

International

Will “shuttle diplomacy” help dig up the truth in Asia Minor?

When a mass burial was unearthed last fall near a remote village in southeastern Turkey, the local police swiftly shut down the site, and Turkey’s official historical society stepped in to declare the human remains relics of Roman times. Enter Prof. David Gaunt, an authority on massacres in eastern Asia Minor, who forcefully argued that the grave most likely contained the bones of 150 Armenians and 120 Syriac men who were seized from the nearby

town of Dara in June 1915, never to be seen again. Since then, Prof. Gaunt has been involved in an effort arrange a scientific investigation of this and other burial sites in the region. With Prof. Gaunt’s new book on massacres just published, and his lecture tour of California scheduled for this week, *Talin Suciyan* interviewed David Gaunt.

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National

U.S. Commission: Turkey’s refusal to recognize Genocide strains relations with West

Turkey’s continued refusal to address the Armenian Genocide remains a source of tension between U.S. and other Western democracies and Turkey, said the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) in its annual recommendations released on May 2. In the Turkey portion of its 2007 report, USCIRF details formal restrictions and other violations of

freedom of religion for both majority Muslims and minority Christian communities. It notes, however, that “the consequences of some of Turkey’s state policies toward religion have been particularly detrimental for religious minorities,” such as Armenians.

Emil Sanamyan reports.

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Armenia



The stirrings of revival in Shushi
This week marks the 15th anniversary of the liberation of Shushi – the heroic military effort that wrested the Armenian city from Azerbaijani control. The ensuing years have not returned Shushi to its former glory – but that may be changing. *Armen Hakobyan* visited the fabled “city of craftsmen” to see how local citizens are teaming with leaders from Armenia and abroad to help Shushi recover its bygone beauty.

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Community

A beloved poet is remembered in New York

When the New York Armenian community gathered for a memorial to the late poet Zahrad, the evening became a celebration of the poet’s life and work. Bayside’s Holy Martyrs Church rang with the sounds of heartfelt recitations of Zahrad’s poetry; personal friends, fellow art-

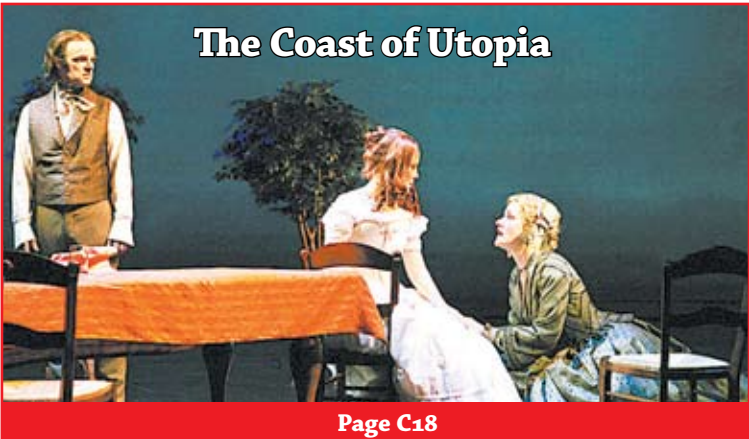
ists, and scholars recounted what made Zahrad such a vital, memorable, and arguably “immortal” figure. The Istanbul poet died on February 21, but his spirit awakened in all its vividness for that evening. As a friend remarked of the event: “Zahrad would have been very happy.”

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Taking Flight

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The Coast of Utopia

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Children of Hayk

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State, parties share burden for fair elections, Kocharian says

by Tatul Hakobyan

MARTUNI, Armenia – Derenik Papoyan, 76, met Samvel Babayan, the former commander of Karabakh’s armed forces on April 30, when Mr. Babayan visited this city on Lake Sevan as part of the election campaign for his Alliance (Dashink) party. Mr. Papoyan asked the Karabakh hero, “Who will protect our vote from the cheats?”

Mr. Babayan, who is part of Armenia’s opposition, assured Mr. Papoyan and other Martuni residents, “Through our party’s local structures, I have made it clear to all local leaders, and in the first place, to village heads, that they should not engage in fraud. They will be strictly punished, so let every man do his job. Fraud primarily happens in the villages. The village heads should restrain themselves.... I want them to let society choose this time. I will not allow them to steal our votes.”

On May 12, Armenia will hold parliamentary elections. The authorities in Armenia have said repeatedly that they will do all they can to ensure that the elections are free, fair, and transparent. Europe-



A sample ballot for the May 12 parliamentary elections in Armenia. Photo: Photolure.

an observers have criticized all of the elections held in Armenia since independence, as well as the 1995 and 2005 constitutional referendums. The 1991 presidential elections were free of taint. Observers also concluded that President Robert Kocharian had the support of the majority of voters when he was elected in 1998, and the outcome of the National Assembly elections of 1999 reflected the will of the electorate.

On April 27, President Kocharian met with students at Yerevan State University to discuss the elections. “We will do all that is possible, whatever depends on the authorities, to have good elections,” Mr. Kocharian said. “But the following too should be clear: political forces equally bear responsibility for the elections.”

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“Lessons from the Rwanda Genocide” opens at the UN – three weeks late, and with revisions

Armenia welcomes retention of reference to Ottoman Armenian experience

by Chris Zakian

NEW YORK – On Monday, April 30, three weeks after it was originally scheduled to begin, the United Nations’ exhibit marking the 13th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide finally opened.

The scheduled April 9 opening of the photo exhibition titled “Lessons from the Rwanda Genocide” had been postponed after officials of the Turkish Mission to the UN objected to a reference in one display panel to the Armenian Genocide. The UN’s decision to postpone



Secretary General Ban Ki-moon (right) and Undersecretary-General for Public Information, Kiyotaka Akasaka (left).

caused an uproar not only in the Armenian community, but among other UN member nations, and in the American media, culminating in a strongly-worded editorial

rebuke of new UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon by the *New York Times*.

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NATIONAL



From Washington, in brief



the President, the Secretary of State, and the Congress.”

In the Turkey portion of its 2007 report, USCIRF details formal restrictions and other violations of freedom of religion for both majority Muslims and minority Christian communities. It notes, however, that “the consequences of some of Turkey’s state policies toward religion have been particularly detrimental for religious minorities,” such as Armenians.

“Built into the founding of Turkish identity was the implicit understanding that citizens other than ethnic Turks residing in Turkey are potentially suspect, since they allegedly harbor a secret desire to secede from and hence, dismember the country,” says the report.

“This fear of dismemberment, which has fueled a strain of virulent nationalism in Turkey, continues to hold sway in some sectors of society, resulting in state policies that actively undermine ethnic and minority religious communities, and, in some cases, threaten their very existence. The Commission learned in meetings that the Greek Orthodox and Armenian Orthodox communities are focal points for this perception and its resultant policies.”

The report points to prosecution and subsequent murder Hrant Dink over “insulting” the Turkish state because of his use of the term “Armenian genocide” in his public remarks and written publications” as “just one example” of such policies.

The report says that even though “during the Commission’s visit, the issue of the Armenian genocide was not raised by any interlocutors, the continued refusal of the Turkish government to recognize the event continues to be a source of controversy in Turkey’s relations with other western countries, including the United States.” Visit <http://www.uscifr.gov> to read the full report.

Top U.S. foreign aid official resigns over prostitution link

The official in charge of all of U.S. foreign assistance programs resigned on April 27, after admitting to using services of a company currently charged with running a high-end prostitution ring, which is illegal in Washington, local TV stations reported.

Ambassador Randall Tobias (featured on this page on March 17) was the U.S. Director for Foreign Assistance, a rank equivalent to Deputy Secretary of State. Mr. Tobias resigned even though according to local NBC 4 he said that “no sex was involved and he only used [the] massage services.”

Asked during April 30 briefing if the State Department had problems with employees getting massages, spokesman Sean McCormack said that he would not comment on “matter that is of current litigation.” He said that Deputy Secretary of State **John Negroponte** will handle funding decisions before a new foreign aid director is appointed.

State Department chronicles world-wide rise in terrorism incidents, related fatalities

There was a more than 28 percent increase in incidents of terrorism in 2006, with about half of them occurring in Iraq, according to the State Department’s latest “Patterns

of Global Terrorism,” a congressionally mandated report released on April 30. The increase in incidents also led to more than a 40 percent rise in terrorism-related fatalities from 2005 to 2006.

In a section that briefly discusses individual countries the report noted that “with substantial U.S. assistance, Armenia continued to strengthen its capacity to counter



Ambassador Randall Tobias

the country’s few perceived terrorist threats.” (Overall, Armenia continues to remain largely off limits to jihadist organizations, but there have been cases of Azerbaijani-sponsored domestic terrorism in the past.) The report also mentions Armenia’s continued support for U.S. efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Unlike the Department’s other publications, such as those on human rights and narcotics, Azerbaijanis’ Karabakh conflict-related allegations did not make it into the “Patterns...” The only mention of the conflict comes in a sub-section dealing with U.S. government’s “Outreach through Broadcast Me-

dia.” It says that in 2006 U.S.’ Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty “provided comprehensive coverage of intensified negotiations over a settlement to the longstanding dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh...”

Poll: Armenians, others like globalization and trade, worried about jobs

Most Armenians believe that globalization and increased international trade are good for their country and for them personally, according to a joint study of the **Chicago Council on Global Affairs and WorldPublicOpinion.org**, released on April 26. The survey included 17 other countries. The Armenia polling was conducted by the Armenian Center for National and International Studies (**ACNIS**) in December 2006.

Like in most other countries, the opinion in Armenia was divided as to whether international trade was good (37 percent) or bad (36 percent) for the environment. In the case of U.S., for example, views were similarly divided (49 percent – bad, 45 – good). Armenians were also in favor of incorporating environmental controls (82 percent) and labor standards (79 percent) in trade agreements.

Of all countries polled, Armenians were particularly anxious over trade’s impact on jobs, with 84 percent saying that “protecting the jobs” should be a “very important” foreign policy goal for Armenia (83 percent said so in Australia and 76 - in the United States.) 35 percent of Armenia respondents thought their government should oppose potential adverse rulings by the World Trade Organization (WTO), while 38 percent were undecided or said “it depends” and 26 percent would comply. South Korea was the only other public where this was the most common view.

by Emil Sanamyan

U.S. Commission: Turkey’s refusal to recognize Genocide strains relations with West

Turkey’s continued refusal to address the Armenian Genocide remains a source of tension between U.S. and other Western democracies and Turkey, said the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) in its annual recommendations released on May 2.

USCIRF is a bi-partisan federal body created by Congress through the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 “to monitor the status of freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief abroad, [...] and to give independent policy recommendations to

Karabakh: Guarding the peace

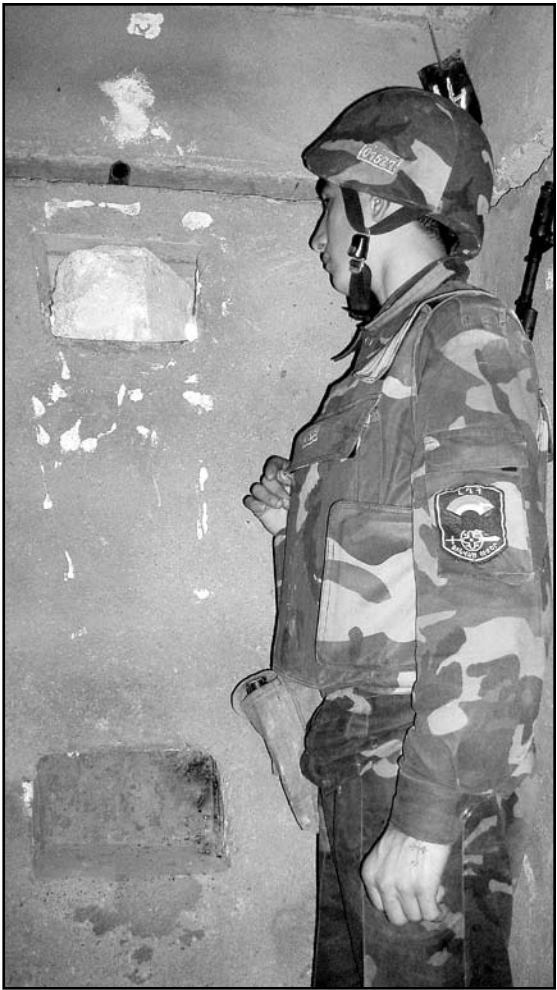


Soldiers walk in their trench.



