REMOTE TRANSNISTRIA HAS LESSONS FOR ARTSAKH

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Team Keghart Editorial, 16 March 2010

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Until the collapse of the Soviet Union, the region was part of the Moldavian Republic. However, in 1991 Transnistria seceded from Moldova when the latter declared Moldovan (a dialect of Romanian) the official language of the country. Slavic people, who make up the majority of Transnistria (30% Russian, 29% Ukrainian, and 5% other Slavs), resented the creeping Romanization of Moldova. To make matters worse, Moldova also changed the alphabet from Cyrillic to Latin. A mini-war (1992) between Moldova and Transnistria failed to change the status of the newly-independent region. The tiny republic is recognized only by South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Russia, which doesn't recognize the political entity, has a consulate in Tiraspol: Russia wants to retain Moldova as an ally without upsetting the Slavs of Transnistria.

Since declaring independence, Transnistria has been subjected to a blockade by Moldova and by Romania. In 2006 Ukraine enacted a customs regulation which forced all Transnistrian exports to carry Moldovan customs stamps. The Ukrainian law has resulted in $2 million to $2.5 million daily loss to the fledgling republic' economy. But Transnistrians refused to be cowed by Moldova's economic blockade and Europe's refusal to recognize Tiraspol's independence. In 2006 Transnistria held a referendum to decide the region's future. According to government sources, 97% voted for pro-independence with free association with Russia. Three percent voted to rejoin Moldova. Transistrians are not intimidated by the blockade and hostility of Moldova, Ukraine and Romania.

Now go over the previous five paragraphs and note the similarities in the status of Transnistria and

Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh). A comparison between the two "republics" would very quickly indicate that the Armenian political entity is better off, more secure, and has a far stronger justification for self-determination.

Some Armenians rightly feel insecure about the independence of Artsakh. They may also forget that the Artsakh/Azerbaijan conflict is not unique: There are a number of long-term, unresolved but de facto political limbos on the global scene. Taiwan, Cyprus, Palestine, the Horn of Africa (Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia), Kuwait and Iraq, Northern Iraq (Kurdistan), Northern Ireland… are some of the better known of these interminable conflicts. One might condemn these unresolved situations, but the fact remains they are part of the global scene. And they exist because one of the warring parties is stronger (Israel in Palestine, Turkey in Cyprus…) than its antagonist. It's not justice that has scripted their current status.

As long as Artsakh and Armenia retain their military superiority over Azerbaijan, Artsakh will remain independent. What Stepanakert and Yerevan have to do is persuade Baku that Armenians can live with the uncomfortable status quo indefinitely, despite the saber-rattling of Aliyev and his blowhards. Baku's belligerence and intransigence force Armenians to embrace the lyrics of a century-old Armenian fedayeen song, "Meeyan Zenkov Gah Hayots Prgoutune" (Arms are Armenians' Sole Saviour)—as far as Artsakh is concerned. Having justice on our side is not enough for political security. It has to be backed by force of arms.