms will develop in the population depending on the regions of the city. Although there are similar contradictions in almost all cities, these contra-

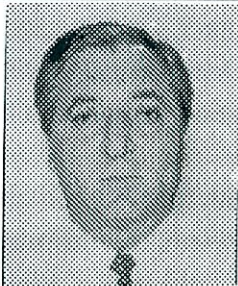
dictions are regulated by legislation. They are divided into areas that are fairly well supported by the state's tax policy. Yerevan cannot have a normal, equitable development if say, the districts of Nubarashen and the Opera Theater cannot compete with each other. One will rapidly develop because of the casinos avail-

able in that district, the other will continue bearing the burden of day-to-day problems forever.

The problem of Yerevan's uniform devel-

opment has been reported to the President in great detail. A commission has been established to follow up on these issues. The greatest of problems today is to create a legal document on Yerevan's status as the capital. If Yerevan does not have the status of a capital and if the National Assembly does not adopt a law on Yerevan, all other problems or efforts to improve any area of life will remain untenable. The interests of Yerevan should pre-empt other political interests. The law should be based on the notion that the infrastructure providing sustainable life in Yerevan is one unit.

...Very preliminary calculations estimate that about 300-400 million dollars worth of investments are needed to solve the water problem.



Souren Abrahamyan was born in 1947, in Yerevan. He graduated from the Yerevan Polytechnic Institute's Department of Technical Cybernetics. Then he served in the army. After re-qualification, Mr. Abrahamyan worked in the Interior Ministry as an employee of the Criminal Investigation Service. Later he studied in the USSR Academy of the Interior. He headed the Department of the Interior of Nairi region and was the head of the Leninian district of Yerevan. Mr. Abrahamyan was deputy head of the Department of the Interior of Yerevan for the Ministry of Interior of Armenia.

Later he headed the Department and finally was Deputy Minister of the Interior.

From 1992 to 1993, Mr. Abrahamyan was the Implementation Manager of the state program in the Syunik-Zangezur region. He coordinated the forces and state structures of state minister Vazgen Sargsyan. Mr. Abrahamyan moved from the position of Deputy to Head of Personnel.

In 1996, after the creation of the Syunik Provincial Council, Mr. Abrahamyan was appointed Governor of Syunik Province.

Mr. Abrahamyan is a Member of the National Assembly.

Mr. Abrahamyan has the military rank of General.

He is married and has two children.

As to the structural reforms of Yerevan, there are regulatory problems in the current legislative relations between the city and the community councils. Should there be problems to be resolved, the logical approach would be that the Mayor's decision be a follow-through to the community council's decision on any particular problem. We ourselves cannot resolve that heritage of contradictions. We are trying to resolve these, however, by means of several decisions promulgated by the Government.

Yerevan, with its all problems, should be one single organism.

It is well known that the most important means for implementing decisions are the financial ones. Let me give you an example. If the Kentron community today has reserves of about 130 million drams, the Achapniak community's budget is zero. This requires serious investments to guarantee the capital's needs. I, as Mayor, cannot decide to transfer some of the funds of the Kentron community to Achapniak, or any other community, to cover pressing needs in the poorer communities.

The situation is difficult in terms of management. While carrying out structural reforms, many areas and services were overlooked. They have not been regulated and currently have no person to be answerable for their administration. Citizens suffer because of these mistakes. During the rush towards privatization of apartments, for example, buildings were handed over to their residents. Such important items as water-pumps or elevators, for example, that sustain the building as a residential structure, were ignored. As a consequence, they now belong to nobody. Thus, neither the residents nor City Council cares for them. Only after eight years have we started to explore the ways to assign responsibilities in these areas.

In my opinion, there are three main problems for the city of Yerevan. The first problem

relates to urban construction. The activities in this field will be carried out in collaboration with professional groups. A council of architects has been established. It will be responsible for the historical and architectural issues of significance for the city. The overall appearance of modern constructions and historical buildings is not at all appealing. Furthermore, intellectual property rights are ignored and that angers our residents. From now on, any important or major initiative will have to be coordinated with the newly established council prior to implementation. We

now have a very scrupulous attitude towards the historical and architectural values of downtown Yerevan. During the transitional period, when government in Yerevan was absent, several structures were built that put safety at risk.

