STATEMENT OF PRESIDENT SARGSYAN

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Category: Opinions

At the annual gathering of the MFA senior executive staff and Heads of the Armenian Embassies and Consulates abroad

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At some point, the president emphasizes his claim to have opened up Armenia's foreign policy to public scrutiny and appears to be inviting Diaspora organizations to debate vigorously the future directions of Armenia's foreign policy.
Whether the speech is largely a sales job or a sincere call for a broad consultation, I think it's important for us to stay informed of the government's position and give consideration to the president's arguments and justifications, reported first hand - from the horse's mouth - as opposed to recounted in media reports. Submitted by DZ

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Dear Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is one of our traditional meetings which take place in the framework of the annual ambassadorial gathering. These gatherings provide a good opportunity to evaluate the ongoing

developments in your host countries and international organizations and look together for the answers for the emerging challenges and issues.

You represent the highest level of political planning in the area of foreign relations and these gatherings are also expected to produce practical proposals and programs regarding our future activities.

My present statement consists of two major parts: First, we will talk about the main directions of the Armenian foreign policy and current developments, and in the second part we will deal with the activities of the Embassies and the work ahead.

At the outset, I would like to make a note regarding our country's standing on the international arena and I would like to invite special attention to this issue. Today, Armenia appears to the world as a stable, predictable, and reliable partner, the positions of which are comprehended and appreciated. Major international players and centers respect our country, a country which has proved its reliability on the regional, bilateral and international levels. As a result, all we have been advocating since regaining independence reverberates today in international quarters and with regard to our country and essential regional issues the international community maintains positions which overall concur with our views.

A number of important developments have taken place since our last meeting.

I would like to make a special reference to the multifaceted and wide ranging relations with our strategic partner, Russia. We will continue to undertake all necessary steps to further deepen and strengthen our relations in all areas. We have already had many meetings on the presidential level, including reciprocal state visits.

I have already started a series of visits to the regions of the Russian Federation, particularly, to those with a sizeable Armenian population. I am confident that there is a great potential in working with the Russian regions for fostering Armenian-Russian economic relations as well as for inspiring our compatriots and strengthening their ties with Armenia.

At the first signs of economic crisis we received a $500mln loan from the Russian Federation, which was used to mitigate the impact of the crisis.

Substantial progress was registered during Armenia's presidency at the Collective Security Treaty Organization, when fundamental decisions on the Organization's enhanced efficiency were developed and adopted. First and foremost, I mean the decisions related to the establishment of rapid response forces. Initial military exercises will take place shortly, or to be precise, their first phase has already begun. We consider it to be an important element in upgrading Armenia's security level.

I want to mention with satisfaction that our friendly relations with the United States expand day by day, dynamics of which underwent changes after the elections in the US and with the accession of

the new administration. There is a mutual desire and will to further develop these relations. We maintain direct contacts with the White House and the State Department. There are numerous programs in the areas of democracy strengthening, security, and expansion of economic relations.

The Armenian American community is a natural link bridging our two countries. Through their efforts Armenia has many friends in the US Congress. Levels of assistance to Armenia have been maintained for years.

Our experience of recent months, related to the normalization of the Armenian-Turkish relations, has also become a distinct factor within the Armenia-US relations. There are some critics, who claim that our initiatives directed at the normalization of the Armenian-Turkish relations barred the President of the United States from using word Genocide in his April 24 statement. I have already said this and would like to repeat that I am confident that our actions in no way hindered the United States and one needs just to look into the American sources to give a right assessment to the ongoing process, and I am confident that sooner or later that assessment will be given.

We will continue to deepen our vigorous cooperation with Europe both bilaterally as well as in the framework of European structures. We have recorded two momentous developments in our relations with the European Union. First, the Easter Neighborhood program has been launched. Second, by the invitation of the Armenian side a group of European experts arrived to Armenia and started to work. We believe that this format of cooperation with the European Union is one of the best means to continue the process of reforms in Armenia.

