

# REGIONAL POST

CAUCASUS

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ARMENIA: 25 YEARS OF  
INDEPENDENCE



**The Friends of Gyumri Foundation was founded in 2014 as a cultural foundation registered with the State Register of Legal Entities of the Republic of Armenia.**

**The goal of the foundation is not only to restore the historical city center of Gyumri but also via inclusion and training of local families, create additional jobs, raise the quality of life and help reversing current trends of migration.**

**Our foundation sees the revival of the historical city center as an opportunity to seriously contribute to the economic development of the whole region.**

**DONATE NOW**

[friendsofgyumri.org](http://friendsofgyumri.org)

**H E L P   U S   R E B U I L D   G Y U M R I**



# Gyumri Ceramics

Inspired by the know-how of the Armenian potters of Kütahya

The prestigious “Gallery de la Tour” in Lyon located at the “Maison de la Tour Rose” (XVI century) recently held a two-month exhibition-sale of unique pieces of ceramics made by the craftsmen of Gyumri using the know-how of Armenian craftsmen from Kutahya, a major center of ceramic production in the Ottoman Empire during XVI-XIX centuries.

The exhibition was initiated by Muscari, an association for the promotion of Armenian and French cultural heritages and its president Manoug Pamokdjian.

This event was organized as part of the global project aimed at the promotion of the economic and artistic prowess of Gyumri, initiated by Antonio Montaldo, Honorary Consul of Italy, and the Pamokdjian family. Antonio Montaldo and his “Family Care” association are behind the considerable effort for the restoration of ancient buildings at the heart of the historical center of Gyumri, such as Villa Kars, which has been converted to a magnificent and charming hotel.

The Muscari Association plans to establish several Armenian Houses (les Maisons d’Armenie), centers for the distribution and promotion of Armenian crafts across France and Italy.

In addition to the unique nature of the presented items, the goal of the exhibition, which will tour various European cities throughout 2017, is to use art as a way of reviving Gyumri, a city devastated by a powerful earthquake in 1988 as well as continued economic crisis.

In addition to the Muscari association, these events are also supported by “Family Care” and the “Friends of Gyumri” associations.





Cover Photo: RUBEN MANGASARYAN

Executive Director  
ARSHAK TOVMASYAN

Editor in Chief  
ARTAVAZD YEGHIAZARYAN

Art director  
NONA ISAJANYAN

Layout Designer  
ARTAK SARGSYAN

#### Contributing Writers

MIKAIL ZOLYAN, TIGRAN ZAKHARYAN, LENA GEVORGIAN,  
ARMEN MOURADYAN, ANI SMBATI, ARMEN HARUTYUNIAN,  
AREG DAVTYAN

#### Photos

PAN PHOTO AGENCY, ROUBEN MANGASARYAN,  
ARNOS MARTIROSYAN, MARIAM LORETSYAN,  
ASHOT MELIK-SHAHNAYARYAN FAMILY ARCHIVE,  
VLADIMIR KARMIRSHALYAN PERSONAL ARCHIVE

#### Regional Post LLC

Legal address: Aysgedzor 62/1  
[regionalpost.org](http://regionalpost.org)  
email: [contact@regionalpost.org](mailto:contact@regionalpost.org)  
For advertisement and partnership  
call: +374 55 387 887,  
[sales@regionalpost.org](mailto:sales@regionalpost.org)

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## ARTIFACT

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Andranik Ozanian, Uncle Sam and other propaganda posters with fingers.

## REGIONAL POST THE NEW VOICE OF CAUCASUS

Dear reader

What you have in your hands is the very first issue of a brand new bimonthly magazine, a new voice of the Caucasus, a tribune for the new generation of emerging professionals and experts across the Caucasus region and beyond.

I continue to believe we are absolutely privileged to live in these times, despite everything that our region has experienced during the past 30 years. We are privileged to witness history – the (re)birth and development of not only our countries but also our national identities. But we also witness how challenging it is for our countries to build relations with each other and with the rest of the world.

The Caucasus region is never boring. We are in the middle of global geopolitical processes that we are yet to fully comprehend, our economies can seem to thrive one year and collapse the next year and there are a few "dormant" conflicts which can be quickly and unexpectedly transformed into full-scale bloody wars, not to mention that after all we are not that far from the Middle East.

Together with our readers and our team of authors we want to discuss international relations, geopolitics, economy, diplomacy but also culture and mutual respect. We want to highlight our common and specific challenges and achievements. We want to build bridges. Let's try to make sense of the Caucasus together.

ARSHAK TOVMASYAN  
Executive Director

# US INDEPENDENCE DAY

This 4th of July the U.S. Embassy in Armenia celebrated the 240th anniversary of the independence of the United States. Armenian PM Hovik Abrahamyan visited the event, congratulated Ambassador Richard Mills, the embassy staff and friendly people of the U.S. on the anniversary of the country's independence.

PHOTOS : PAN PHOTO



◀ High-level guests of the event



◀ Live music during the Independence Day celebrations



▼ U.S. Embassy celebrates the 240th anniversary of the independence of the United States





YEREVAN



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TEL: +(374 10) 56 11 56  
+(374 10) 54 56 97  
MOB: +(374 98) 56 11 56

# ARGENTINA INDEPENDENCE DAY

Argentina gained independence on July 9 1816, marking a date as a national holiday. As usual it was also celebrated in Yerevan. On July 11 Armenian president visited Ambassador Gonzalo Urriolabeitia to congratulate on that occasion.

PHOTOS : MARIAM LORETSYAN



Nika Babayan and Karen Shahgaldyan



Chess superstar Levon Aronian (right) among the guests

Event took place at the Best Western Congress Hotel





# UNIVERSAL GRAPHICS

Արտաքին  
Գովազդ

(+374) 98 709-709  
[www.ugraphics.am](http://www.ugraphics.am)  
[universalgraphics@mail.ru](mailto:universalgraphics@mail.ru)

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# BASTILLE DAY

This year France celebrated the 224th anniversary of the storming of Bastille prison. Celebrations also took place in Yerevan. Armenian president Serzh Sargsyan was among those who visited the Embassy of France in Yerevan this July 14. He congratulated Ambassador Jean-François Charpentier, the embassy's staff, and the entire people of France.

PHOTOS : MARIAM LORETSYAN



▲ Guests having fun celebrating Bastille Day in Yerevan



► Armenian choir in French Embassy



▲ Ambassador Jean-François Charpentier (left) and MFA Edvard Nalbandyan (center)



◀ Formal diplomatic relations between Armenia and France were established on 24 February 1992



# ARMENIAN CERAMICS IN GYUMRI

INSPIRED BY KUTAHYA AND IZNIK TRADITIONS



THE PROJECT IS INITIATED BY ANTONIO MONTALTO,  
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TEL: +(374 10) 56 11 56



# POPE IN ARMENIA

Pope Francis of the Roman Catholic Church arrived in Armenia on June 24. He was invited by His Holiness Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II and President of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan. Armenia became the 24th country Pope visited.

TEXT : LENA GEVORGIAN / PHOTOS : PAN PHOTO



"Visit to the First Christian Nation" was the motto of His Holiness Pope Francis's visit to Armenia. The official logo of the visit depicted Biblical Mount Ararat and the Monastery of Khor Virap – a holy place which had played an exceptional role in the dissemination of Christianity.

The official ceremony of welcoming Pope Francis took place at Zvartnots International Airport. The President of Armenia, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians and other state officials greeted Pope Francis at airport, besides Little Singers of Armenia children's choir performed medieval Armenian carols for His Holiness. During his three day visit Pope Francis had a very tight agenda in Armenia. Before his arrival a photo was posted on the official instagram account of the Pope with a caption reading "Please Pray for me as I begin tomorrow my pilgrimage to Armenia, first among the nations to welcome the Gospel of Jesus".

On the same day of his arrival Pope attended the welcome ceremony at Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin. "I consider it a precious gift of a God

➤  
Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II and Pope Francis





People saluting  
Pope before his  
speech in Yerevan



Pope Francis in  
Gyumri

Pope in Khor-Virap  
monastery

With president  
Serzh Sargsyan

to be able to approach the holy altar from which the light of Christ shone in Armenia”, the Pope stated.

During his pilgrimage Pope visited The Armenian Genocide memorial and paid tribute to all the victims. The Pope laid a wreath at the memorial and flowers at the Eternal Flame, where the clergy performed the intercessory prayer, asking for the mediation of the holy martyrs.

The Ecumenical ceremony and the Prayer for Peace performed by His Holiness Pope Francis and His Holiness Supreme Patriarch Catholicos of All Armenians Garegin II took place in the Republic Square in Yerevan. The event was also attended by hundreds of pilgrims, who have arrived from abroad. Thousands of people from Yerevan and different regions of Armenia also took part in the ceremony. His Holiness Pope Francis and His Holiness Supreme Patriarch Catholicos of All Armenians Garegin II performed a liturgy in Vardanants Square in Gyumri. The official farewell ceremony for His Holiness Pope Francis took place at Zvartnots International Airport.



# THINGS TO DO IN ARMENIA

## this September/October



### THE BIGGEST GATA IN THE WORLD

VAYOTS DZOR  
SEPTEMBER 24,

On September 24 the regular Gata Festival will take place in Khachik village of Vayots Dzor region. Various games, a preparation of traditional Armenian gata and arishta, vodka distillation are scheduled within the framework of the festival, which is always accompanied with national songs and dances. The most important thing is that world's biggest gata will be baked within the festival. An exhibition-sale of arts and crafts is also planned. The participants of the festival will have a chance to taste the best gata and different meals typical to this community.

### KHOROVATS FESTIVAL

AKHTALA  
SEPTEMBER 24,

If for some reasons you do not manage to taste the best Armenian gata, there is a chance to visit Akhtala on the same day to take part in another regular festival that is devoted to Armenian khorovats (barbecue). The festival takes place for the eighth time. As usual, dozens of teams representing different restaurants will compete to cook the best khorovats on the fest, while guests may taste them all.

### ENGAGE VANADZOR, ROCK FESTIVAL

VANADZOR  
SEPTEMBER 25

Vanadzor has always been known as one of the centers of Armenian rock music. Besides, it is a very interesting city to visit. So there is a chance both to visit Vanadzor and to listen to the most popular Armenian rock bands and artists within an Open Air Rock Festival. The Beautified Project, Dogma, Nemra, Lousnelius, Mher Manoukyan from Lav Eli are among the participants. The festival takes place within the framework of Engage Vanadzor project and European Heritage Days.

### DIGITEC EXPO

YEREVAN  
SEPTEMBER 30 – OCTOBER 2

Armenia is famous for both its cuisine (such as gata and khorovats) and for highly developed IT sector as well. So, if you want to get acquainted with the latest innovative solutions of the sphere, don't miss DigiTec Information and Telecommunication Technologies Expo, which will be held for already 12th time this year. Last year it hosted over 170 local and international companies and had over 50,000 visitors. DigiTec Expo is organized under the patronage of the RA Prime Minister. The Union of Information Technology Enterprises is the organizer of the expo. Ucom is the Platinum sponsor.



## ARENI WINE FESTIVAL ARENI SEPTEMBER 30 – OCTOBER 1

One of the most famous festivals in Armenia will take place for the 8th time, as usual in Areni village of Vayots Dzor district, one of the country's winery centers. Event will include a harvest festival, a demonstration of cooking lavash, the traditional pressures of grapes (probably the most spectacular element of the festival), tasting home-made wines, introduction and tasting of Armenian producers folk songs, dances, theatrical performances. Really worth to visit.



## YEREVAN JAZZ FEST YEREVAN OCTOBER 13-17

Armenia has always been a country with a great heritage of jazz, so musical performances, jazz concerts and festivals are frequent here. This year Yerevan Jazz Fest is dedicated to George Avakian, a Grammy winner record producer, known for his collaboration with Louis Armstrong, Miles Davis, Keith Jarrett and other notable jazz musicians. #YerevanJazzFest2016 will host such world known artists as Dee Dee Bridgewater, Joss Stone, Tavitjan Brothers, Aliana Engibaryan and others. Armenian musicians Vahagn Hayrapetyan and Levon Malkhasyan (Malkhas), as well as the Armenian State Jazz Band (artistic director Armen Hyusnunts) will also perform within the framework of the festival, organized by Armenian Jazz Association and Mezzo Production.



## YEREVAN HALF MARATHON YEREVAN OCTOBER 16

On October 16, the capital of Armenia will once again host Yerevan Half Marathon, one of the most colorful and festive events in the country. The race offers runners an exciting route featuring most picturesque places in the heart of the city. This year it will attract an outstanding number of runners from the entire Armenia, as well as from many other countries of the world. Distances are developed to meet the needs of all categories: 1 km race for kids, 10 km for beginners and 21.1 km for experienced runners. The race will be organized at a professional level. High-quality timing will be provided by MY-LAPS, a system guaranteeing absolute reliability and accuracy of race results.



## "LENINGRAD" ROCK BAND YEREVAN OCTOBER 19

There is a special event especially for those, who have been dreaming of listening to Russian rock, but did not know how to do it live. "Leningrad" is one of the most popular Russian bands, which members are considered to be the hooligans of Russian rock. Sergey Shnurov, the founder and the frontman of the band, is known for his high quality sound and lyrics full of some dirty words. Exactly these have become a visit card for him. So a cheerful mood is definitely provided.





# 25

## YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE

From foreign affairs to sports

Summarizing results of the first  
quarter century of Armenia's  
independence in various spheres.



MIKAEL ZOLYAN

## POLITICAL ANALYST ON ARMENIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

In the 25 years of its existence as an independent state Armenia has had no shortage of foreign policy challenges. Yet, with a foreign policy that has combined both pragmatism and adherence to principles, Armenia has been able to do things that might seem virtually impossible. Thus, it has maintained a security alliance with Russia and at the same time closely cooperate with USA and EU while enjoying friendly relations with Iran. It has also been able to contain the threats coming from confrontation with two of its neighbors, both of which far exceed Armenia in population, territory and resources. And, finally, despite of its troubled neighborhood and limited resources, Armenia has been able to become a respected member of international community, punching above its weight when it comes to international cooperation on global and regional issues.

\*\*\*

For most post-Soviet countries probably the most vital issue is how to build relations with Russia and the West. Post-Soviet countries have normally tried to keep a certain balance between these global forces, however these attempts have not always been successful. Armenia, in this sense has probably been in the most complicated situation due to its geopolitical setting, exacerbated by the conflict with Azerbaijan. In case of Armenia, there is also an additional variable in the equation: Iran, a neighbor that is vital for Armenia, for de-

➤ Serzh Sargsyan at the session of the supreme council of the Eurasian Economic Union, 2016

cades had complicated relations with the West. Georgia, a country that Armenia has friendly relations with, has in the past found itself caught up in the middle of the complicated relations between Russia and the West. And then there is Turkey, another regional power that has been in confrontation with Armenia. Armenia's foreign policy has been defined by Armenia's readiness to cooperate with all the regional and global actors present in the region. The policy of simultaneously advancing relations with major global and regional powers has been the main paradigm of Armenian foreign policy since independence. Thus, Armenia has closely cooperated with Russia, especially in such areas as security and economy. Armenia is also a member of the Collective Security Treaty Organization and of the Eurasian Economic Union. Armenia's good neighborly relations with Iran are also vital from the point of view of Armenia's economy and national security. At the same time



Armenia is also striving to forge close contacts with the West. While the Armenian government has repeatedly stated that it is not planning to apply for NATO membership, it is closely cooperating with NATO, and the level of this cooperation is comparable to that of Armenia's neighbors. Obviously, maintaining cooperation with various centers of power, who have had difficult relations between each other (to say the least) has not been an easy task, which had required immense efforts from Armenian foreign policy community.

\*\*\*

During periods when relations between various global and regional powers had been conflictual, Armenia found itself under pressure to choose sides. The first years after the fall of USSR could be described as a sort of "a honeymoon" between Russia and the West, so Armenia was quite comfortable in keeping its friendly relations with Russia and simultaneously build-



Pan Photo

ing cooperation with the Euroatlantic community. However, in the wake of NATO's expansion eastward, the Kosovo crisis and the Colored Revolutions the relations between Russia and West were slowly deteriorating, ultimately leading to a major crisis in the context of the Russian-Georgian war in 2008. The subsequent "reset" proved unsuccessful, and the disagreements over EU association agreements with Russia's neighbors, led to the crisis in Ukraine and a new confrontation that is often described as a "New Cold War". Naturally, these crises represented a major challenge for Armenian foreign policy. Of course, Armenia had suffered some serious setbacks in the context of these confrontations, however, ultimately, it has been able to achieve a certain balance between Russia and the West in its foreign policy. Armenian diplomacy has been able to achieve a degree of understanding for Armenia's foreign policy position both in the North and in the West.

➤  
The Collective Security Treaty Organization's informal summit in Yerevan, 2010



Pan Photo

Thus, Armenian diplomats have been able to convince Washington and Brussels that Armenia's security alliance with Moscow is conditioned by Armenia's strategic interests and is not aimed against the West. At the same time, in Moscow there is an understanding that while Armenia is a committed ally of Russia and a member of CSTO and EEU, Armenia's vital interests require cooperation with both EU and NATO.

\*\*\*

When it comes to relations with the neighbors, obviously the greatest issue of Armenia's foreign policy is the problem of Nagorno-Karabakh. Armenia has been locked in a conflict with neighboring Azerbaijan for more than 25 years. Having started in February 1988 the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh is the oldest among the protracted conflicts in the former Soviet space. Armenian diplomacy is aiming at peaceful resolution of the conflict, which would allow the people of Nagorno-Karabakh, who have exercised their right to self-determination by creating independent state in 1991, to enjoy peace and security. While, ultimately, the international recognition of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic is a major goal for Armenian foreign policy, currently is willing to proceed with a peaceful conflict resolution process, working together with Stepanakert, Baku and the international community. Azerbaijan, however, has chosen a different strategy, betting on the forceful resolution of the conflict in its favor. Having suffered a military defeat in the

war of 1991-1994, Azerbaijani government has since then embarked on an effort of outgunning and outspending Armenia, using its oil windfall profits to beef up its armed forces. Baku is also engaged in a large-scale lobbying effort, trying to advance its view on the Nagorno-Karabakh in various capitals and on various international fora. However, neither economic blockade, nor political pressure, nor military provocations have so far been successful in terms of bringing Baku closer to its goal. As the April 2016 events showed once again, attempts to alter the status quo using military means are doomed, and it is only through negotiations and compromise that solution to Karabakh conflict can be found.

\*\*\*

Another issue, which Armenian diplomacy has been dealing with for 25 years, is the problem of Armenia-Turkey relations. Though Turkey was among the first countries to recognize Armenia's independence, it has refused to establish diplomatic relations with Armenia. The Armenia-Turkey border was sealed by Turkey in 1993 and has been locked till this day. Even though attempts to normalize Armenia-Turkey relations have failed so far, the relations between both countries have come a long way since the early 1990s. Armenian diplomacy has been able to show both the international community and the Turkish society that Armenia is ready for normalization of relations. Besides, in spite of an extremely aggressive stance of part of Turkish political

and military establishment, Armenia has been successful in containing the threat of open military conflict with Turkey. While in the early 1990s various Turkish political and military figures threatened that Turkey could intervene militarily in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, today even the most hardline figures in the Turkish establishment are refraining from such rhetoric.

Obviously, Armenia-Turkey relations cannot be viewed in separation from another major issue of Armenian foreign policy, the issue of Armenian Genocide recognition. However, contrary to a common misperception, Armenia does not consider genocide recognition a prerequisite for normalization of relations with Turkey: on the contrary, the Armenian position is that relations should be normalized without preconditions. At the same time, Genocide recognition remains one of the priorities of Armenia's foreign policy. During the first years of independence Armenia refrained from actively promoting genocide recognition campaigns, in order not to complicate the process of normalization of relations with Turkey. However, as Turkish government continued its policies aimed at isolating Armenia, Yerevan reconsidered its position and started actively assisting the genocide recognition efforts of Armenian Diaspora and progressive activists all over the world.

