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T H E   Z O R Y A N   I N S T I T U T E

THE QUESTION OF KARABAGH:  
AN OVERVIEW

A Preliminary Report  
On the Question of Mountainous Karabagh  
submitted by  
Gerard J. Libaridian

with  
AN APPENDIX

NOTES ON THE RESPONSE OF  
THE DIASPORA  
AND CURRENT NEEDS

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# THE QUESTION OF KARABAGH: AN OVERVIEW

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"Karabagh is a Test of Perestroika"

The speaker, in blue jeans and a short-sleeved open shirt, looked young, about 26-27 years old. He spoke clearly and confidently. From the distance where I was standing at the Opera Square that evening in late May, he looked like any one of the thousands listening to him.

He had been speaking for some time when we reached the Square. To a crowd exceeding 50,000 of young and old, men and women demonstrators, he was presenting what turned out to be a sophisticated analysis of developments of the "Karabagh Movement" over the last three years. He highlighted moments when the now deposed first secretary of Armenia's Communist Party, Karen Demirjian, had conspired with Azerbaijan's fallen Bagirov and Politburo's Ligachev to thwart Gorbachev's reform movement, when reactionary leaders of Armenia attempted to provoke demonstrators into questionable and violent acts, when they tried to steer the movement toward nationalism and anti-sovietism which would have discredited both the movement and Gorbachev.

He gave facts: names, dates, figures, exact times of conference calls. He spoke to the demonstrators as if he was addressing an intimate circle of friends.

I asked my companion from Yerevan, a veteran of demonstrations, who the speaker was. I asked a stranger standing next to me the same question. "I don't know, comrade," he said, "but if he is not on the Committee, he should be, whoever he is."

The speaker concluded his long presentation with four demands:

1. That officials in Moscow, Baku and Yerevan responsible for the massacre at Sumgait be tried publicly at the Opera Square and judged by a jury of citizens;
2. That the new first secretary of the party, Suren Harutiunian, appear before "the people" at the Square and present his program and proposed solutions to the problems on hand;
3. That the next session of Armenia's Central Committee convene at the steps of the Opera House so that citizens can identify names with policies and decisions;
4. That Armenia's deputies to the party conference in June resign, since they were elected fraudulently; should they not wish to do so, they should appear before the people and explain why they should be the ones to represent Armenia in Moscow. (This issue was also raised by demonstrators in other parts of the Soviet Union in June, such as Irkutsk.)

The posing of the question of leadership and citizens' rights so clearly marks not only a widening of the scope of demonstrations but also an evolution in the thinking of the organizers and demonstrators. The reasoning had been thus far that if the issues are placed in the right context, given the historical justice, the moral right, and the spirit of glasnost, Armenians could expect a just solution to their problem. By the end of May some were no longer sure that their assumptions were correct. The questioning had started with Sumgait but became a dominant theme when Ligachev appeared in Baku to arrange for the transfer of power from the discredited Bagirov to the

new first secretary Vezirov and used the occasion of the central committee's meeting there to state that the issue of Karabagh was over. He had also scolded the Karabagh representatives and allowed the Azerbaijanis to humiliate the five Armenians.

The question by the end of May had become: Is Ligachev acting on his own or does he represent the views of the Politburo? Can Ligachev make such statements without having secured Gorbachev's support? In other words, is there really a struggle between Gorbachev and Ligachev or are they playing "good cop, bad cop?" This was the most hotly debated issue in the hundreds of small groups at the Opera Square, in cafes, at the University. A group of leading organizers, including at least one active member of the Karabagh Committee, had lost its enthusiasm for Gorbachev and concluded that there was no difference between the two, that all the efforts to remain in the context of legality and propriety, to avoid offending soviet sensibilities and embarrassing or damaging Gorbachev in his struggle against Ligachev were useless and misplaced. The Committee, the disappointed linguist argued privately, must rethink its strategy and assumptions, and not to limit its proposed solutions to the soviet context.