The Eastern Partnership provides endless opportunities to use the European potential. We need to get the best of European experiences and expert assistance. We must be persistent and proactive seeking and using all the opportunities provided in Brussels as well as in the European capitals. We should also insist on receiving from the European Union and the European countries adequate assistance and support envisaged for partner countries.

Armenia has been provided with the opportunity to make use of the general system of preferences and that opportunity must be utilized expediently. We should be more aggressive in promoting Armenian goods in the European markets and work diligently to sign the free trade agreement. We must solve promptly all the internal problems which will get us closer to gaining an eased visa regime with the EU. For quite some time we have been unable to register concrete results in establishing a general center for the EU entry visas. We haven't received any objection with this regard from the European structures, but we do not take steps that would bring us closer to solving that problem. Armenia and Europe are linked by the similar system of values. To make that similarity generate new results it is necessary for our societies and individuals to interact more actively.

Our relations with NATO are progressing; results of Armenia's Individual Partnership Action Plan are encouraging as are the results and level of Armenia's participation in the international peacekeeping operations.

We will continue efficient cooperation with our neighbors – Iran and Georgia. Further development of good-neighborly relations with these countries is of crucial importance for the Armenian foreign policy.

Together with the Islamic Republic of Iran we launched the Iran-Armenia gas pipeline, while during my official visit to Tehran we reached understanding regarding the implementation of a number of new infrastructure projects. With our colleagues from the Asian Development Bank we have started the North-South highway construction project which will undoubtedly become a strong impetus not only for Armenia-Iran but a number of new regional initiatives.

With Georgia too we continue our political dialogue on the highest level. We exchanged visits on the Presidential level. At this very moment intensive works are underway on Gyumri-Akhaltskha-Bavra-Batum road, the conclusion of which will allow to facilitate shipping from Armenia to the Black See and in the opposite direction.

We should do our best to provide possible assistance to the Armenian community of Georgia. Logic of our policy toward Javakhk should rest on "integration without assimilation" premise. In this case, integration should presume strengthening of the Armenians in Georgia as dignified, able and respected citizens of that country. I believe that recognition of the Armenian as a regional language, registration of the Armenian Apostolic Church, steps to protect Armenian monuments in Georgia will only strengthen Armenian-Georgian friendship and enhance the atmosphere of mutual trust. On all these issues we should be considerate but also persistent and principled.

Invigoration of our relations with the Arab world remains an important issue on the agenda of the Armenian foreign policy. Dynamic development of these relations in the first years of independence was followed by a stalemate which is to be overcome and steps on that direction have already been taken.

We have been maintaining close relations with China and India, which hold a special place in Armenia's policy toward the Asian region.

I stressed it during our last meeting and I would like to underscore it now: it is necessary to further develop relations with our traditional partners as well with the countries relations with which are not yet at the adequate level. It goes for the countries of the South-East Asia, Australia, and the Latin American countries.

Now, I would like to talk about two pivotal issues of our foreign policy: Nagorno Karabakh peace process and our initiative for the normalization of the Armenian-Turkish relations.

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About the NK peace process:

Our negotiations with Azerbaijan with the mediation of the OSCE Minsk Group are being conducted

in a rather visible and comprehensible format. As you know, with the President of Azerbaijan we have already met six times. The Maindorf Declaration was signed in November, 2008, there was a joint statement of the Heads of the MG Co-chair countries, and the Co-Chairs have presented the general outline of the Madrid principles. I am sure there is nothing new for you in these publications, but the public at large saw all these principles brought together and heard from official sources for the first time. I attach great importance to the fact that there is not a single point in those documents on which we failed to inform the public on our viewpoints and approaches. Publication of these documents proved that we never lied and never tried to mislead our own people on the issues that were negotiated.