\*\*\*

These efforts led to impressive successes: as of today 26 countries have passed official legislation recognizing the genocide, the qualification of events of 1915 as genocide has become the accepted norm in the academic community all over the world, leading international media such as New York Times have recognized



the events of 1915 as genocide as part of their editorial policy. In some cases the results of these efforts have been mixed, as in the case of US: US presidents have adopted the practice of making an annual address to the Armenian community on the issue, however so far have been reluctant to pronounce word "genocide". And in some cases, certain achievements have been reversed, as in the case of the French law on criminalization of the Armenian Genocide denial, adopted in 2012, which had been overturned by the Constitutional Council. However, overall result of the Armenian genocide recognition campaign has been quite remarkable: today Armenian genocide is no longer an obscure episode of history that it was 25 years ago, it has become a part of a global humanitarian agenda. Arguably, it is the most well-known case of genocide in 20th century after the Holocaust, and it is hard to imagine any informed discussion of crimes against the humanity without a reference to the extermination of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. Obviously, Armenian Diaspora communities played an instrumental role in the Armenian Genocide recognition campaign, however, as the experience of the pre-1991 genocide recognition campaign shows, these efforts would have hardly been so effective without the

support of Armenian diplomacy. Ironically, the Turkish government has itself contributed to the success of genocide recognition campaign, since aggressive and misguided reactions of Turkish officials to genocide recognition efforts around the world have often backfired. And, of course, one also has to acknowledge the courage of many Turkish scholars and intellectuals, residing both in Turkey and in Turkish Diaspora, who have added their voices to the calls for the recognition of the tragedy.

\*\*\*

Overall, looking back at the 25 years of Armenia's foreign policy, one can say that with all its ups and downs Armenia has been able to pursue a foreign policy that has dealt successfully with the numerous challenges that the country has been facing. Today, the whole region is going through turbulent times, as conflict is brewing from Donbass to Syria, and political regimes, from Turkey to Central Asia, are facing internal instability. Against this background Armenia's security and prosperity, may be even its survival as an independent country, depend on the ability to formulate and pursue an efficient foreign policy. Luckily, unlike 1991, when many things had to start from scratch, today Armenian diplomacy can boast of a tradition that is quarter of a century old. ♦

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## FURNITURE AND DOOR PRODUCTION

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E-mail:[gaudi\\_design@yahoo.com](mailto:gaudi_design@yahoo.com)

59 ARSHAKUNYATS STR., YEREVAN, ARMENIA

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▲ Registration of  
children in Tumo  
Center in Gyumri

◀ UWC Dilijan College  
opened in 2014

I am someone whose five children have gone through the Armenian education system's standard program over the past eleven years: from kindergarten to the end of high school. Although we complain about our kids' education all the time, I think that's mainly a result of high expectations. For science and math oriented children, the Armenian education system presents the same kinds of competitive advantages that other post-soviet republics still have. In brief, it is a very technical education. There's a high tolerance on the part of the parents and students for lots of homework with difficult problems and not a lot of concern for the psychological well-being

of the children. If the student survives that (and sometimes that's a big "if"), they end up being rather competitive. But it's not a necessarily a great pedagogy overall, because many children with great potential stay behind simply because they don't fit into that model. My impression is that the model is optimized for creating a kind of elite that can win Olympiads. It reminds me of Soviet era athletes striving to win Olympic gold medals. It seemed like the whole state apparatus was working on growing that kind of athlete for almost diplomatic and political reasons. Well, maybe in sports and some other areas that makes strategic sense, but in education it's not at

all optimal. Because the general population gets a very uneven education in the process. And now, when the world is putting more and more value on soft skills in terms of the ability to collaborate, transparency, initiative taking, entrepreneurship etc., Armenia needs to do more to become competitive. On the other hand, science, technology, math aptitudes remain very much in demand. So I think Armenian kids have the potential to get to the best universities in the world with the training they get in schools. So I have mixed feelings about the school system. But I don't have mixed feelings about the university education system

in Armenia. I think it's rather dysfunctional and it's critical that we figure out a way of moving towards a more competitive higher education system.

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I don't pretend to have a solution, but it seems that the problem is not about administrative issues, not about how the professors are paid, etc., even though those aspects need to be addressed. It's more a problem of academic culture. For a large part of society, education is a kind of fetish. Many people study not necessarily for acquiring knowledge but because they just value a university degree. Of course that's not entirely a bad thing. At least, it's good to have high demand for higher education. But the bigger problem is how you recycle an academic culture into a more research-oriented one, to make it more functional and transparent. One of the solutions in my opinion is creating institutions that work towards reforming the system from the outside. Being one of the founders and board members of the Tumo Center for Creative Technologies, I can say that Tumo is taking very much the approach of working from the outside with high-school-aged kids. Without trying to reform the education system per se, but complementing it, almost creating an alternative, which kids can experience and, as a result, become more demanding, see more possibilities in their schools. Maybe the same should happen to universities with the help of external centers of excellence that will complement, challenge and at some point reinforce the education system. Reforming the system from the inside will probably take more resources than one can afford in Armenia. For example, to have labs or centers of excellence that are accessible for all the universities equally. Students and even professors who come in and out of such labs gradually acquire a new culture. That way they can contribute to improving their universities more effectively and more quickly.

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We haven't yet done a major study to understand the impact of Tumo from a systematic point of view and it's still very early. However, we have some impressions at this point about the effect on kids who have been through the center. How it changes their mentality, makes them more self-confident. How they begin to learn more effectively and develop higher expectations of their schools, and later of universities. It also affects their civic lives. They become more aware, more critical in their thinking. One parent complained to us that her girl is cutting her hair short and expressing too many opinions at home after visiting Tumo. Well, we think that might be a good thing.

Opening Tumo centers in different parts of the country, beyond Yerevan, was an experiment for us. We wanted to see if we could use the same program, exactly the same approach in places like Gyumri and Stepanakert. And it worked. Because in any case, even in Yerevan, Tumo's environment is such an alien one for kids that they have to completely reset their expectations.

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Tumo is not the only project working from the outside that can help the whole education system in this way. Another bright example is the Ayb School. It's impossible to achieve systematic change across all schools at the same time. Maybe that can be attempted in a rich oil-producing country for example, but not in a country like Armenia with limited capacity. But highly ambitious schools like Ayb, they immediately deny the claim that it's not possible to achieve world-class results in education in our context. Some people say it's because of their financing, but I don't think that if you gave the same budget to a regular public school it would suddenly become excellent. There's something in Ayb's approach that makes it a good model. Let's say someone works at Ayb, then leaves it and goes to work at some other school. They will take with them the culture they assimilated at Ayb. The same



TUMO center opening in Gyumri



with students who graduate from there. Or just people, who are inspired by it. And finally, other schools try to challenge it, which begins to propagate improvements across the system. The effect of challenging, setting an example, proving that doing better is possible can be very powerful. And because Ayb is affordable to anyone through scholarships, it is not elitist, which is extremely important. Given the fact that we don't have very strong state institutions that can implement education reforms on a large scale, the alternative is creating these types of islands of excellence. These bright spots will have a system-wide effect much faster than one might think. I would call them catalysts. They trigger change, but they also speed up the elimination of non-functioning parts of the system through competition and then start influencing the rest of the system by changing mindsets and infusing know-how, by osmosis. The other useful example is the Luys Foundation. They take a small number of university kids who are accepted in the best universities of the world, support them financially, and then expect that they will come back to affect change in Armenia. The resulting "brain circulation" is very important. International mobility is one of the advantages independence gave Armenia. We need to use it wisely. ♦



ARMEN HARUTYUNYAN

## LECTURER AT THE INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT ON ECONOMY



Scientific Center for Farming  
Pan Photo

Over the past two decades Armenian economy has gone through many difficulties, tests and undergone a remarkable transformation. First years after gaining independence economy was falling at high rates, and stated to recover at average 6 percent from 1994–2001. The first decade of the twenty-first century was unprecedented in economic performance, from 2002 to 2007 economy managed to maintain six years of consequent double digit GDP growth which reached its peak of 13.9% in 2005. During that period in one of the World Bank reports Armenia

was named the Caucasian tiger, referring to economic success of four East Asian states; Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan. Furthermore, double digit growth period was paralleled with integration of domestic economy into global trade system through membership to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2003. Then came the fall. Armenian economy went into a deep recession as the result of global financial crisis and economic turmoil. GDP contracted by 14.4% in 2009 mainly due to sharp decline in construction and mining sectors.

After sharp decline in 2009 Armenian economy is slowing but growing. Meanwhile, there are many internal and external challenges to be addressed. Public debt is rising, foreign private transfer declined, aggregate demand is diminishing. On the other side the main trade partner states are facing economic difficulties that have direct impact on export as well as foreign direct private transfers. Fiscal and economic crisis has sharpened debates among economists, academics and policymakers about economic system and development policies.

## SOVIET PAST

Before collapse of the Soviet Union, Armenian economy has been hampered by communist ideology. Central planning system hindered development of entrepreneurship and distorted market mechanism through state planning of production and central government setting prices for main products and services. Foreign trade was mainly limited to soviet bloc countries with single regulated currency. The economy of the Soviet Union was not competitive, and productivity and quality of products was low. In addition, massive resources were financed to sustain communism in many states around the world, and lot more was invested into military.

Armenia was positioned as the industrial state with vital dependence on raw material supplies from other states, and agricultural sector was dominated by the collective farm system. Soviet economy has been vulnerable in many ways. Agricultural sector productivity was low, and although large amounts were invested in developing agriculture and food processing, it faces serious challenge of supplied food to population. Import of food was primarily financed through increasing production of oil. This tendency later led to dependence on oil to finance imports of food and nonfood items. Furthermore, as international prices for oil had diminished, Soviet government complemented its financing of imports with gold reserves and credits from west, which came however with market reform conditionality at later stage. In the end of 1980s the situation worsened and gradually led to collapse of the system which had dominated for more than 70 years.

In Armenia downfall of the socialistic system was paralleled with severe collapse of entire economic system, distortions in the works of public institutions, massive migration, brain drain and limited supply of electricity and water. Liberating war for Artsakh led to return of historical justice and independence of Artsakh (also referred



Armenia entered World Trade Organization in 2003



as Nagorno Karabakh); however it had resulted in destruction of physical infrastructure, isolation, blockade which eventually held country back from crucial economic and institutional reforms. Dark years as most Armenians coins that times paved difficult time for transition.

The first and primary objective of the transition was to move from planned to market economy. Moderate but robust economic growth in the initial years of the recovery accelerated in the late 1990s. Armenia went through massive privatization of land and property, joined World Trade Organization and opened its borders for free trade. As mentioned in the beginning Armenian had gone through a period of double digit growth which significantly improved livelihood of population. Basically the first stage of transition which aimed at adoption of principles of market economy succeeded. Second round of transition is much complex and requires fundamental reforms, it should aim at increasing efficiency, competitiveness and complexity of the economy. A new economic paradigm should also consider inclusive development issue to ensure elimination of poverty and slow migration of skilled labor force.

Four sectors of economy that has the best potential for development are tourism, commercial agriculture, and alternative energy production and information technologies. The logic behind this listing is straightforward and simple. Tourism industry benefits many stakeholders and provide sources of income to many layers of

population. In other word tourists are consumer wide range of products and services and therefore their spending are distributed to wide range of producers or service providers. This means that tourism is good sources to ensure inclusive development. In addition, there are many different types of tourism activities that have good outreach, such as ecotourism and agro tourism that creates alternative source of income for people living in rural areas and depending solely on agricultural activities. Ultimately, Armenia possesses rich history, cultural heritage and nature that can be further developed to attract more tourists. Commercial agriculture is another important branch of the economy, which including food processing constitutes around 25 percent of the GDP and is also source of employment in rural areas. Global demand for food is projected to grow as population in the world is growing; in particularly as global economy will be recovering more food will be necessary to feed people. In this terms Armenian should either attempt to explore economies of scale in some product categories, but also focus on production of valuable crops and food products to earn higher margins at export markets i.e. organic products. Former is more feasible for small countries such as Armenia that possess limited land resources. Furthermore, due to favorable climate and weather Armenia has excellent potential to development alternative energy production, such as solar, wind and hydro. This will boost economy by providing cheaper energy for

production as well as for consumers. It has also important political implication from the perspective of energy independence.

Finally, information technologies are important to sustain competitiveness of the economy, building knowledge based economy since technologies are shaping the way we live and economies perform, therefore, this branch is utmost important to sustain competitiveness of the economy in the long run.

Development of each requires comprehensive diagnose of fundamental challenges hampering competitiveness and hindering development of selected sectors, which should be followed by capacity assessment. The former one is usually underperformed and well written strategy is not realized due to missing or limited capacities, financial, physical, human etc. Based on this medium and long term strategy should be designed which will define specific, measurable targets, outcomes.

Furthermore, set of assumptions has to be taken into consideration: a) sectors have to be observed in regional context taking into account developments and regional economic integration processes i.e. large scale infrastructural projects. China has announced One Belt One Road initiative for example, what would be the role of Armenia, what are the benefits, advantages, risks and threats? b) economic and political situation in neighboring states as well as main partners c) slow recovery of global economy d) low global aggregate demand e) automatization and development of robotics and gradual transfer of labor intensive industries back to developed states f) level of economic complexity etc.

One should remember that analysis of success of developed states urges to design exclusive development model, since there is no universal recipe or model that can be completely adopted. Moreover, if Asian Tiger Economies has benefited from



Pan Photo

▲ Serzh Sargsyan (center) in Nairit factory

➤ Roundtable on solar power engineering as the main source of alternative energy, 2013



Pan Photo

golden age of development, nowadays it is much more difficult to manage stable inclusive economic development because of economic difficulties and increasing competition from emerging economies.

In the meantime, there are some basic policies and programs applicable to most developed economies the two common factors are a) availability of good physical infrastructure b) good quality education system. Think about any developed country that has poor infrastructure or high level of uneducated population? From the data of the World Economic Forum, most developed countries have basic physical infrastructure and one among underlying causes of slow improvements in economic performance is shortage of investments in infrastructure. Literally all aforementioned sectors require infrastructure, such as roads and airports for tourisms, water management systems for agriculture, alternative

energy requires investments into solar systems or wind energy infrastructure and ultimately information technologies will require high speed internet networks. In this context, infrastructure is apparently a pillar for development. However, from economic perspective these investments should be justified to understand its long term implication on economic development, meaning that if a road or rail project is implemented what is critical success factors, public return on investment, payback period and outcome. A good demonstration is reconstruction of infrastructure in Europe which was one the critical component of Marshal Plan. A more recent example is China, which has been investing in infrastructure development, and infrastructure remains a top priority for government in China. According to McKinsey Global Institute study, China has overtaken US and EU and is consider being the biggest investor in



Pan Photo

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Minister of Agriculture Sergo Karapetyan in Tavush

infrastructure . In addition, infrastructure development programs can have short term boost for economy during slow growth, since it would create temporary jobs and therefore reduce unemployment in the short run, but also trigger demand in the short terms which can boost demand and stimulate businesses to invest.

The second issue is human resource and ability of country to train and teach labor force. Taking into account fast rate of technological innovations, development of information technologies, automation countries need to focus more on education and attempt to adopt new technological solutions in production. This can be reached by modernizing education institutions and equipping them with modern facilities, paying more attention on teaching quality. While building schools, renovating university building and provision of equipment is rather expensive; the most difficult part is to ensure good

teaching and proper teaching materials for schools. Taking into consideration massive resources that are spent on capacity building programs, trainings and consultancy, these resources could be directed on development of primary and higher education. A latest book on East Asian Development: Foundations and Strategies, highlights positive correlation between education and economic growth . Education and ability to attract skilled labor force also demonstrate the strength of US economy in terms innovations and technological advance . In the review essay on What Does Human Capital Do? A Review of Goldin and Katz's The Race between Education and Technology Acemoglu and Autor highlight findings on the investments in education leading to economic, political and social development and that primary factor of economic growth in the US is associated with human capital. According to authors, Ameri-

can leadership was linked to the level of investments into human resources, which led to economic growth . In addition, Armenian businesses should also learn to attract specialists and talents from abroad to cover the gap in selected industries. Furthermore, more attention should be directed to language teaching, because many online programs with free access to lectures of the top Universities is available now so everyone who has access to internet can receive education through iTunes U, Coursera etc. and even complete degree programs. These two reforms are only example of critical components of new economic paradigm, which would require many policies and actions, such as institutional and legal reforms, better enforcement of law, access to finance and improved business environment. Nonetheless, complete reform agenda can be designed as diagnose and capacity assessment is completed. ♦



BAGRAT YENGIBARYAN

## HEAD OF ENTERPRISE INCUBATOR FOUNDATION, ON ARMENIA'S ACHIEVEMENTS IN IT SECTOR



The biggest IT event in the country, DigiTec, takes place annually in Mergelyan Institute's building

### FROM SOVIET ERA TO INDEPENDENCE

In the Soviet Union the information technology industry was quite developed in Armenia.

From the first computer in the USSR and ending with the establishment of numerous enterprises, institutes, including Mergelyan (The Yerevan Computer Research and Development Institute), thousands of people were engaged in the technological development of the Soviet Union. By saying Information Technology we mean a sector that is developing rapidly and constantly, and you have to work hard to keep your leading position. In this regard, it's important to note that Armenia was the leader in this field in the Soviet era.

After declaring independence the economy of Armenia collapsed and in 2001 the government announced the IT sector as a priority. The competitive advantage of the country in the development of IT are people and the creative mind they have. Here we had all the work that had been done during the Soviet period, including the education, technological bases provided by the Yerevan Polytechnical Institute, Yerevan State University and many other science institutions as well as traditions and methods – which is something that many developed and developing countries spend huge money on to develop.. But years are

needed to develop such traditions. When the borders opened, Armenia got access to global markets. It turned out that many of our compatriots living abroad have a great influence and play important roles in the IT field, particularly in the Silicon Valley, which is truly one of the biggest high-tech manufacturing centers in the world. Several years ago we conducted a research and found out that Diaspora is represented in almost 80% of Armenian companies whether as a co-founder, or a shareholder, or someone who provided links between the companies and the foreign partners.

## MAKING OF ARMENIAN IT SECTOR

The first thing to do was how to use the traditions, experience and our international links we already had. In the Soviet Union all IT companies were state-owned whereas in the beginning of the 21st century we had to deal with private companies and private entrepreneurs. We had to build mechanisms so that the companies could unite and proudly represent Armenia in the global market.

In 2002 a strategy was developed and the Enterprise Incubator Foundation was established within the framework of the World Bank's "Enterprise Incubator" project. It has become one of the largest technology business incubators and consulting companies in the region, based in Yerevan, Armenia. The Foundation is called to support the development of information and communication technology sector in Armenia through creating a productive environment for innovation, technological advancement and company growth.

▼  
Robotics is one of the priority fields in Armenian IT



So far thanks to the teamwork and efforts of the Foundation and the private companies we have an established and rapidly developing IT sector that has become a leading – if not the most leading – sector Armenia. Armenia now is on the IT world map, we have a clear idea and are able to support the development of engineering, high technologies and clean technologies.

This was a trial period, which we successfully passed and which showed that Armenia is able to keep up with other leading countries of the world IT industry. Meanwhile 15 years ago many people were doubtful about the success of the project. There were a few people who believed that thanks to the project ICT sector's annual growth rate will be 20% on average, that the number of workplaces in the sector will exceed the number of those in the mining industry and that the IT development would have a pivotal role in the development of education, the private sector, the development of the country in general and become our flag on the international platform.

## THORNY PATH

But the road was not easy, it consisted of three main phases. First one was to expand the scale of operations, get contracts from partners abroad, perform the best way we can do and show to the world that we can deliver quality products. Thus the number of employees in the sector increased as well: along with the increasingly large orders the "army" of IT industry was growing. In some ways, it was a stage of self-affirmation. Second phase was the involvement of transnational corporations, because the IT sector is evolving so fast that even the world's developed countries are making great efforts to keep pace with these developments. The involvement of transnational cor-

porations would mean inserting their achievements here instead of time-consuming process of development. This refers to Microsoft Innovation Center, IBM Innovative Solutions and Technologies Center and several other corporations that opened their representations in Armenia and in a short time brought the country's IT sector to a level, at which they can cooperate with local companies. Now we are in the third stage, when we are working towards the development of new organizations and the promotion of Armenian production. Armenian solutions are being sold worldwide, and it is not only about phones or software packages, but entire organizations. Now everybody knows about Picsart, Joomag, Oracle and other companies that already cost millions of dollars. Now we focus on the newly created companies to develop and increase their value on the international market.