The views of this particular member of the Committee did not seem to be shared by the majority or by the public attending the demonstrations. It may have been the horrifying hopelessness implied by a Ligachev-Gorbachev equation that kept others from sharing this interpretation, but most seemed to think that Gorbachev was in a deadly struggle against Ligachev and the strategy of the movement would continue in the present path.

The sobriety, seriousness and dignity of demonstrations and speeches may be explained by the fear among Armenians that if Gorbachev loses, it is not the cause of Karabagh alone that would be lost. Armenia itself, pressured demographically, faced with increasing emigration of its population to other parts of the Soviet Union and to the West, may no longer provide hope for its new generation and would not find enough energy and motivation for economic revitalization necessary to face the next century as a viable state.

Soviet Armenians are looking at perestroika the same way as some traditional societies looked at westernization and modernization. It is an opportunity to be seized, as well as a challenge that must be faced. If Armenia sidesteps it or fails in the challenge, it is condemned to oblivion and irrelevance. But Armenia wants to help define it, not just accept a definition from above.

That places the battle for Karabagh squarely at the heart of the struggle for perestroika. To the question "Is the Soviet Union really ready to introduce the reforms and reorganization necessary to redefine the relationship between government and peoples?" echo the questions "Will Moscow continue to define the needs of its citizens?" and "Will Armenia be part of the reforms?"

A corollary tenet central to the movement is to define the issue as part of the reconsideration of the Soviet Union's past. Making Karabagh a region of Azerbaijan is seen as a historic injustice consecrated by Stalin whose policies have also produced a number of

other disastrous consequences for the Soviet peoples, including the Armenians. Why are Stalin's mistakes being revealed and studied now, if no corrective measures will be taken? Glasnost has allowed various national groups to begin reclaiming portions of their past once denied by official ideology. This aspect, too, has given emotional support and political legitimacy to Armenian demands for justice, as events and figures of the 1918-1923 period are reassessed and the record is brought to light.

A second important principle in the development of the context of the movement is the definition of the problem as a political matter. References to ethnic and religious differences or antagonisms are nonexistent, at least in public statements and pronouncements. This is not to say that there was no consciousness of the antagonisms or, even, that there was an ideological denial of the problems in those areas. Rather, there is a deliberate effort to show respect for ethnic and religious differences and trace the problems to now discredited ideologies and rulers, and to ruling elites associated with them. The struggle is for the people of Karabagh, not against anyone.

Third, demonstrations and other activities related to the movement occur in the open, as legal, quasi-legal or extra-legal events allowed by the Constitution or the new laws on associations. None of the activities are considered illegal by the organizers and there is no attempt to hide the organizational effort or network. While a number of parallels with recent Polish history and the background of some of the organizers may suggest preparation for any eventuality, as of May 1988 there is a conscious policy to be as open as possible. The purposes of this policy are to "win" legitimacy in the eyes of the government, to maximize their ability to define the issues and minimize any distortions and, finally, to ensure the cooperation of the government in avoiding "ugly" incidents or provocations. Government officials seem to appreciate knowing what is to happen. For those especially sympathetic to the cause, it has been possible to provide assistance without feeling that their authority was being challenged. To my question as to would he have wanted to see the end of the demonstrations, one official asked, "Why should I? Am I not also an Armenian?"

Clearly, the articulation of the issue implies a critique of the Armenian as much as of Soviet and Azerbaijani leaderships, and the banner "Karabagh is a test of perestroika" appearing at the demonstrations in Yerevan in February is not an empty slogan. Armenians appear to have taken Gorbachev at his word and believed that reforms must also mean the right of individuals and peoples to articulate their own grievances. Thus Karabagh is part of the larger challenge to the government of Armenia, at least under the fourteen year leadership of Karen Demirjian, removed from office on May 18, 1988. Since the rise of Gorbachev, Demirjian was challenged on a number of issues:

1. Corruption as a way of life and principle of governing;
2. Arbitrariness and personalization of power;
3. More orthodox than Moscow; undue repression of intellectual, literary, cultural freedom;

4. Insensitivity toward the environment;
5. Insensitivity toward Armenian concerns; and,
6. Reluctance to bring the benefits of Gorbachev's reforms to Armenia.