Officers pose for a picture inside the battalion command post. Photos: Emil Sanamyan, October 2, 2006.

EDITOR’S NOTE: This month, Armenians around the world will mark the anniversary of the 1992 Shushi operation that paved the way for subsequent success in the Artsakh war and, eventually, the 1994 cease-fire agreement, also concluded in May. We think it appropriate to pay tribute to those who continue to guard Armenia’s peace today. Before becoming our Washington editor Emil Sanamyan took these pictures at the Line of Contact on October 2, 2006. The NKR Defense Army provided him with an opportunity to visit the frontline, talk to the service members, and take these photographs. See the forthcoming issue of Ararat Quarterly at <http://www.agbu.org/ararat> for an accompanying trip report.



Soldier at the frontline observation bunker.

INTERNATIONAL

Turkish military forces early election

EU worried, U.S. remains confident in Turkish democracy

News analysis by Emil Sanamyan

WASHINGTON - Only last week the Justice and Development Party (AKP)-dominated Turkish Parliament was set to elect Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul as the country's next President. But this week, Prime Minister Recep Tayyib Erdogan of AKP is being forced to call an early general election and risk losing parliamentary majority.

What happened?

While AKP has been in power in Turkey since its 2002 victory in general elections, the party remained largely outside the military-dominated Kemalist establishment (the so-called "White Turks") that has been in charge of Turkey since the 1920s. The military previously forced four Turkish governments it did not like into early retirement, sometimes jailing or even executing its leaders.

The military has always been suspicious of AKP's non-Kemalist agenda and Islamist roots. But through a combination of efforts to move forward Turkey's membership bid in the European Union (EU), political bankruptcy of secular nationalists and restraint exercised by the previous armed forces chief Gen. Hilmi Ozkok, AKP was able to take charge of the government.

Five years later, Turkey has more than recovered from an earlier economic crisis and even achieved some headway in talks with the EU.



Gen. Yasar Buyukanit

As part of EU-mandated democratization, AKP has also managed to somewhat limit the military's influence in domestic affairs.

But Turkey's courts, secular opposition parties, much of the media and especially the state bureaucracy, including the presidency, remained the bastion of nationalists who oppose what they see as AKP's "Islamization through democratization" agenda.

Since his selection as Turkish military's chief last year Gen. Yasar Buyukanit said, and repeated this view during his February visit to Washington, that, in his assessment, the "Turkish Republic has never faced as many threats as it faces now." Stalling talks with EU and the crisis in Iraq only added to the nationalists' perpetual concerns, but also gave them more freedom for action.

Murder of Hrant Dink and subsequent dead-end investigation sent yet another unmistakable signal to those who may have had doubts of Turkish nationalists' ability to bite. While Erdogan pointed to the role of "deep state," Turkish security officials congratulated the murderers.



Prime Minister Erdogan.

Showdown

As the term of the military-friendly president Ahmet Necdet Sezer began to run out (it will on May 15), the generals and their allies warned the government not to nominate Mr. Erdogan or another Islamist candidate for the presidency. Well-attended and well-organized demonstrations were held in Ankara and Istanbul to show the public's concern with "Islamization."

But with more than ample majority in Parliament, the way appeared open for AKP to nominate one of its leaders for president, which in Turkey is selected by Parliament. Perhaps since Mr. Gul was seen as less irritating to the military and well liked in the West, he was eventually the one nominated.

On April 27, probably sensing AKP was letting itself be pushed back, the Turkish military made an announcement which said, in so many words, that it will do all it can to stop an election of a president it does not like.

The military-allied parliamentary opposition appealed to the Constitutional Court to annul the first round of presidential elections on

the grounds that two-thirds of all parliament members did not participate in the vote. Never mind that Turkey's constitution demands that only one-third be present for any parliamentary session to be legal. The pro-military Court complied.

While the EU warned the military to stay out of politics, U.S. officials remained stoic in face of apparent breaches in due process. During April 30 and May 1 briefings, a State Department spokesperson repeatedly expressed "real confidence in Turkey's democracy" and "faith in Turkish constitutional process."

The Washington Post suggested in a May 1 editorial, that the Bush Administration was keeping a low profile "mindful of its low standing among Turks." But that factor rarely stops U.S. from expressing its views. A more likely reason for lack of U.S. reaction is that Washington officials have been, or think that they have been, better informed of Turkish leaders' intentions than have Europeans.

Whatever is the case, it is quite likely that many U.S. policy makers may see a secular "correction" in Turkey as beneficial to U.S. interests. Indeed, Turkey's leaders, both AKP and the military, have been less that helpful to U.S. efforts in Iraq and containment of Iran.

But while the source of AKP's opposition appears ideological (Islamist solidarity), the military's concerns are rooted firmly in real politic - and first and foremost making sure an Iraqi Kurdish state can not shift the regional balance of power against Turkey.

Prospects

The Constitutional Court ruling means that any future presidential candidate could be blocked by minority parties. (Unless of course

the ruling is ignored as the Constitution was this time around.)

Still exuding confidence about his and his party's popularity, Mr. Erdogan is now saying he is ready for early elections to be held about forty days from now. But, in return, the military's allies in parliament are asked to support a proposal to make the presidential post popularly elected, potentially shifting the balance of power within Turkey away from prime minister.

Mr. Erdogan said, "the parliamentary democratic system has been blocked. The only way to get rid of this blockage, and to lift the domination of a [parliamentary] minority over the majority, is to go to the nation... and let the people elect their president with an election system of two rounds."

But the parliamentary opposition leader has so far refused to negotiate on terms of early elections. Deniz Baykal, the chairman of the People's Republican Party (CHP), told reporters in Ankara on May 1 that early elections were "a constitutional requirement."

Mr. Baykal said, "A parliament that cannot elect a president should hold elections. The only thing that the Turkish parliament can do is to [call for early elections]. A negotiation on that is not possible."

Should negotiations on early elections take place after all, CHP and other secular nationalists that were left outside the Parliament in 2002 are likely to make proposals of their own that would help improve their representation in next Parliament by, for example, lowering the 10 percent threshold for entry.

That change, or alternatively an electoral alliance of several nationalist parties, may mean that Turkey's next government may not include AKP at all.

“Lessons from the Rwanda Genocide” opens at the UN – three weeks late, and with revisions

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Standing on principle, the U.K.-based Aegis Trust - which organized the exhibit, and had been told by the UN secretariat just prior to the scheduled opening that the reference to the Armenian Genocide would have to be eliminated - refused to go forward with the exhibit unless the reference was retained.

For the April 30 opening, the panel in question did contain revisions in the language used to describe the events of 1915.

Originally the panel had read: "Following World War I, during which 1 million Armenians were murdered in Turkey, Polish lawyer Raphael Lemkin urged the League of Nations to recognize crimes of barbarity as international crimes." This was the language the Turkish UN Mission found objectionable.

The revised wording now reads: "In 1933, the lawyer Raphael Lemkin, a Polish Jew, urged the League of Nations to recognize mass atrocities against a particular group as an international crime. He cited the mass killings of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire in World War I, and other mass killings in history. He was ignored."

The substantive alterations include the substitution of "Ottoman Empire" for "Turkey," of "mass killings" for "murdered," and the deletion of the reference to the number of Armenians who perished. Raphael Lemkin is also identified as "a Polish Jew" instead of "Polish."

At this writing, the Turkish embassy has ventured no reaction to the revised language.

Armenia's Permanent Representative to the UN as well as the Aegis Trust exhibit sponsors have said that they were satisfied with the result.

A spokesman for the Aegis Trust told the Associated Press that his organization still "feels the reference is quite strong."

"The magnitude of the event is still clear in the new wording," he said. "We're quite pleased with the outcome."

Amb. Armen Martirosian, Armenia's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, was quoted in the same AP article as saying that the new wording reflects the truth "to some extent."

"This is a Turkish version of history which is not acceptable to us, but to avoid further postponement of the exhibition, we compromised," he was quoted as saying.

But in an interview with the *Armenian Reporter*, Amb. Martirosian clarified that statement. "I am certainly satisfied with the outcome," he said. "It is indisputable that the mass killings of Armenians constitute a genocide, and the exhibit language reflects that." His mention of a "Turkish version of history" in the AP story was intended to refer to the denialist position, advanced by Turkey, that the Armenians killed were merely casualties of general fighting in World War I, and not targets of a systematic extermination.

The new language does not support that position, Amb. Martirosian said, and the alterations to the earlier text "reflect the real political situation we have today at the UN."

"This was not an Armenian event," Martirosian added; "Armenia was neither an organizer nor a participant in the exhibit. It was about Rwanda, and the importance of acknowledging the people's suffering there. So this was not an occasion to initiate time-consuming discussions about the Armenian Genocide." The major concern was that the exhibit should not be delayed longer, he said.

The ambassador said that in the wake of the opening, other UN colleagues have congratulated him for what they term a victory. "But this isn't really about victory or defeat," he said. "It hasn't been about a single sentence, but about preventing censorship and denial." "Our task was to nullify Turkey's attempt to export its denialist agenda to the UN. And we prevented that attempt, through the help of the Armenian community and the mass media."

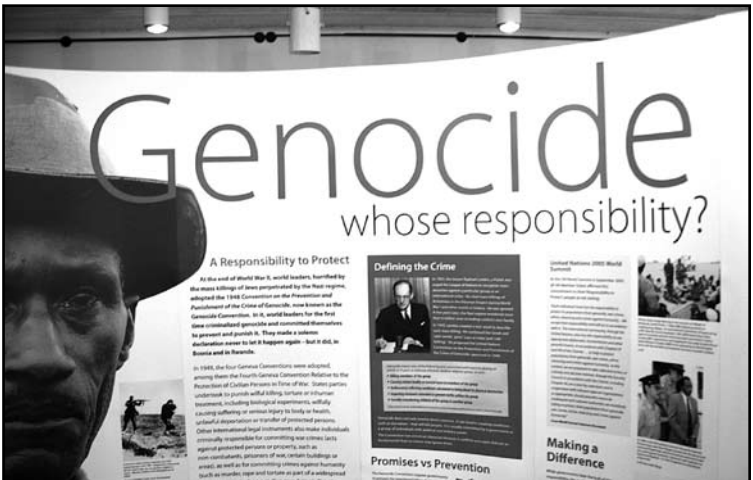
"The whole Armenian community in the U.S. and its institutions were very helpful in all this. To some extent the outcome shows the might of Armenians in the U.S., and in the United Nations," Amb. Martirosian said. "We also have to give credit to the Aegis Trust, which did its utmost to stand on principle. I met with them and thanked them."

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"Our task was to nullify Turkey's attempt to export its denialist agenda to the UN. And we prevented that attempt, through the help of the Armenian community and the mass media."

Humankind's darkest chapters

Amb. Martirosian was among the diplomats who attended the April



The box dedicated to Lemkin is in the middle of this panel of the exhibit.

30 opening ceremony of "Lessons of the Rwanda Genocide," which is scheduled to run for three weeks in the south gallery of the visitors' lobby at the UN headquarters building.

Turkey's mission did not send an official representative to the event.

In remarks on the occasion, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon noted the victims of the Rwanda genocide, estimated at some 800,000 people, mainly Tutsis and moderate Hutus, who were massacred by militant Hutus in April of 1994. Ban recalled his own visit to Rwanda last year, and his conversations with "those who had endured one of humankind's darkest chapters."

In what has been seen as a gesture to Turkey, he said, "This exhibition is about lessons learned from the Rwandan genocide, and does not attempt to make historical judgments

on other issues. The United Nations has taken no position on events that took place before the World War that led to the birth of the organization." Earlier this year, however, the Secretary-General opened an exhibition commemorating - and articulating a definite position on - the trans-Atlantic slave trade, which predated the UN's founding.

His April 30 remarks also made no mention of the genocide in Sudan's western region of Darfur.

Ban did say, however, that the post of the UN's special advisor on genocide, now held by Juan Mendez of Argentina, would be elevated from a part-time to a full-time position.

