

A TALE OF TWO COUNTRIES

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By Berge Minassian MD FRCP(C), Toronto, 4 November 2009

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In addition to their visible patriotism, Georgians have a strong attachment to their church and venerate their spiritual leaders. Although they complain that Saakashvili is not doing enough, most Georgians support Georgia's president. Tbilisi, Georgia's capital is affluent and clean. However, it's not as pretty as Yerevan, the capital of Armenia. A great deal of the Georgian development is due to financial aid from the United States.

Massive, perfectly constructed highways crisscross Georgia, including the road leading to Javahkh. In addition to the improved road network in the mostly Armenian-inhabited Javahkh, Georgia is extending other services to encourage Armenians to feel they are part of Georgia. However, Tbilisi has enacted new rules which are resented by Javahkh Armenians. For example, Javahkh Armenians used to go to Armenia to deliver their babies. Now they are not allowed to bring back the baby unless they obtain Armenian citizenship for the newborn.

At the Georgia-Armenia border Georgia's customs buildings are large, clean and imposing, whereas the Armenian structures are small and look derelict.

South Ossetians, who have separated from Georgia, are said to be aware of the progress being made in Georgia. Since they have seen no similar improvement in their enclave, they are wondering which country they should belong to.

What's the prevailing mood in Armenia? Citizens of Armenia do not trust their government or their church. They also have an immense disdain and hatred for the oligarchs. More significantly, they feel no ownership of their country or its future. 

There was near complete disinterest in the Protocols. Not that Armenians did not have views about the Protocols: they felt their opinion did not matter. The consensus was that whatever the country's oligarchs-political leadership decided would come to pass. Most Armenians feel no pride in their country and have little hope for the future. Their dreams of a progressive Armenia have been dashed. Since many, if not most, feel no commitment to building a progressive and democratic society, they have turned inward, toward personal rather than societal needs. Thus, it's not surprising that many Armenians contemplate leaving their homeland.

