HUNGARIAN RHAPSODY IN DISCORD

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By now most Armenians know about the scandal of the Azeri murderer's release by Hungary. Because the story is still developing, new wrinkles should appear in the coming days and weeks. Meanwhile, there are a number of obvious and disturbing questions about the background of the international outrage.

In recent years the Azeri embassy in Hungary has been busy building bridges with Budapest authorities while spewing anti-Armenian hate propaganda. As well, Peter Szijjarto, Hungary's minister of "East" affairs, has visited Baku to negotiate financial assistance from oil-rich Azerbaijan. While Baku was courting Hungarian authorities, Armenia has no diplomatic presence in the country. The closest Armenian mission was in Vienna. The embassy—with a skeleton staff—is in charge of representing Armenia in four countries in the region.

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Armenia's absence in Budapest didn't deter local Armenians, who were represented by an organization called Armenian National Self-government (ANSG), from diligently following the Azeri strategy. Dr. Szevan Serkisian, chairman; deputy chairmen Alexan Avanesian and Nikogosz Akopjan of ANSG kept a close eye on the brutal murder of Armenian officer Gurgen Margaryan by Ramil Sahib Safarov and the trial of the Azeri slayer. They also followed Azeri diplomatic activities in Hungary. Over the years these dedicated and diligent Armenians frequently warned the authorities of Armenia about the sordid and secret activities of the Azeri diplomatic mission. In a letter addressed to RoA president S. Sargsyan on Sept. 2, 2012 ANSG clearly states that on August 20, eleven days prior to extradition, Nikogosz Akopjan personally informed the RoA foreign ministry, ministry of the Diaspora and the Armenian embassy in Vienna about the impending news. All to no avail.

Last week Budapest handed Safarov to Baku, although the criminal had served only eight years of

his 30-year sentence. Upon landing in Baku, the Azeri butcher was handed immediate pardon by President Ilham Aliyev. He was given a brand-new apartment, promoted to the rank of major, given his eight-year accumulated salary. The murderous coward was honored at public gatherings. A 24-karat Turkic hero. Safarov, obviously a man with room temperature I.Q., publicly thanked Turkey for lubricating his unlawful release. Of course, Baku's 3-billion euro purchase of Hungarian state-bonds didn't hurt the underhanded and scandalous deal.

Since the scandal broke, a number of Armenian sources have suggested Armenia should recognize Artsakh as an independent republic. They have cited their reasons why it would be timely.

Such a decision could provide Baku with *casus belli*.

Suspicious minds might say Sarkissian had, for a long time, been preparing to recognize Artsakh and was cunningly waiting for the proper time. That's why he ignored the pleas of ANSG leaders.

Even more suspicious minds might say Sarkissian—by recognizing Artsakh-- was deliberately furnishing an excuse to Baku to declare war on Armenia and Artsakh.

The above speculation presupposes that Armenia believes it can beat Azerbaijan.

If Armenia believed it's stronger than Azerbaijan and is indirectly inviting Baku to the battlefield, why is Armenia hosting Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) maneuvers in mid-September? And more importantly, if Sarkissian was goading Aliev to war, why would Armenia hold, in October, the biggest maneuvers since the country became independent? The maneuver is so important that it would include the participation of civilian males who are over the age of 50. Another reason Sarkissian might not be planning war: there are local elections in Armenia this month.

Suspicious minds would probably say it's misdirection by Armenia: Yerevan wants Azerbaijan to think Yerevan would be busy with maneuvers in the next few months.

Time will tell. Meanwhile, shame on Hungarian authorities. Their explanation that Azeris had promised to jail their axe murder doesn't wash. Anyone who follows Azerbaijan politics knows that Safarov became an Azeri hero when he slew the sleeping Armenian officer. Wasn't the Hungarian ambassador in Baku aware of Safarov's heroic status among his murderer-idolizing racist people? Hungary might have decided to pretend naiveté for a cool 3 billion. Hungary's economy is in doldrums under Prime Minister Victor Orban. Budapest is begging the IMF for further loans.

But what price Hungarian honor? Many Hungarians, including the main opposition party, have criticized their government. Hungarian authorities are caught in a vise: if they accuse Baku of misleading them, Baku might decide not to buy Hungarian state-bonds. Hungary would lose the Azeri investment and wind up with large egg on its face—without the 3-billion, without honor. Orban's government might not survive.