The second important issue is the problem of water. It is surprising, in our country with its large resources of drinking water, that the issue of water remains an old problem for Yerevan. We have worked out a gradual strategy to solve this question. Unfortunately, the city alone, or even the national government within its current budget, will not be able to resolve this issue completely. Even very preliminary calculations estimate that about 300-400 million dollars worth of investments are needed to solve this problem. We have an important plan that we will try to implement step by step. In August, we will start a project worth 30 million dollars that will provide water, on a 24-hour basis, to Achapniak and the areas around the Physics Institute.

Next year, we will try to solve another very important and very difficult problem. We will attempt to formalize the communication channels (as they pertain to the provision of water and electricity) between City Council and Yerevan's residents. Unfortunately, there is

important wastage. On one hand, we at City Council suffer from these wastes. On the other hand, we very often illegally ignore citizens' rights to these utilities. In all cases, the government's reputation drops.

The third problem relates to the protection of the overall appearance of Yerevan and its sanitary condition. At present, there is no coordinated garbage collection and waste management in Yerevan. That has been a problem for many years, especially during the hot months of summer. Certain architectural design errors and the poor quality workmanship of service facilities create a real danger of unsanitary conditions. In this regard, we are negotiating with a number of foreign companies to construct a garbage treatment plant and to establish a proper sanitation system.

Another major problem for Yerevan is the expansion of trade in the streets. This has exceeded our capacity to control it. Sometimes the very officials who are supposed to control it, in fact, support it. City Council has worked

out a solution to that problem as well. Even if we "hurt" the poor through that measure, nonetheless we are going to implement it. They have over-stepped the limits: uncontrolled street trade is a disgrace for Yerevan. The next day, street traders will march to the City Council to protest. We are resolved, however, and we will not let this continue. To some extent, others encourage their complaining. We will not compromise and will remove that ugly spectacle of street vendors.

They have over-stepped the limits: uncontrolled street trade is a disgrace for Yerevan.

One more important problem is the issue of civic behavior and respect for rules and regulations. Recently, I am seldom in the city, but the impression I have is of being in a city that is out of skelter. Yerevan does not foster a climate that creates citizens who acknowledge their responsibilities and protect rules. Our present goal is to encourage a certain kind of citizen. This will materialize only by changing the current atmosphere. The Mayor's own feelings will not be able to change much! Every resident of Yerevan should feel his or her own responsibilities towards this city.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

-Recently we see that some of the illegal or unauthorized constructions are being destroyed. The number of destroyed ones, however, is far less than the number of new ones growing like mushrooms. In your opinion, will the time come when this ratio will change?

-Unauthorized constructions and Yerevan's powerlessness against them are really depressing. I can assure you that part of the pessimistic mood of people is partly because they feel powerless against the activities of the "anything goes" type of people. Unfortunately, those unauthorized constructions are not really unauthorized. They have documents. The production of construction materials today is so well developed that just overnight; a "light" construction can become a "heavy" one. There is a construction now in progress on Abovian Street that I would qualify as a slap in the face. I have no idea what they are building there: a tall building next to traditional, old ones. The demolition of that building would cost us 4 million drams. I recently met with the heads of communities, heads of the departments of the interior, and procurators. It seems that we have actually approved 90% of those constructions! We have now decided that on Mondays, the head of the interior department will report directly to me on the approvals given in the previous week.

He will report to me on the community council activities and the follow-up to these requests. Anything that conflicts with the overall appearance of the city or with safety must be demolished. For example, there are several caf s by the Getar River that are expensive. If we try to remove these, we will have to spend about 40-50 million drams. The solution was to de-privatize them, auction them off, and place them at the disposal of City Council to credit the city budget. We will see if that mechanism works. I wonder how long I can bear all this!