Also speaking at the opening, Rwanda's UN Representative, Amb. Joseph Nsengimana, said that the international community needed to "act in a more serious and consistent manner to prevent genocide."

International

Will “shuttle diplomacy” help dig up the truth in Asia Minor?

An interview with
Professor David
Gaunt

by Talin Suciyan

EDITOR'S NOTE: David Gaunt should be a familiar name to readers of the *Armenian Reporter*. The Nov. 18 edition of this paper ran an article on a mass grave discovered in the Mardin region of southeastern Turkey in October 2006, in which Prof. Gaunt, an authority on massacres in the region, speculated that the remains in the grave most likely belonged to the 150 Armenian and 120 Syriac male heads of families from the nearby town of Dara, killed on June 14, 1915. The local Turkish gendarmery closed the Mardin site to further inspection, prompting Prof. Gaunt to attempt to arrange an objective scientific examination of the grave – these attempts were chronicled in the Reporter's Feb. 17 and Mar. 3 editions. (These articles are available on the Reporter's website, www.reporter.am)

A professor of history at Södertörn University College in Stockholm, Dr. Gaunt holds a doctorate from Sweden's Uppsala University. Much of his research has centered on social questions involving the family and work, ethnicity and violence; his studies of everyday life combine history and social anthropology.

Prof. Gaunt began to research genocide late in his career, first investigating the Holocaust, and later focusing on Syrian, Chaldean, and Assyrian Christians, large groups of which arrived in Sweden in the past three decades. His books include *Jews and Christians in Dialogue II: Identity, Tolerance, Understanding; Collaboration and Resistance during the Holocaust: Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania*; and his latest volume, *Massacres, Resistance and Protectors: Muslim-Christian relations in Eastern Anatolia during the First World War*. In progress is a monograph on the development of religious and ethnic tolerance in Eastern Europe during the Early Modern Period.

This week, Prof. Gaunt begins a series of lectures throughout California. Talin Suciyan recently interviewed him for the Reporter. A Turkish-language version of the interview is appearing in Istanbul's *Agos*.

Talin Suciyan: What did you do after finishing your work in Dara?

David Gaunt: I have been photographing sites, in order to see them with my own eyes. We went to Idil [Azakh], which is close to Cizre and the Syrian border. I wrote an entire chapter about it in my book [*Massacres, Resistance and Protectors: Muslim-Christian relations in Eastern Anatolia during the First World War*]. Idil defended itself against Teşkilat Mahsusa (Special Organization) and units of the Third Army under the leadership of Ömer Naci Bey. I was trying to reconstruct this defense, which is one of the success stories of the Assyrians. There were quite a few Armenians there as well, but we do not think they participated in the



Prof. David Gaunt at the *Agos* office.

defense because they were women and children.

During that defense, *fedais* (fighters) took the guns of the Ottoman army by passing through the tunnel. I was looking for that tunnel – and we found it. It is 500 meters long; we took photographs. It is now a well near the Santa Maria Church. The tunnel goes under the whole of old Idil. On top of the tunnel there is a shrine. The well was renovated recently.

Suciyan: When did this defense occur, and how do you know who was living there?

Gaunt: The defense took place at the end of October 1915 or beginning of November 1915. There are telegrams between Enver Pasha and Kamil Pasha. Enver Pasha asked who those people were, and the response was, “Assyrians and Armenians.” The troops were on their way to Iran actually, but they got stuck there and were defeated at the end.

We went to Aynvert (now Gülgöze) as well, which had also defended itself; but we have only oral historical accounts of that defense. There are bullet holes in the walls of the church – and in many cases the actual bullets are still in the stones.

Suciyan: Where else have you been?

Gaunt: We went to Midyat. We visited the places where we knew fighting took place. Syriacs actually attempted to mount a defense – like in Van, but something less elaborate. It did not succeed, however, and they were wiped out. You can still see the bullet holes on the police station.

Suciyan: Where exactly?

Gaunt: A little beyond the center of Midyat. We found the tunnels which were used by civilians to get to Anyvart or other places.

We went to places where we knew attempts had been made to mount more systematic defenses. The history is very complex in Midyat; each clan has its own story. I find this to be typical of that time.

Suciyan: Do you think the rivalries between the clans were known by the authorities? If so, were these rivalries exploited by them?

Gaunt: Of course. You have mixed towns, with Syriac Orthodox and Catholic, Nestorians, Chaldeans, Protestants, etc. Authorities go and say, “We will not take you, we will take the Catholics and Protestants,” let's say; but on the other hand they go and tell the Catholics and Protestants the opposite. This is the way things were done; many times it worked, but in some cases it did not.

Syriacs actually attempted to mount a defense – like in Van, but something less elaborate. It did not succeed, however, and they were wiped out. You can still see the bullet holes on the police station.

In Azakh there were Assyrians saying, “Let's stop this defense. They don't want us, they want the Armenians.” In my opinion this shows how overtly Armenians were targeted. The Assyrian [historical] sources are very rich indeed, because in many cases where Armenians were deported, Assyrians were still in their places and wrote chronicles. A Syrian Catholic priest in Mardin wrote chronicles in Arabic. He wrote that the members of a community led by Archbishop Ignace Maloyan had been killed on the 10th of June 1915. This was the first arrest of Armenian notables in Mardin, and included Assyrians, Syrian Catholics, and Chaldeans.

Suciyan: What is the name of the priest who wrote that chronicle, and where was it published?

Gaunt: Ishak Armalto. It had been published in Arabic, in Lebanon in 1919 and in the 80s. The title of the book was *Calamities of Christians*. There were also three French Dominican priests – all three of them were writing chronicles, too.

Jacques Rhethore, a famous scholar in his time, had a 300-page book in which he also chronicled this event. Maloyan was an Armenian Catholic; the two had connections with each other. There are other Catholic priests' reports as well.

Suciyan: Are you planning to return to Turkey for any cooperation with the Turkish Historical Society?

Gaunt: We will be talking to Turkish historians in the near future, and then we'll decide.

Suciyan: On the same mass grave?

Gaunt: No. The grave I saw was not available anymore for any scientific work. However there are documents that are definitely worth pursuing.

Suciyan: Of what kind?

Gaunt: More or less like the ones Ara Sarafian requested. We know very well how developed the bureaucracy was in Ottoman Empire. We know that property registers are far better than [population] censuses. These documents can provide more information about Christians. And further, there are the original records of trials after the war, after the leaders of the Committee of Union and Progress left the country. There is no reason to believe that they were destroyed.

Suciyan: After the conference held in Stockholm, you wrote a report and said that Kemal Çiçek from the Turkish Historical Society told Vahakn Dadrian: “Bring your Armenian money and you will get the documents.” Was this a reference to the documents you mention?

Gaunt: Yes; Çiçek said, “Bring your Armenian money and you will get the documents” – and the audience heard his words. Dadrian made a presentation on the need for sources, and this was his response. On the basis of Çiçek's remark, a Swedish parliamentarian, Ulla Hoffman, presented a bill to use foreign aid funds for this purpose; but nothing has come about.

Suciyan: You have quite a diverse range of interests. You've worked on such subjects as futurology, everyday life, the family; you're work combines history with anthropology. When and how did you become interested in Ottoman history during the First World War.

Gaunt: I've been working on historical matters for 30 years. Ten years ago my children started to get interested in genocide issues. They were interested because their grandmother was a Jew from the Ukraine, and they convinced me to work on the subject as well. I wrote a book about Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania in the context of Holocaust. While I was lecturing at the university, some students came and asked for help; a debate on Assyrian history was to take place in a high school, between a history teacher and an Assyrian student, and I was asked to mediate.

Suciyan: Is this typical of the way conflicts are resolved in Sweden?

Gaunt: Swedes like consensus; they do *not* like ongoing conflicts. I guess that history teacher is no sharper today than he was then.

Suciyan: Did you face any problems due to your work on these subjects?

Gaunt: In Uppsala I was lecturing for a government agency called Living History in 2003. And my lectures were hindered by Turkish authorities: Omer Turan from the Turkish Historical Society, people from the Turkish embassy, some people accompanying them. Members of the Turkish media were

there as well; they took photographs of everyone attending. We were made to look ridiculous; they tried to undermine what we were saying, intimidating us by saying “Oh, you do not even know Turkey's geography!”

In the end, it was obvious who knew better Turkey's geography and it was not them. They said, “No Swedish historian ever visited the Ottoman archives.” I said, “Here is my list [of items] that I want to get from Ottoman archives. Can you get them for me?” They said, “Of course” – in front of a lot of people. It did come, in six months; from military history and the Ottoman archives.

Suciyan: Are these what you refer to in the footnotes of your article on the importance of the occupation of Iran in the 1915 process?

Gaunt: The ATASE [military archive] references are to those [documents], yes. Later, I came by myself and worked in the archives.

My lectures were hindered by Turkish authorities. They took photographs of everyone attending. They tried to intimidate us.

Suciyan: What do you think about the statement holding that “both sides committed atrocities”? Do you think it's just a way to be disputatous? Or does it have a basis in fact? And why?

Gaunt: Both sides killed each other – this is true. At that point the definition of “atrocities” becomes important. Atrocities has one meaning if both sides have guns in their hands. It would have a totally different meaning if only *one* side has the gun, targeting unarmed civilians because of their ethnic and/or religious origin. There are many sources on the atrocities committed against the Armenians and Assyrians between 1914 and 1916, and later to the Greeks. This was a war crime.

Later, in Kars and Erzurum, after the Transcaucasian army fell apart, atrocities did occur, most probably because of the disappointment and anger the Armenians had. But chronologically that came later. The Turkish Historical Society opens mass graves of 1918, of people killed by Armenians. But there are differences in chronology, in the extent and systematic nature of the atrocities. One does not neutralize the other.

Suciyan: How is that chronology used in Turkey's official historiography?

Gaunt: It is used in a very confusing way. They do not pay any attention, when things happen, to the *order* in which things happened, and the *context* in which they happened. It is told that Muslims were killed, but it is not said when.

Suciyan: What do you think what your role as a historian will be in the future?

Gaunt: It's going to be like “shuttle diplomacy.” It is not a good position, because both sides are locked. Professional historians are essential – and this is the weakest point. If there are enough strong professional historians, the process will proceed. As a result, we will be talking among ourselves on boring historical subjects. And politics will not be involved. ☐

ARMENIA

Shushi’s revival, like its liberation, will require a united Armenian effort

A town’s quest to regain its bygone charm

by Armen Hakobyan

YEREVAN – In a few days, Armenia will mark the 15th anniversary of the liberation of Shushi. The military operation that wrested the city from alien hands on May 9, 1992 was welcome evidence that Armenians, when united, are capable of outstanding achievements.

But a decade and a half on, Shushi still waits for a similar effort by the Armenian nation, to help it rise from the ruins, and regaining its former beauty and reputation as Armenia’s city of artistic wonders.

Rebuilding the legendary city is the focus of the Shushi Revival Fund (www.shoushi.org), established in spring 2006 through a government initiative. Appropriately, Yerevan Mayor Yervand Zakharian chairs the fund’s Board of Trustees, leading a group of 15 members which includes well-known cultural, public, and religious figures from Artsakh, Armenia, and the diaspora. Among them are the primates of the Ararat and Artsakh dioceses, Archbishop Navasard Kchoyan and Archbishop Barkev Martirosian; American University of Armenia president Harutiun Armenian; writer and publicist Zoriy Balayan; Hamazgayin theatrical director Sos Sargsyan; Armenia TV chief Artem Sargsyan; and Shoushi Fund president Bakur Karapetian.

City of artisans

Shushi is situated 1,500 meters above sea level, at the crossroads of the Caucasus and Iran, and between two important Armenian lands: Zangezur and Artsakh. Artifacts unearthed in the surrounding territory date the earliest settlements to the first millennium B.C.

The town of Shushi itself was established much more recently: in the mid-18th century at the site of Shoshaber, the familial fortress (sghankh) of Melik Shahnazar of Varanda, one of Artsakh’s five constituent principalities. Since then, and until the early 19th century, Shushi was a center of the Karabakh khanate, first subordinated to the Persian shah and then to the Russian emperor. Following Russian-initiated administrative reforms, Shushi became the center of a self-named district, which incorporated most of Artsakh and parts of Zangezur, and was itself part of the Yelizavetopol governorate.