## THE FUTURE

We consider two models of IT sector development. The first model assumes that companies engaged in information technologies will try to find solutions to non-local problems and the earned money will come to Armenia. There is a number of large-scale problems which are not within the scope of our interests, but we have huge consulting companies, such as Synopsys Armenia, a research center that creates global products. The second model assumes testing a large amount of solutions here on a smaller scale and then spreading them in the region. Developing a solution to the problem is one thing, while its localization is completely different. In this regard, Armenia can become an interesting testing ground, where professionals will not only develop the idea, but also work on the localization, effectiveness and implementation. ♦



SERGEY SMBATYAN

## ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF THE STATE YOUTH ORCHESTRA OF ARMENIA (SYOA) ON CULTURE



Pan Photo

Narek Hakhnazaryan



Pan Photo

Concert of State Youth Orchestra of Armenia (SYOA) on Midem 2015 festival, Cannes

Armenia has always been a country with a rich and quite difficult history. And the fact it gained independence is nothing but a matter of pride. I have studied abroad for a certain period and it was really a great feeling for me to have a chance to represent my small independent nation. During the years I have spent outside Armenia I have realized that the value is the strongest thing in a person's life. The values of your country and the nation are the most important bricks of building your own values. Saying small I mean the quantity, because there are so many heroes that make Armenia recognizable. I just want to compare the feelings of being inside the country and being abroad. The feeling of pride

towards your homeland is much stronger, when you are outside the country, far away from your home. People always tend to compare themselves, their own homeland with the biggest and the most successful countries, but in our case it is not very honest to do so. We should understand that the quantity also matters and it is not fair to compare ourselves with, for instance, a country with a multiethnic population of 56 million. We are a monoethnic country with a common heritage, same targets. Taking into account the historical background of our country and the mentality we have, I can surely say that I am a proud person to live in an independent country, which celebrates its 25th anniversary.

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We always speak about some three million of Armenians meaning those who live in Armenia, but you can surely find Armenians everywhere in the world. This is another proof that we can implement our talents in other societies as well. And this becomes possible due to the consciousness of coming and representing an independent country. I can speak for my Armenian friends of my generation, leaving abroad and tell you that it is great to have an opportunity to build our own country. The State Youth Orchestra of Armenia has been performing for over ten years. This means that we have a state, a country, a nation, a government, which can take care of young professionals. And I think this means a lot for the coun-



Par Photo

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Luys i Luso Project: Concert of Tigran Hamasyan and Yerevan State Chamber Choir in Stepanakert

try. Again, comparing Armenia with other countries, I can surely state that there is a number of foreign countries, which still do not have a state youth orchestra. April 24 1915 was the day of annihilation of the representatives of Armenian intellectuals. And now, a century later, a younger generation has a chance to show the rebirth of Armenian intellectual heritage. I am not speaking only from the political point of view. All this is very important for a modern society. I try to communicate with our audience, people can just come up to me in the streets and say that they attend our concerts. I am so happy that we managed to associate the classical music with success. There used to be a misunderstanding of this sphere, as we had a heritage of Soviet Union concerning the term "state". And what we have now is a huge success for a small country like Armenia.

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When one has got a certain amount of money, he can decide what they wants to spend it for. It also depends on the person's intellect and values. If one has values, it means we will have future. I studied in London when I was young. The orchestras in London use private money. So if the sponsors decide to stop funding, everything will end in a second. In our case the budget we get from our government is not that much, we cannot have a tour in Europe or in the USA only with this money, but the presence of the term "state" is so important for us. The success of the orchestra during these ten years shows that we are the children, the product of an independent country.

During the Soviet times there was a saying that when a young family wanted to set up their own apartment the first thing they bought was a table, a chair and a piano. It meant a lot for us. Notes were the second alphabet for Armenian children. When I meet a person, who knows nothing about classical music, anyway there is a deep respect towards music and art in total. This is truth and this is amazing. Now I consider the talented people among the Armenian youth as real champions, I mean the quantity of the populations and so many achievements in different spheres that we have. Of course, our country has got so many economic, political and social issues. Each issue in every sphere is of great importance. This is a complex issue, it's like a child, which has to be raised. All these is about the process of building.

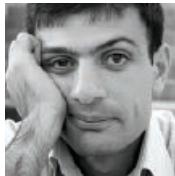
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We have accumulated an extraordinary quantity of knowledge here in Armenia, but the problem is that we fail to make branding here. There are so many talents here, just phenomenal people, but we do not even realize this fact and we know nothing about their branding. Probably there is less quantity of talents in Europe, but they manage to make a perfect packaging and we want to buy that ready packaging instead of producing our own. Our success story is based on the knowledge, coming from the old generation, the enthusiasm we possess and the vision. My vision is that we have a great country and a nation, knowing what the real values are. Education is the basic and the main

tool for us. All these are the components for the great future of our country. There is a huge difference before and after gaining independence. The most important change is the independent and free way of thinking. Although we keep speaking about past, I am sure, we will have a great future. I will give you just a few names of the musicians, the representatives of young independence generation, who can make a change in the world. They are Sergey Khachaturyan, Narek Hakhnazaryan, Gevorg Hakkobyan and Tigran Hamasyan. That is it. The most important thing is that they are either based in or have a very close connection with Armenia.

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We are celebrating the 25th anniversary of independence this year and I have an idea to show what a real independent country is. "Independence Generation" project is kind of a storytelling about the generation of 25 year olds, I mean the "children" of independence. Saying Armenia we always mean only Yerevan, the main of this project is to show that whole Armenia, including all the cities and regions, have this huge heritage of culture. So five hundred musicians of the orchestra and another five hundreds musicians from all the regions of Armenia will get together on September 21 in the Republic Square. The maximum age of the musicians is 25. Imagine, one thousand young musicians are given a stage to perform classical music. These are the voices and the sounds of independence. Our orchestra is really unique; you will not find its parallel in the world. We are one nation, the representatives of one generation, we are the only art team where each member was born in independent Armenia, all of us have graduated from the State Conservatory, mentally we are on the same wave and you can hear this in our sound. Armenia has a great culture of performing art. And that is our mission and responsibility to show that and to continue presenting the classical heritage of great composers. ♦



KAREN ANTASHYAN

## THE FOUNDER OF “BAREV ARMENIA” TRAVEL AGENCY ON TOURISM INDUSTRY



Arthur Lumen Bayorgyan



Northern Avenue hosts tourism expo

Pan Photo

Inbound tourism market of independent Armenia has experienced significant changes during the recent 25 years. Initially, during the first decade of independence tourism was out of question, as the war and the economic collapse following the breakup of the Soviet Union were risks which could not be combined with such an entertaining and leisure activities as tourism. So tourism began to develop in the early 2000's, when there was a more or less stable economic situation in Armenia. The first tourists which our agency hosted were our compatriots from the Diaspora. The fall of the iron curtain encouraged them to reconsider their concept of Armenia

as homeland and to start visiting here together with their families, or in groups composed of certain community or organization members. A large flow from the Diaspora shaped Armenian tourism with its advantages and disadvantages. For an Armenian by origin, who has never been in his homeland, visiting Armenia becomes an exciting mix of tourism, pilgrimage and repatriation, and it is not quite hard to satisfy such a person, as everything becomes so interesting and emotional for him. Places strongly associating with the propaganda of the Armenian identity, especially churches, landscapes of Ararat, Tsitsernakaberd (The Armenian Genocide

memorial complex) are of great interest among such tourists, as well as stories about being the first nation to adopt Christianity as a state religion and being the first in many spheres, being a most ancient nation are ideas, pleasing the Armenian Diaspora and multiplying their excitement. The advantage of this is the fact that without possessing a travel and tourism industry Armenia managed to generate a huge demand in the market. Probably no one has ever spoken about the main disadvantage of the sphere, as the idea can be labeled as a “treason against the nation”. So the idea is that the touristic product that was so pleasant for the Armenian Diaspora became

the stereotype of the Armenian tourism for over 10 years. There was nothing else but to show Garni and Geghard, Ejmiadzin and Zvartnots, and dozens of other churches to the tourist, as well as to make khorovats (barbeque) for them, to see them off and to watch him leaving happy and excited.

This completely non-competitive market also had a negative effect of blocking the development of touristic infrastructure, as we felt no internal responsibility to build more comfortable and luxury hotels with high level of service, or acquire better cars, to repair the roads leading to sightseeing places etc. The reason for this was that we were trying to show a miserable image of our homeland, which was in need of aid from the Diaspora. This was the very beginning, and actually it was not bad for the start, as it spontaneously gave birth to a pool of professionals and an infrastructure. Thanks to the first namely non-Armenian foreign tourists we began to acknowledge that it was not very entertaining to show them dozens of churches within a week. The well-established tourism clichés still survive now and even the fact, that we understand that standard tourist routes need reconsideration and replenishment, can change nothing. In terms of developing infrastructure there is very little progress on the part of private investors and state agencies. The classic example is TaTever ropeway, a single successful project that encouraged the development of whole region. Firstly, thanks to this ropeway the southern touristic route became

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Opening of TaTever  
ropeway, 2010



essential major one, and secondly, a number of hotels, guest houses and restaurants were built in that region.

#### INTERNATIONALLY ACKNOWLEDGED BRAND?

Currently we have developed a number of historical sightseeing and touristic routes. Experienced professionals work with us, we offer luxury hotels, high quality vehicles, restaurants with appetizing menus. All these components make us competitive in the field. By the way, outbound tourism is one of the rarest highly competitive fields in Armenia and it brings about reasonable pricing and a growth of the volume of their services and their quality. In addition to historical tours we offer a number of modern touristic activities for people with more specific interests, such as winter sports, medical treatment, culinary, winemaking, archeology, observation of rural areas, extreme tourism, bird watching etc. At this stage of the development we face institutional and macroeconomic serious issues. The most essential issue is the lack of government's support for the development of the field to promote Armenia as a touristic destination in the international market. We are not competitive abroad and it becomes obvious at different foreign exhibitions, where we can watch huge thematic pavilions of our neighbors which are designed with the support of public funds next to unattractive and small tables, representing Armenian tourism. Actually there is no progress in the development of different infrastructures either: roads, public toilets, information centers, training of professionals,

establishment of service standards, legislative and tax reforms – all these infrastructures need development.

#### HOW TO ATTRACT YOUNG TOURISTS?

Seaside and coastal holidays are of top demand in general, but we cannot offer this kind of tourism. If you have an apricot garden it is useless to make huge efforts and plant avocado instead of increasing apricot yield. Increasing of yield would be that Yerevan finally met international standards, offering a number of leisure and entertainment attractions for tourists. Just a simple example: there are a few pools in hotels. It is impossible to keep tourists interested in Yerevan for more than two days. And it is a very serious issue. On the other hand there is no need to underestimate our tourism, which actually possesses its unique huge market. However, there are some issues concerning the development of historical and outdoor tourism. Our product needs additional reconsideration. For instance, if a small outdoor tour is added to the traditional route to Garni and Geghard, along with a refreshment in a rural home, a workshop, an animation, or with a concert of a spiritual and folk choir, or play of duduk, that would be a more expensive, but more interesting and a diverse tour. Even during a standard group tour in European cities tourists do not get so much new knowledge and experience emotions, as during this kind of tours. And these are observations of tourists hosted by our agency. If we add the hospitality, traditional, caring attitude, the delight of a tourist is guaranteed. ♦



EDUARD KALANTARYAN  
**SPORTS REPORTER  
AT PUBLIC TELEVISION OF  
ARMENIA ON SPORTS**



Armenia's biggest football star, Henrikh Mkhitaryan

Artur Alexanyan,  
Olympic champion  
of Rio 2016

Pan Photo

### SOVIET HERITAGE

I have been reporting professionally about sports for over twelve years. I have always been a sport lover, so I know this field. What we have now in the field of sports is mainly inherited from the Soviet times. It would be correct to say that the Soviet school was so strong that it laid a foundation for the future. The first years of the independence were a tough period in Armenia's history. The war broke out, then there was a post-war period, but even in such a situation we had quite strong and successful sportspeople. They all were those who had started their carrier in the Soviet period. Thanks to them we

managed to get quite good results. From 1952 to 1988 Armenian sportspeople participated in Olympic Games as members of Soviet delegations. In 1992, after the USSR's dissolution, Armenia took part in the Olympics as a part of Unified Team, which included athletes from former Soviet countries. It was exactly in 1994, when Armenia first participated in Olympic Games as an independent country. Since then the sportspeople from the Republic of Armenia participated in all Summer and Winter Olympic Games. The most remarkable moment was in 1996, when Armenian Greco-Roman wrestler

Armen Mkrtchyan became the first ever Armenian athlete, who got a gold medal and became an Olympic Champion under the flag of his independent country. For two decades he was the only Olympic Champion in the history of independent Armenia, until wrestler Arthur Alexanian won the gold at the Rio Olympics this year.

Gradually the generation of independence, I mean those sportspeople, who were already born in the independent country, began to "invade" this field. It is only now that their achievements can be seen. Many representatives of this generation took part in the Rio Olympics.

It was considered to be an intermediate period starting from the mid-90's to nowadays. It was such a difficult period for the development of the Armenian sports. The results were poor. There was a little ray of hope in football, but unfortunately we have to admit that it was just a short period with which did not last long. But we still hope that ray could have laid



Pan Photo

a foundation for the brighter future. A friend of mine keeps saying this country will finally become successful, when the last person, who was born in Soviet era, dies. I think it does not apply to sports, as there are a few coaches, who still continue to use Soviet methods while training the young generation. It is difficult to state distinctly, if those methods are good or outdated, but one thing is definitely a fact – the field of sports was much stronger and successful during the Soviet times. That was the result of the fact that we were living in a powerful country. I was born in the Soviet Union and I feel that advantage in my case. I used to be an athlete, everything was coordinated and centralized at that time. 15 countries were working for the realization of one single idea. The Soviet school was indeed stronger, but the conditions for trainings are just perfect now. So if the coaches are retrained or foreign professionals are invited to train our athletes and share their experience, we will definitely have success and tangible results.



Armen Martirosyan

◀ Armenia won the Chess Olympiads of 2006, 2008 and 2012

### THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF INDEPENDENCE

The formation of the National Olympic Committee (NOC) of Armenia in 1990 was one of the most significant achievements of independence. In 1993 it was already officially recognized by the International Olympic Committee. The NOC supports and encourages young Armenian sportspeople, finding solutions to various issues. The most important achievement for us is the feeling of being independent and self-determined. There are different [sports] federations functioning in Armenia, a number of sports venues have been opened in Yerevan recently. For instance the Technical Center-Football Academy opened in Yerevan's Avan district is considered to be one of the best in the region, Yerevan Velodrome, which has a total area of 3,200 square meters and is equipped with different modern facilities, or the complex of Olimpavan, covering an area of 1,000 square meters and providing Armenian sportspeople with all the necessary conditions for their activities. Unfortunately these kind of venues are mainly centralized in Yerevan, I would like to see this kind of development in the regions of Armenia. I consider some of our sportspeople to be the greatest achievements for our independent country. We have Greco-Roman wrestler Arthur Alexanyan, who is a two-time World Champion, three-time European Champion and an

▲ The new Yerevan velodrome

Olympic bronze medal winner, Henrikh Mkhitaryan, a footballer and an Armenian pride, who just debuted this season in Premiere League as a midfielder for Manchester United. These are the two Armenian sportsmen who are known worldwide in their fields. Many people still refuse to consider chess to be sports. But due to chess once again the world heard of Armenia as a country possessing a successful field of sports. There have always been a number of strong athletes in the history of Armenian sports, successful sportsmen in wrestling, boxing, football and etc. But chess became the most successful sphere for us after we gained independence. Solid foundations for their success were laid since the Soviet time and modern strategies were added, so we got a great result. Levon Aronian was born in Soviet Union, but became one of the symbols of independent Armenia.

For me the term "independent Armenia" is associated with our chess players as well as Henrikh Mkhitaryan and Arthur Alexanyan. Trust me, to represent an independent country is indeed a very encouraging experience for the athletes. The sportspeople hold the flag of their homeland, listening to the national anthem, ready to perform knowing, that they are children of an independent state. ♦

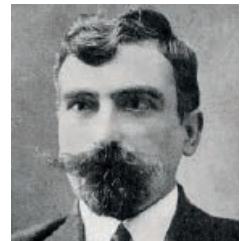


# AN EVANESCENT INDEPENDENCE

## Armenia's First Republic

Armenia became independent in 1918 following five centuries of absence of own statehood. Albeit short-lived, that independence left a deep impact on the fate of Armenia, having its implications also in the current history of the country.

TEXT : TIGRAN ZAKHARYAN



▲  
1st Minister of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Armenia Aram Manukyan

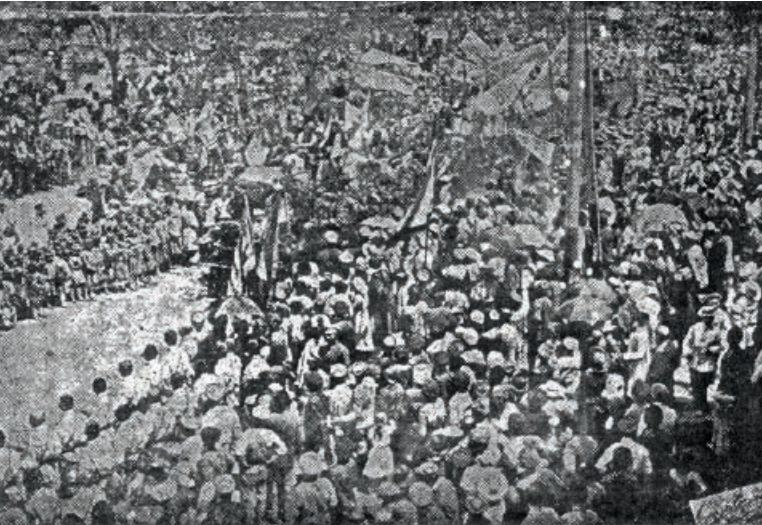


▲  
First Republic's Prime-Minister Simon Vratsian

I t would have been an exaggeration to say that the Armenian people and even its intellectual and political elites were ready for that independence by 1918. The Armenian political parties, which were preoccupied with national issues, spoke of a “free” rather than an “independent” Armenia. After the 1917 February revolution in Russia Armenian leaders started to think about autonomy under the protection of a democratic Russia which would defend Armenians against an imminent threat in case of a Turkish incursion into the Caucasus.

**T**HE OPPONENTS OF ARMENIA'S INDEPENDENCE (OR, AT LEAST, A CERTAIN PART OF THEM) BELIEVED THAT ARMENIA'S FUTURE WAS WITHIN A DEMOCRATIC SOVIET RUSSIA WHICH WOULD DEFEND ARMENIANS FROM OTTOMAN TURKEY

However the course of history went a different way. The Armenian leaders, or, more it would be more correct to say the ARF leaders in Tiflis (today Tbilisi) – who undoubtedly enjoyed the support of the majority of the Armenians in the Caucasus – had to declare independence taking into consideration of the perspective of a division of the Armenian-populated areas between the newly independent states of Georgia and Azerbaijan. However, some Armenian politicians, mostly left-wing, were utterly dissatisfied with the decision, some even going so far as calling it a “betrayal”. Such a position would seem quite absurd from today’s viewpoint, however the opponents of Armenia’s independence (or, at least, a certain part of them) believed that Armenia’s future was within a democratic soviet Russia which would defend Armenians from Ottoman Turkey as well as will prevent conflicts with other neighbors, which were becoming increasingly



▲ 1919, celebrating the first anniversary of Independence

▶ First Republic's own roubles

clear. The so-called Baku commune (in fact composed of Armenian soldiers, formerly in Russian imperial service, who were blocked there on their way home) and even the renowned military figure Andranik Ozanyan, who was defending Armenian civilians from possible attacks on the part of Turks or Caucasian Tatars, declared on their loyalty to the Soviet Russian government with a hope that they could support Armenians in a more effective way than the Armenian authorities in Yerevan.