- *There have been different deadlines promised for completing the Davidashen bridge. What deadline would you promise? Are they discussing the issue of privatization of the bridge and having a toll?*

- The Davidashen bridge belongs to City Council. If anybody wants to privatize it I should at least be removed from my post first. Secondly, the issue is under the president's control. I pray God that the construction finishes while I am Mayor. The funding is quite stable, the construction is well under way and there even are some unused funds. The bridge has significant importance in terms of the city's security and strategic policy. It will help people's transportation needs. If I am not mistaken, next year 2 billion drams will be allocated in addition to the 1.6 billions. Probably, this autumn, construction of the bridge will be completed.

- *What is being done to adopt the new basic city plan?*

- We are concerned about this plan. The chief architect is currently working on that. To adopt the city plan, we need financial investment. Yet this is a problem not only for Yerevan, but for the country as well. As soon as we can afford it, we will turn our attention to this.

- *Which of your positions is closer to your heart: Member of the National Assembly, President of the Football Federation of Armenia, or Mayor?*

- It was not by accident that I took over the problems of Armenian football. One ought to be just a little bit crazy to accept that position while also being Mayor. Yerevan used to "breathe" football. I am asked to return that atmosphere in our life. If I do not do it, I will resign. Unfortunately, our football is at an embryonic stage. But I hope that soon I will say, "Dear residents of Yerevan, I am starting to build the National Stadium". There are issues related to some important investments that I need to look into. This is not the responsibility of the state. It is the federation's responsibility. Also, frankly speaking, there are teenagers who loiter on the streets for far too long. While parents earn their living and schools do not pay too much attention, teenagers are attracted by life on our streets. Just think how many children will quit the streets if I am also able to develop junior football! Regarding the position, this one is more tempting to my heart: I took over the municipality with a debt of 8 millions, while the football federation has a one million surplus in its account...

- *What is your attitude towards having public figures declare their incomes?*

- In that regard I can justify my incomes. I am a General, I am a Mayor, I am a member of the National Assembly, and I am the President of the Football Federation. In my capacity of General alone, I receive 52 000 drams. Let others think of declaring their incomes.

- *The traffic rules are often violated by cars that have special number plates. What is your opinion on that?*

- Very negative. When I see "fancy" cars burning a red light, I remember my previous job and want to chase that car. But I stop myself. The problem should be taken seriously. I agree; very often traffic rules are violated by cars with special plates. This is exactly the reason for such an atmosphere. We have to take serious actions. But when I am the one who suggests these actions or steps, people say that I have a dictatorial attitude. We need to look at that from the other angle and probably criticize ourselves a bit.

- What is your approach to bringing young people to City Council?

- My approach to the cadre policy is based on experience and youth. We are now in a transitional period, however, and

young specialists may not understand this yet. When we say professional, I understand it to mean a person who has experience too. An honor's diploma does not make a person professional. It must include one's experience of life, and one's ability to orient oneself. If my heads of departments are people who have experience, then their deputies should be young people, and a little crazy. We have gone through a different system; today we need other, different stimuli. Of course, every era has its own heroes, and I am sure, some 5-10 years from now, I can imagine our Mayor with a bow tie and a smoking suit. I see the future of Yerevan like that. But, when I asked children the other day what they wanted to become they said everything ... but Mayor.

THURSDAY, JULY 30



MR. KHOSROV HARUTUNIAN

President of the
National Assembly of Armenia

Presents a lecture on

**THE LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY OF THE
NATIONAL ASSEMBLY'S SEVENTH
SESSION**

Thursday, July 30, 1998
At 6:00 PM

American University of Armenia
Small Auditorium, 5th floor

ADMISSION IS FREE



**The
SPEAKER**

Newsletter of the
Lecture Series Program

American University of Armenia
Extension Program

URL: // www.aua.am/aua/extens/lectures

American University of Armenia
40 Bagramian St., Yerevan, Armenia
Tel: 27-16-58

Addressee: