PARI (CH)DESANK, YOVANOVITCH

Posted on July 3, 2009 by Keghart

Category: Opinions

By Lucine Kasbarian, New Jersey, USA, 29 June 2009

Like many Armenian Americans, I am unhappy that our organizations hosted the recent public tour by the U.S. Ambassador to Armenia, Marie Yovanovitch.
Nevertheless, trying to make the most of the situation, I attended her presentation at the Armenian Cultural Foundation in Massachusetts.

By Lucine Kasbarian, New Jersey, USA, 29 June 2009

Like many Armenian Americans, I am unhappy that our organizations hosted the recent public tour by the U.S. Ambassador to Armenia, Marie Yovanovitch.
Nevertheless, trying to make the most of the situation, I attended her presentation at the Armenian Cultural Foundation in Massachusetts.

As expected, Yovanovitch largely evaded the audience's pointed questions and comments.
From having spoken to Armenians who attended Yovanovitch's public presentations elsewhere, such as in New York City, I know that similar scenarios unfolded there.

Even worse, the Armenian American press failed to critically and frankly assess Yovanovitch's opening remarks, questions from the audience, and her replies. Such press outlets include Armenia Now, the Armenian Weekly, the Armenian Reporter, the Armenian Mirror-Spectator as well as the email newsletters of the Eastern U.S.A. Diocese and Prelacy.

Unfortunately, even HETQ, the investigative journalism website in Armenia, merely republished an article from the Glendale News-Press about Yovanovitch's visit to Southern California.

What separated HETQ from some of the outlets mentioned above, however, is that it didn't censor critical reader comments posted under their online articles. While most of us recognize that Armenia suffers from a democracy and free-speech deficit, few of us have said publicly that our Diaspora media and organizations suffer from the same ailment.

I am forwarding HETQ's reader comments about Yovanovitch to our Diaspora organizations, media, and clergy because there are many questions they need to answer. Among the very first is: why did American Armenian organizations agree last year to the U.S. Senate's confirming Yovanovitch even though she and the State Department were as evasive on the genocide issue as John Hoagland, the previous failed nominee, had been?

Given Yovanovitch's and the U.S.'s dishonesty about the genocide, and the obvious fact that she was going to give evasive replies regarding a host of issues on her present tour, why did Armenian organizations even agree to host her? If their reasoning was that she needed to hear what we had to say, she undoubtedly already knew that from reading the Armenian press and news releases since assuming her ambassadorship.

Frankly, this tour was an honor and privilege that neither the State Department nor the ambassador deserved.

Armenian organizations held private meetings with Yovanovitch. What, may we ask, was the outcome of these meetings, or are our organizations once again practicing the same lack of transparency for which they criticize the Armenian government? They are accountable to the communities they claim to represent and serve, or haven't they noticed?

Ultimately, we must reject the vassal mentality that has been ingrained in us after centuries of Ottoman occupation. If we don't take a harder line in defense of Armenian rights in the post-genocide age, we have only ourselves to blame — and not the Turkish government — for jeopardizing our survival as a nation, on or off our native lands.

I direct you to HETQ, where outspoken Armenians have their say.

Other Articles by Lucine Kasbarian

Armenia: Yesterday, Today, and Maybe No Tomorrow

Top Twenty Tall Turkish Tales

The above essay was originally published by HETQ as a letter to the editor and generated the following comments

Armand, June 30th, 2009 at 01:05

I don't see anything good that came out of the visits by Yovanovitch, unless frustration is a good thing. What are Armenian American political organizations going to do to follow up? Nothing, I think.

Torkom, June 30th, 2009 at 01:07

Dear Lucine Kasbarian,

What did you really expect from a State Department bureaucrat who is following the line of the Obama Administration? After all she is the ambassador of the United States, not Armenia.

Are you that naive to have believed that she would spell out, in black and white, why the current White House, like all the U.S. administrations before it, tow the same line regarding Armenian issues, except for some cosmetic changes. Did you expect a truthful explanation of U.S. strategic interests in the region?