In the latter 19th and early 20th centuries, Shushi had its own mayor with a city council (duma), as well as a town police force, magistrate, treasury, a mutual loan bank, a post and telegraph office, army barracks, and other public offices.

The town of that day had a population of 42,000 – large for its time and even for present-day Armenia – mostly of populated by Armenians. Shushi was home to 1,856 stone-built homes, 11 streets, six squares, four stone and two wooden bridges, 376 shops, five hotels (caravanserais), seven taverns, four tanneries, two brickwork shops, three dye-houses, and one small silk factory.

Craftsmen representing more than 500 professions worked in the town, and in the years straddling the 19th and 20th centuries, a majority of the population were



An abandoned building in Shushi. Photo: Grigor Hakobyan.



Yervand Zakharian, mayor of Yerevan and chair of the Shushi Revival Fund’s board of trustees, shows Shushi schoolchildren around Yerevan City Hall over the New Year holiday. Photo: Shushi Revival Fund.

artisans, including metal-workers, jewelers, stonemasons, tailors, weavers, shoemakers, and barbers.

“Shushi was one of our rare settlements with a pronounced urban culture,” says Marina Grigorian, the Shushi Revival Fund’s public relations officer. “We want Shushi to regain its status as an Armenian center of culture, education, and spiritual matters. That’s the reason that we want to draw the attention of all Armenians to Shushi, hoping that our compatriots will understand and realize the strategic, political, and cultural importance of rehabilitating the city, for the sake of Armenia’s and Artsakh’s future.”

“We want to restore Shushi to the way it was in the old days – reconstruct it to become even more beautiful and attractive to its own inhabitants, and particularly to our youth and tourists,” Ms. Grigorian continues. “This is the fund’s aim. Fifteen years have passed since the liberation of Shushi, but sadly much of the town is still in ruins. Only the Ghazanchetsots Church has been fully restored.”

Ms. Grigorian recalls that other organizations have helped Shushi in the past. “Certainly the Hayastan All-Armenian Fund implemented several projects in Shushi. But the rehabilitation of an entire town, especially one of such historical and cultural value, requires a special approach. It’s not just about constructing an individual building, or

a street or a road, but a much more comprehensive program, requiring years of planning and implementation.”

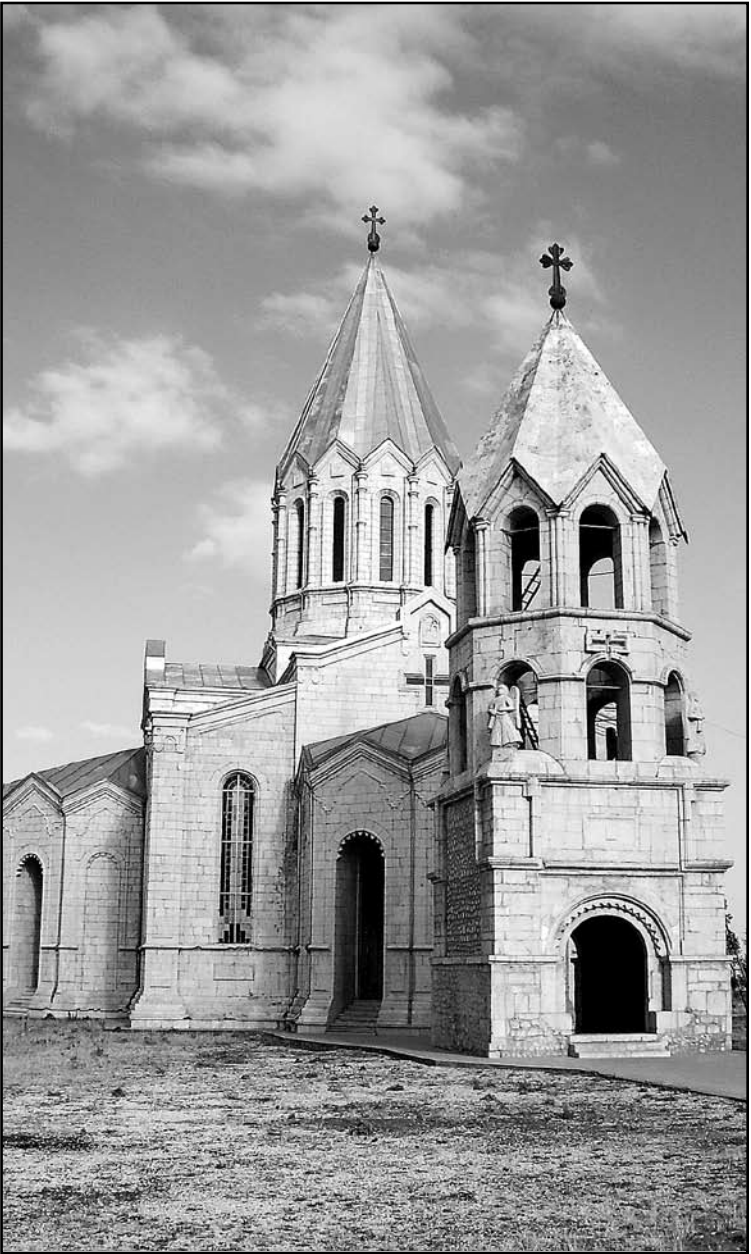
Stirrings of revival

In the year since it began, that the Shushi Revival Fund has managed to fund the development and implementation of several projects intended to breathe new life into the town.

It has already commissioned and completed a 50 million-dram (about \$140,000) master plan for Shushi, which includes a blueprint for its social and economic development.

The fund is particularly proud of completing the 180 million-dram (over half a million U.S. dollars) “Center of Tourism and Crafts” project, which aims to attract tourists while creating local jobs. The program involved rebuilding the bus station, which now houses an information center for tourists, and the adjacent square, which now includes traditional crafts shops, cafés with local cuisine, a winery, and exhibition spaces.

About 100 Shushi residents took part in the reconstruction. Thirty local young men and women received training which included internships in Yerevan, and will now work in the Center – which is due to formally open on May 9 as part of the 15th anniversary celebration.



Surp Ghazanchetsots Church in Shushi. Photo: Grigor Hakobyan.

Shushi-Shosh: the tallest branch of a young tree

The word *shosh* in the Artsakh dialect of Armenian means a branch of a young tree that is the tallest of all. Through its elevated geographic location, Shushi is in fact “taller” than much of the surrounding landscape, and the similarity to *shosh* is obvious. Besides, there is still the village of Shosh located just south-east of the town.

As with other old towns, the debate about the origin of its name continues to this day. The competing theory is that the name comes from the Turkic word for glass or mirror, signifying that Shushi’s air was and is so clean (and it is in much of the rest of mountainous Armenia).

But names of most of Artsakh’s settlements are typically prompted by their geography, e.g. Arachadzor, Karintak, Kolatak, Getashen, or other physical characteristics. The transformation of “Shosh” into “Shushi” is also typical of the Artsakh dialect, in which switching of “o” and “ou” are common, as in tot-tout, ton-toun and shon-shoun.

Also in the works is a 30 million-dram (\$85,000) micro-lending program, which through loans and training would assist 20 local families to launch small businesses like restaurants, pharmacies, hairdressing salons, photo services, and Internet cafés.

In another project, 100 Shushi children, mostly nine- and ten-year-olds, were taken to Yerevan for Christmas vacation. This year, the fund will help bring students from Armenia and the diaspora to Shushi.

And this summer, when Shushi hosts events for the Golden Apricot International Film Festival, the town will have a completed summer cinema. The festival’s director, Harutiun Khachatryan, is a member of the Shushi Revival Fund Board.

Partners in realizing a vision

The Shushi Revival Fund continues to move the town’s rehabilitation forward. The effort is mostly solitary – for now. But organizers feel confident that Armenians every-

where would be interested in seeing this beautiful town revive, and would welcome the chance to help.

Among its larger projects, the fund is building a new water-supply system for the town; the design has already been completed by a Yerevan-based company. The lack of a modern water supply system is one of Shushi’s major problems.

Plans also include the historical preservation and renovation of the 19th-century Realakan and Mariamian gymnasiums, and the creation of an entire educational district for the city.

Most importantly, say the fund officials, all this effort is intended not simply to provide a handout to Shushi, but to make it an attractive place for further investment. The goal is to help Shushi’s citizens “learn how to fish,” as the saying goes.

In the meantime, the various rehabilitation projects inspire hope for a larger revival of Shushi. In the opinion of this writer, that process would greatly accelerate if the political will arose to restore Shushi’s prominence as the administrative center of Artsakh. ■

Armenia

A look at the electoral terrain

by Armen Hakobyan

YEREVAN – Of 131 seats in Armenia’s National Assembly, 90 are allocated to political parties and electoral blocs. Each party presents a list of candidates. Parties that win more than 5 percent of the vote get seats according to the proportion of the nationwide vote they have won. As of May 3, there are 22 parties and one coalition (1,245 individual candidates) in the race.

The remaining 41 seats are contested in local districts. There are 119 candidates in the race, seven of whom are running unopposed in their districts.

The campaign for the May 12 election officially began on April 8. The Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaksutjun), the Prosperous Armenia Party, the Republican Party of Armenia, the Country of Laws (Orinats Yerkir) party, the Heritage party, and the Peoples’ Party of Armenia started lively campaigns, with events throughout the country, meetings with constituents, posters, and television advertisements. They have enlisted popular singers: Nune Yesayan and other popular stars have performed for the ruling Prosperous Armenia Party. Arto Tunçboyacıyan of The Armenian Navy Band performed at Marriott Armenia for the campaign kickoff of Raffi Hovannisian’s Heritage party, and then again at the mass rally organized by the ARF in Freedom Square. Another famous singer, Forsh, permitted the use of his popular song “And this is just how we live,” with modified lyrics, for the Country of Law’s theme song.

On a less pleasant note, the launch of the election campaign was marked by explosions at two offices of Prosperous Armenia, in which no one was hurt. No arrests have been made yet.

What follows is a glance at the most active parties in the campaign.

The Prosperous Armenia Party, led by Gagik Tsarukian, head of the Multi Group conglomerate, is a new party. Its banners were up before the official start date and its campaign is continuing it apace. It claims 370,000 members (which is 100,000 more than the number of votes garnered by the top vote-getter, the RPA, in 2003) and thus has high expectations. Prosperous Armenia says it is in the political center; it has adopted the slogan, “Together, let us build a prosperous country.” The party says it acknowledges the progress that has been made in recent years, but will not shy away from confronting existing problems and, in any case, is in favor of the rule of law, effective government, and the development of democracy without extremism and dogmatism. It promises to fight the shadow economy – even though Mr. Tsarukian’s mother, Rosa Tsarukian, recently told the newspaper *Zhamanak Yerevan* that their companies hide part of their income from the state. (The tax authority has not responded to the *Armenian Reporter’s* repeated requests for comment.)

Prosperous Armenia did not exist at the time of the 2003 election. Two members of the party, Mr. Tsarukian and Melik Manukian are running unopposed in districts 28 and 29 and are thus assured of winning seats in the National Assembly.

The Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaksutjun) has adopted the campaign slogan, “Our old friend is the Dashnaksutjun.” Leaders of the party, which is 117 years old, hope this theme



Top, from left: RPA, Prosperous Armenia, Country of Laws. Above: ARF. Right: Prosperous Armenia, Heritage, Impeachment (Photolure). Bottom: RPA. Photos: Armen Hakobyan for the Armenian Reporter.



will resonate with voters who do not trust the motives of relatively new parties dominated by newly wealthy officials and entrepreneurs. The party, a member of the Socialist International, is emphasizing the social and economic aspects of its program. It promises to fight the shadow economy, provide a level playing field for economic competition, ensure that people pay their fair share of the tax burden, triple the state budget, raise the minimum pension to 30,000 drams a month from 10,000, and raise the minimum wage to 50,000 drams per months from 15,000. It also promises to implement policies that support continuous population growth.