Meanwhile Eastern Armenia and its centre Yerevan with the utmost stretch of their forces were able to repel a Turkish attack on the heartland of Armenia in the battle of Sardarabad and became de-facto independent even before a formal declaration.

It was to fall following two and a half years, not only under the external blows, delivered by Soviet Russia and Kemalist Turkey, but also to large degree, due to internal moral bankruptcy in the eyes of a large part of its own citizens, who in 1920 thought that Russia was to defend Armenians against Turks and that it was pointless to lead a war against Turkey if Russia was not an ally. A contemporary's memoir conveys the spirit of time, describing how a group of MPs were



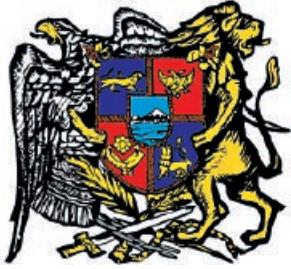
## A SERIOUS CONTROVERSY ERUPTED SINCE 1920 IN DIASPORA OVER THE LEGITIMIZATION OF SOVIET ARMENIA. MEANWHILE NOT ALL OF THE SUPPORTERS OF SOVIET ARMENIAN WERE COMMUNISTS OR SOCIALISTS IN THEIR POLITICAL VIEWS

singing the Russian empire's anthem inside the parliament building as the prevailing mood in the last days was that Russians, red or others, will ultimately take over the Caucasus.

All the more so, it is hard to overestimate the role of the first Armenian republic the leaders of which yielded their power to the Soviet regime through a formal agreement signed on 2 December 1920. The existence of an independent Armenia and its agreement with Soviet Russia became legal foundations for the existence of the smallest Soviet republic, Armenia. The 1921 February rebellion was for many people a complete break with the set pattern, as it was hard to imagine that Armenians, threatened and occupied by three of the four neighbors, experiencing hunger and shortage of everything, could rebel against its historic "saviors". This was



First Republic's coat of arms which 70 years later became basis for Third Republic's one



1918, First Republic's army



Members of the Second Cabinet, 1919

a sort of an answer to all those, who excluded such an option in view of the Turkish threat? Dreams of independence versus Realpolitik? The ideological centre of the Armenian independence following 1921 moved to diaspora for quite obvious reasons, which, for its turn, was still in its formative years.

Armenian renowned writer and political figure Levon Shant in his article penned in 1920's was calling Armenians worldwide not to drop the idea of independence. In one of them entitled "Independence as a matter of national existence" urged not to be discouraged by the greatness and strength of Russia. He suggested that the independent spirit of revolt rather than docility would enable Armenians to achieve some concessions from Moscow as well as its friendship. "Why would the Russians ever make an effort to win 'friendly' – i.e. loyal Armenians, who already have lost their will and linked their future to the protection of the Russian arms?"

A serious controversy erupted since 1920 in diaspora over the legitimization of Soviet Armenia. Meanwhile not all of the supporters of Soviet Armenian were communists or socialists in their political views.

It was Garegin Nzhdeh, an ideologist of Armenian hardline nationalism, who broke off from the ARF and founded his own party to combat against those who were ready to make compromises in the idea of independence. The idea was so dear to Nzhdeh that he went so far as to cooperate with the Nazi regime, which had real chances of invading southern parts of the USSR, including Armenia. It was also Nzhdeh's preoccupation with the future of an Armenian statehood that forced him to offer an uncomfortable alliance with Stalinist Russia. Meanwhile the Second World War and the emergence of the Soviet Union as a nuclear superpower changed the balance of forces inside diaspora too. While a significant part of them, predominantly from Eastern Europe and Middle East took the decision of "repatriation" to Soviet Armenia, where almost no ancestors of them lived, the propaganda against soviet Armenia became less efficient as few believed in a possibility of an independent Armenia. The USSR's antagonism with Turkey, a NATO member, cooled down the anti-Soviet fervor of diaspora politicians, who believed that the incorporation of Western Armenia was a far plausible option rather than a secession from the Soviet Union with an imminent threat of a Turkish invasion. ♦

# THOSE, WHO CHOSE INDEPENDENCE

September 21 is a special date for all Armenians worldwide. In 1991 on this day an independence referendum was held and more than 2 million citizens of the Armenia (99.5% of the voters) voted in favor of independence from the Soviet Union. A whole generation is already born in an independent country, having its own constitution, borders and laws. A lot of people still remember that notable day, when their homeland took its separate place on the world map. "Regional Post" interviewed five of those, who chose independence back on that day in 1991, about the differences of life in the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic and the Republic of Armenia, their memories, feelings and expectations.

TEXT : ARMEN MURADYAN





### GAYANE AVETISYAN

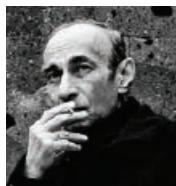
#### Babysitter

By the day, when almost Armenia unanimously decided to become independent, I was already a mother of two sons. My elder son was four years old and the younger one was two. We were a young family ready to participate in the referendum, as the future of me and my sons' was at stake. This was a temptation and a chance of raising our children in an independent country and we could not remain indifferent to it.

We were so inspired on that day. Along with our friends, relatives and neighbors we just went and voted "yes". No one thought about politics, or about the difficulties we would face in the future. And there was no need to think about those details; the most important thing was to take our chance and to make that important decision. I never understood those, who regretted for the decision they made and those who voted against. Any serious decision always entails difficulties and challenges.



"Battle", 1992,  
a picture by  
a primitivist artist  
Rubik Mkrtchyan



### RUBEN ALTUNYAN

#### Composer

I remember clearly the days preceding the before September 21, the day when our country gained independence. We gathered in the Freedom Square, a central square in Yerevan where most important rallies are held. I still remember the people who held speeches on that day, I remember the bright faces of people and our discussions.

I still sometimes re-watch video recordings of those days and every time I get so excited. I cast my ballot into the box at a polling station, but I have managed to save another ballot. So this small piece of paper is a part of the history of both my country and my family. I have also saved food vouchers that replaced money for a certain period.

I was told that everything would be fine. But our hopes and expectations have not been fulfilled. The war broke out and we lived without electricity and gas. But despite these circumstances we played concerts and visited border areas. This was the first test of freedom and we survived it.

**SOS MANUKYAN**  
**Welder, Stonemason**

All my life I have been working hard, I have travelled around the entire Soviet Union. I have been even in Arkhangelsk. The USSR used to be a home for me. It was my homeland and I could not even imagine my life far away from my home. But one day it became clear we had to make a decision to stay with everyone or to be separated. There was not any alternative left for us. The Soviet Union outlived its usefulness, so to vote "No" would have been as absurd as to say no to rain trying to stop it.

Despite of the overall happiness and euphoria I knew that the future would not be bright and there would be no paradise on earth waiting for us. Such a naive word as "democracy", used everywhere, was making me furious. But this is a business as usual; one should earn freedom. I am not a pessimist, but it seems to me I will not survive until the day when there will be freedom we all long for. The only hope is in my children and grandchildren, I truly believe in them.



◀  
"Outburst", 1988,  
a picture by a primitivist  
artist Rubik Mkrtchyan



KARINE AVAKIAN

**Accountant**

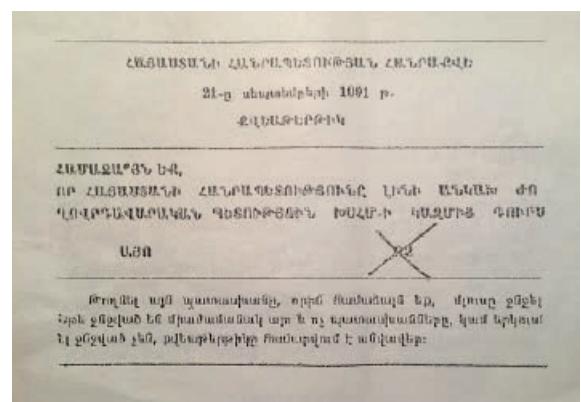
On 21 September 1991 I was in my first year of university. This was one of the happiest years of my youth. Me and my friends felt we were people of a new country and new values, new music and new art. And that was true. I remember how the Lenin statue was toppled. Unlike other countries it was done without hatred. We were watching on TV how statues were just demolished and destroyed in many countries of the former USSR. We just said farewell to our past and opened a new page of our nation. All this was accompanied with dances, discussions, games ... The first decade of freedom was unbearably hard, but not for us, the young students, who were getting ready for the exams under the light of a kerosene lamp, or a candle. This was a real romantic adventure for us.



ARMEN HAYRAPETYAN

**Photo editor**

I was 13 years old in 1991. Many things were unclear for me, I did not realize what was going on. But at some time I and my friends caught the overall euphoria. We were gathering and shouting, "Free and Independent Armenia" and "Karabakh is ours". I clearly remember, on 21 September we went to vote, while my parents and grandmother were persuading my grandfather, who was a real communist and had fought at war, to vote "Yes" in the referendum. My grandfather was the only person who was prejudiced against the independence referendum. At last they thought they managed to convince him, but after the voting I felt he voted "No". I remember 21 September as the day of unity. There was unity and an expectation of something new, unknown, greater...



# ROAD TO INDEPENDENCE

25 years have elapsed since the historic moment when Armenia regained independence. During the past two and a half decades ideas of independence and the people who once championed them were discredited to a certain degree, particularly against the background of heavy economic and social problems, which came instead of the expected prosperity. However back then these were cherished dreams of but a handful of people, mostly intellectuals, whom few would have understood, let alone followed in the "first social country of the world".

TEXT : TIGRAN ZAKHARYAN / PHOTOS : ROUBEN MANGASARYAN



## THE SPIRIT OF INDEPENDENCE

It is to be admitted, despite the wide-spread opinion on the contrary, that there were ideas of independence in Soviet Armenia, although their role should not be exaggerated either.

The idea of independence was popular among certain individuals even as early as in 1950's when the Soviet Union was just starting to awaken from its "deep Stalinism". In 1955-1958 in the city of Gyumri (then Leninakan) a dissident group was active, which distributed leaflets with a call to create a "united and independent" Armenia. "Down with the deceitful communist dictatorship which is preventing reunification of our Armenian nation! Long live our free and independent state to come!" one of the leaflets said.

During the "thawing" years the Armenian people, along with others in the USSR, became more outspoken on its own rights, including the right to commemorate its greatest tragedy, the Armenian genocide in the

Ottoman Empire. Moscow initially tried to quell those sparks of national consciousness, however soon revised its course and started to cooperate and even channel those demands in a way which was in its own interest, underlining in particular, Tsarist and later Soviet Russia's "decisive" role in "saving" Armenians from a complete destruction. Nevertheless a handful of Armenians in the country of soviets challenged that image of Russia as a "savior" of their country and insisted on the idea – which by that time seemed delirious – that the solution of the Armenians' national issue is not in a tightest union with Moscow under the USSR's powerful umbrella, but in separating from it and creating an independent Armenian statehood.

The underground United National Party founded by Stepan Zatikyan and his associates (in 1966, according to other reports, in 1967) which distributed samizdat materials (the first issue of the journal "Paros" reportedly was in 5,000 copies) had a clearly articulated anti-Soviet position and placed national values at the top of agenda.

This was more dangerous to the Soviet authorities than the simple "nationalism" of which Kremlin functionaries sometimes accused certain Armenian party fellows or intellectuals, as they normally concentrated on the rights of Armenians as an ethnic group and never raised the issue of separation from the USSR.

Zatikyan and his associates were soon arrested by the KGB and sentenced to prison terms.

Meanwhile the KGB repressions did not stop after Zatikyan's release from the prison. Following a series of mysterious explosions in Moscow Metro in 1977 Zatikyan and two others, accused of being his "accomplices" were charged of

organizing terrorist acts. Zatikyan was sentenced to death and shot in 1979.

Then a young activist, Paryur Hayrikyan took the charge of the party, which was put an end to by new arrests. Hayrikyan reinvigorated the independents movement by founding his National Self-Determination Union in 1987 by the time when "glasnost" (relative freedom of speech) was officially a part of Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's policies.

## MOVEMENT

The epoch of glasnost, half-freedoms and halfhearted reforms under Gorbachev opened the Pandora Box of nationalism and unresolved problems of the past, which the Soviet leadership never managed to settle.

In Armenia as early as in 1987 under semi-legal conditions signatures were collected for a petition urging incorporating the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) into Soviet Armenia.

Since February 1988 in Yerevan rallies broke out in support of the wish of the NKAO, already expressed formally, to secede from the Azerbaijani SSR and become a part of the Armenian SSR. The mood in Moscow immediately expressed in the "central" (i.e. all-Soviet Union) media, particularly in the Central TV's Vremya news program which called the protesters "extremists", whose number by that time exceeded tens of thousands. Also the central authorities intervened into the ongoing anti-Armenian pogroms in the Azerbaijani city of Sumgait with a "delay" of several days, which seemed an impossible occurrence under the over-centralized power structure in the country of soviets.

Nevertheless a public discussion of Armenia's independence in 1988 seemed unrealistic. One can even remember discussions in early 1989 when arguments like "how many hours such an independent Armenia would survive next to Turkey?" seemed quite plausible. An argument following the same logic could be found, in somewhat modified version, in the current social and political discourse in Armenia.

For the same reason the issue of independence was also by 1980's downgraded in the agenda of the Diaspora, which traditionally was the hotbed of the ideas of a united and independent Armenia. After a long silence on the developments in the homeland, on 1 October 1988 ARF (Armenian Revolutionary Federation) Dashnaksutyun, Hnchak and Ramkavar parties in a rare united move, speaking in the name of the Diaspora, in a statement called on the Armenians in homeland to "abstain from acts [...] which could be perceived as a disloyalty towards Soviet authorities." Such a passive stance of the diaspora parties, including of the

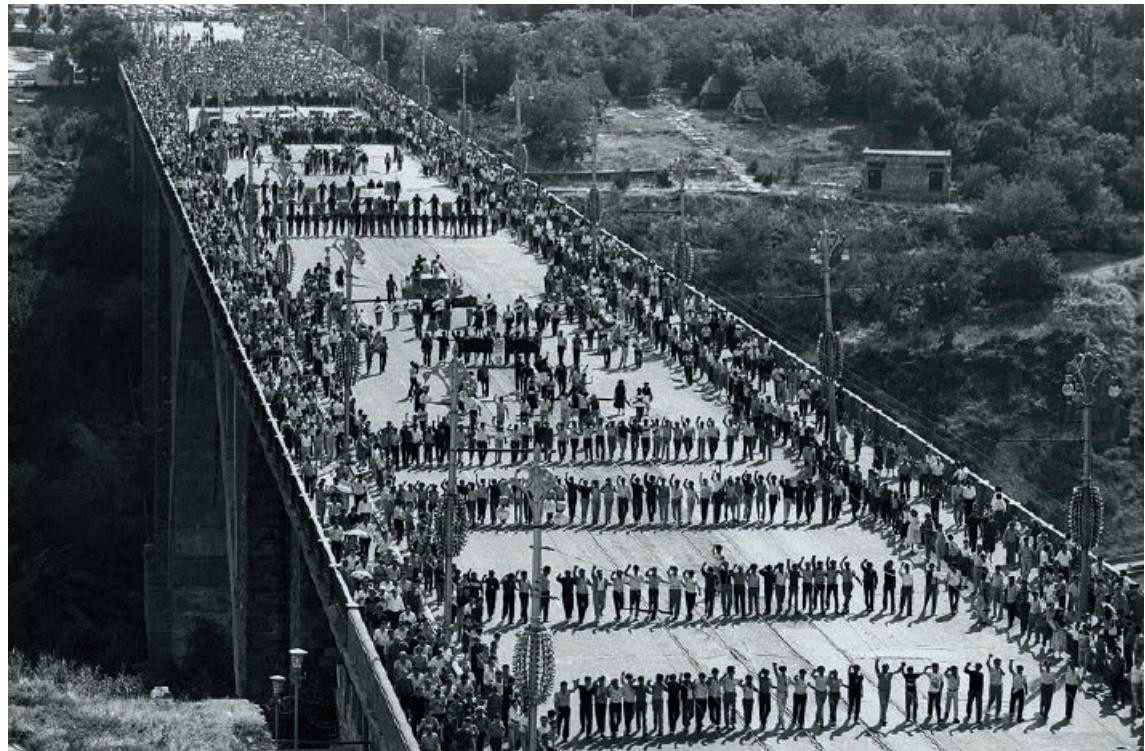
**THE IDEA OF INDEPENDENCE  
WAS POPULAR AMONG CER-  
TAIN INDIVIDUALS EVEN AS  
EARLY AS IN 1950'S WHEN THE  
SOVIET UNION WAS JUST START-  
ING TO AWAKEN FROM ITS "DEEP  
STALINISM"**



ARF, which kept declaring independent Armenia as its aim, caused dismay both in Armenia and in some Diaspora circles. Head of the US-based Zoryan Institute, Gerard (Jirair) Libaridian, for instance, as a sign of protest left the ARF, criticizing the party for their failure to realize the social and political reality in the homeland.

Soon the political parties in the Diaspora had to follow unfolding developments. When the movement for the independence of Armenia assumed an irreversible dimension, many realized that the myth on Diaspora as the main source and depository of Armenian nationalism until the homeland's in-

dependence, was ruined. Hence Armenia became the centre of Armenian national policy where the nation was perceived not only and not that much as an abstract cultural and historical community but as a concrete social and political unit. In the meantime it would be exaggerated to state that early on the leader of the Karabakh movement and the people were mature for the idea of independence. The leaders rather followed the events in that direction, rather than preceded them. Almost a decade following the breakup of the USSR in an interview to the Dutch scholar Tomas de Waal, first Armenian president Levon Ter-Petrosyan said that the idea of indepen-



dence was first seriously discussed only by summer 1989 after a strike of about one million of miners in Russia who put forward their political demands. "That is the time; we need to fight for independence. Also because it would have been too dangerous if we were not ready for that in case Soviet Union collapsed" Ter-Petrosyan recalled as quoted by De Waal. The very idea of independence, in Ter-Petrosyan's words split the Karabakh movement. Intellectuals and political activists like Silva Kaputikyan, Zori Balayan and Igor Muradyan who were concentrating only on the idea of Karabakh's integration into Soviet Armenia, left the movement.

Certain individuals, on the contrary, were well ahead of the leaders of the Karabakh movement in the matter of independence. Movses Gorgisyan (in the future he became one of the first victims of the starting war with Azerbaijan) from the NSDU on 28 May 1988, the day when the first republic was proclaimed in 1918, in the Freedom Square of Yerevan flew the national tricolor as a symbol of the demand for independence.

Movements in Armenia were developing along with other processes, namely, the fall of the Berlin wall, demise of pro-Moscow regimes in Central Europe and an intensification of nationalist and democratic demands inside the USSR.

Even Russia's first congress of people's deputies adopted a declaration on the state sovereignty of the RSFSR on 12 June 1990, which widely opened the door for similar developments in other Soviet republics.

On 24 November 1988 the Supreme Soviet (parliament) of the Armenian SSR passed a resolution dismissing all Soviet Central authorities' decisions and laws in the territory of Armenia unless they were approved by local authorities. Moscow immediately responded this by sending troops who effectively took power in Armenia for several months. Leaders of the Karabakh movements were arrested while Karabakh's autonomy was suppressed.

Things changed in spring 1989 when the jailed leaders of the movement were set free and the topic of independence started to be discussed openly. Armenian negotiators, according to Vazgen Manukyan, a prominent leader of the Karabakh movement, made it clear to the authorities in Kremlin that if the central authorities resolve the Karabakh issue in line with Armenian demands, the demands for independence could be dropped. The "Karabakh for independence" barter did not take place (whereas it effectively took place in the case of Azerbaijan) as Moscow was increasingly losing its own leverages of power and even could not, or did not wish to, lift the blockade imposed on Armenia by Azerbaijan since summer 1989.