Armenians in the U.S. would do better to reform their own backyard and so-called representatives before crying foul when it comes to official reps of the White House.

And what did you expect "Hetq" to do? Rely on the American-Armenian press for a realistic description of Ambassador Yovanovitch's visit and the ire of some individuals like yourself?

You, yourself, state that the American-Armenian press failed miserably in this regard.

Perhaps if Diaspora Armenians contributed more to "Hetq" and other independent news media in Armenia they could afford to have permanent reporters in the U.S and Europe and thus do the job that the local Armenian press should be doing.

Hatsuni, June 30th, 2009 at 18:36

Bravo. I think that the response to the tour should have been that we are all busy praying for the souls of our martyred ancestors – feel free to join us.

Lucine, June 30th, 2009 at 19:36

Thank you for your comments, Torkom, with which I fully agree. The most honest appraisal of events filed so far can be read in a report published by Asbarez yesterday afternoon.

Aline, July 1st, 2009 at 08:05

It's beginning to look like a Shakespearean tragedy. Thank you Lucine for your insightful letter.

Some comments unrelated to Lucine Kasbarian's essay that appeared in Hetq

Harry, June 26th, 2009 at 20:41

So far, the coverage of Yovanovitch's visit, as presented by the U.S. Armenian Diocese E-Region news reports, Armenian Prelacy E-Region news reports, the Armenian Reporter International newspaper, the Armenian Weekly newspaper, and Asbarez newspaper (and this HETQ report, above), have been written as if they were press releases dispatched directly from the U.S. State Department, not from critical Armenian press outlets or organizations.

And the articles certainly don't reflect how furious Armenian questioners and commentators (including myself) were who were present at these meetings. Why is this?

For the U.S. government to follow up on its bankrupt positions towards the Armenian nation and people by sending Yovanovitch to the Armenian-American community to announce the strategic interests of the US-Turkish-Israeli axis was a slap in the face for anyone who seeks answers from the Obama administration, justice for our long-suffering homeland, and freedom from foreign invasion and occupation.

Why did those who run our community organizations agree to host Yovanovitch in the first place?

Pointed questions, remarks and expressions of disgust from Armenians were met by Yovanovitch with rehearsed party lines at best, and empty, evasive responses at worst — hardly meaningful exchanges for an ambassador who claims that the U.S. wishes to bring democracy to Armenia.

Why have Armenian organizations — whose supposed purpose it is to represent Armenian interests

— met Yovanovitch with smiles, handshakes and gifts? This article whitewashes what went on at the Armenian Cultural Foundation. Will all other Armenian newspapers do likewise?

Evidently, Armenians seeking to curry influence in elite circles believe that if they jump on the establishment bandwagon, they will one day have a slice of the pie. What they forget is that in compromising the truth along the ride, they will become the very entities against whom they struggled for so long.

Amot. Hazar amot.

Aram, June 26th, 2009 at 23:10

I attended one of the community meetings and displayed my deep disappointment and anger at the U.S. government for not giving a damn about Armenian democracy, human rights, economic development, and justice. All it cares about is building an energy pipeline through Armenia. That's why they are forcing Armenia's illegitimate authorities to implement the "parallel processes" of normalizing relations with Turkey based on an undisclosed "roadmap" and resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict based on the pro-Azeri Madrid Document. How clever!

The U.S is also complicit in Turkey's shameful denial of the Armenian Genocide, and now wants us to join them in "exploring" what has long been determined as an established reality and settled fact! How insulting!

Yovanovitch not only provided evasive and offensive replies to our questions, but also deflected questions she didn't like, pretending she couldn't hear the question. How convenient!

Worse, she was pandered left and right by the self-proclaimed "leaders" of various Armenian organizations who "claim to represent the Armenian-American community." Unless their memberships number 750,001 out of the total 1.5 million Armenian Americans (50%+1 clause), they clearly do not and cannot represent the entire Armenian American community! For them to receive her with smiles, handshakes, and gifts and to invite her again "on behalf of the Armenian-American community" is mind-boggling, unethical, and illegal!