The ARF is part of the coalition government. The deputy speaker of the National Assembly and four ministers are from the ARF. In 2003, the ARF gained 11.5 percent of the votes in the party lists, receiving 11 seats in the parliament. In the current election, the ARF is focusing on the proportional ballot, having nominated only one candidate in a local district.

For the **Republican Party of Armenia**, the sudden death of its head, Prime Minister Andranik Margarian, was a serious blow on the eve of the elections, and the party’s campaign was slow to start. But it is in high gear now, with Prime Minister Serge Sargsian at the helm. The electoral program of the RPA too is full of specific numbers and promises, with an emphasis on the continuation of ongoing programs and political and economic reforms. Having been in power for the last few years, the RPA is reaching out to voters with the slogan, “For you, Armenia!” with the results of its work over the last seven or eight years, and with the promise of establishing an ever-improving environment for investments, a level playing field for economic competition, and a supportive environment for small and medium businesses, as the basis for the formation of a middle



class. The party says its promises are modest but realistic.

In 2003, the RPA won 23.66 percent of the vote in the party lists (280,363 votes), coming in first place and receiving 23 seats. The party also won seats from the non-proportional ballot. Unlike its coalition partner the ARF, the RPA is also running or supporting candidates in most local districts.

Country of Laws (Orinats Yerkir) Party was part of the ruling coalition until just over a year ago, at which time it joined the opposition camp. Its leader, former Speaker Artur Baghdasaryan, has become embroiled in controversy (see story on page A7). The party’s slogan is “We fight for a dignified life, law, and justice.” The party platform calls for population growth by offering, “Let’s say 400,000 drams [\$1,120] for the first child,” to quote Mr. Baghdasaryan. (The ARF proposes offering a 200,000 dram grant to families for each of their first two children and 2.5 million [\$7,000] for the third.) The platform also calls for higher and professional education opportunities for every young person

through student loans with 30- or 40-year repayment periods and the gradual elimination of university entrance exams. The party promises to lower the retirement age for women, make the military service period for conscripts shorter, continue the return of devalued Soviet-era bank deposits, and fight corruption. It also promises to fight monopolies: “It is better to have 100 people owning one store each, than one person owning 100 stores.” The party also proposes to build a second Iran-Armenia natural-gas pipeline to provide for Armenia’s energy security.

In 2003, the Country of Laws Party won 12.49 percent of the vote in the party lists (147,956 votes), coming in third place and receiving 12 seats (not counting local districts). When the party moved to the opposition, some of its deputies broke with the party, however.

The Heritage Party, led by Raffi Hovannisian, is taking part in the parliamentary elections for the first time, but its members are not new to politics. It is engaged in an active and civil election campaign.

The campaign does not travel in expensive SUVs or official vehicles but an American-style campaign bus. Also, in the spirit of Newt Gingrich’s Contract with America, the party is offering to sign a contract with the people of Armenia. “In Armenia, illusory democratic institutions have been made through imitation and declarations; they are in reality hollow,” the party declares. “The citizen of Armenia is estranged from the opportunity to have decisive and real influence on the administration the most important functions of state and society. The political will of the authorities in power is directed toward the distortion of democracy and obstruction of the development of civil society. Only the legal, legitimate authorities formed through fair elections will be morally and politically able to secure human and civil rights and fundamental freedoms on all levels of government.”

The party’s slogan is, “Free speech, free people, free country.” The Heritage Party offers voters a detailed legislative and executive program, promising that after coming to power they will bring to



Left: An ARF rally for workers’ rights on the occasion of international labor day. Right: A rally organized by Aylentrunk (Alternative). Photos: Photolure.

life the principles of accountability, transparency, and punishability.

The electoral campaign of the **National Unity Party** is also marked by active meetings with voters, during which the leader of this opposition political force, Artashes Geghsmian, mainly introduces his crisis-alleviation program, the slogan of which is “Let’s save the fatherland through unity.” Mr. Geghamian presented a similar program in 2002; the current one, he says, is revised and more complete. The program, which is rather bulky, proposes to pass 42 or 43 laws in the first 100 days. The party believes that Armenia is in a general crisis “as a result of the actions of oligarchic and corrupt authorities,” and in order to overcome the crisis, it is first of all necessary to “eliminate mysticism and empty talk of reform.” Mr. Geghamian and his followers believe that “in conditions of general competition, Armenia’s socioeconomic development requires the emergence of a new political class, which will be able to offer hope and jobs to the country, and first of all to its youth.”

In 2003, the National Unity Party won 8.9 percent of the vote in the

party lists (105,480 votes), taking fifth place and receiving 9 seats.

The People’s Party of Armenia was part of a coalition in 2003 but it is running alone this time around. It remains one of the most organized and influential forces in the opposition camp. It is led by Stepan Demirchian, son of Karen Demirchian; the older Mr. Demirchian led Soviet Armenia for many years, made a comeback, and was assassinated in the 1999 attack on parliament.

Stepan Demirchian was the runner up in the last presidential contest. He and the People’s Party have maintained the same approach: they promise authoritative leadership to establish law and order within the government, in the economy, and across the board.

The People’s Party started its campaign actively, organizing meetings with the voters. Mr. Demirchian has noted that the authorities do not hinder the campaign. The focus of the campaign is fair elections, or “taking ownership of the votes we receive.” Mr. Demirchian says that people’s conditions are very hard and oppressive. “People have simply lost

their faith in elections; but even in the most neglected places, people are not broken,” he says, calling on the citizens to take part in the elections. He does not think that those who take advantage of people’s destitution to buy their votes will succeed.

In 2003, the Justice Alliance won 13.78 percent of the vote in the party lists (163,203 votes), taking second place and receiving 14 seats. The Justice Alliance comprised more than ten parties, but the People’s Party reasonably considers the bulk of the alliance’s votes to have come from the People’s Party’s supporters.



In addition to the seven parties briefly discussed above, there are 18 more political forces involved in the election contest. There’s the **United Labor Party (MAK)** led by a businessperson, Gurgen Arsenian, owner of Arsoil. The party came in 6th place in 2003, and with 5.7 percent of the vote, won 6 seats. When Country of Laws withdrew from the coalition government, United Labor filled the minister of culture portfolio, and is thus part of the government.

MAK has gained an unexpected rival in the form of **MIAK, the United Liberal National Party**, led by the brother of Garik Martirosyan, a well-known entertainer in Russia and Armenia.

The **Democratic Way Party** is also noteworthy. Its uncompromising opposition politicians Manuk Gasparian, Arshak Sadoyan, and Aghasi Arshakyan have been part of the National Assembly for practically all of Armenia’s 15 years of independence.

As for the “exes,” the **Armenian Pan-National Movement** was running but dropped out of the party-list ballot. Individual candidates are still running in two districts. (In 2003, the party received 7,676 votes or 0.65 percent).

There is also an **“Impeachment” bloc** advocating ideas in the spirit of the Armenian Pan-National Movement. Had their nomination been rejected because of their provocative name, they may have gotten a great deal of attention, but that is not how things turned out.

The **Alliance (“Dashink”)** party headed by the former commander of Karabakh’s armed forces

Samvel Babayan has the potential to be a significant factor. The defection of a number of candidates on the party’s list have hampered its credibility somewhat.

Although the campaigns have proceeded without any serious collisions and confrontations, the struggle for each vote will become more intense as May 12 draws closer. The RPA, with the resources of the state and incumbency, can expect a strong showing. Prosperous Armenia, with the resources of its leader, can likewise do well. The ARF, with numerous articulate and well-regarded leaders to represent it, may find that its constituency has grown.

Meanwhile, things are more complicated for the opposition, which is fractured. With a threshold of 5 percent of the vote to get any seats through the party lists, a multitude of parties with small support bases can dissipate the opposition vote. Until the day nominations were closed, there was talk of a various alliances. But the alliance never materialized. This fact has disappointed and disillusioned opposition-leaning voters, some of whom may sit out the elections.

State, parties share burden for fair elections, Kocharian says

Continued from page A1

The president added: “A calm and civilized campaign is underway, which is laudable and is a result of the fact that the parties running have avoided radical, extremist slogans. Today the opposition has the opportunity to criticize, to hold election gatherings throughout Armenia. No state structure is raising any obstacles, as international observers have confirmed.”

Eavsdropping

The campaign season has seen one major scandal, and Mr. Kocharian touched on it in his meeting with the students.

Golos Armenii, a Russian-language newspaper published in Yerevan, on April 21 ran a front-page story titled, “Around the table at Marco Polo, or, at what price is Artur Baghdasaryan selling the motherland?” The story recounts a secretly recorded conversation at a Yerevan eatery between the former chair of the National Assembly, Artur Bagdasaryan, and Great Britain’s deputy chief of mission in Yerevan, Richard Hyde.

In a discussion of the coming parliamentary elections, Mr. Baghdasaryan repeatedly tried to persuade his interlocutor of the desirability of foreign intervention in the elections, the article said. Mr. Hyde reportedly responded

that Armenia’s authorities must make a serious blunder to justify foreign intervention. “We need an unequivocal violation for the European Union to make a strong statement,” Mr. Hyde is reported to have said. The article claims that Mr. Baghdasaryan told Mr. Hyde that Mr. Kocharian does not like the British, and Mr. Hyde responded that the feeling is mutual.

Golos Armenii on April 26 ran what it identified as a transcript of the secret recording in its possession. According to the transcript, Mr. Baghdasaryan had held a meeting with Boris Berezovsky, the Russian oligarch who has taken refuge in Britain, to discuss the financing of a colored revolution in Armenia.

The British Embassy in Yerevan on April 26 released a statement, saying it was “dismayed that a clandestine recording has been made, and recently released in part to the press, of a conversation between an official of this Embassy and the leader of an opposition party.”

The statement added: “Along with the OSCE, European Union, Council of Europe, the diplomatic community and others, the Embassy is interested in seeing elections on 12 May that conform to international standards. In this context the Embassy maintains a wide range of contacts and dialogues with institutions and individuals across the political spectrum in Armenia, in order to be informed

of all shades of political opinion. This enables us to form as complete and objective a view as possible of the political process, and is in line with the normal and accepted practice of any embassy anywhere in the world.

Foreign policy is not a priority in this election. The parties are focused on social issues, and there is a great deal of populism.

“As a member state of the EU, we wholeheartedly support the commitment shared by the EU and Armenia in the European Neighbourhood Policy Action Plan to work together to strengthen democratic institutions, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and we welcome Armenia’s democratic achievements so far.

“In that context, our objective will remain to do what we can to support and promote effectiveness in the performance of democratic institutions and processes in the country. It is not, never has been and cannot be, our business to support the political platform of any specific political party.”

Asked about the recording during his meeting with students at Yerevan State University, President Kocharian said that Mr. Baghdasaryan’s actions constitute treason. However, no action has been initiated against Mr. Baghdasaryan. Nor has Mr. Hyde been declared persona non grata.

Some political leaders join Mr. Kocharian in his assessment. But Gurgen Arsenian, leader of the United Labor Party, which is part of Armenia’s governing coalition, has noted that there are laws against bugging. “I think clandestine recording of conversations does not help the formation of political culture in Armenia,” he said.

Campaigning

The election campaign is in full swing. The parties and individual candidates are reaching out to voters.

One important difference between this election and previous ones is that practically no one is taking political advantage of the Karabakh issue. Foreign policy is not a priority in this election. The parties are focused on social issues, and there is a great deal of populism, along with lavish campaign promises.

Opinion polls have been conducted by the British firm Populus for Armenia TV and by the Armenian Sociometer Center. Populus

interviewed 2000 adults face-to-face between April 3 and 10. Interviews were conducted across the country. According to both polls, the Republican Party of Armenia, led by Prime Minister Serge Sargsian, and the Prosperous Armenia Party, which is associated with the president, each enjoy the support of between 25 and 30 percent of voters.

A group of parties, including the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaktsutun), Artashes Geghamian’s National Unity Party, Artur Baghdasaryan’s Country of Laws Party, Stepan Demirchian’s People’s Party of Armenia, and Raffi Hovannisian’s Heritage Party, are likely to cross the 5 percent threshold to win seats in the National Assembly. Another group of parties, including the United Labor Party, Mr. Babayan’s Alliance, and Tigran Karapetian’s Popular Party are close to the 5 percent mark.

