

EX-MP EXPLAINS WHY NKR PREZ DIDN'T VISIT CANADA

Posted on December 2, 2011 by Keghart



Bako Sahakyan

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20 December 2011

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Keghart: Why did Canada ban Mr. Sahakyan's entry?

Sarkis Assadourian: We were told by our "leaders" that President Sahakyan travelled with a NKR passport. Canada does not recognize the passport. We were also told he applied too late for the visa, yet he entered the United States and other countries without any problem. We have to look elsewhere for the source of the visa rejection.

Over the past two decades citizens of Armenia or NKR and Armenians from other countries who are leaders/members of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation party, by and large, have been denied entry to Canada. This is related to events in 1980s. Recently NKR's minister of foreign affairs was elected to the highest leadership, the bureau of ARF. In my view, the denial of the visa is a retaliation by the government of Canada. Based on my contacts in ARF/ANCC and from what I was told by many government sources, this is the main issue along with other excuses.

Keghart: Why did the US allow Mr. Sahakyan entry?

SA: The US government, to my knowledge, acts in a similar way but is a bit more discreet than Canada. The US has a vastly different geopolitical interests in South Caucasus and the world than Canada.

Keghart: Why have "Hayastan Himnatram" (Canada) or other Armenian organizations been silent about this unfortunate development?

SA: All organizations involved with *Hayastan All-Armenia Fund* have a stake in keeping the incident hush-hush. After all, it's embarrassing for the organizers to face this kind of problem which involves millions of dollars. Now is the time for all Armenian organizations to review this matter. We know it's hurting our national cause ("Hye Tadd") and our nation's aspirations to go forward. I hope all Armenian organizations will look at this issue and take an active role in resolving it.

Keghart: Do you know whether the Azeris in Canada played any role in the visa rejection?

SA: This kind of problems is playing in the hands of the Azeris and the Turks. I know this from my 11 years of Ottawa experiences as a member of the Canadian Parliament. On one occasion, I was initially denied a visa to Azerbaijan with the Canadian government delegation, headed by the Hon. Gar Knutson. The trip included stops in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. Following a protest from the Canadian government to the Azeri authorities, I was issued a visa but I refused to take part in the Azeri leg of the trip. This and other public information leads me to believe these communities are very active in Canada and around the world, sabotaging Armenian efforts.

Keghart: Are you aware whether any role was personally played by the Canadian Minister of Immigration and Citizenship in the Mr. Sahakyan episode?

SA: Only fools would believe when the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration says "I have no choice in this matter" to an Armenian delegation. He is the minister, and that's that. Now that the government in Canada is a majority, the Conservatives will follow the advice of Ottawa civil servants and bureaucrats.

Keghart: Would you like to add further comments?

SA: On many occasions ARF approached me in Ottawa and elsewhere. I had one advice that was true then and is true now: take the government to court, and try to resolve this nagging issue which is hurting Armenians everywhere. Petty politics has to take back seat when it comes to national issues of importance, such as why NKR is not recognized as an independent state, like Kosovo? The situation is the same. To suggest that there is an issue with the charter of the All Armenia Fund is a ridiculous point. How many Canadian organizations forward millions of dollars to the West Bank, which is not recognized by Canada or any other nation in the world?

Armenian traditional parties have to come out of the 19th century and become truly modern parties. The mentality of punishment, of harassment, bullying, and hurting their own members for having differences of opinion or approach is damaging us. This incident must be an opportunity for Armenian parties to look at what's at stake, to renew internal policies and revitalize themselves, instead of pushing matters under the rug.