Furthermore, Armenian-American newspapers, including the Armenian Weekly, the Armenian Mirror-Spectator, Asbarez, and the Armenian Reporter, have poorly covered her community visits, censoring the many important questions that were asked and presenting everything from a U.S. State Department and NATO perspective. Moreover, web moderators of some of these papers have been deleting rather than posting critical comments sent in to appear under their online articles. We are all aware that there is a democracy and transparency-deficit in Armenia. The same goes for the Diaspora!

So, we must now ask ourselves the following tough questions:

1. Why did those who run "our" community organizations agree to host Yovanovitch in the first

place?

2. Why are most Armenians placing parochial interests over national ones time and time again?

3. Why is the Armenian press lying to us, and who are they protecting?

The U.S.-led NATO alliance has turned a deaf ear to Armenian demands, thrown us Yovanovitch, and gotten what it wanted out of most Armenians: compliance! And what have we gotten? Migraines, ulcers, and insomnia as dignity, truth, and justice for the Armenian nation and people are denied us yet again!

While I agree that Armenians should stop looking to outsiders to grant us our legitimate demands, one would think we could at least rely upon "our own" organizations! Quite apparently, we cannot rely on them either. If only their leaders were democratically-elected!

Ghazaros, June 26th, 2009 at 23:26

Q: Why have former G-word users, Barack Obama, Joe Biden, Hillary Clinton and Samantha Power remained shamefully silent, remote, and unremorseful in the aftermath of Obama's refusing to use the G-word in Turkey and elsewhere?

Q: Why have Armenian-Americans not demanded and held a meeting with top White House and/or State Department officials?

Q: Why did Armenian-American organizations instead agree to receive Ambassador Yovanovitch into their communities to be subjected to revisionism and lies?

Q: Why was the US Senate "hold" on Yovanovitch's appointment removed, even though she did not forthrightly acknowledge the Armenian Genocide? And why haven't we read about this in the Armenian press?

Q: Why did so many Armenian-American groups hosting Yovanovitch behave like "house negroes," as described by Malcolm X?

Q: Why is the Armenian-American press concealing the fact that Yovanovitch deflected critical questions and provided evasive replies at these community meetings?

Q: How many card-carrying members do our Armenian-American organizations possess to give them the right to claim that they speak "on behalf of all Armenians?"

Q: Why are our Armenian-American organizations and media outlets self-censoring and misleading the Armenian public?

Chris, June 26th, 2009 at 23:46

Obama sends around a State Department career lackey – Yovanovitch – who has been about as forthcoming on Armenian American audiences' questions and comments as I would be if asked to explain the fine points of Sanskrit.

Obama promised to acknowledge the Armenian genocide and this is the best he can do?

And what are AAA and ANCA doing? Getting pictures taken with her, and acting as if she is the one who makes decisions about genocide acknowledgment.

As for the so-called joint historical commission – if it will discuss the genocide – and we really don't know the details yet – it is true that it is hypocritical of the US to approve of it.

Then again, if the Armenian President and his ruling political party are naive and dumb enough to go for it, perhaps we should be directing our complaints to them, not just to the US.

Let's get something clear: if the *Armenian Ambassador* to the US were asked about a joint historical commission – today – he himself would have to say he approves of it since it is now the policy of his boss, the Armenian president.

So, let's take some responsibility for our own stupidity and lack of resolve, shall we? I would like to see some mea culpas from organizations such as ANCA and AAA for being so laid back.

And do you know why ANCA and AAA get away with being lazy? Because their constituents (is that you?) don't care enough to write them, call them, complain to them, go to their public meetings, and write letters to Armenian papers taking them to task and suggesting alternative courses of action.

This is our responsibility.

Get mad at yourself, not just Yovanovitch.

Foss, June 28th, 2009 at 04:59

I just think that Yovanovitch's whole tour was a big waste of everyone's time. To naive Armenian Americans, she and the US State Department looked good because they probably thought she was polite and well-spoken.

The non-naive Armenian American probably did not get much out of it that he or she did not already know.