According to sociologist Aharon Adibekyan, head of Sociometer, 42 percent of voters expect serious violations of election laws, 20 percent expect minor violations, and 22 percent expect relatively fair elections.

Incidentally, Mr. Kocharian told students the names of the parties he would like to see elected: Republican, Prosperous Armenia, Dashnaktsutun, and United Labor.

Armenia

Birthright Armenia expands its recruitment to Eastern Europe

PHILADELPHIA – Birthright Armenia spares no effort to inspire young diaspora Armenians to connect with their homeland through a meaningful, longterm immersion experience. The first 200 volunteers sponsored to intern in Armenia have hailed from 13 countries and 20 diaspora organizations.

However, to date, none have come from the former Soviet bloc of Eastern Europe, home to some of the oldest Armenian communities.

But through a series of recruitment events scheduled for Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, and the Czech Republic, Birthright Armenia will soon promote the importance of connecting with the homeland among the young people of this region. The events in Eastern Europe will focus on year-round opportunities for volunteering in Armenia, and the Birthright Armenia services available to help make participation a reality.

According to Linda Yepoyan, Birthright Armenia’s executive di-

rector, “These are no longer your typical organized communities, centered around the church or an organization. Many of the younger generation there are completely assimilated into existing society, so we are excited about the opportunity to connect them with their ancestral homeland. Our challenge is to try to find those who have lost all connections, and encourage them to reconnect with their homeland through community service, with our assistance.”

The search for future young leaders from this untapped part of the world is being coordinated with local community leaders on the ground, and will take the Birthright Armenia staff to Sofia, Plovdiv, Prague, Bucharest, Warsaw, and Krakow.

“By actively networking with the Armenia-Diaspora Conference representatives from Eastern Europe, as well as with other community leaders and organizational contacts, we have been able to pull to-

From left, Armenian Assembly Intern Program Manager Alex Karapetian, Birthright Armenia Executive Director Linda Yepoyan and Assembly Intern Alum Christopher Babayan during an opportunity fair in Boston on January 21. Photo: www.aaa-inc.org



gether a recruitment itinerary that will introduce hundreds of young people, from a segment of our diaspora often overlooked, to the concept of a homeland that they have

a birthright to feel is theirs,” said Yepoyan. “We will go to Eastern Europe fully prepared, with printed materials in their native languages,” she

said. “We want local leadership to become familiar with our mission, and in turn, to take an active role in channeling local youth into programs such as the Armenian Volunteer Corps (AVC), which accepts volunteers year-round.”

But given the pioneering nature of this recruitment effort, the leaders of Birthright Armenia have no illusions about instant success. “At first, it may take a lot of effort to convince even a couple of youth to take the plunge and volunteer in Armenia,” Yepoyan said. “But we are inspired by the prospect of connecting even a small segment of the youth from these communities to the homeland. Birthright Armenia’s investment in these young adults will ensure that these pockets of the diaspora remain vibrant, and have a crop of future young leaders, who hold a positive attitude about the role of the homeland in their Armenian identity.”

A special pilgrimage leads Armenian youth to Holy Etchmiadzin

ETCHMIADZIN – On Sunday, April 15, the faculty and students of Holy Etchmiadzin’s Gevorkian Theological Seminary organized a pilgrimage for 220 students from 11 specialty schools, including orphanages, Armenian Church Youth Centers, and other institutions.

To start the day, the young pilgrims arrived at the monastery of St. Hripsime, where they participated in a morning Divine Liturgy. Following church services, the boys and girls visited the other churches and monasteries in Vagharshapat, had lunch together on the grounds of the St. Gayane Church, and finally arrived at the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin in the afternoon.

The older students received a special tour of the Alex and Marie Manoogian Museum on the grounds of the Holy See, where they viewed its extensive collection of vestments, liturgical vessels, and art.

At the end of the day, the young pilgrims were ushered into the recital hall of the seminary building, where they were treated to a concert of folk music and songs performed by a youth choir.



The Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin

An ancient Urartian temple is unearthed

BLOOMFIELD HILLS, Mich. – In the fall of 2006, Project Discovery awarded \$4,955 to Dr. Inesa Karapetyan, senior research fellow at the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography, of Armenia’s National Academy of Sciences. The grant was to investigate the ritual significance of the site of Armavir, from the end of the 4th millennium to the end of the 1st millennium BC.

The excavations which followed exposed the architectural character of two types of temples. With the help of the artifacts found at the site – including cultic ceramics, statuettes, and altars strewn with the bones of sacrificial animals – archaeologists have been able to reconstruct some of the rites and rituals of Armenia’s Urartian period.

The excavation team included a graduate student specializing in the archaeology of the Urartu, offering a wonderful opportunity for this student to gain knowledge and experience beyond what would be available through university courses.

During the October excavations, the southern wall was cleared across its entire length (14.90 meters), as was the wonderfully preserved southeastern corner, and a 5-meter section of the eastern wall on which rested a wall of medieval construction.

On the upper levels, traces of medieval construction with domestic

hearths (*tonirs*), pits, large storage vessels and associated materials were discovered.

The central square construction (14.9 meters square) is characteristic of Urartian temple architecture, distinguishable by its characteristic stonework and masonry. Other wonderful examples of Urartian temples can be found at Cavustepe, Altintepe, and Van.

On the northern slope of the hill the team completed excavations on a cult sanctuary. The interior area of the sanctuary is enclosed on the eastern side by the worked cliff, the southern side by a faced stone cliff, and the western side by a constructed stone wall. Rocky outcrops dominate the interior space, one of which is an altar.

The second interior space was transformed into a three-stepped pedestal (*parakon*) on which would have been placed a statue of a god. A basalt idol was found at the base of that pedestal. Inside, in addition to the cultic character of the bones of sacrificial animals, there was found a movable stone altar. The discovered artifacts demonstrate that the sanctuary functioned in the post-Urartu period.

With its strategic location, excellent defensive constructions, a formidable complex of buildings within the fortress, and the sanctity



The Urartian sanctuary unearthed on the north slope of hill at Armavir.

of the site, Armavir appears to have retained its existence as a temple center in the post-Urartian period (from the 6th to 4th centuries BC), and was subsequently chosen as the capital of the Armenian dynasty by the Yervandid kings, from the end of the 4th century to the second half of the 2nd century BC.

The study of Armavir in this epoch has tremendous significance for archaeologists and historians studying culture, history, and religion in the 1st millennium BC. Of no small importance is its significance for the study of the architecture of ancient Armenia.

Project Discovery is an independent charitable organization dedicated to the discovery and preservation of Armenia’s archaeological and cultural legacy. For information, visit its website at www.projectdiscovery.net.

Armenian students take part in a Junior Achievement trade fair in Romania

YEREVAN – The student company of Etchmiadzin School No. 4, called “Belts,” represented Armenia’s Junior Achievement Program at the organization’s annual European Student Trade Fair, meeting in Romania.

The Armenian students joined more than 76 companies from 30 European countries in the annual competition that brings together the best of student companies to display their products. The event also gives the young entrepreneurs an opportunity to market their goods in a European city.

Junior Achievement of Armenia is a non-governmental or-

ganization whose mission is to teach young students the basics of applied economics. Throughout the year, the students learn economic theory and then apply their knowledge in creating student-run businesses. They conduct marketing research, issue stock to raise capital, manufacture the product, and develop marketing strategies.

The students of Etchmiadzin School created a unique product: a belt made of wooden beads that could also be used as a massage belt. The product survived a rigorous national competition in Armenia, and was chosen to rep-

resent the country at the international level.

“We were so proud to have been chosen to participate in this event,” said Anoush Meykhanajyan, one of the student representatives. “We worked very hard on establishing our business, and were happy to be rewarded for all of our work.”

Anna Hovhannisyan, the product designer, said, “I learned a lot from the experience. It is one thing to watch other people conduct business; it is another to actively do it. Our trip was so wonderful. We got to learn much from other student companies and our experiences in selling our product. We

met wonderful people from all over the world and we made so many friends. We also very much enjoyed learning about Romania and its culture.”

Armine Hovannisian, executive director of Junior Achievement of Armenia, accompanied the students on their five-day trip. “This is the third year that we are taking part in this important event. We were honored that our nation’s diplomatic representatives attended the trade fair and encouraged our students with their presence.”

“I think the experience is priceless for those involved,” she added.



Armine Hovannisian, executive director of Junior Achievement of Armenia

COMMENTARY

Making history on parallel tracks

Yeltsin, Ter-Petrossian, and the emergence of democracy in the post-Soviet era

by Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan

YEREVAN – A rarely-heard voice could be noticed last week among the Armenian leaders conveying their condolences over the passing of Boris Yeltsin, who died on April 23 at age 76.

Former President Levon Ter-Petrossian – who has been largely silent since leaving office in 1998 – took the occasion to express his grief at the death of his fellow statesman. The two men shared a unique bond as the first freely elected presidents of their respective countries. And that was hardly the sole tie connecting them.

Armenia-Yeltsin alliance at the end of Soviet Union

Their first exposure to each other most likely occurred after Ter-Petrossian became chair of what would be Armenia’s last Supreme Soviet (the parliament of Soviet Armenia) in 1990. In that capacity he went to Moscow to meet Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev and other high level Soviet officials.

But closer cooperation between them started when Yeltsin became the leader of the Interregional Group of the Council of People’s Deputies: the first all-Soviet parliament elected with an element of freedom.

Ter-Petrossian, as the head of one of the republican parliaments, could participate in the work of the council and cooperated with the group. From this connection in the corridors of what was still Soviet power, Yeltsin and Ter-Petrossian naturally established a rapport with each other a few years later, when they entered the presidencies of Russia and Armenia.

Yeltsin saw the issue of Karabakh as intimately connected with Armenia’s democratization processes, and with its struggle against the Communist Party nomenklatura that had originally ceded Karabakh to Azerbaijan. Ter-Petrossian boldly joined the fight on the side of the democratic faction, whereas the Azerbaijani government of the time staked itself entirely on the old Communist powers.

Though at the time its attention was directed away from Moscow and toward establishing good relations with Turkey, the Ter-Petrossian-led Karabakh Committee, and later the Pan-Armenian National Movement were allied with Yeltsin in the struggle against the Soviet hard-liners. Gorbachev himself was wavering between the party’s “liberal” wing, informally led by Alexander Yakovlev, and its “conservatives” like Yegor Ligachev – who were also Yeltsin’s direct rivals. At the same time, the latter faction had an extremely negative image in Armenia and Artsakh due to its stance on the Karabakh problem.

In that atmosphere, the fact that Ter-Petrossian did not support the putsch – the August 1991 coup d’etat attempt of Soviet Vice President Gennadiy Yanaev, KGB chief Vladimir Kriuchkov, Defense Minister Dmitry Yazov, and others, who tried to take power away from Gorbachev – played an enormous role in establishing future relations between Armenia and Russia.

The leaders of the putsch were attempting to turn back the clock on reforms. During its three days’ duration, some leaders of the Soviet republics like Azerbaijani leader Ayaz Mutallibov publicly supported the putsch; Ter-Petrossian, however, was silent.

Yeltsin organized the resistance, famously climbing on a tank outside Moscow’s “White House” (the Russian government building) – a symbolic gesture that helped galvanize public opposition to the putsch and, eventually, bring him victory in his contest against Gorbachev. At the time, people in Armenia wondered whether Ter-Petrossian’s silence would have dire consequences for Armenia – a definite possibility were the putsch successful.

Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan is a Moscow-based consultant. He contributed this story while on a visit to Armenia.



Left:Armenia’s first president, Levon Ter-Petrossian and Russia’s first president, Boris Yeltsin. Right: Mr. Yeltsin, Mr. Ter-Petrossian, Kazakh president Nursultan Nazarbayev and Azerbaijani president Ayaz Mutalibov in Zheleznovodsk, Russia, September 1991. Photos: Photolure.



But Ter-Petrossian’s allies succeeded: the putsch sank, taking with it the entire Soviet system. Against this background the young Armenian government found a sound basis for good relations with the new Russia, over the ruins of the Soviet Union.

