"ACADEMIC CITY" OR A PLOT

Posted on August 1, 2024 by Keghart



Category: Opinions

By Minas Kojayan, PhD, Los Angeles, 16 July 2024

In the past year, the Academic City project has been covered extensively in Armenia's media, heavily promoted by oligarchs and especially by the government-controlled media. The project coincides with proposals to relocate also the Komitas Conservatory and the Yerevan State University, my Alma Mater. These plans, conceived in the "globalized" and "Sorosized" minds of Armenia's leaders, raise serious concerns. The financial incentives for the would-be Armenian and non-Armenian project managers warrant further scrutiny.

If the project proceeds, the legacy of Yerevan's brilliant architect, Alexander Tamanian, will be trampled. It's akin to moving the Eiffel Tower in the pretense of urban development.

Tamanian, an exceptional and European-educated architect, skillfully integrated Armenian architectural traditions with modern urban planning. He designed Yerevan, the capital of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic with a central core featuring a network of political, cultural, and educational institutions. This included the Yerevan State University, the old Komitas Conservatory building, the Medical Institute, the Fine Arts and Theater Institutes, the Polytechnic Institute, the Opera and Philharmonic complex—an architectural masterpiece—all centered around Circular Park. The layout continues to define Yerevan's Republic Square.

During my student and doctoral years (1968-1978) in Yerevan, parks, cafes, and theaters near our educational institutions were vibrant gathering spots. These spaces infused the city with youthful energy, giving it its distinctive character—described in songs as "Yerevan, my good city" or "Spring Yerevan, lovely Yerevan." The "Academic City" program threatens to strip Yerevan of these defining characteristics.

I studied for a period at the Paris Alliance Française and attended the Armenian studies courses at the Sorbonne (under Prof. Fr. Feydit) as an observer. Both institutions are located in central Paris where other higher educational centers are also located. Daily thousands of students traveled from University City (Cité Internationale Universitaire de Paris) in the southern 14th arrondissement to these centers. Armenians had their student accommodation there: the "Maison des étudiants arméniens", thanks to the foresight of Boghos Nubar Pasha, founder of the Armenian General Benevolent Union. The building featured arches and a porch in Armenian architectural style. We took great pride in our "Vostan" (the building's name, meaning 'capital').

It took us at least half-an-hour to travel from University City to our universities. Being in the city center gave the Latin Quarter and its surrounding neighborhoods a unique character—streets bustling with students, lecturers, and a lively academic atmosphere. Only when we were exhausted did we take the Metro back to our dorms. Several Parisian student uprisings also began in these neighborhoods. The French government and the Paris municipality never considered building an "academic city" elsewhere because a tradition dating back to the 14th-15th centuries gave the city its distinctive character. Paris's renowned educational institutions are located in the heart of the city,

enriching its appeal. Thus, RoA officials aspiring to join the European Union take a decidedly un-European step by proposing an "academic city" far from the city center.

Having closely observed the environment in Armenia, I see that pure profit motives lie behind these construction projects which are obscured by their proponents. Local and foreign construction firms, aided by paid advocates, lobby to secure these projects, presenting them with sugar-coated promises of benefits for future academic progress. Unfortunately, most of our misled masses, struggling to meet basic needs, lack the means or motivation to oppose this flawed plan. I would not be surprised if the "admirers" of the current regime dismiss this as a "conspiracy theory" concocted by people like me.

Indeed, after analyzing the motives of the current regime over the past four to five years, it is evident that one of their goals is to consolidate students "under one roof," making them easier to control. Additionally, the regime intends to displace students—the more active segment of the Armenian population—from the capital.

Don't be surprised if Armenia's prime minister—who claims to represent the will of the Armenian people—and his associates propose turning Tsitsernakaberd (the Genocide Memorial) into a monument to "Caucasian nations' friendship" or "Armenian-Turkish friendship."

But I wonder whether the true purpose of this "luxurious" project is to create an "academic city" or simply a golden opportunity to line their pockets.