Now President Obama and the State Department can say that they took the Armenian American viewpoint into consideration. But that's not true. Obama is a big phony. His foreign policy is not much different from that of his predecessors, even though he tries to look "kinder and gentler." As for Hillary Clinton, a less principled politician has never waddled this earth. At least John McCain was upfront with Armenians that he did not give a darn about them. Obama, on the other hand, is just another lying politician, along with his obedient concumbine, Ambassador Yovanovitch.

Andreas, June 28th, 2009 at 23:26

My wife and I attended the event at the Prelacy in New York, and it was entirely bland. Madam Ambassador did not answer questions about NKR, or the Genocide (there I do not fault her, she was not asked about it, at least not during the public part of the presentation — my wife did ask her face-to-face but got the standard "government policy" response). Some of the soft questions thrown at her had obviously been planted and the Uncle Toms (wrong race, wrong culture, wrong history, I know, but you get the idea!) in the audience played the game very well, not permitting anything controversial to be said.

There was some questioning about the Azerbaijian/Armenia USAID and military imparity, and she kept insisting that there was no such imparity. It turns out she was right, because the questioner was out-of-date and obviously not aware of the US's recent backtracking on this — but she must have known and I cannot understand why she did not set the record straight right there.

I tried to find out what Iran's role would be in the overall NKR/Armenia/Turkey negotiations(all three countries abut on Iran), but she blathered about how everything would be handled by the Minsk negotiators. I pointed out that NKR is not represented at the Minsk table, and she said she was pretty sure that Stepanakert was being kept informed by Yerevan on all important aspects of the negotiations (as if she doesn't know that NKR/Armenia are in many ways not aligned — she does, I am sure!)

Robert, June 30th, 2009 at 02:12

We, that is Armenians, are our own worst enemies.

Why on earth did the American Armenians ever bother in giving this person a chance to explain or even talk? All that comes out of their mouth are unfortunately insincere comments and lies, but then they are politicians; what do you expect from them, "truths"? They cannot repond to questions with a direct answers, they are taught to evade.

What has happened to constant questioning of important issues and if no answer is given why continue? Get up and leave and show them your disgust and what you really feel about these useless politicians. How can you ever believe a politician? And a president at that? America is not ruled by Americans and that's why they will not answer civil questions truthfully.

C.K. Garabed, June 30th, 2009 at 04:19

Yovanovitch's remaining appearances should be boycotted.

Steve, June 30th, 2009 at 05:25

The question that is on the mind and the lips of Armenian American advocates here in the States is

that at the time of her confirmation Yovanovitch and Asst. Sec. Of State Matthew Reynolds stated in writing:

"our goal is not to open a debate on whether the Ottomans committed these acts, (the mass killings and deportations of Armenians committed by Ottoman soldiers and other Ottoman officials in 1915) it is to help preserve the documentation that supports the truth of those events."

" Regarding Ms. Yovanovitch's response to Senator Menendez's Question #8, the Administration recognizes that the mass killings of over one and half million Armenians were conducted by the Ottoman Empire, We indeed hold Ottoman officials responsible for those events."

The question that we have asked and will continue to ask until we get a sensible response is: has U.S. policy changed in the last 11 months? It certainly appears to with the approval of the Historical Commission within the "Roadmap"!

As as result or shortly following this testimony to the Senate in July of 2008 the Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs moved to confirm Ambabassador Yovanovitch.

Pray tell, does the Senate sense that Marie's confirmation was based on false pretenses ?

We sure do!

I think it is good and right for American Armenians to express themselves on these and other issues directly to the Ambassador and the Administration. I encourage the forum that has been provided.

Hovsep Dagdigian, Harvard, MA, USA, June 30th, 2009 at 21:38

I attended Yavonavitch's talk in Arlington, MA. The purpose obviously is to sell Obama's foreign policy to the Armenian community, but our purpose should be to let her know we don't go along with this one sided, deceptive, treacherous policy.

Moreover I am extremely concerned that we get so involved in the Genocide issue that it eclipses the issue of diplomatic recognition for Karabagh's right to self-determination. We need to continually and forcefully speak up on this issue. I am very much afraid that in events such as this that the Karabagh issue is falling through the cracks.