With the collapse of the USSR, the involvement of Moscow in the Karabakh conflict changed dramatically. This was due to a unique combination of personality factors and systemic political issues. Kriuchkov, Yazov and others, who were ousted from power after the putsch, were directly responsible for the conduct of Moscow’s earlier involvement in the Karabakh conflict: “Operation Ring” and other policies intended to expel the Armenian population from Artsakh and its surrounding territories, in exchange for which Azerbaijan, for a time, stayed loyal to the Soviet Union. The failed putsch thus marked the end of Soviet participation in the conflict on the side of Soviet Azerbaijan.

Finding common cause with the new Russia

With the USSR collapsing, Russia began its search for a new identity, which in important ways continues to this day. A part of that still unfinished search was a return to traditional Russian values – and for the first time in the 20th century, these shared identity markers, no matter how superficial, played to the benefit of Armenians. The common Christian religion of Armenians and Russians was seen as a point of solidarity against the Islamic traditions of Azerbaijan’s population.

Some Armenian leaders, particularly Ashot Manucharyan and Eduard Simonyants, began a long-term effort to befriend key players in the new Russian government, despite the lack of consensus on this approach inside the Ter-Petrossian team itself. These efforts were encouraged by elements in the Ter-Petrossian administration, which understood that anti-Russian rhetoric, promoted at the time in Armenian nationalist circles, was detrimental to an Armenia which found itself both in blockade and at war.

Thus, for the first time since early 1920s, Moscow under the leadership of Boris Yeltsin was acting with at least a semblance of impartiality in regard to Armenia and Azerbaijan, rather than with a heavy imbalance favoring Azerbaijan. Evidence for this can be seen in the rapid conclusion of the Treaty on Military and Strategic Cooperation between Russia and Armenia. That treaty and other important diplomatic documents would eventually have different stages and titles, but the first phase was negotiated already in 1992, when it was still unclear whether the successor to the Soviet Union, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) – which did not, at the time, include either Azerbaijan or Georgia – could maintain orderly relations among its members.

Since that time, Azerbaijanis have concluded that Russia was supporting Armenia in the Karabakh conflict – ignoring both the prior history and the consideration that Russia’s support was intended to contain the conflict and keep it in an unresolved condition, as a lever of influence on both states, rather than to help either side achieve a total victory.

Nevertheless, in this way too Yeltsin’s coming to power heralded a new stage in Russian-Armenian relations. At least officially, Armenia had gone from being a satellite or a

part of Russia, to becoming a strategic and military ally – moreover, Russia’s only one in the region.

The radical nationalist policies of President Abulfaz Elchibey of Azerbaijan (1992–93) on the background of its losses during the Karabakh war resulted in a coup d’etat led by one of Azerbaijan’s military commanders, Suret Husseynov, and probably partly supported by Russia. That resulted in the return to power of Azerbaijan’s Soviet-era leader, Heidar Aliiev. He immediately embarked on mending relations with Russia and Yeltsin. Azerbaijan joined the CIS.

For the first time since early 1920s, Moscow under the leadership of Boris Yeltsin was acting with at least a semblance of impartiality in regard to Armenia and Azerbaijan, rather than with a heavy imbalance favoring Azerbaijan.

However, the Russian-Armenian strategic alliance had already taken root, and neither Yeltsin nor his administration could forget Azerbaijan’s past, if brief, disloyalty. Besides, Yeltsin, the Soviet rebel of the late 1980s, must have remembered that at that time Aliyev represented the anti-reform wing of the Soviet establishment. In any case, Azerbaijan chose to build its foreign policy on the basis of oil development rather than on relying solely on the difficult friendship with Russia.

Yeltsin’s team, as distinct from Gorbachev’s, did not feature many recognizably Armenian names; the exception was Andranik Mhramyan, one of Yeltsin’s many advisors.

But even in the absence of Armenian figures in his immediate circle, Yeltsin’s relations with Armenia were cordial thanks to his connection with Ter-Petrossian. This summit-level friendship was reinforced by other layers of friendship, such as the connection between Vazgen Sargsyan and Pavel Grachev, the ministers of defense in the two administrations.

Gradually an “inner circle” formed around President Yeltsin, and direct access to him became much more difficult than it was in the “revolutionary” times. With Yeltsin losing health and gaining in “czar-like” qualities, his decisiveness of the younger years turned into an arbitrariness in decision-making. Many decisions would not be made because he personally was not aware of them, or was not interested in them. To describe the situation, a special expression came into existence: “access to the body.” Politicians were divided between those who could have direct access to Yeltsin, and those who could not. Ter-Petrossian was one of those who had that access, and he used it carefully.

Armenia-Russia parallels

Other parallels in the political biographies of Yeltsin and Ter-Petrossian would later come to light, perhaps highlighting a deeper connection between Armenian and Russian politics. In June and September 1996, Yeltsin and Ter-Petrossian respectively stood for second presidential terms. In both cases the elec-

tions were most likely heavily rigged. In any event, the results gave much less of a mandate to the incumbents than they received during their inaugural terms.

In both cases, the presidents resigned in the middle of their terms (Ter-Petrossian at the beginning of 1998 and Yeltsin at the end of 1999), even if for seemingly different reasons. In both cases, the successors were former Prime Ministers who had backgrounds in the “power spheres”: Vladimir Putin in security, and Robert Kocharian in the Karabakh war. Both new presidents were from “the second capital”: Putin from St. Petersburg and Kocharian from Stepanakert. And both were initially brought in from outside the sitting presidents’ team to mend their seemingly broken administrations.

The parallels have been inherited by the successors. Both Putin and Kocharian to a great degree renounced the policies of their predecessors and gradually replaced the overwhelming majority of civil servants, substantially relying on their homeland connections. Both have encouraged the promotion of a negative image of their predecessors’ terms, despite their own roles in those administrations.

Putin has declared that the collapse of the USSR was the greatest tragedy of the 20th century; Kocharian immediately freed leaders of the Dashnaktsutun party, persecuted during Ter-Petrossian’s times, and has declared the global recognition of the Armenian Genocide as one of the priorities of his foreign policy, as opposed to Ter-Petrossian’s more unusual line of currying friendship with Turkey and peace with Azerbaijan via concessions. Both presidents have curtailed freedoms, particularly the freedom of expression, in substantial ways, while overtly declaring their devotion to them.

Today, Putin and Kocharian are about to complete their second terms in office, and face the issue of succession.

Yeltsin’s legacy

Yeltsin, also like Ter-Petrossian, withdrew from politics after leaving office. But in recent years, visiting Armenia, he reiterated that the Genocide should be recognized by Turkey. (It was during Yeltsin’s term that the Russian Duma recognized the Genocide.) So even after leaving office, he remained sympathetic toward Armenians. During his last visit he also met with Ter-Petrossian.

Yeltsin was a vivid and formidable figure on a historic scale. Actions of such figures are hugely consequential. It is no wonder that his mistakes would prove as fatal as his successful decisions proved providential.

His political will allowed him to start an independent power game, grasp and keep power in the biggest country of the world, unconditionally support freedom of expression in a country traditionally lacking it, and accomplish Russia’s historic transition from communist rule to a market economy. He governed over a period of institutional change, and his personality played a larger role in strategic decisions than do the personalities of leaders who come to power in more stable historical periods. One mistake on a historic scale was the war in Chechnya.

In later years it became more difficult for Armenians to have “access to the body”: that is, to achieve Yeltsin’s personal attention on the issues which worried them. Nevertheless, it is fortunate that Yeltsin remained a friend of Armenia up to the end.

A month of victories

May is the month when Armenians get together and make history. The Battle of Avarair, most historians tell us, was fought in May 451. While it was technically a loss, it was a victory for Armenia’s future.

In May 1918 Armenian forces stopped the Ottoman Turkish onslaught at Sardarabad and Aparan, making the very existence of an Armenian state possible.

In May 1945, Allied forces – including tens of thousands of Soviet Armenians and thousands of Armenian-Americans – put a definitive end to Nazi rule in Europe.

And more recently, in May 1992 Armenians liberated Shushi in Nagorno-Karabakh and in the following weeks opened the corridor into Zangezur in southern Armenia, physically stitching together the two parts of Armenia.

In May 1994, Armenian soldiers launched a final offensive of the Artsakh war that threatened to cut Azerbaijan in two and forced it to accept a cease-fire and the relative peace that both nations continue to enjoy.

This list is not exhaustive, but it is a reminder of what Armenians *may* accomplish through collaboration, determination, and sustained efforts.

At the start of Artsakh war, Azerbaijani forces controlled Shushi and surrounded Stepanakert. Artsakh’s capital came under direct and indiscriminate fire for over six months, with local people living in bomb shelters on the brink of starvation. Armenians were outnumbered, outgunned, and encircled. Many thought the situation was hopeless.

To have a chance, Armenian forces had to break out of the circle, and that meant, most importantly, taking Shushi. The operation, codenamed Hrazdan – and informally known as “Wedding in the Mountains” – took over a month of careful planning.

On May 8, 1992, Armenian forces, all volunteers, scaled the steep cliffs on which Shushi is located, engaging Azerbaijani forces. After a day-long battle, in which 52 Armenian soldiers were killed, the Azerbaijani forces retreated, and Armenians liberated the town in the early morning of May 9.

This year Armenians are celebrating the 15th anniversary of the Shushi victory. Much work remains to be done in the town itself. (See story on page A4.)

Likewise, much work remains to be done to translate the Armenian military success into a political and diplomatic one, and prevent another war that has been threatened by Azerbaijan.

In the United States, a key role in these efforts is played by the Office of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic in Washington. This mission works with the U.S. administration, Congress, opinion makers, and the general public to advance the pan-Armenian cause of a secure and prosperous Artsakh.

An apt way to celebrate this month of victories is to support the NKR Office in its important work. Visit their website at www.nkrusa.org. Or call 202-223-4330 and see how you can help. We should all be able to take pride in our role in the progress of a secure and free Artsakh.



Commentary

Letters

A pleasure to read

Sir:

I’ve been meaning for some time now to write to you and congratulate you for the total change of the caliber and essence of your whole newspaper since the new management took over.

The total spirit of your newspaper is so much more professional than before and it is a pleasure to read the newspaper from the beginning to the end. As longtime subscribers, we sincerely appreciate your new group.

The latest change was the color pages. That also has enhanced the look of the newspaper. Thanks for bringing us such an interesting product.

Very truly yours,
Maida Domenie
Florida

Not a pleasure to read

Sir:

I along with many of my friends do not like your new format and layout of the paper. The red banners are unnecessary. It is difficult and confusing to read this newspaper. I have a hard time following it. The print is too small. The Calendar of Events is hard to read.

It is not a pleasure to sit and read this paper anymore. We hope you will make a change for the better or else just go back to the way it was.

I have been a long time subscriber.

Very truly yours,
Claire Bardakian
Garden City, N.Y.

Tread lightly on the earth

Sir:

Congratulations on launching your new format and expanded coverage! Your ambitions, intellects, and fervor infuse our whole community.

I was particularly inspired by Paul Chaderjian’s comments upon joining the team: “All I have ever dreamed of doing in my career since childhood...are now part of my daily work experience.... Through our work in media, our stories will be passed on to future generations of Armenians, will become part of the collective history of humankind, and help Armenians around the world be part of a virtual community.”

I too have yearned to unite my life’s pursuits in the mission of building my family, Armenian community, and human community. But increasingly, the call-to-action is shifting. We must now acknowledge that as we tread heavily upon our earth, we threaten our future generations. In your pages, perhaps special mention should be made of Armenians who contribute to a sustainable environment. Armenians have always contributed to humankind’s advance, and we now confront a reality – environmental destruction – that could render all of our past accomplishments moot. May your pages become a place where we

can meet to work towards a sustainable future together on our fragile planet.

Very truly yours,
Joseph Basralian
New York, N.Y.

Finally it changed

Sir:

The new updated *Armenian Reporter* is wonderful!

The style and the various sections are easy reading. Finally it changed, and I like the new print, which does not smear on your hands, etc.

Very truly yours,
Gloria Alvandian
By email

After the resolution

Sir:

Armenian-American groups have done an excellent job of focusing attention on the Armenian Genocide resolutions in Congress. But these resolutions still have not been passed. Even if they do pass, then what? What is the follow up? What is the recompense?

