FLYING HIGH

Posted on February 25, 2024 by Keghart



Category: Opinions

By Jirair Tutunjian, Toronto, 25 February 2024

There's this stamp-sized, poor, and mountainous ancient country whose existence is threatened daily by the neighboring but not neighborly Turkic Twins: Turkey and Azerbaijan. Although the 2,800-years-old country lost thousands of people and a significant slice of its ancestral lands when the Turkic Twins attacked it in 2020, the world and its media hardly took notice of the unprovoked attack on the country which some people still confuse with Romania and Albania. The correct name of the country in question is Armenia or more formally, Republic of Armenia (RoA).

In recent years Armenia has gradually swerved its focus from Russia to the unreliable-indifferent-nebulous West. Many Armenian diplomats have gained notoriety among European airport customs officers as petty smugglers: one Armenian ambassador and his wife tried to take to Armenia scores of expensive Swiss watches as "presents to relatives and friends." We don't know whether these small-time crooks fly first-class when they go to Europe. However, we know that if they're headed to the City of Light or to the erstwhile Swinging London, Armenia's palatial embassies in Paris and London would be their home away from home.

Late last year, Armenia bought a building in central London to serve as its new embassy. The price tag? Seventeen million pounds (USD 21.53 million). A few weeks ago, Armenia bought a palatial building in the fashionable 16 Arrondissement of Paris. The price tag? A cool 23 million Euros (USD 24.88). That is, the impoverished and debt-ridden Armenia has spent or committed to spend USD 46.41 million for the two embassies.

Blowing hot air at the opening of the London embassy, Armenia's Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan went into poetic soliloquy and said: "The embassy is a beacon of the friendship and cooperation between our peoples…" Apparently, His Honor Baron Mirzoyan suffered from momentary amnesia as he forgot how Britain, in the past 150 years has harmed us at every turn. The opening was blessed by His Grace Bishop Hovakim Manukyan, an acolyte of the UnCatholicos Karekin II.

At USD 24.88 million (give or take a couple hundred thousand dollars), Armenia's Paris embassy is the former home of ex-French President Valery Giscard d'Estaing. This time, Deputy Foreign Minister Mnatsakan Safaryan did the flowery opening speech. He justified the astronomic price of the embassy by citing the expansion of Armenia-French relation.

Of course, it didn't occur to him that the more expensive the building, and the more exclusive its address, higher its monthly expenses.

Now let's grab our pocket calculators and do a simple math related to the above.

Total outlay for the two embassies: 46.41 million

Average income in Armenia: $5,116

In other words, the money paid for the two embassies could feed, for a whole year, 9,071 (46.41

million divided by 5,116) persons and their families.

The $46.41 million outlay becomes almost criminal when one considers the following:

--Armenia's National Government Debt in December 2023 was $11.8 billion and rising

--Armenia has a huge security problem, including acute need for modern and costly weapons

--Tens of thousands of exiled Artsakh people require jobs and housing. Unable to find a job, in Armenia, 7,000 Artsakh residents have already moved to Russia

--Decades after the 1988 earthquake, a huge number of Gyumri residents still live in *domiks*/metal shacks

--Inflation since the COVID continues to take its toll on Armenians with fixed incomes

--While 200,000 Russian immigrants have infused cash into the economy, at the drop of a hat, the Russians can return home with their cash.

Meanwhile, the RoA government continues to issue rosy economic statistics.

Let's consider Mark Twain's line that there are "lies, damned lies, and statistics."

A physically and mentally exhausted populace, jaded by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's inane stratagems, blunders, and sugar-coated statistics needs a smart straight-shooter to lift Armenia from the depression the ironically-named Nikol has wrought.



***Domiks* / shacks in Gyumri**



Following forced evacuation from Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabagh) some live under tents

Comments

Jirair – 2024-02-28 11:42:26
Vahe, As you said, we have different takes re Pashinyan. When he was elected, I looked forward to an intelligent and efficient administration. His alienating politics, his reckless style, his diplomatic immaturity, his "my way or the highway" attitude, etc. etc. left me disenchanted.