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Comments

Vahe Apelian – 2024-08-10 14:24:44
David, you referenced the anti-Pashinyan hired gun Harout Sassounian.. The PM referenced Mount Ararat during the heated exchange in the NA about symbolism of the coat of arms. I happened to be watching it. The PM said, asked any student in Armenia which is the highest peak of Armenia, they will say Mount Ararat. He said Mount Ararat is not in Armenia. I did not know the highest peak of Armenia but learned because of that exchange. I wonder whether you knew. The issue is one of symbolism and some argued against this version of coat of arms from get go. "There are more animals on the coat of arms than in the zoo of Yerevan" I remember being said three decades ago. I am for retaining Mount Ararat on a coat of arms of Armenia. There is no mountain called Mount Ararat in Turkey. Mount Ararat is a biblical mountain and is part of our recorded history mythical it may be. For me, it is the symbol of our enduring faith and tenacity. It is not meant to be a symbol for any territorial acquisition. Artistically and symbolically, I do not like this coat of arms.. We should have either kept it or changed, but not retain symbols of an eagle and a lion turned into a steer like domesticated animal. I wonder whether you like the present version of the coat of arms.

David Boyajian – 2024-08-09 11:56:18
The *implications* of what Pashinyan has said about Ararat and the coat of arms are clear. He even disparages the lion on the coat of arms. See:
https://armenianweekly.com/2023/06/20/pm-pashinyan-disparages-armenias-coat-of-arms-and-national-anthem/
EXCERPT: Here is how Pashinyan described Armenia's coat of arms: "What is depicted there? Noah's Ark on Mount Ararat; the emblems of the four thrones, dynasties, kingdoms…. Moreover, what has that emblem to do with the state founded in 1991? Looking at the center [of the emblem], Noah's Ark is on Mount Ararat; today's territory of Armenia's Republic is under floods; and a lion that has not lived here for a long time under normal conditions." See here too how Pashinyan twists words about Ararat: https://fip.am/en/22648

Vahe H Apelian – 2024-08-07 23:30:10
David Boyajian Can you please cite me when the PM said that "he wants to remove Mt. Ararat from the Coat of Arms." You may not know that the depiction of Mount Ararat on the coat of arms is enshrined in article 21 of the Armenian Constitution. I am sure the PM knows that only the citizens of Armenia can amend the constitution. Now coming back to my question Could you please cite when the PM said that "he wants to remove Mt. Ararat from the Coat of Arms."

Hovanes Boyadjian – 2024-08-06 11:08:07
This article has brought out anti Pashinyans and old regime supporters out of the woodwork. I have been visiting Armenia every year since 2018 and in those years I have seen many improvements, namely road constructions in outlying areas, these should have been done twenty five years ago. Yes, at present we have to swallow some very bitter pills, because of the abuse and neglect of past regimes. "You must kiss the hand that you can't cut" Arab proverb.



David Boyajian – 2024-08-01 23:47:42

Aside from questions about the Pashinyan government's foreign and domestic policies, it has become alarmingly clear over the years that he has little regard for Armenian history, culture, territory, language, and people. He belittles the Armenia of the "past" while asserting that only the Armenia of "today" counts. Huh? How many years back is considered irrelevant by Pashinyan? Pre-2018? Pre-1991? The year he was born? 200 years ago? 2000 years ago? And he wants to remove Mt. Ararat from the Coat of Arms. That's sick, deranged stuff. Does he also want to rename Armenia's "Ararat" Province and the town of Nor "Kharpert"? Hey, why not? And he insults the memory and relevance of the Genocide by questioning the exact number of victims. In other words, the Genocide is no longer relevant because, Pashinyan apparently believes, Turkey has reformed and is no longer a danger. It's all supposedly an Armenian "hangup." That's a sign of mental illness, but it's a sort not covered in psychiatric manuals. Dr. Kojayan writes: 'Don't be surprised if Armenia's prime minister—who claims to represent the will of the Armenian people—and his associates propose turning Tsitsernakaberd (the Genocide Memorial) into a monument to "Caucasian nations' friendship" or "Armenian-Turkish friendship."' I think this may come to pass. Pashinyan may even just knock the thing down entirely. After all, it's "in the past." I don't enjoy saying these things about an Armenian PM, but they must be said.



LK – 2024-07-28 05:29:43

Thank you, Baron Kojayan, for articulating the concerns of many Yerevantsis and global Armenians. Concurrent with this drive is the ongoing construction of several massive condominium complexes (ie - the enormous, DEFANSE company project in Yerevan and the humungous initiative in Tsaghgatsor are just two examples). Who shall be living there? Displaced Artsakhtsis? Diasporans desiring residency/citizenship? We think not! We venture to guess that the new residents will be Turks and Azeris, authorized by the Pashinyan regime. Already there are constant posters on social media (such as on the "Traveling to Armenia" public group on Facebook) who post queries, identify as Turks/Azeris, and ask the group if they would be welcome or face danger if they visited Armenia as tourists. Little by little, the intention is to normalize the soft invasion of Armenia.