Turkey has had the chance to do the right thing – 92 years is long enough. Now is the time for real restitution and penalties. Here are some things we Armenians should do:

1. Boycott all Turkish products such as apricots, dates, nuts, rugs, etc.
2. Boycott all cruises and trips that include Turkey in their itineraries.
3. Picket advertising and PR agencies that are apologists for Turkey and picket Turkish embassies on a regular basis.
4. Create Armenian Genocide material for all levels of school curriculum.
5. Denounce all organizations that deny the Armenian Genocide.
6. Flood local newspapers with letters regarding the Armenian Genocide.
7. Call or e-mail radio, TV, and cable stations for Armenian Genocide coverage.
8. Assure that any reference to events prior to A.D. 1200 in Asia Minor be cited as historic Armenia, not Turkey.

And here are some demands Armenians should make:

1. Turkey must admit, and take responsibility for the Genocide.
2. Turkey must cease its illegal blockade of Armenia, which is tantamount to a declaration of war.
3. Turkey must include the Armenia Genocide as part of its educational curriculum for all ages.
4. Turkey must yield to Armenia a 10-mile-wide corridor from Armenia to the Black Sea.
5. Turkey must restore all the churches and khatchkars that it has desecrated and destroyed.

Sincerely yours,
Haig Bohigian
Sleepy Hollow, N.Y.

The writer is professor emeritus at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, of the City University of New York.

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Commentary

LIVING
IN ARMENIA

Women and parliamentary elections

by Maria Titizian

Parliamentary elections set for May 12, 2007 in Armenia will not likely present a significant increase of women in parliament. Although women’s organizations have been lobbying more actively this past year to have a greater representation of women in the National Assembly and some political parties have been showcasing their women candidates on the campaign trail, it is unlikely that the status quo will change.

Of the 131 seats in parliament, 90 seats are assigned to national proportional lists and 41 are majority, single-mandate seats. The overriding majority of the 28 parties which have submitted their proportional lists to the Central Electoral Commission have included at least one woman in the top ten. Of all the names on the proportional lists, 353 women’s names are listed, the highest percentage ever. Three parties have placed women as the second name on their lists; those include Raffi Hovannisian’s Heritage Party, Samvel Babayan’s Alliance (Dashink) Party and Shavarsh Kocharian’s National Democratic Party. However the likelihood that any of these parties will manage to pass the 5 percent threshold required to get into parliament, is slim. Only three parties out of the 28 have 3 women in their top ten, and 4 parties have two women in the top ten, the rest have the mandatory single name. The fact that there are women at all in the top ten names of these proportional lists is because Armenia’s electoral code was amended and which now stipulates that parties must include 15% women in their proportional lists (from the previous 5% requirement), and at least one woman’s name must be included in every ten names.

There are only 5 women who are vying for one of those 41 single-mandate majoritarian seats but the likelihood of their winning is almost nil, especially when you take into con-



Ruzan Khachatryan of the Popular Party (foreground), Hranush Kharatyan of the National Democratic Party. Photo: Photolure.

sideration that most of the incumbents and new candidates in the electoral districts that these women are running in are wealthy businessmen, with lots of resources and leverage, ultimately leaving women out in the cold. Interestingly, in two electoral districts, there are two women candidates running against each other. A seasoned politician once said that if there was one independent woman running in a single-mandate seat then all political parties should collectively support her to ensure she wins. In his estimation this would help in the creation of a new political culture which would see broad based support for women. This suggestion obviously never came to fruition.

The problem is that there is no level playing field. Women do not enjoy the same privileges as men nor do they have the same access to finances, thus leaving them out of the game. During one of many conversations with men, including members of parliament, when talking about the lack of women in parliament and government, one politician posed the question – is it a level playing field even for the men in this country. Making it to the National Assembly for most it seems, man or woman is a matter of money and connections.

Throw into the mix election fraud and ballot rigging and women are further alienated. These elections will be a benchmark for Armenia. If the powers that be do not have the political will and moral fortitude to ensure that the elections are fair, free, and transparent, then many things will hang in the balance for the future of this country. Every political party is reaching out to the electors, asking them not to take bribes, promising that they will not be part of the extensive and imaginative forms of ballot rigging. Although everyone is saying the same thing, we are constantly bombarded by the news which documents the fact that some political parties are not only passing out bribes, but are also demanding voters’ passports as insurance that their payment to the elector actually translates into a vote for their party. One cannot turn on the television without hearing the same sentiments being expressed. International and local observers will be monitoring the elections. International observers include, the Executive Committee of CIS, OSCE/ODIHR (Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights) with 131 observers, OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and PACE with 48 observers. There are 34 local organizations which have also registered to conduct election observation. One particular NGO, The Center for Youth, Legal and Social Support, is participating with 532 members.

To raise awareness among women voters, the Women Voter’s League and the Women’s

Coalition of Armenia held several debates among women candidates, representing different political parties. The first debate was held on April 13 at the Sundukian Theatre in Yerevan. Over 500 women from different women’s organizations and NGOs participated in a very lively debate which sometimes crossed the boundaries of etiquette and decorum. To an impartial observer, it seemed that some of the women in the audience, unaccustomed to this kind of forum, only wanted to pursue their own objectives. It became apparent toward the end, when the moderator had lost control of the situation that the level of frustration on behalf of most women was at its pinnacle. This is not surprising because in the past, women have rarely had the opportunity to voice their opinions and make their concerns heard. All the same, it was a first step in a long road to attaining women’s participation and involvement.

It is imperative that more women make it to parliament in Armenia, not simply to increase numbers but to create a new democratic agenda in Armenian politics which can improve the lives of all the citizens in the republic. There cannot be real democracy in Armenia if over half the population is not involved in the process. If we continue to ignore the gender disparity in Armenia, it will come at a great cost to our society’s ability to sustain growth, to govern effectively, increase productivity and eventually reduce poverty. The majority of women in Armenia want to have a role in the development and empowerment of our nation not only to advance women’s rights or “interests” but because they want to have a stake in public policy development and ultimately bequeath to their children a country they can be proud of.

Although most indicators suggest that there will not be a significant increase of women in the National Assembly after May 12, we must continue to advocate for gender parity in all areas of public life in Armenia. 𐌌𐌔𐌕𐌕𐌔

Los Angeles Times’ managing editor’s misconduct infuriates the Armenian-American community

by Harut Sassounian
Publisher, The California Courier

Last week’s column on the actions of Douglas Frantz, the Managing Editor of the Los Angeles Times, who has been accused of discriminatory practices against reporter Mark Arax, sent shock waves throughout the community. Frantz had blocked the publication of an article written by veteran reporter Arax on the Armenian Genocide resolution in the U.S. Congress.

My previous column was posted on scores of websites and quoted or commented upon by the L.A. Weekly, Hurriyet, one of the largest newspapers in Turkey, several wire services, and many other newspapers around the world in various languages. This writer was also interviewed by Larry Mantle on KPCC radio in Southern California and appeared on the Larry Zarian TV show which covers Glendale, Burbank, La Crescenta, Montrose and La Canada.

Within days of the release of that column, as hundreds of critical e-mails poured into the newsroom, several top executives of the Los Angeles Times began issuing public statements in response to the complaints.

The e-mail sent by David Hiller, the Publisher of The Times, was both fair and sensible. He assured the readers that he takes accusations of discrimination at the newspaper “most seriously.” Hiller said that he “will never tolerate anybody being discriminated against based on ethnicity, race, religion, or any other ground. This includes how reporters are assigned stories and how stories are handled in the editing process. ...I am proud of the reporting that The Times does on the Armenian genocide, and also the positions we have taken on our editorial pages. I am also proud and grateful for the welcome and support my new friends in the Southern California Arme-

nian communities have shown me since my arrival here six months ago. I look forward to continuing that fine relationship and the strong and open communications on which it is based.”

The second reaction came from Jim O’Shea, the top editor of the L.A. Times. In a memo to the staff, he said he was responding to complaints from many staffers and readers who had written to him in recent days. He stated that he recognized “the gravity of this issue” and took “these complaints seriously.” Although O’Shea announced that an internal investigation was being completed, he nevertheless jumped the gun and proceeded dutifully to defend his colleague Frantz without waiting for the completion of that process. While saying that he wanted to “set the record straight because much of the publicity surrounding this issue is inaccurate,” he proceeded to make several faulty and misleading statements himself.

In his memo, O’Shea reiterated Frantz’s earlier unfounded accusation of bias on the part of Mark Arax, impugning yet again the integrity of this professional reporter. O’Shea hid the fact that a subsequent investigation proved that the so-called “petition” that Arax and five other reporters were accused of signing was not a petition, but a letter that simply informed the editors and the staff of their deviation from the newspaper’s established policy of referring to the Armenian Genocide as genocide. O’Shea’s repetition of such accusations against Arax serves only to compound the newspaper’s potential legal problems and exposes The Times to possibly more damaging lawsuits.

Moreover, O’Shea’s memo contained several inaccurate statements:

– He claimed that The Times simply placed a “hold “ on Arax’s story for one week. In fact, the story was put on hold for two weeks before it was killed and eventually replaced by a much weaker story on the Armenian Genocide resolution written by Richard Simon;

– O’Shea claimed that Simon, the new reporter assigned to the story, “uncovered additional material involving the position on the resolution of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi,” was false. In fact, there was nothing new or important in that story. Pelosi did not even talk to Simon;

– O’Shea bragged that The Times had done a thorough job covering the Armenian community and cited 67 stories over the past two years that mentioned Armenia or Armenians. But he failed to state that many of these articles had mischaracterized the Armenian Genocide and only after repeated complaints, a correction was grudgingly published. Could it be that the editor was including some of these corrections in his count of 67 stories? Furthermore, even in the midst of the current controversy, while covering an Armenian Genocide protest rally in Hollywood, The Times published in its April 25 issue a photo and caption that read: “...the annual genocide protest marking the day in 1915 that Armenians say Turkey began mass deportations, arrests and executions.”

Fortunately, O’Shea ended his missive on a positive note by stating that he would “never tolerate anyone on the staff making decisions on a story out of a bias or because of the ethnicity of the writer.” Yet he undermined his own credibility when he added: “In this case, that did not happen,” thereby pre-judging the outcome of the newspaper’s internal investigation.

The crudest public statement of all was made by Simon K.C. Li, the newspaper’s Assistant Managing Editor, who rushed blindly to defend his boss, Douglas Frantz. In a letter to the L.A. Weekly, Li chided writer Daniel Hernandez for repeating “a nasty innuendo from Harut Sassounian’s piece” and provided a lengthy and convoluted explanation as to how Frantz ended up being the moderator of a panel in a conference to be held in Istanbul in May in which genocide denialist Andrew Mango is to participate.

Li explained that Frantz was initially supposed to interview Orhan Pamuk and Elif Shafak at that conference. When that fell through – Li says he does not know why – Frantz was assigned to a second panel that also did not materialize and he ended up on a third panel with denialist Mango “through a series of accidents.” Li could not explain why Frantz did not resign from the panel, after discovering the names of its participants.

Li unabashedly said he did not know “whether Sassounian’s description of Mango is fair or widely accepted.” It is amazing that the Assistant Managing Editor of the Los Angeles Times could not type the name Mango into his google search and find out his identity and position on the Armenian Genocide. Nevertheless, Li went on to insult L.A. Weekly’s readers by calling them “biased, unthinking, [and] credulous.” One would hope that when Frantz goes, he would take Li with him.

Finally, the Readers’ Representative Office at The Times, acting more like the representative of the management, sent a reply to those who complained to the newspaper, telling them that they do not have “the full context of the issue,” and releasing yet another offensive statement from Frantz. The problem with this statement is that it repeats Frantz’s unfounded accusation against Arax, thus compounding his discriminatory misconduct against the Armenian American reporter and getting himself in more legal hot water.

Arax, in an open letter he sent to his colleagues at The Times on April 30, exposed the details of Frantz’s actions and demanded a public apology from him – which is not asking very much in view of the gravity of Frantz’ misconduct.

It behooves the top management of the L.A. Times to resolve their Douglas Frantz problem as soon possible, before the reputation of this venerable newspaper is further tarnished. 𐌌𐌔𐌕𐌕𐌔

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