Vahe – 2024-02-28 10:20:37
Mardig Simply because I did not know that. She could have been from the other half, or less than half, of Armenia's population who are NOT of Western Armenian extraction. I also met another Armenian who I was surprised to find out that he is of Yezidi extraction, I could not have guessed it from his name and from everything else that I ascribe to an Armenian. I think its a good thing to know in a fun way

Mardig – 2024-02-28 02:18:16
Vahe, Mardig is not my real name. On several occasions I have met Hranoush, also people in positions during the Soviet, Kocharian-Sargsyan, and present periods, including Prime Minister Pashinyan, with whom I have had very personal relations. What does "Sassoun extraction" have to do with the subject matter? I don't have the statistics at hand, but it's safe to say that almost half, if not more, of the Republic of Armenia's population, are of Western Armenian extraction: Moush, Van, Erzrum, Musa Ler, etc. Karen Demirchyan, Silva Kaputikyan, and many other prominent personalities were of Western Armenian "extraction".

Vahe – 2024-02-28 01:18:51
Jirair, I met Harnoush Hagopian in LA and had a brief chat with her. A remarkable woman of Sassoun extratation. But I saw the treatment she got in the Armenian press. Diaspora can rally about the present liaison called High Commissioner. What difference would it have made a minister of the ministry of a diaspora affair? I do not want to get into an argument whose undertone is political. I support the democratically elected government of Armenia and see the cup that is Armenia half full. Your stand is and has been contrary to mine. I stand by comment I made. To each its own



Jirair – 2024-02-27 17:11:06

Vahe, Thank you for your letter. To reply categorically to your questions and comments: 1. Being in exclusive neighborhoods, the Armenian embassies in London and Paris were pricey purchases. I don't know whether the RoA paid the going price. 2. Neither the British nor the French governments have zoning restrictions as to the location of embassies and consulates. Foreign governments can locate their diplomatic missions anywhere they like in London and Paris. 3. Re your digression about the Diaspora's "callous and insensitive" reaction to the plight of Armenia's poor..." I am not qualified to comment on the behavior of 5 to 6 million Diasporans re Armenia's poor. However, we know Pashinyan slammed the door to the Diaspora. Following a trip to Los Angeles, he said the Diaspora was useless. He dismantled the Diaspora Ministry. As well, after witnessing official Armenia's corruption (stealing money sent by the Diaspora to Armenia's needy), many Diasporans decided not to donate money. 4.You say Pashinyan's government is an improvement over the previous governments. That may be true, but that doesn't absolve Pashinyan or make him a good leader. Thirty-three of his blunders were itemized in the previous Keghart. 5. FOOtNOTE to Diaspora's alleged indifference to Armenia's needy. A Torontonian, who went to Armenia immediately after the disastrous 2023 War, wanted to help Armenia any way he could. With that thought in mind, he visited a hospital where injured soldiers were being treated. He sat by their bedside and chatted with them. Before leaving, he handed XYZ dollars to every soldier he talked with. He returned to the hospital a few days later but was stopped by the supervisor who told him he was not allowed to donate money to the soldiers. He told the Torontonian to give the money to him and that he would see that the soldiers got the money. The Torontonian refused. He waited at the hospital's entrance for the families of the injured soldiers. When they arrived, the Torontonian distributed the money to them.



Vahe H Apelian – 2024-02-26 23:47:25

Jirair I do not know whether those buildings are expensive or these are the going rates to have the Armenian embassies in the capital cities of France and England in these neighborhoods. I also do not know if there are zoning regulations for having embassies within special zoning, given security considerations. Consequently I refrain from commenting on the prices of these buildings and the reason/s they were bought where they were bought. But I take issue in your inferring that they are an uncalled for expenditure, citing poverty in Armenia. I take issue because I do not know how governments and the Armenian government budget expenditure. But I have to say that I find the doings of the post Velvet Revolution Armenian government much more transparent than any time before. Also, I find the post Velvet government much more generous in their budgeting for public works, schools, roads, social assistance across Armenia than any time before. One more thing, Diaspora has been remarkably and extraordinarily callous and insensitive to the plight of the poor in Armenia. I am not sparing myself. Diaspora has not sacrificed an iota of its standard of living, and has not curtailed the slightest its derive to purchase the more expensive homes it does not need to live comfortably, driving the more luxurious cars it does not need to attend to all its needs, going to expensive vacations, and so forth and so on. I do not believe that Diaspora has the moral authority to take the high road when it comes to alleviating poverty in Armenia.



Keith Garebian – 2024-02-26 21:58:03

A blisteringly accurate, trenchant, and heartbreaking article in a very important way!