Under the given circumstances Armenia anyway found itself alone in resolving its vital problems. It was forced to think

about setting up an Armenian national army after armed confrontations on the border with Azerbaijan as well as in Karabakh. In fact a parallel power along with the Soviet power existed in Armenia on the eve of the parliamentary elections on 20 May 1990, which was a remarkable success for Ter-Petrosyan's Armenian All-National Movement. Ter-Petrosyan became the speaker of the newly elected parliament, thus assuming the office number one in Armenia, putting an end to 70 years of Communist rule in the country. On 23 April 1990 the Declaration on Independence was adopted which marked independence merely as an aim, also changing the country's formal attributes, such as the name (suppressing the words Soviet Socialist), national flag etc. Armenia, along with the Baltic states, Georgia and Moldova did not take part in the referendum on preserving the Soviet Union held on 17 March 1991, thus declaring on its firm stance in seceding from the disintegrating USSR. Instead

a decision was passed to hold a referendum on Armenia's independence.

Paruyr Hayrikyan and some other radical politicians were advocating for immediate declaration of independence however the failed putsch in August 1991 showed that the centre still was potentially dangerous. The strong anti-independence stance of the coup leaders was clearly demonstrated during the short period of the putsch, when according to observers a shift to brutally suppressive actions by Soviet troops in Karabakh was remarkable.

After the failed coup the prospects for independence became much more realistic and the people of Armenia almost unanimously voted for it in the referendum on 21 September. The Belavezha agreement between the Slavic republics, Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, which were the core of the Soviet Union, sealed the fate of possibly the greatest utopia in history which cost millions of lives of many nationalities, including of Armenians.

Currently as we throw back our view to the history of last quarter of a century we can remark the striking naivety which was present during the referendum. To most people born under the Soviet power, with some knowing Stalinism by their personal experience, the ideas of civil rights were understandably foreign. However the referendum was a choice which gave a chance for a better future of Armenia at least ensuring its external security, which was by that time becoming increasingly problematic.

The citizens of Armenia living in the second decade of the XXI century have a mission which is like a referendum on daily basis. It is up to them and their daily "referenda" to decide whether they should live in a law-governed, independent, socially protected and safe society or not. ♦

## A PARALLEL POWER ALONG WITH THE SOVIET POWER EXISTED IN ARMENIA ON THE EVE OF THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS, WHICH WAS A REMARKABLE SUCCESS FOR ARMENIAN ALL-NATIONAL MOVEMENT

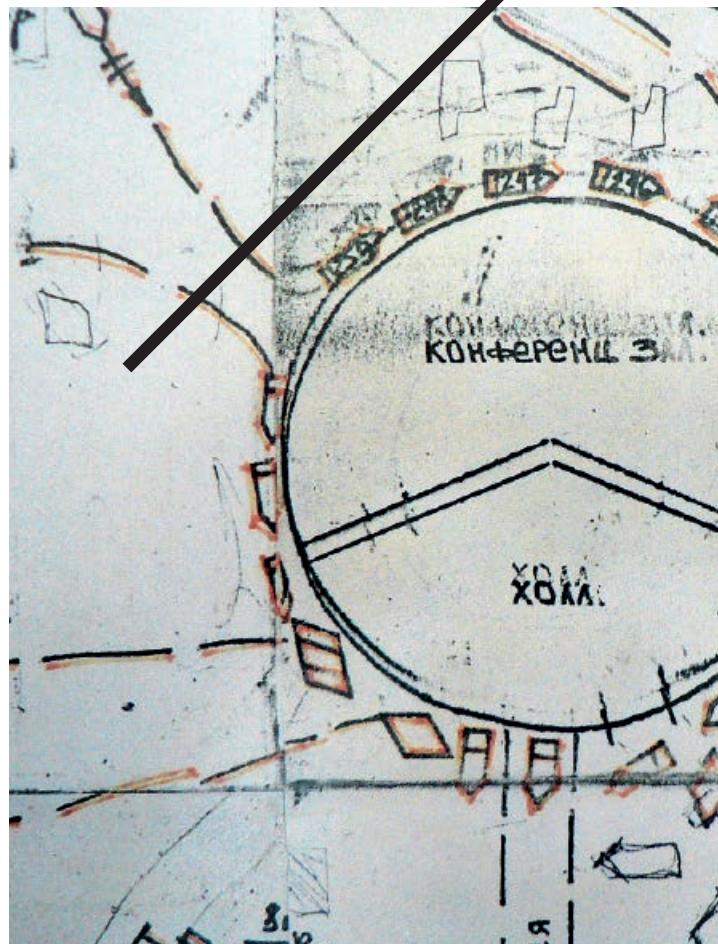
# A COLOSSUS DISINTEGRATING:

## Breakup of the Soviet Union

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was a most remarkable phenomenon in the 20th century and both its development as well as disappearance will long be a topic for disputes in social science and humanities. It existed for about 70 years as a global alternative to the "capitalist" world order, ensuring support for some, fighting against colonialism.

TEXT : TIGRAN ZAKHARYAN

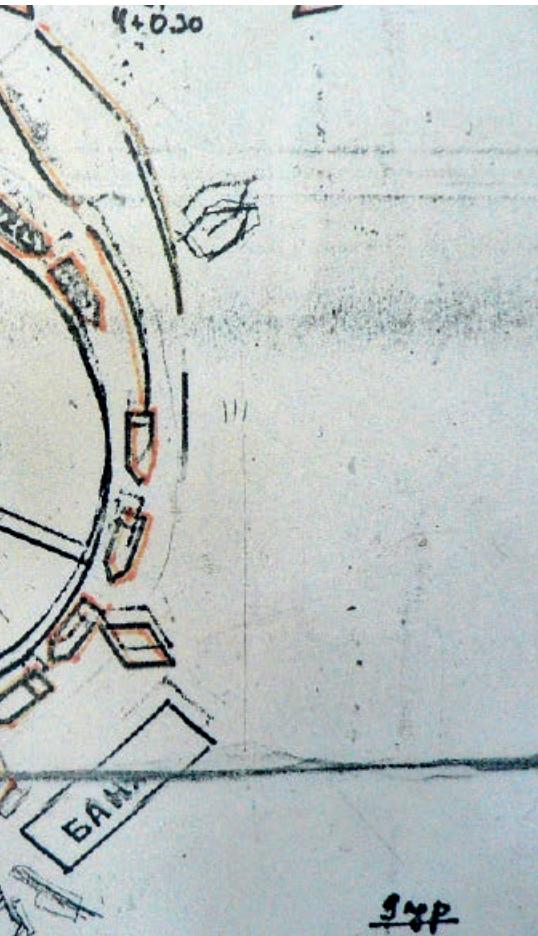
▼  
January 13 events  
in Vilnius, Lithuania



In 1970's and even 1980's few would believe that a powerful state with a dreadful nuclear arsenal, no matter how economically less impressive than its adversary, would fall apart in a matter of several years.

The USSR fell apart due to ideological bankruptcy, rather than financial, although the economic factors had their part to play. In late 1980's the USSR's hard currency assets dwindled, however they could be a match to the figure of 1970's and by that time the Soviet Union was by no means on the brink of collapse.

Albeit the 1970's were known in the Soviet Union as the time of "zastoi", the same period was also marked for most soviet people as time of relative prosperity, when items otherwise considered luxurious, such as a TV, a refrigerator, or even a car became affordable, although not always through the mediation of corrupt schemes and black market.



◀  
Vilnius TV Tower  
Soviet attack plans

▼  
Baltijos kelias: a peaceful  
mass demonstration, 1989



## LITHUANIA, LATVIA AND ESTONIA WITH A TRADITION OF INDEPENDENCE BETWEEN 1918 AND 1940 WERE NATURALLY AT THE FOREFRONT OF THE MOVEMENT

However USSR's involvement into the costly Afghan war since 1979 increased dissatisfaction over the unexpectedly high number of casualties. The soaring Soviet military budget coupled with plummeting hard currency incomes, namely due to the dropping oil price resulted also in cuts of social expenditures. Following the start of the Afghan war the budget expenditures on health care, schooling and culture were drastically cut as the soviet people, already accustomed to relative prosperity and nominally free (although sometimes difficult to get) social benefits, witnessed an increasing pauperization.

In the same time the Soviet Union under Brezhnev and the West came to an arrangement on peace and stability in Europe, seemingly at a low price for Moscow. In 1975 the CSCE (Council of Security and Cooperation in Europe, later OSCE) Helsinki Final Act was called to finally legitimize the

results of the World War II recognizing the existing borders while in the same time the agreement, at the request of the western powers, urged that observing human rights be an international commitment. The Soviet leadership had made a serious miscalculation, by being overconfident of its own might to exclude any effective foreign intervention and excluding the possibility that the agreement might step up domestic movements for rights. Hence the human rights condition in the USSR became an international issue and no arrest of dissidents by the KGB was possible without more or less significant international reaction. So the lack of social progress coupled with an increasing realization of the lack of the freedom of speech started to generate dissatisfaction over the "system". It is no coincidental that jokes about Brezhnev deriding the soviet government and lifestyles became

widely popular in 1970's and 1980's. The system although still wielding power, was gradually becoming funny and not that scary. Another reason, which obviously was important, was the rise of nationalism coupled with the abovementioned democratic movements. Nationalism was at least partially contained phenomenon in the USSR, although at times it was displayed and also used. Soviet authorities tended rather to "tame" the national feelings, coloring them rather playing ethnic identity factor against a full-fledged nationalism, which might bring forward political demands, including a complete cessation from the USSR. There were different pattern of the union republics seceding from the Soviet Union. The Baltic states, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia with a tradition of independence between 1918 and 1940 were naturally at the forefront of the movement. Whereas Central Asian

➤  
Barricades at Riga,  
Latvia, 1991

republics with a certain exception of Kazakhstan, all established as nations only after the soviet power came into their territory, were following the events and it was not until when the failed August putsch in 1991 apparently left the soviet authorities isolated that they declared their full sovereignty. Strangely enough one of the first ever rallies or even riots with nationalist agenda was held in Kazakhstan in December 1986, when thousands of people were protesting against substituting of an ethnic Kazakh with a Russian functionary from the Russian Federation as the head of the republic.

#### BALTIC INDEPENDENTISTS

In Latvia and Estonia the drive towards independence started, as in some other republics, with a public revision of the soviet mainstream historiography, with an aim of challenging the official version on the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact of 1939 which effectively sealed the fate of the Baltic states as annexed parts of the Soviet Union. As early as in 1987 in Estonia the national tricolor (blue-black-white) was displayed and the 1918-1920 war of Estonian independence was publicly remembered. Lithuania, which seemed to join the camp comparatively later, started a powerful movement for independence since 1988, when in May of that year the movement "Sajudis" (literally meaning "movement") was founded.



## A TTEMPTED PUNITIVE ACTIONS BY MOSCOW, IN WHICH SOVIET TROOPS LOOKED MORE LIKE FOREIGN INVADERS, ONLY STIFFENED RESISTANCE OF THE BALTIC NATIONS

Even Moscow's newly appointed First Secretary Algirdas Brazauskas had to bow under pressure and legalize flying the Lithuanian tricolor (yellow-green-red) since October 1988 and agree to a law making Lithuanian the only official language.

In 1989, also influenced by the "velvet revolutions" occurring in central Europe, Baltic states engaged into more ambitious programs leading to full independence. A grandiose all-Baltic peaceful political demonstration in the form of a human chain was held on August 23, 1989 extending across Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania marking the 50th anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. The fact that later that year the soviet leadership had to condemn the pact made the claim of those states for independence as legally well-grounded. Meanwhile a revolution occurred in Lithuania, shaking the very bases of the Soviet power not only in that republic,

but also elsewhere. Sajudis in the elections to the Congress of Peoples' Deputies in 1989 won the majority whereas Communist Party of Lithuania under the leadership of Algirdas Brazauskas, split from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and abandoned its claim to have a constitutional "leading role" in politics in line with other central European states. This was a devastating blow to the power and prestige of Moscow in the Baltic states. Sajudis won the elections in 1990 and on 11 March the new parliament passed a resolution on "Re-Establishment of the State of Lithuania", making Lithuania the first Soviet Republic to break away from the USSR.

Latvia declared the restoration of independence on 4 May, 1990, with the declaration stipulating a transitional period to complete independence as Estonia passed a similar resolution on 30 March 1990.





▲ Boris Yeltsin giving a speech on the tank during 1991 August putsch



➤ Seimas Palace during January 13 events in Vilnius, Lithuania

However, Moscow was not ready to yield its positions that easily. In January 1991 soviet troops tried to storm the TV tower in Lithuania's capital Vilnius, during which civilians were killed. Similar developments occurred in January in Latvia. All those attempted punitive actions by Moscow, in which Soviet troops looked more like foreign invaders, only stiffened resistance of the Baltic nations, rather than gave any results. Ultimately the three Baltic states were recognized by Soviet Union in 1991 after the August failed coup (the "putsch"), when a group of conservatives tries to oust Gorbachev and reinstate Moscow's rigorous control over the republics.

**SOUTH CAUCASUS, UKRAINE, BELARUS, MOLDOVA**  
South Caucasus republics, particularly Georgia, had their own memories of independence and such popular demands were heard as early as in 1956 riots in Tbilisi, when, oddly enough, it was coupled and powered by a popular discontent over de-Stalinization launched by Moscow. Calls for independence were publicly heard in Georgia since November 1988 however on 9 April 1989 the soviet troops



brutally suppressed a huge demonstration, killing about 20 protesters. In the meantime in Georgia's Abkhazia autonomous republic a movement started calling for secession from Tbilisi. Nevertheless, Moscow lost control over Georgia in November 1990, when the Georgian Round Table-Free Georgia won elections and on the symbolic date of 9 April, when soviet troops crushed the demonstration in Tbilisi, declared independence.

The option of independence for Armenia and Azerbaijan were tightly linked in their inter-ethnic bitter conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh autonomy, which, being almost exclusively Armenian populated at the onset in 1920's was increasingly azerbaijanized and Armenians of the region felt threatened as a group. As Moscow made efforts to repress popular discontent, which almost exclusively was coming from the Armenian side, Azerbaijani society on

the whole was loyal to the Soviet Union. Meanwhile the lingering conflict started to be used as a mobilization tool by Azerbaijan's Popular Front, which starting from late 1988, when the exodus of Azerbaijanis from Armenia started, to put forward political demands. The Popular Front since 1989 started to effectively replace the local soviet authorities in place, and in September 1989 a law was passed giving precedence of local laws over Soviet legislation.

Political changes in Azerbaijan were occurring against the background of even more mobilization of nationalistic sentiment against ethnic Armenians, culminating in 1990 January pogroms, to which soviet troops interfered only days after the riots started and at a moment when the soviet power was deeply threatened in Azerbaijan. Meanwhile during the January events thousands of Azerbaijanis crushed Soviet border infrastructures which they said

were separating them from their ethnic kin living in Iran. The suppression of the Azerbaijani uprising was brutal and caused over 100 deaths. Despite this, Azerbaijani communist leadership, which preserved its power in contested election, in view of the situation in Karabakh, made a decision to stay formally loyal to Moscow and Azerbaijan, unlike its Caucasian neighbors Armenia and Georgia did take part in the 1991 March referendum on preserving the Soviet Union voting almost unanimously in favor of preserving the union. Armenia was quite a remarkable case among the movements for independence which sparked out in the Soviet republics. Unlike Baltic states Armenia did not have lots of outspoken champions for independence, however national problems were on top agenda in Armenia since early 1988's Karabakh

▼  
Demolition of the Berlin Wall, 1991



movement demanding unification of the autonomous region with Armenia. Soon Moscow manifested itself not as a "fair arbitrator" but rather an impediment to the cause and even a supporter of Azerbaijan. As early as in November 1988 the parliament (supreme soviet) of the Armenian SSR adopted a resolution recognizing primacy of Armenian legislating over the Soviet laws, however immediately after that Soviet troops effectively made a military coup, taking the power in Armenia into their hands for several months. With Soviet troops in Yerevan and a curfew established in the night hours, Armenia felt itself as occupied and the reactions soon started to move towards a cessation from the Soviet Union.

1989 was a turning point and future Armenian president, then leader of the national movement Levon Ter-Petrosyan recalled that the issue of independence had broken apart the Karabakh movement, with some moderate figures considering that the independence demands would only be detrimental in talks with Moscow. Ter-Petrosyan also recalled that the move-

ment embarked upon the independence project only after a major strike of miners in Russia in 1989, in which they also put forward political demands, including democratization etc.

The new parliament was elected in Armenia in 1990 with Ter-Petrosyan's Pan-Armenian Movement as its majority and the parliament on 23 August adopted a "Declaration on Independence" stating independence as an ultimate end and meanwhile suppressing Soviet symbolic from its coat of arms, flag etc. Armenia held its independence referendum on 21 September 1991, after the putsch and declared its independence based on its results.

In Ukraine the movements were centered on historical memory and ethno-religious and linguistic issues of Ukrainians, having as a center the western city of Lviv with its peculiar historical tradition.

Separation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church from Moscow's control and recognition of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church were important issues in that movement. Starting from October 1989 the Ukrainian parliament abrogated Communist party's "leading



◀  
Victims of 9 April's  
clashes in Tbilisi,  
Georgia

▶  
Demonstration  
at Kurapaty,  
Belarus, 1989

role" in the country and introduced Ukrainian as the only official language. However the Communists in Ukraine, unlike many other republics, had a large support and in 1990 election they won majority and the parliament speaker was a communist. Later the same year he was replaced by Leonid Kravchuk the first president of Ukraine. The parliament voted for declaration of state sovereignty of Ukraine. Ukraine was among the last to formally declare as independent after a referendum held in December 1991, when it was apparent that the fate of the USSR is sealed. Unlike that the transition of Belarus into an independent state was rather smooth.

Moldova followed in general the Caucasus pattern with ethnic tensions erupting into violence inside its territory in Transnistria and the regions inhabited by the Gagauz ethnic minority.



In Belarus the demonstrations were targeting environmental issues, including the nuclear plant of Chernobyl on the border between Ukraine and Belarus. In 1990 the parliament, still dominated by the communists, voted for a declaration on "state sovereignty" and the country became fully independent only after the Belovezh agreement on 8 December 1991, which drove a final nail in the coffin of the Soviet empire. The same pattern was observed in the Central Asian republics, which were mostly loyal to the Moscow authorities, despite some ethnic tensions. In most republic former communist

leaders of the "last generation" appointed by Moscow became presidents in their respective countries. All of them during the referendum of 1991 voted for the preservation of a modified Soviet Union and became independent at a point when the Union effectively did not exist. A major reason of the comparative weakness of the center, which is sometimes underestimated, was the active rivalry between the soviet authorities and those of the RSFSR, by far the most important member of the Union. A critic of the Gorbachev-style perestroika, a Moscow's Communist Party leader Boris Yeltsin soon became the chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR in 1990 and as first Russian president in 1991. Yeltsin's historic speech mounted on a tank turret during the August coup in 1991 which had a galvanizing effect on the people of Moscow showed ultimate who the master at home was. When Gorbachev returned to Moscow after the putsch was repressed, he did not seem to be in command of anything. Ultimately the first and the last president of the Soviet Union resigned on 25 December, when some of the former republics not only had declared their independence, but those were also recognized by the UN and international community. Prior to that on 8 December the leaders of the three Slavic republics, Russia, Ukraine and Belarus gathered in a locality in Belarus called Belovezh where they finally abrogated the 1922 agreement on the creation of the Soviet Union. ♦

**THE COMMUNISTS IN UKRAINE, UNLIKE MANY OTHER REPUBLICS, HAD A LARGE SUPPORT AND IN 1990 ELECTION THEY WON MAJORITY AND THE PARLIAMENT SPEAKER WAS A COMMUNIST**



# ASHOT MELIK-SHAHNAZARYAN:

## *“The most productive diplomat”*

Diplomats of the “old school” with their most valuable experience gained during the Soviet period have played a major role in the making of the diplomacy of independent Armenia. One of such professionals was Ashot Melik-Shahnazaryan, who returned to Armenia from Moscow in 1992.

TEXT : ARSEN MELIK-SHAHNAZARYAN / PHOTOS : MELIK-SHAHNAZARYAN FAMILY ARCHIVE

### 45 YEARS OF SERVICE

After graduating from the Moscow State Institute of International Relations in 1956, Ashot Melik-Shahnazaryan started his career as an interpreter to the Soviet diplomatic missions in Vietnam and in Belgium (1956-1958). Since 1959 he started working in the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), holding different positions in central office and in foreign missions in Africa, Asia and Europe.