Obviously, there are some provisions in the documents that differ, sometimes considerably, from our desired ideal settlement. It is also obvious however that all the players realize that the right of people of Nagorno Karabakh for self-determination and issues of comprehensive security guarantees for Nagorno Karabakh are the cornerstones of these documents.

I do understand the roots of anxiety in some circles in Armenia and Artsakh. The NK issue is a sacred issue and thousands of our fellow citizens put their lives on the altar of the cause, for which we have been enduring hardships, but it is also one of the most glorious pages of our history. There is no doubt in my mind that any Armenian leader, who has been involved in the resolution of the NK conflict, realizes the enormous responsibility before our people, our history and our future generations.

Any other point of view is either the result of ignorance or petty profiteering. In case of Artsakh petty profiteering is unacceptable.

It is important that you explain everyone, and first of all the officials in your host countries, that the NK settlement is not an issue of days, weeks, or even months. Everyone must understand clearly that currently we are negotiating over only some of the basic principles for settlement. Even if the agreement is reached on these, that are still many other principles to be negotiated, and after that – the agreement itself, which will regulate the details for implementation. That process requires huge work.

At this stage our priority will be to ensure security of Nagorno Karabakh during the negotiation period and to achieve a proper understanding of the issue on behalf of the international community. In this struggle the Armenian people have been the ones fighting for survival and freedom and no one has any right to call the people of Artsakh, who defended their right to live with blood, “aggressor”. Our response to that must be forceful, confident, and compelling. This is particularly important for our Ambassadors accredited to the countries-members of the Islamic Conference. We should redouble our efforts for neutralizing negative impact of the resolutions either adopted by that organization or future ones.

On the Armenian-Turkish relations:

As you already know, a joint statement on the process of normalizing Armenian-Turkish relations was released yesterday. The documents, which fully reflect the agreements made so far, have also been publicized: Protocol on the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries and Protocol on the development of bilateral relations.

At the meeting with you last year I set out the objectives that I pursued by inviting the President of Turkey to Armenia. Armenia approximated the possibility of normalizing Armenian-Turkish relations. The awareness and commitment of the international community has been increased.

I have sought to normalize relations with our neighboring country with dignity as it is appropriate to the civilized world of the 21st century.

I think that these protocols open up that opportunity. The drafts made public yesterday reflect three vital realities:

1.As I have repeatedly stated, the talks conducted with Turkey and the agreements attained do not contain any precondition related to the peaceful settlement of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict or any other issue related to that.

2.As we have stressed, the issues on the historical dimension will be discussed not within the committee of historians but rather within one of the sub-commissions of the intergovernmental commission.

3.For the first time in the history of independent Armenia public debates will precede the signing of the most important international documents. The debates will enable to listen to all the views and approaches.

On this issue I anticipate your active participation. You should lead an active part during the public discussions in Armenia as well as in Diaspora. You should explain the provisions of the pre-signed Protocols in detail, both their positive and, why not, also controversial elements.

I also anticipate that shortly we will be having vigorous discussions in the Armenian communities abroad and international research centers. With this regard you should also provide necessary venues for the meetings and presentations of the speakers from Armenia.

Dear Colleagues,

Area of foreign relations is one of the crucial elements of our national security. You are entrusted with the important and responsible mission. The diplomatic missions of Armenia are our first points of entry and foreigners get their first impression by stepping over that threshold and meeting with you. It means that positive impression of Armenia depends on your professionalism, attitude and image.

Since becoming the President of Armenia I have appointed more than ten Ambassadors. Only two of them were political nominees, who never before were employed in diplomatic service. It means that

I want to view diplomatic work as a professional activity, the cornerstones of which are your professional qualities and dedication to Armenia, not to a person. But that approach of mine requires reciprocal responsibility.

It is great honor to be called Armenian diplomat. One must be deserving of that honor every day and every minute and that honor must be carried with the greatest responsibility. I wish you success and I wish this annual gathering productive work.

Thank you.