NEGLIGENCE HAMSTRINGS ARMENIAN DIPLOMACY

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Armen Kouyoumdjian, Former vice-president, Armenian Community of Chile
Valparaiso, Chile, 17 November 2010

In response to Keghart.com editorial team's Clannish Mindset Impedes Armenia's Progress Mr. Kouyoumdjian mailed us a letter authored by him and addressed to H.E. Mr Edward Nalbandian, Minister of Foreign Affairs and H.E. Dr. Hranush Hakobyan, Minister of Diaspora. It relates to appointement of an Honorary Consul of Armenia in Chile. It is distrubing what Mr. Kouyoumdjian reveals.
The text is presented to the readers of Keghart.com without editing.

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November 17, 2010
H.E. Mr Edward Nalbandian, Minister of Foreign Affairs
H.E. Dr. Hranush Hakobyan, Minister of Diaspora
Erevan, REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA
Your Excellencies,

I am writing this letter to draw your attention to the isolation and obstacles faced by the Armenian Community in Chile. Though we are small (around 120 registered members, maybe a couple of hundred more around), not only have we made extraordinary efforts to show our dedication and commitment, but I think that the survival of the smaller communities is more important than the large ones, which will always find a way to get through. We in Chile have no school or church, nor the facilities for cultural activities. Not a single senior official from the Republic of Armenia has visited us since independence, and when from time to time low level Chilean delegations visit Armenia, we are never informed, before, during or afterwards, about the purpose, development and

consequences of their trip. There is virtually no trade between Chile and Armenia, and a minimum number of travellers in either direction.

Though we are mainly a middle to lower-middle class community, with no millionaires among us, we managed to make a significant contribution in the launch year of the All Armenia Fund. Seeing that it would not be possible to keep it up regularly, we chose instead to sponsor a specific project, and from 1997 to 2009, I myself single-handedly spent over a quarter of my savings in supporting the AveMaria classical female choir in Yerevan. On top of that, I also sponsored the presence of five Armenian journalists to the Cannes film festival over the years. I made 11 trips to the country between 1998 and 2009, meeting with both your ministries and other organisations, giving talks and being interviewed on the media. I attended the last Diaspora Conference in Yerevan, and helped set up the Spanish-language library at Villa Delenda in Erevan.

In Chile itself, we kept the Armenian cause flying high in the media, managed to sabotage a dinner given on April 23 some years ago by an extremist Turkish organisation, convincing the Chilean president not to attend. Talks, conferences and media interviews were made regularly. The Armenian embassy concurrent in Chile from Buenos Aires was regularly informed not just of Chilean developments, but also about the activities of the Turkish embassy and government in its relations with Chile. Last but not least, we managed to have a Genocide recognition resolution passed unanimously by the Chilean Senate.

Some years ago, the ambassador in Buenos Aires asked me to coordinate a committee to act as unofficial liaison with him. As I am semi-retired and with good contacts, I took the job on almost singlehandedly.
I was offered the possibility of becoming Honorary Consul, but I do not live in the capital, have no infrastructure as I work from home, and limited resources, so I did not accept the offer. Nevertheless, I carried out many of the activities an honourary consul would have done. I even made the yearly trip to Buenos Aires to attend the celebrations of independence each September.

Suddenly, in March 2010, the embassy stopped all contact with me and our community, not answering messages or reacting to requests and queries. We carried on our business as usual but the situation was increasingly puzzling. Finally, I heard at a diplomatic party, from a journalist close to the Foreign Ministry, that a Chilean lawyer had been formally accredited as Honorary Consul of Armenia to Chile on September 10 last. This person, whose only link to Armenian affairs is that he helps Eduardo Eurnekian in some of his Chilean businesses, not only I am sure has no knowledge of the culture, history, geopolitics and diplomacy of Armenia, but the fact that it took him two months to make himself known to the community (and that, only to the chairman of the board of the community) shows how little interest he has in carrying out the job as it should be. He also has a rather shady past in the diplomatic service when he served the Pinochet government.

I, and many other members of our community, find it unacceptable that not only such a person

should be appointed to represent Armenia and the Armenians in Chile, but even more so as neither he, nor the embassy, consulted, informed or confirmed the fact to us until we heard it from another source, quite by accident, two months later. On top of all the other neglect, it is an affront to the community, though I am writing this letter on a purely personal basis.

The situation of Armenia is such that it requires special care in putting across its case, particularly in countries such as Chile where it is little known. To suddenly kick away people who have helped for years in money, effort and dedication, without even so much as keeping us informed or saying thank you, is an unacceptable attitide. I have resigned from all Armenian activities myself, because I am obviously not wanted.

Respectful regards,

Armen Kouyoumdjian
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