In 1960s Melik-Shahnazaryan was involved as a top level interpreter thanks to his fluent command of French. People like the president of Guinea Ahmed Sékou Touré, President of Congo Alphonse Massamba-Débat, Anastas Mikoyan, Vladimir Voroshilov and even Leonid Brezhnev, then still young, were among his “beneficiaries”.

Ashot Melik-Shahnazaryan was on diplomatic mission for almost half a century. He worked in the Soviet MFA for 33 years and in the MFA of the Republic of Armenia for 12 years. During the period of work at the Soviet MFA he held positions in the directorates on African Affairs (1964-66), General International Issues (1969-75), on Press and Information (1975-81), on Assessment and Planning. Melik-Shahnazaryan was on missions in





◀  
"Young sniper  
Ashotik", 1938

➤  
On the swordplay  
competition in  
Kinshasa, Congo



different embassies of the USSR in Guinea (1960-64), Senegal (1966-68), Zaire (1968-69), Cambodia (1982-87) and Mali (1989-92).

Melik-Shahnazaryan was also Chargé d'Affaires in Zaire, Cambodia and Mali. During the Soviet period in 1989 he was assigned the rank of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary. During the period of his diplomatic career in the MFA he worked at all levels of diplomatic services, graduating from the Diplomatic Academy of the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1971) and to completing an executive training course for the MFA senior officers (1981).

The dissolution of the USSR coincided with the completion of his mission in Mali and his retirement age, so he returned to Moscow. On January 17 1992, just a day before his arrival, Melik-Shahnazaryan's father Zare Samson passed away. He was 88 years old (my grandmother had passed away a few years earlier). Melik-Shahnazaryan learned about that sad news the moment he landed in Moscow, so he immediately took a plane to Yerevan to attend the funeral. It was in Yerevan that Ashot Melik-Shahnazaryan made a decision to continue his diplomatic career in his homeland, Armenia.

### BACK TO ROOTS

Melik-Shahnazaryan worked at the MFA of the Republic of Armenia for 12 years. He was Minister Counsellor at the MFA (1992-94), Permanent Representative to the United Nations and other international organizations based in Geneva (1994-95), Director of MFA Department of International Organizations (1995-98), Ambassador-at-Large (1998-2000), Armenian Ambassador in Mexico and Cuba (2001-2004).

In September 1997 Melik-Shahnazaryan by a decree of President Levon Ter-Petrosyan was promoted to the rank of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary. Why so late? Just after the dissolution of the USSR and the sudden independence of Armenia the government of the young country was almost exclusively in the hands of "young reformers" from the Armenian All-National Movement shaped during the last years of the USSR and headed by first president of Armenia, Levon Ter-Petrosyan. Meanwhile Melik-Shahnazaryan's professionalism played an important role in Ministry's shaping. The most important part of his activities was the involvement in shaping main directorates and structural subdivisions of the MFA putting into effective use his great experience and knowledge.

No country could have a competent foreign policy without such tools. His skills of establishing close contacts with the Russian MFA and the Russian embassy in Armenia, the successors of the Soviet MFA, were also significant. However, it was quite natural as Vladimir Stupishin, the first Russian ambassador in Armenia over the period from 1992 to 1994 was Melik-Shahnazaryan's years-long friend, associate and neighbor in the apartment block on Chaykovsky street in Moscow as well as colleague in the MFA of the USSR.

### DEFENDING RIGHTS OF NAGORNO-KARABAKH

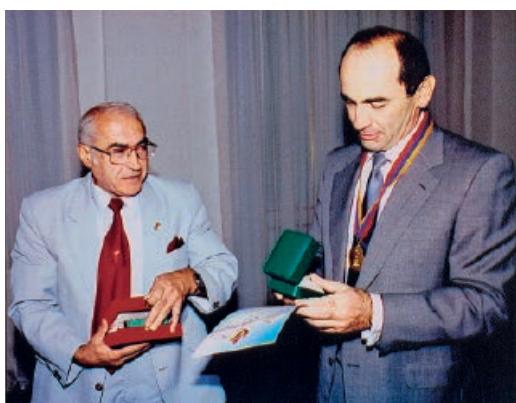
For Melik-Shahnazaryan Karabakh and Shushi have always been a part of his soul that was why he was so deeply touched by the dramatic events that occurred from 1988 to 1994. In 1988 during a general meeting at the Soviet MFA Melik-Shahnazaryan was not afraid to call anti-Armenian pogroms in Sumgait a premeditated massacre based on ethnic hatred aimed to intimidate the Armenians of Karabakh and to blackmail Moscow, despite the official version of Kremlin reading the occurrence as "violence from hooligan motives". During the Karabakh war from 1992 to 1994 Melik-Shahnazaryan had

▼ Melik-Shahnazaryan (right) with director-general of the UN Office in Geneva Vladimir Petrovsky



▲ With members of the International committee of Pan-Armenian Games

► Passing president Kocharyan a Pan-Armenian Games award

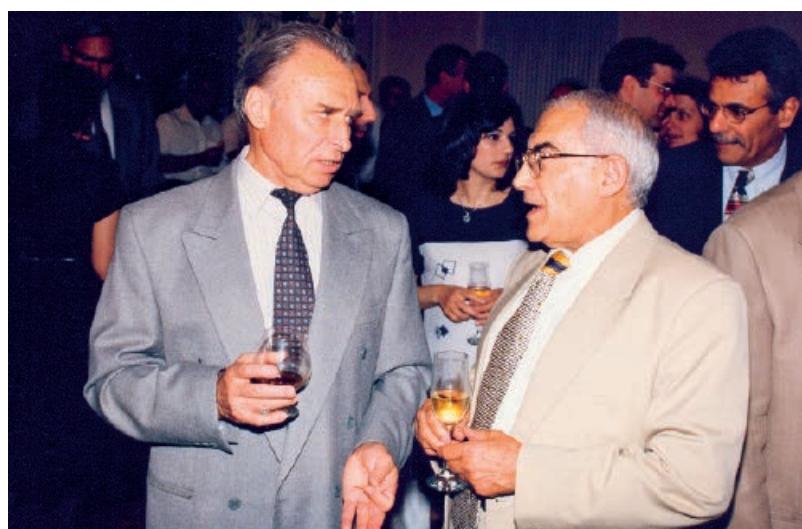


▼ Melik-Shahnazaryan (back right) translating for Mikoyan, Voroshilov with Kongo-Brazzaville's president Massamba Debat, Moscow, 1965



▲ Translating during meeting of Guinea's president Ahmed Sékou Touré with Soviet delegation

▼ With ambassador of Russian in Armenia Anatoly Dryukov, 2002



several trips to Stepanakert. In July 1993 he helped to the young Nagorno-Karabakh Republic to shape its own MFA. It was of vital importance for the people of Karabakh to be able to negotiate competently on the settlement of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict within the framework of OSCE Minsk Group and other formats, as well as to cooperate with international organizations and funds, supporting Karabakh to overcome the consequences of the war, imposed by the government of the Republic of Azerbaijan. In all diplomatic positions and missions at the Armenian and Nagorno-Karabakh MFAs Melik-Shahnazaryan vigorously defended the rights of the young republic on the international stage.

#### A PAN-ARMENIAN DIPLOMAT

Melik-Shahnazaryan was fond of sports since his preschool age. He went in for sports when he was a school and as well as university student continuing his hobby throughout his diplomatic career. During the last years of his life Ashot Melik-Shahnazaryan, besides his professional career, he was actively engaged in the sphere of sports, particularly in the Olympic movement. Melik-Shahnazaryan spent his childhood and youth years in Baku, an international city in that period. As early as in the pre-war years Baku journals and newspapers had records about "young sniper Ashotik", as well as on his father, a shooting instructor and his mother and younger brother. Those paper and journal clippings were kept in Melik-Shahnazaryan's personal archive.

Melik-Shahnazaryan in different years was elected Vice President of the Federation of Modern Pentathlon and Fencing Federation of the USSR. He was appointed advisor on developing countries to the Soviet Olympic Committee; he took part in the preparation and organization of the XXII Olympics in Moscow.

After moving to Armenia, he was also elected in different years president of the Fencing Federation of Armenia,

#### PANARMENIAN GAMES

Melik-Shahnazaryan first conceived the idea of organizing universal games for all Armenians while he was on a mission in 1965 to Brazzaville, the capital of the Republic of Congo, which was getting ready to participate in the first Pan-African Games. However the idea was dismissed by central government in Moscow as "nationalistic". He gave a second chance to the idea after Armenia gained independence. He quickly gained the support of the Armenian Diaspora figures and in 1999 Yerevan hosted the First Pan-Armenian Games with 1141 athletes from 63 cities of 23 countries of the world.

chairman of the National Fair Play Committee, vice-President of National Olympic Committee, the member of Bureau of Sports Development Committee of the Council of Europe, as well as he was national ambassador for Sports in that European institution. Melik-Shahnazaryan had many friends and acquaintances among sports officials, including the President of International Olympic Committee Juan Antonio Samaranch.

Melik-Shahnazaryan became a well-known figure in Armenia and in the worldwide Diaspora as the founder, mastermind and the organizer of Pan-Armenian Sports Movement. For the first time Ashot Melik-Shahnazaryan announced publicly the idea of holding Pan-Armenian Games in 1996 in Paris and next year he became the first president of World Committee of Pan-Armenian Games. The games successfully took place in Yerevan in 1999, 2001 and in 2003.

Within the framework of those sports events thousands of Armenian young people arrived in Yerevan from scores of countries worldwide. Many of them visited their historical homeland for the first time, bridging the modern Armenian state with Armenian colonies, spread worldwide. Melik-Shahnazary-

an also authored the music and lyrics for the march and the farewell song of the Pan-Armenian Games.

#### LAST DAYS

Ashot Melik-Shahnazaryan continued to work up until his very last days of his life. He was Yerevan-based Armenian ambassador in Mexico and in Cuba, continuing also his activities within the framework of Pan-Armenian and International Sports Movement, meanwhile inspiring also a movement of the Francophonie Armenia, gave lectures in Slavonic (Russian-Armenian) University in Yerevan.

In 2003 Melik-Shahnazaryan underwent an extremely complicated and a risky heart surgery. It seemed that the surgery would restore his former previous working ability for at least a decade. In the same year Armenian Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian handed him an award of "the most productive diplomat". Melik-Shahnazaryan passed away on January 18, 2004 in Yerevan. His grave is located in Sovetashen graveyard in Yerevan, next to his parents Zare and Anaid.

#### LEGACY

During his active and productive life Ashot Melik-Shahnazaryan received a number of governmental and public awards, including the Movses Khorenatsi medal, which is considered to be the highest award in the Republic of Armenia for contribution in culture and the Medal of Gratitude of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic.

But beyond all those awards and ranks he had, a most important thing about him that deserves highlighting, was his greatest love towards the life he had, as well as his avid desire and ability to work towards and to achieve success in quite a number of different challenging goals. Punctuality and self-discipline that he developed in himself during his diplomatic career, as well as sport activities, giving him endurance and helping him to keep fit until the last days of his life, played an important role in all spheres of his activities. ♦

# VLADIMIR KARMIRSHALYAN:

## “A diplomat has no right to relax”

Vladimir Karmirshalyan is one of the most experienced Armenian diplomats. The Regional Post spoke to Mr. Karmirshalyan about his career in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs during the Soviet era and the establishment of the MFA following Armenia's Independence.

TEXT : AREG DAVTYAN / PHOTOS : VLADIMIR KARMIRSHALYAN ARCHIVE





Karmirshalyan, on the left, with then MFA Raffi Hovhannisian



With Baroness Caroline Cox



**Mr. Karmirshalyan, you began your diplomatic career in the 1970's. How did it come about?**

— Before Armenia became independent there was the MFA of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic where I began to work in 1977. The staff was small, there were only approximately 11-12 members and fewer still were diplomats. This small team was a part of and played a significant role in the MFA of the Soviet Union. Our mission was particularly important for the USSR's foreign relations specifically with neighbouring countries such as Iran, Turkey and the Arab World. Armenian diplomats were traditionally assigned to countries with significant Armenian populations such as France, Lebanon, Syria , Argentina, etc. The relationship with the Diaspora was considered essential so we provided information concerned Armenia's attitude towards particular states to the Central Soviet authorities.

**What was your position at the Armenian office at that time?**

— I have to say I was exceptionally lucky to have worked with Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Armenian SSR John Kirakosyan at the beginning of my career, a wonderful person who was both a historian and a diplomat. I had worked as his assistant for eight

## I WAS EXCEPTIONALLY LUCKY TO HAVE WORKED WITH MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE ARMENIAN SSR JOHN KIRAKOSYAN AT THE BEGINNING OF MY CAREER

years. By the way, I was assigned to my first diplomatic rank of Attaché by Andrei Gromyko, a famous Soviet statesman who had previously been the Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1957 to 1985. In August 1991, when the USSR was dissolved I was assigned the diplomatic rank of First Secretary by Eduard Shevardnadze, the Soviet Union Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1957 to 1985 and later president of Georgia.

**But then you spent quite a few years working outside Armenia...**

— From 1985 to 1989 I was appointed as consul at the Consulate General of the Soviet Union in Da Nang, Vietnam. When the Spitak earthquake struck, the MFA of the Soviet Armenia played a significant role in organizing assistance from abroad. I remember learning about the disaster and the first thing I thought of was leaving Vietnam and returning to Armenia. I felt that even if I managed to rescue a single person from under the rubble it would have been worth leaving my

posting, However, the ambassador, being more realistic suggested that I use my resources differently. and he was right. The average Vietnamese person, who although lived a simple life, donated so much to the families of the victims. They had had their own bitter taste of disaster during the war and I remember an old lady approaching me and saying that her daughter working in Czechoslovakia had sent her a coat and she wanted to send it to Armenia to one of the victims of the earthquake. I still have a towel with the inscription "To the Armenian nation from brotherly Vietnam".

**In 1989 you began studying at the Diplomatic Academy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the USSR.**

— Yes, I did. And it was an important step for me to become geographically closer to Armenia. My graduate thesis was about the role of the Armenian community of Argentina in the political and social life of the country. In 1991 I was proposed to work in the Russian Embassy in Argentina, but I preferred

**VLADIMIR KARMIRSHALYAN**

Born in 1952 in Echmiadzin, Armenia.  
Diplomatic Rank: Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary  
Current position: Head of Consular Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, Yerevan.  
Education: in 1970-1974 Studied at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations. 1976 Graduated from the Moscow State University, in 1991 Graduated from the Moscow Diplomatic Academy with a degree of excellence  
2012-2013 Adviser, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, Yerevan  
2006-2012 Ambassador of the Republic of Armenia to the Argentine Republic, Oriental Republic of Uruguay and Republic of Chile (with residence in Buenos Aires)  
2000-2006 Ambassador of the Republic of Armenia to the Kingdom of Denmark, Kingdom of Sweden, Kingdom of Norway and the Republic of Finland.  
1998-2000 Member of the Human Rights Committee, headed by the President of the Republic of Armenia.  
1994-1995 Head of the Department of International Organizations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, Yerevan.  
1992-1994 Head of Latin American Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, Yerevan.  
1991-1992 Head of the First Political Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, Yerevan.  
1990 Short term mission in the Embassy of the USSR in Buenos Aires, Argentina  
1985-1989 Consul, General Consulate of the USSR, Da Nang, Vietnam.  
1978-1985 Assistant to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Armenian SSR, Yerevan.  
1977-1978 Second Secretary, Department of Political Information, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Armenian SSR, Yerevan.



Karmirshalyan, on the right, celebrating 10th anniversary of MFA



to return to Armenia as at the time a Ministry of Foreign Affairs if the independent Armenia was in its formation process. I decided that my previous experiences would be put to better use in my homeland. I was granted my first diplomatic rank of Attaché by Andrei Gromyko, a famous Soviet statesman who had previously been the Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1957 to 1985. In August 1991, when the USSR was dissolved I was granted the diplomatic rank of First Secretary by Eduard Shevardnadze, the Soviet Union Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1957 to 1985 and later president of Georgia.

**Which is the main difference between working in the MFA of the USSR and the MFA of the Republic of Armenia?**

— A Soviet diplomat, although a tiny cog in a gargantuan machine, felt the power of a mighty empire behind him, however an armenian diplomat who works for his independent state felt nothing but immense pride.

**What about your most memorable mission?**



With catholicos Garegin II and president of Uruguay Jose Mujica



With Chile's president  
Michelle Bachelet

## HAVE PRESENTED MY CREDENTIALS AS AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA TO **FOUR PRESIDENTS, TWO KINGS AND A QUEEN**

— I will never forget the 26th of December, 1991. I was the head of the Department of the Americas and we were on a mission to Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil to negotiate on the recognition of the Armenian independence. The then Foreign Minister of Armenia, Raffi Hovhannisyan with whom I travelled to Latin America had left for the USA and I was in Buenos Aires, anxiously awaiting the decision of the Argentinian government. The following morning I received a phone call setting a meeting with the Deputy Minister. On my way to the MFA approximately 25-30 Argentinian armenians came up to the building of the Ministry and there was so much excitement in the air. Everyone was waiting for the decision. On my way to the Deputy Minister's office one of the employers passed by with a tray of champagne and glasses and I have realized that we were going to have something to celebrate! When the official decision was read out and it was submitted to me as to the official representative of the Republic of Armenia I realized that being a diplomat was all about moments like these.

It is a great honour for any diplomat to represent his country during such a crucial period in its history.

**During that particular period, a lot of Armenian diplomats returned to work at the MFA of the Independent Republic of Armenia leaving behind their foreign missions and careers.**

— Yes, there were some. And it would have been nearly impossible to establish the ministry we have today without their assistance and participation. Ashot Melik-Shahnazaryan, Arman Navasardyan, Grigori Badalyan and others were among them. It's also worth mentioning that Edward Nalbandian, a current Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, is one of the diplomats, who chose Armenia instead of his successful diplomatic career in Russia. We decided to use our experience and invest all of our efforts into the development of Armenian diplomacy while simultaneously working with the new generation. MFA sent a number of young students to study abroad and gain experience needed to represent their country on the international stage.

It is impossible to build and to develop diplomacy without experience, theory cannot replace practice. I can proudly state that some young boys and girls who joined MFA between 1991 and 1993 are now heading our diplomatic missions around the world, professionally and proudly representing the Republic of Armenia. I personally have officially represented Armenia for 12 years in 7 countries. I have presented my credentials as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Armenia to four presidents, two kings and a queen. It is quite an achievement and an honour for me.

**What do you think is the main rule in diplomacy?**

— A diplomat has no right to relax, this is a profession that requires constant self improvement and continued study. I always try to learn even from the younger generation. If a diplomat loses his drive then there is nothing left to do. We cannot afford to relax, we must at all times be vigilant and ready for any unexpected situation, especially in this interconnected and changing world. ♦

# LITHUANIA'S AMBASSADOR TO ARMENIA ERIKAS PETRIKAS:

## "We are here to help Armenia"

In November 1991, the Republic of Lithuania signed an agreement of diplomatic relations with a newly established independent Republic of Armenia. This might look like an ordinary diplomatic routine, but the fact is that Lithuania became the first ever state to recognize the independence of Armenia. This year both countries celebrate the 25th anniversary of independence and 25th anniversary of diplomatic relations. But how would the relationship between the two countries develop a century later? How deep our countries cooperate in the 21st century? We talked about this with the Ambassador of Lithuania in Armenia, Mr. Erikas Petrikas.

TEXT : MIKAYEL ZOLYAN / PHOTOS : EMBASSY OF LITHUANIA IN ARMENIA

Mr. Petrikas, you were appointed an ambassador to Armenia in 2013. Was it your first visit to Armenia at that time? What surprised you most of all?

— Yes, it was my very first visit to the region. Previously, I served in four European countries. And never before I have encountered such a strong acknowledgement of my country as I met here. Nobody in Armenia confuses us with other Baltic countries; ordinary people know such small towns and villages of Lithuania which I don't even remember myself. Later I found out that it was coming from Soviet times when lots of Armenians served in the army in Lithuania and their relatives went to see them. Many others went there for their honeymoons, because Lithuania seemed to be Europe inside the Soviet Union. And it is such a great thing that they still remember it with warmth. And, of course, Armenians remember our great basketball players.

Finally, Lithuania was among the first countries to recognize Armenian independence!

— Exactly. And it comes as no surprise. Armenians and Lithuanians have always been like brother nations, start-



ing from the middle Ages and ending with the national movements during the last years of the Soviet Union. And I can say for sure that friendship between our nations is still very strong. On one hand, Armenians remember us very well; on the other, Lithuania sends signals and states: "We are here to help Armenia". We really see a huge potential of your country.

When our Minister of Defense, Juozas Olekas, met Levon Ter-Petrosyan during his official visit in 2014, they remembered each other from the times when they were both deputies in Moscow. And our minister even visited Ter-Petrosyan when the latter was in pris-

on in Moscow in late 1980's. It's not surprising that I remember Armenian and Lithuanian flags carried together during our national movements. And, of course, the earthquake of 1988. It was one of the worst tragedies that united our nations. I was so proud to see several buildings, including two schools in Artik, that were built from scratch by a Lithuanian company. I remember myself collecting things for those in Spitak... It was as if this tragedy happened to your relative, your brother. When I was appointed an ambassador, I've been called "akhper jan", my brother, many times. So proud to be.

➤  
Celebrating Day of Restoration of Lithuania's Independence in Yerevan with invited star Martynas Levickis



## O N ONE HAND, ARMENIANS REMEMBER US VERY WELL; ON THE OTHER, LITHUANIA SENDS SIGNALS AND STATES: "WE ARE HERE TO HELP ARMENIA". WE REALLY SEE A HUGE POTENTIAL OF YOUR COUNTRY

Strengthening of economic cooperation is your priority as an ambassador, isn't it?

— It is. I have to say, that previously there wasn't much positive experience in two-side economic relations. But then a special intergovernmental commission was organized, which marked fourteen areas where our countries could cooperate. And it is not just an agreement on paper. There are numerous practical steps that can be seen already. Like three business forums that had a great impact. There were three participating countries in one of the forums: Lithuania, Armenia and Iran. Though we do not cover Iran from Armenia, this request came from the President of Lithuanian Business Confederation, and it could be a good example of how big is Armenia's potential to serve as a bridge between Europe and Iran. Armenia has to use this opportunity.

Did all this result in a significant growth in terms of economic relations?

— Yes, since last year game-changing things started to happen. Last year our export to Armenia grew up to 16 million euros. It is not that

much on a big scale, but in comparison with previous years, it is more than twofold, so I'm quite pleased with the progress.

In February, Lithuanian meat and dairy products could already be found in Armenian supermarkets – two supermarket chains so far, but still it's a great step forward. The decision was made by one of the Lithuanian companies, the one which was exporting products to Georgia – it was easy to enter the Armenian market from there.

What about other spheres?

— Agriculture is one of the key priorities for both countries. Our Minister of Agriculture was here in June and signed an agreement with Armenian exporters, who were invited to Vilnius in August. We pay particular attention to cattle breeding, ecological farms, fishery and consultancy in agriculture, and we can become trusted advisors to Armenia in this sphere. We've been in a similar situation some ten years ago, and now we can share our experience with Armenian colleagues, so they could avoid mistakes we had made.

There are three agreements between our countries already on the table ready to be signed – in the areas of social security and labor, sport and readmission which will be signed later this year or at the beginning of 2017. It's so much important for us to share our experience with you!

Lithuania is part of EU, Armenia recently became member of Eurasian Economic Union. How did this affect the relationships between our countries?

— I remember it was at the beginning of 2013, when we were all busy with preparations for your President's visit to Vilnius where he had to sign an agreement with EU, and I, on my side, had already reported this news, and then September 3rd happened. It was quite a surprise, but we have what we have, and we need to think about the future. Fortunately, Armenia laid a good basis for negotiations. We really want to save all those positive elements gained during the negotiations before 2013, so we don't have to invent a bicycle, just keep on going and find common solutions. EU is very positive and Armenia is quite flexible, so the relationship between these two definitely has a future. ➤



Celebrating Day of Restoration of Lithuania's Independence with Lithuanian community



Exhibition dedicated to Jurgis Baltrušaitis

You mentioned Iran. How should Armenia use its close position to it?

— Energy security has always been a priority for Lithuania, and still is. From this perspective Armenia's cooperation with Iran in this area is very important. Iran is a friendly partner and a good neighbor to Armenia, so I see big potential there. Armenia may become a transit between Iran and Eastern-European countries. It's all in your hands.

Few years ago tourism was declared as one of the priority segments of the Armenian economy. Do you see any potential here? Are there many tourists from Lithuania traveling to Armenia?

— Honestly, we haven't succeeded much in this area yet, but I hope that

the situation will change in the coming years because I see real potential for it. Armenia should improve its touristic infrastructure. See the example of Kutaisi in Georgia. By the way, the other way to attract more tourists is to bring to Armenia those who are visiting Georgia. I know lots of Lithuanians who would be pleased to expand their trip while exploring Georgia and visit Armenia. Besides, the road signs should be also written in English and not only in Armenian. It may seem a small thing, but believe me, this matters a lot. The other thing is promotion. While waiting for connecting flights to Yerevan, one can see attractive ads of Georgian resorts, but not a single sign of Jermuk or Tsakhkadzor, or the Symphony of the Stones in the Garni Gorge.

You seem to travel a lot in Armenia.

— I'm trying to! There are so many magnificent places here! And you know, it's important to realize that Yerevan is not all Armenia. So I love traveling and meeting people, talking to ordinary Armenians. It is the only way to understand the country.

You are also very active in a cultural area.

— We are not a very rich country and usually we prefer to organize one big event within the scope of a National Holiday inviting the best Lithuanian artists. On February 16, we hosted an accordion virtuoso, Martinas Levickis, while last year we enjoyed a concert of two prominent Lithuanian jazz musicians – Petras Geniušas and Liudas Mockūnas. However, we started our cultural activities here from cooperation with a talented Armenian pianist, Hayk Melikyan, by supporting his project called "1900+". In 2014, we supported Hayk's initiative and organized concert series where works of three Baltic States composers were presented; and in 2015, we released a CD dedicated to the works of famous Lithuanian artists, Čiurlionis and Dvarionas. We have also presented some Lithuanian films to the Armenian public. But to me the most interesting and import-

ant project was the one we had on May 21st which was the Street Music Day in Yerevan. It was very difficult for me to convince Armenian counterparts to “copy” a Lithuanian project which we have been running for 10 years already. Most supportive person there was Mayor of Yerevan, Mr. Taron Margaryan. He asked me very openly: “What other towns have “bought” this Lithuanian idea?” I mentioned Tallinn, Riga, St. Petersburg, Dublin, Vienna and Tbilisi. He was convinced. So Northern Avenue and other places in the city center have become a stage for all those who wished to showcase their musical talents in public. This event was widely publicized in the Lithuanian media. Another significant event I felt very happy about took place in May 2015, when the Poetry Spring with participation of three Lithuanian poets was held in Yerevan as well.

I can see few interesting books here...

— Yes, this one means a lot to me. In 1928, Jurgis Baltrušaitis Junior, Lithuanian art historian, visited the Julfa Cemetery in Nakhijevan and took 38 photos of Armenian khachkars. For years it was thought that those photos were lost, but with the help of our friends – a Paris-based professor, Dickran Kouyumjian, and our Portuguese colleague Carlos Costa Ramos – we managed to find them. Our Armenian friends helped us to have this book translated into Armenian and present it to the Armenian public in Matenadaran. Next steps would be to inaugurate a room named after Jurgis Baltrušaitis Junior at the Yerevan State University of Architecture and Construction and to establish a scholarship fund in his name available for Armenian architecture students. For me Baltrušaitis Junior is one of the most significant figures in history of the relationship between Armenia and Lithuania. By the way, Lithuanian J. Baltrušaitis also wrote two books about Armenian architecture in 1929 and 1936.



**T'S IMPORTANT TO REALIZE THAT YEREVAN IS NOT ALL ARMENIA. SO I LOVE TRAVELING AND MEETING PEOPLE, TALKING TO ORDINARY ARMENIANS. IT IS THE ONLY WAY TO UNDERSTAND THE COUNTRY**

And here you can see two books that came as a wonderful surprise to me: Felix Bakhchinyan translated into Armenian the works of our famous poets – Kristijonas Donelaitis and, later, Maironis and Baranauskas. So this is a big cultural exchange that comes from both sides.

**What is your biggest achievement as an ambassador?**

— I spared no efforts to create an intergovernmental commission. We managed to achieve this with a great support of Ara Ayvazian, former Armenian ambassador in Lithuania. Well, there were some obstacles that just had to be put aside in order to move forward. And step by step we built our relationship.

**What about things yet to be done?**

— Many things could be done in the areas I have mentioned before, as well as, for example, in education. So far, there are only five Armenian students

studying in Lithuania. Regrettably, no one has applied for the government scholarships for researches and fellowship particularly in the Baltic studies. Those scholarships didn't disappear, of course, they just were given to students from Moldova, Georgia, and other countries. Starting from 2015, Armenian universities can apply for the exchange programs for students and fellows through the Erasmus EU program – the package holds about 1.6 million euros. But again, lack of interest is seen.

**What are your favorite places in Yerevan?**

— It's great to live in the city center, so you can walk a lot. I really enjoy walking. My local friends organize Saturday walking tours in the city, during which we not only explore architecture but also visit wonderful artists of Yerevan. We visited Benik Petrosyan's, Pharvon Mirzoyan's and Shahumyan's families, Ara Alekyan's, Hasmik Avetisyan's, Ashot Harutyunyan's, Eduard Shakhikyan's and many others' studios. ♦

# FROM MENDERES TO ERDOGAN:

## The complicated history of the relationship between military and the civilian leadership in Turkey

When in July 2016 the news that an attempt of a military coup had begun in Turkey, it seemed like a headline from the past: military takeover of power had become an almost routine phenomenon in Turkey in the second half of the previous century.

TEXT : MIKAYEL ZOLYAN





Founder of Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk

### PROTECTORS OF ATATURK'S LEGACY

In order to understand the role of the military in Turkey one has to go back to the founder of the modern Turkish republic Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. Ataturk himself was a military man and he came to power as a result of a military success. Though as soon as he came to power Ataturk resigned from the military and ruled the country as a civilian leader, throughout his rule he had a special relationship with the army.

Ataturk carried out reforms which, as he claimed were based on 6 principles, which included republicanism, nationalism, populism, etatism, secularism, and "Revolutionism". Of these, secularism, or, to use the term most often used in Turkey, laicism, was probably the most difficult to implement, given the Turkish context: separation of state and religion and removing religion from public sphere was not going to be an easy task. Turkey had by that time become an almost exclusively Muslim country, as most religious minorities had disappeared as a result of genocide, ethnic cleansing and population exchange. Moreover, for ages the Ottoman sultan was also considered the Khalifa, the religious leader of all Muslims, and principles of Sharia were embedded in the Ottoman system of government, though they were not always strictly enforced.

Ataturk's efforts of secularization of the Turkish society were met with resistance, active or passive, and often had to be implemented through coercion and violence. Even though Ataturk was able to achieve a certain degree of secularization and westernization in the society, and in many ways Turkey became quite distinct from other Muslim countries of the Middle East, it was obvious that these changes could easily be reversed. Whatever, the limitations imposed on Islam, the majority of Turks remained devout Muslims, and Ataturk's reforms remained quite unpopular, especially in the provincial regions of Central and Eastern Turkey, in contrast to the large cities and coastal towns of Western Turkey. It was obvious that without pressure from the state the Muslim way of life, which Ataturk fought so hard, could make a comeback. Therefore, the Turkish military was given the task of preserving the secular character of Turkish state and preventing secular Islam from becoming a political force in the country.



## THE TURKISH MILITARY WAS GIVEN THE TASK OF PRESERVING THE SECULARITY OF THE STATE AND PREVENTING SECULAR ISLAM FROM BECOMING A POLITICAL FORCE

This has been a relatively easy task as long as Turkey remained an authoritarian regime, under Ataturk himself, and his successor İsmet İnönü, who, by the way, also was a general, credited with winning the most decisive battle in the war against the Greeks. However, in the aftermath of the 2nd World War Turkey felt pressure to democratize, especially as it became part of NATO, a military block that presented itself as the defender of "the free world". İnönü and Ataturk's Republican People's Party, which continued Ataturk's policies, managed to win the first supposedly "democratic" elections in 1946. However, in the next election, which was much more democratic they lost to the recently established Democratic Party of Adnan Menderes. Thus, in effect Menderes became the first prime-minister of Turkey, who came to power as a result of democratic elections. He also became the first prime-minister of Turkey to be deposed in the military coup.

### THE RISE AND FALL OF ADNAN MENDERES

Today, when we look back at the story of Adnan Menderes, it is hard not to notice some similarities with Erdogan. Though, Menderes was not considered an Islamist (which would have probably been impossible in the political context of the time), just like Erdogan he appealed to the previously disenfranchised population of provincial Turkey, who also happened to be more religious.

›  
Istanbul pogroms that took place in 1955



›  
A Turkish soldier kisses the hand of Ismet Inonu, 1960



▼  
People celebrating victory of coup d'état of 1960



Naturally, Menderes' policies reflected the preferences of his voters, which meant slowly reversing back some of the secular reforms of Ataturk and easing some of the restrictions that he had placed on religion in Turkey. He also tried to limit the influence that the military had on the affairs in the country. Soon it became obvious that the army, placed by Ataturk into the position of the guarantor of the Turkish political system of the Turkish state, was not going to tolerate this. However, the tension with the military and attempts to win over the conservative and religious voters were not the only reason for Menderes' downfall. In another obvious parallel to Erdogan Menderes started out as a democrat, who saw as his main objective the dismantling of the authoritarian system left as legacy from Ataturk, but soon it became obvious that Menderes had a strong authoritarian streak. He tried to control the media and started repressions against his political opponents, including the Republican People's Party. Minorities also did not feel safe, especially in the wake of the pogrom of 1955 in Istanbul, when mostly Greeks, but also some Armenians and other minorities were targeted. To many in Turkey it was obvious that the country, which had only recently become more or less democratic, was headed toward a new dictatorship. Thus, Menderes had managed to alienate not just the military, but other political forces and various groups of population. Probably, that was one of the reasons, why the coup d'état, which was started by a group of mid-level officers proved successful. On May 27, 1960 the military arrested Menderes and his allies, and created a body called "Committee of National Unity",



➤ Adnan Menderes, the first prime-minister of Turkey, who came to power as a result of democratic elections



## MENDERES BECAME NOT ONLY THE FIRST TURKISH PRIME-MINISTER TO BE DEPOSED BY COUP, BUT ALSO THE ONLY ONE THAT LOST HIS LIFE AS A RESULT OF IT

which assumed the power in the country, under the leadership of general Cemal Gürsel. Several thousand military officers and state officials were purged, some were arrested, and Menderes, together with two of his close associates was tried for treason and hanged. Thus he became not only the first Turkish prime-minister to be deposed by coup, but also the only one that lost his life as a result of it.

Within the junta there were two factions: the more liberal one believed that the aim of the coup was to restore democracy, therefore, the military should withdraw from politics and allow the return of political parties. Another one, which consisted of ultranationalists like Alparslan Türkeş, who was later to become the founder of the infamous ultra-nationalist group "Grey Wolves", believed in preserving the military dictatorship. Ultimately, in 1961 new elections were held and political parties assumed government. However, the military also promulgated a new constitution, which contained specific provisions about the role of military as guarantors of secularism and democracy, thus creating a basis for further interventions.

### DÉJÀ VU: PRIME-MINISTERS VS. GENERALS

In the subsequent decades the pattern established by the 1960 coup was repeated several times. After the coup the military ruled the country for certain time, then a civilian government would return, which in some time would run into trouble with the military, leading to another coup, and then the whole cycle would be repeated again. Thus, in 1965 Süleyman Demirel became prime-minister, who carried out successful economic reforms. However, the 1960s were a tur-

bulent time all over the world and Turkey was not an exception. Various leftist, Islamist and rightist groups clashed with each other, many of them using violence and terrorism. The situation in the country was spiraling out of the control, and the military took power again on March 12 1971. This time the coup was virtually bloodless. It seemed that Turkey's politicians had learned the lesson that it was better not to mess with the military. All it took was a memorandum by the head of the armed forces that demanded to form a new cabinet that would rule in accordance with the Ataturk's principles. Demirel resigned and a new cabinet under direct influence of the military was formed. State of military rule was declared in Turkey, repressions, mostly against liberals and leftists, followed. Before the military returned power to the next elected government, they added new changes to the constitution, which further enhanced the position of the military. The 1971 coup did not solve the contradictions that had led to it. The bitter struggle between the radical left and the radical right, the latter connected to some groups within the military and security services, continued throughout the 1970s. Both sides formed death squads and assassinated their opponents. a new dimension of the conflict was becoming obvious as various Kurdish groups, especially the newly emerged PKK, Kurdistan Workers' Party, turned to violence in order to advance the rights of the Kurdish minority. It was in this period, that the actions of Armenian Diaspora militant groups like ASALA took place, which though were not large-scale, received wide resonance and unnerved Turkish government, since they targeted diplomats and other Turkish state officials. ➤

➤  
Anafartalar Boulevard in capital Ankara, 1950's

It was against this background that on September 12, 1980 a new coup took place. The military immediately initiated a wide crackdown on various militant organizations, both on the left and on the right, including the infamous ultra-nationalist "Grey Wolves". Of course, as it usually happens, it was not just the radicals and terrorists who were targeted, but also critics of the government, dissidents, human right activists: thousands of people were arrested or forced into exile, hundreds died in Turkish prisons. However, the military succeeded in stabilizing the domestic political life in Turkey. The cabinet of Turgut Özal, which was formed as the result of 1983 elections, succeeded in bringing about economic reforms. Thus, in the 1980s Turkey became a relatively stable country with a fast growing economy. On the downside, however, the military crackdown exacerbated the Kurdish issue, leading to what became almost a full-scale real war with Kurdish fighters in the South-East.

#### THE REVENGE OF THE ISLAMISTS

The last time the Turkish military performed a successful coup d'état was in 1997. It became known as the "Postmodern coup". Technically, it was not even a real coup, all it took was a memorandum by National Security Council, a body dominated by the military. In 1997 Turkey was ruled by Necmettin Erbakan, the leader of a moderately Islamist "Party of Prosperity". Erbakan started removing some of the restrictions on religion in the country, reversing some of the most sacrosanct rules of Ataturk's secularism. Naturally, the army as the guardian of secularism, was suspicious of Erbakan's intentions from the very beginning. After an anti-Israel protest with Islamist slogans was organized in one of municipalities of Ankara, the National Security Council, issued a memorandum by the, which the generals demanded from Erbakan to stick to Ataturk's principles of secularism. Erbakan got the message: he resigned. Erbakan's Party of Prosperity was banned and Erbakan himself was banned from political activities. However, in the long run, that did not help the military: the Turkish military were soon to be faced with a more serious opponent. The closed



**SOME SURVIVING PARTICIPANTS OF THE PAST MILITARY COUPS WERE PERSECUTED, INCLUDING THE LEADER OF THE 1980 COUP AND FORMER PRESIDENT KENAN EVREN**

Party of Prosperity became the basis for a new party, the Justice and Development Party (AKP), and Erbakan was replaced by his disciple, a young and charismatic Recep Tayyip Erdogan. In 2002 AKP won the elections and a year later Erdogan became the prime-minister. AKP's approach to politics was quite innovative: its policies blended democratic reform and a moderate Islamist agenda. In his efforts to curb the influence of the military Erdogan cited the need to adhere to the democratic standards of the EU, which Turkey has been desperately trying to join since the 1980s. This new approach left the military few space for maneuver. Slowly but surely Erdogan was depriving the military of the leverages over political life in Turkey. Moreover, plans for military takeover were discovered by



◀ Ankara, the coup of 1980



◀ Necmettin Erbakan

the police and special services (the “Ergenekon” and “Sledgehammer” affairs), many military were deprived of their posts, some were arrested. Constitution was changed to reflect the primacy of the civilian government. Even some surviving participants of the past military coups were persecuted, including the leader of the 1980 coup and former president Kenan Evren, was convicted in 2012, when he was 95 years old. However, the triumph for democracy soon turned into something else. Erdogan’s authoritarian tendencies were becoming obvious as he consolidated power and limited democratic rights and freedoms. While the first years of AKP were an opening for minorities, including Kurds, Armenians and others, today the Kurdish regions descended into civil conflict after negotiations with the Kurds led nowhere. The secular Kemalists unhappy about the Islamization of Turkish society, the liberals and minorities were unhappy about the curbing of democratic freedoms. Relations with the neighbors and allies soured. In foreign policy Erdogan managed to fall out with such important partners as Israel and Russia, failed to resolve the Cyprus issue and the issue of relations with Armenia, and got involved in a military conflict with Syria. Human rights issues led to complications in the relations with EU and USA. As it seemed that Erdogan was repeating the path of Menderes, alienating friends both in Turkey and abroad, some forces within the military felt it was time to act. However, as we know, the calculations of the military proved wrong. Turkey had changed significantly since the last time a successful military coup had taken place. First of all, Erdogan had succeeded in weakening the military and creating his own loyal forces, particularly within the police and the security services. Besides, the situation proved that thousands of Erdogan’s supporters were ready to go out in the streets and risk their lives fighting the military. As for Erdogan’s en-



▲ Failed coup of summer 2016

mies for most of them a military takeover was just as unacceptable as the continuation of the rule by Erdogan: few people were ready to accept the replacement of an authoritarian, but democratically elected leader, by an unelected military dictatorship. As a result, the coup not only failed, but it provided Erdogan the pretext to deal a decisive blow to all those who opposed his power, including the military. The scale of the crackdown remains unprecedented in the history of Turkish republic: the Turkish military will probably never be able to completely recover from that blow. In an especially dark twist of fate, Erdogan’s supporters are demanding to bring back the capital punishment: the organizers of the military coup should be hanged: it seems that the history of the Turkish republic has come full cycle since 1960. ♦





# MADMEN OR HEROES? MAKING SENSE OF THE EREBUNI STANDOFF

**Two weeks that shook Armenia**

It is hard to surprise Armenians with political protests. Street rallies, demonstrations, clashes between police and the protesters are almost as usual part of Yerevan life as overcrowded minibuses or open air cafes. But what happened this July was unprecedented for Armenia. a group of armed men, who declared an armed uprising, seized a police building, kept control of it for two weeks, while thousands of their supporters rallied outside. The July events represented probably the most serious internal political crisis in Armenia, since the post-election protests of 2008.

TEXT : MIKAYEL ZOLYAN / PHOTOS : PAN PHOTO / HRANT KHACHATRYAN, ARAM KIRAKOSYAN, VARO RAFAYELYAN, VAHAN STEPANYAN, KARO SAHAKYAN

**I**t all started on July 17, when a group of armed men, who called themselves "Sasna Tsrer" ("the daredevils of Sasoun", after the Armenian epic), captured a building in Erebuni district of Yerevan, where the regiment of Patrol Guard Service of Armenian police is located. In the shootout with the police, several people on both sides were wounded and one high-ranking police officer, Artur Vanoyan, was killed. Through social networks the gunmen spread their appeal for people to come out into the streets in support of an "uprising", demanding the resignation of the President Serzh Sargsyan and the release of those whom the group viewed as political prisoners. Several policemen, including the deputy head of the national police, and the deputy head of Yerevan police were held hostage.

In the course of following days negotiations started and the hostages were released, in exchange for an opportunity to communicate with the media. However, soon



▲ Sasna Tsrer armed group supporters organized march to the Republic Square

◀ On July 23 the armed group released all hostages in exchange for the presence of journalists at the scene.



negotiations disintegrated, and the police refused to allow for food to be transported to the gunmen. After several gunmen were wounded by police snipers, and some of them refused to be taken to hospital. For some time several ambulance doctors were held by the armed group: the authorities called them hostages, while the group claimed that the doctors were there to help the wounded. During the siege a citizen, who claimed he previously had no links to Sasna Tsrer, broke the police barriers on his car and brought them food. However, ultimately the police siege proved effective and the gunmen surrendered on July 31. Unfortunately, there was one more casualty among the police on the day before. The police blamed

the gunmen for the death of policeman Yuri Tepanosyan, while the gunmen claimed that he was shot by the police either deliberately or due to friendly fire. Meanwhile there was also a "second front" as unarmed protesters held rallies in Erebuni district and sometimes also in central Yerevan. On the first day of the siege there were no protest actions, however, the police detained dozens of opposition activists. Some were detained because of suspected links with the gunmen, others were detained because they were suspected of preparing a rally, particularly in the vicinity of the Freedom Square in central Yerevan. The widespread detentions backfired and already on July 18 there was a rally on Freedom Square, and the participants went to Khorenatsi street in Erebuni to express their support for the gunmen. The rallies were getting bigger, and by the last days of the siege there were thousands of protesters. Clashes with the police also took place in Sari Tagh district, which neighbors Erebuni, where the local population was unnerved with the continued police presence, and the fact that gas and electricity had been shut off (officially "for security reasons"). The protests were getting larger, which led to a police crackdown on July 29, when dozens of activists, as well as inhabitants of Sari Tagh, were injured. There were widespread reports throughout the siege, but the clashes



PAVEL MANUKYAN

On the night of July 27, a shootout started between the armed group and the police; Pavel Manukyan and his son Aram Manukyan were severely injured and taken to the hospital. On July 31, Pavel and Aram Manukyan were given 2-month jail terms

of July 29 were the most violent: not just participants of the protests, but also women, children and elderly inhabitants of Sari Tagh were beaten up, as well as several journalists. In spite of arrests and beatings, next day a large protest took place in the center of Yerevan. One protester, Kajik Grigoryan even tried to set himself on fire: he died of the burns sustained two days later. After the gunmen surrendered, however, the numbers of the protesters started diminishing, and after several days they died out.

#### WHO ARE "SASNA TSRER" AND WHAT DO THEY WANT?

"Sasna Tsrer" ("Sasna Dzrer" in Western Armenian pronunciation) is the title of Armenian epic, which tells the story of heroes from the region of Sasoun, who confronted much stronger enemies and won. The epic is taught in schools, and a statue of the most popular hero of the epic, Davit of Sasoun is one of the most well-known landmarks of Yerevan. The title of the epic is usually translated into English as "daredevils of Sasoun", but as it is often the case, some important nuances are lost in translation. Tsur (plural "tsrer") literally means "crooked" or "astray" in Armenian, and in the context of the epic it combines two meanings: of "brave men" or "daredevils" and of "mad men". In other words, the heroes of the epic "Sasna Tsrer" are not regular people,

## SASNA TSRER IS THE TITLE OF ARMENIAN EPIC, THE STORY OF HEROES, WHO CONFRONTED MUCH STRONGER ENEMIES AND WON

they have gone astray from the regular ways, since they are ready to stand up and fight in a situation when everybody else would either retreat or submit to the stronger enemy. This symbolism conveyed by the name "Sasna Tsrer" is quite clear to anyone well acquainted to Armenian culture. Before the July events the majority of the Erebuni gunmen were part of a movement called "Founding Parliament", a somewhat marginal force in Armenian political landscape. It is hard to assess the level of their public support, since FP rejected participation in elections on the ground that elections in Armenia are routinely falsified, and participation would only lend legitimacy to the regime. Instead, they advocated civil disobedience, though until recently they talked about a peaceful uprising. It is hard to talk about specific ideology of FP: their rhetoric mixed nationalist language with calls for democracy and criticism of social injustice. However, in this sense they are no different from the majority of other Armenian parties. They are often called "nationalist", especially in the international media, however, this does not help to distinguish them from the parties of the government coalition, Republican Party and Dashnaktsutyun which, at least formally, are adherents of conservative-nationalist ideology. However, what did distinguish FP, apart from their radical opposition to the government and rejection of elections, was their outright rejection of concessions in the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. Thus, in June 2016, in the run-up to a meeting of the presidents of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia in St. Petersburg, the leader of PF, Zhirayr Sefilyan claimed that Serzh Sargsyan was planning to make "one-sided concessions" to Azerbaijan. Immediately after that Sefilyan was arrested and accused of plotting mass disturbances and possession of weapons. Release of Sefilyan was among the demands of the Sasna Tsrer aired on July 17.

Sefilyan, as well as several members of the Sasna Tsrer, is a veteran of the war in Nagorno-Karabakh. Born and raised in Lebanon, he was among the diaspora Armenians who joined the war and became one of the most successful commanders. Other well-known war veterans among the group included Pavel (Pavlik) Manukyan, Arayik Khandoian also known by his nom de guerre "Lone Wolf", Martiros Hakobyan, known as "Ded" or "Grandfather" and others. The photo images of a young Khandoian, who resembled Che Guevara's famous pictures, Manukyan, dressed as



a 19th century Armenian freedom fighter, Hakobyan with his thick beard and a bandana decorated with a cross, are among the most recognizable media images of the Armenian fighters of the war. a film presenting Arayik Khandoyan as a war hero had been shot and shown by the Armenian state television several years earlier. Obviously, the fact that many of the gunmen are revered as war heroes, made things more difficult for the government, and increased sympathy for them. What was probably the most unnerving for the government that these people were highly respected among Karabakh war veterans and in the military. Of course, it is difficult to assess to what extent the perception that the government is preparing “one-sided concessions” in shared among the military, but in any case this is a possibility that the government cannot afford to ignore.

#### FOR OR AGAINST: REACTIONS OF THE PUBLIC AND THE POLITICAL FORCES

What was probably the most worrying sign from the point of view of the government, was the public reaction. Episodes involving armed radicals confronting the government are possible in any country, under any regime. However, what signifies a serious problem in the Armenian society is the fact that the actions of the Sasna Tsrer, did not encounter lead to a clear condemnation by the majority of the Armenian society, even though they clearly violated the law and led to several deaths,. There have been no opinion polls on this issue, and, even if there are any, it would be hard to get a reliable picture of what the public really thinks, given the possible repercussions for openly supporting the actions of the radicals. However, the reactions of politicians, various public figures, as well as the social network users, suggest that the public opinion in Armenia is divided, to say the least. Moreover, many of those



Opposition MP Nikol Pashinian delivered a speech on Khorenatsi Street and stated that armed group members are not terrorists.



who did not approve the violent methods employed by the Sasna Tsrer, still share their view that the country is in deep crisis and the government is to blame for that. The first days of the crisis were met with almost complete silence from the government politicians, with the exception of several statements by the National Security Service and the police. Government figures and ruling party members mostly refrained from public statements until July 21, when the president issued a short statement, saying that attempts to bring about political change through violence were unacceptable. Unexpected support for the government position came from one of the most influential opposition leaders, Armenia's first president Levon Ter-Petrosyan. In his statement Ter-Petrosyan appealed to Sefilyan and his supporters with plea to reflect on the question whether their actions harmed the Armenian state. a similar view was expressed by another veteran politician, former head of the National Security, Davit Shahnazaryan, who condemned the actions of the gunmen as early as on the first day of the standoff. Besides, a letter signed by several well-known figures of the arts and culture sphere, including renowned composer Tigran Mansuryan, was signed, which contained an appeal to Sefilyan and his supporters to lay down arms. However, some controversy was generated with regard to the letter, as it turned out that the version signed by the artists did not coincide with the version published in the media.

At the same time, there was no lack of voices expressing support for the gunmen. One of the most unequivocal endorsements was voiced by former minister of foreign affairs and the leading opposition candidate in the 2013 election, Raffi Hovannisian: he called the gunmen “counter-terrorists” battling “the real terrorists”, i.e. the government. One of the most popular Armenian artists, singer-songwriter Ruben Hakverdyan was equally blunt: speaking at a rally in Erebuni he called on the police “to stop protecting the enemy”, i.e. the government, and called the actions of the gunmen “self-sacrifice”. Even more common were statements that refrained from openly supporting the gunmen, but put the blame for the situation to the government’s mismanagement of the country’s affairs.

Some of these voices represented Armenian Diaspora. Thus, the leader of the US band System of a Down, Serj Tankian expressed such a view in his Facebook status. Another famous Diaspora Armenian, Canadian actress Arsinee Khanjian, who also happens to be the wife of director Atom Egoyan, who was in Yerevan at the moment, actually came to the rally and had a speech in front of the Sasna Tsrer supporters. Soon enough she was detained by the police. The police realized that Khanjian’s detention was a recipe for a PR disaster, so she was soon released and the police even issued apologies, making her the only protesters during the crisis, who had been released and received an apology for detention.

However, this wide support, which Sasna Tsrer received among part of the society, did not translate into an efficient political movement. The rallies in Khorenatsi street were getting bigger day by day, but even at their height the participation was, according to various estimates,

▼  
The march participants chanted slogans  
in support of the armed group



## WIDE SUPPORT SASNA TSRER RECEIVED AMONG THE SOCIETY, DID NOT TRANSLATE INTO AN EFFICIENT POLITICAL MOVEMENT

between five and ten thousand people, which is quite low by Armenian standards. The protests also lacked a co-ordinated leadership and a clear vision of their goals or program. During the first days of the crisis, an opposition MP Nikol Pashinyan was active and obviously showed leadership ambitions. He acted as a mediator, and using his status as an MP was able to enter the territory of the Erebuni police regiment, where he talked to the gunmen and their hostages. He also filmed them. Arguably, Pashinyan’s video, which was widely shared on social networks, was among the factors that contributed to sympathy for the gunmen. It showed charismatic speeches by Pavlik Manukyan as well as by another leader of the group, former ministry of defense official Varuzhan Avetisyan. It also showed that the hostages were treated well and were able to walk around freely: the situation was so calm that civilians, from neighboring houses were not afraid to remain in the streets, including children.

However, the gunmen and Pashinyan had serious differences. On July 21 Pashinyan attempted to take upon himself and his party “Civil Contract” the leadership of the protests. He also called on the protest movement to remain strictly within limits of non-violence and refrain from any clashes with the police, focusing on the demand of Serzh Sargsyan’s resignation. However, in their communication with the media, the Erebuni gunmen made it clear that they viewed Pashinyan’s actions as an attempt to hijack the movement, and Pashinyan announced that he was leaving the stage. After that, there was no clear leadership of the protests: an attempt to create a coordinating body was not very successful, as many of its members were soon arrested. Besides, there was no clear mechanism of decision-making in the coordination body, and the actions of the protesters were often chaotic and lacked a strategy.

### WILL THE LESSONS BE LEARNED?

Ultimately, as the gunmen surrendered, the crisis was resolved. However, its impact on the political situation in Armenia will be enormous. There are lessons to be learned, and they need to be learned fast. The very fact that about thirty gunmen were able to capture and hold a major police installment for three weeks is a major cause for worry. It shows that, in spite of the huge sums of money spent on national security and the police, these institutions remain inefficient and have difficulty dealing with genuinely dangerous situations. ➤

However, what should probably worry the government even more is the unexpectedly high level of public support for the government actions. Now, as the gunmen have been arrested and will be going through a trial, this support is likely to increase further. The level of mistrust to government institutions is so high, that the gunmen will be perceived by many as victims of unfair system. Another potential danger lies in the fact that the Sasna Tsrer had crossed a line that Armenian opposition had not crossed so far: though protests and clashes with the police are common, armed rebellion has never been on the table for the Armenian opposition. The Erebuni events may become a precedent for other radicals. Further radicalization of anti-government sentiment may lead to even more radical actions and further endanger the internal stability of the country. This is especially likely given Armenia's complicated external situation, especially related to the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. In the coming months, Yerevan will be facing increasing pressure to agree to certain concessions in the context of a compromise solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. Compromise and concessions are always painful, and for any government it is difficult "to sell" compromise to their own society. However, given the level of mistrust and alienation that Armenian government is facing within own society, it is highly unlikely that it will be able to convince its society to accept a compromise in the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. However, if such a compromise is not reached, repetition of the April events could become highly probable, and against that background the internal instability could have disastrous consequences for Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh's security.

In order to deal with this dangerous situation the government needs to work on removing the causes for the discontent of the public. These include socio-economic conditions, which had been steadily deteriorating for years, but are not limited to those. The economic troubles are worsened by

## THE VERY FACT THAT THIRTY GUNMEN WERE ABLE TO CAPTURE AND HOLD A MAJOR POLICE INSTALLMENT FOR WEEKS IS A CAUSE FOR WORRY



On July 27, Armenian police arrested actress Arsine Khanjyan, who participated in rallies

the issue of corruption. Armenia has a relatively free media, which means that the facts of widespread corruption are well-known in the society, however, cases when high level officials are punished for corrupt activities are extremely rare. The four day war revealed that even the armed forces and security sector are not free from corruption, leading to further resentment among the population. Things are made worse by the common perception that no change can be achieved through elections or other channels of legal political struggle, which leads to radicalization of protest. Unless all these issues are dealt with, the emergence of a new group like Sasna Tsrer is simply a matter of time. ♦



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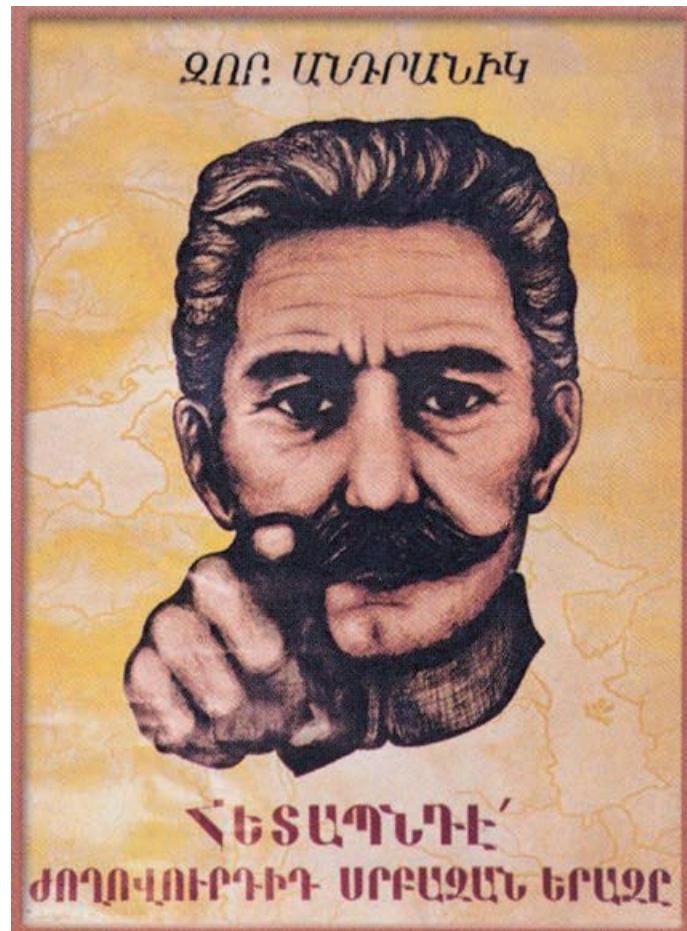
# FINGER POSTER

General Andranik Ozanian, an Armenian military commander and statesman, a key figure of the Armenian national liberation movement, became a symbol of a fight for freedom soon after his death in 1927. His character was widely used especially in Diaspora. In 1960's a poster with Ozanian was printed in America, with Ozanian pointing a finger and with caption: "Chase the holy dream of your people".

This poster is influenced by a famous "Lord Kitchener Wants You" poster, spread during World War I. A hugely influential image and slogan, it has also inspired imitations in other countries, from the United States to the Soviet Union.



United States,  
World War I.  
Daughter of Zion  
(in Yiddish): "Your  
Old New Land  
must have you!  
Join the Jewish  
regiment"



British Lord Kitchener poster,  
1914, was used to recruit  
soldiers for World War I

Bolshevik recruitment poster from  
the Civil War of 1920, by Dmitri  
Moor. "You, have you volunteered?"



1917. J. M. Flagg's  
Uncle Sam  
recruited soldiers  
for World War I  
and World War II.  
"I Want YOU for  
U.S. Army"



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10 Northern Ave, Yerevan, Armenia  
Tel.: +374 94 80 80 96