In fact, the first demonstrations in Yerevan in mid 1987 were organized to protest against the government's environmental policies or the lack thereof. Almost two years ago a group of scientists and intellectuals had circulated an open letter detailing the devastating impact of pollution on the population of Yerevan, thus officially placing the issue on the public agenda. The causes of the deterioration of the environment were traced to the chemical industry, a nuclear plant near Yerevan, and car pollution.

Charges of corruption were widespread and known by the general public. As explained by one member of the Karabagh Committee, pollution and corruption are causes universal to the Soviet Union and the fight against them has mighty protectors throughout the union and in Moscow. Karabagh had no protectors but the Armenian people and major demonstrations tended to be organized around that issue.

Considering the importance in Russian and soviet politics of personalities, it is difficult to make any predictions as to who is right or who will win. Regardless, demonstrators in Armenia had reached a point where all problems led to the question of leadership in Moscow and in Yerevan. And the dominant thinking, at least hope, was that all problems could be expected to have a fair hearing, if the right leaders won control of the government.

The speaker asked the demonstrators for names of potential members of the jury that would try the leaders, including "Comrade Demirjian, excuse me, Mr. Demirjian." There was a burst of laughter. Demonstrators appreciated the humor and applauded.

### The Politics of History

"But what about Karabagh?" shouted a young man tall enough to have been noticed by those around him. Is it possible that Karabagh will be a victim here in Yerevan too, will it be lost in other issues?

That, of course, was highly unlikely. The question of Karabagh has historical roots in a society whose collective memory is measured by millennia. Its modern phase can be traced to the Republic of Armenia, 1918-1920. Despite a war against Azerbaijan, the government of the Republic was unable to secure the inclusion of Mountainous Karabagh in the boundaries of the newly established state due to the opposition of Azerbaijan and Great Britain. And despite a moment when it seemed Azerbaijani opposition had disappeared, the Soviet government of Russia managed the inclusion of Karabagh in Azerbaijan, along with that of Nakhichevan. The first acquired the status of an "Autonomous Region," the second that of an "Autonomous Republic."

Throughout the period since the formalization and finalization of that arrangement in 1923, the Soviet Azerbaijani government has followed a policy of treating Karabagh as an "African colony," in the words of a demonstrator in Stepanakert in February. Cultural repression, economic underdevelopment, substantial unemployment, lack



of opportunities, and political pressures have resulted in a considerable decrease in the number of Armenians, largely in the form of emigration of educated and entreprising youth. In the view of Karabagh Armenians, a view shared by Soviet Armenians and others in the diaspora, this follows a familiar pattern of depopulation of historic Armenia: first Western Armenia, then Nakhichevan, and now Karabagh.

This process becomes a political issue when one realizes that it is the result of Azerbaijani policies that make life impossible for Armenians there, and specially for the youth. The question of Karabagh deals with the daily lives of the region's inhabitants: denial of rights to preserve cultural monuments, to develop Armenian cultural institutions, to benefit from Armenian cultural advances in Soviet Armenia; changes in the substance and interpretation of laws defining the autonomy of the region, failure to exploit local resources for the benefit of the region and an overall policy of economic underdevelopment, and incidents of physical violence, without due punishment, against citizens of Karabagh by Azerbaijanis. These have, in the past, produced petitions, letters of protest, and appeals to Soviet authorities in Moscow, while the Soviet Armenian leadership in Yerevan has avoided the issue for fear of being branded "nationalist" or going against the stated ideology of an already achieved "brotherhood of nations."

The people of Karabagh had concluded some time ago that there is no solution other than annexation to Soviet Armenia.

While the demand for annexation communicates an issue that relates to the nationalities and territorial aspects of the problem, the fundamental causes of the "Karabagh Movement" remain social, economic, political and cultural. In other words, the movement is not motivated by an abstract nationalism but rather by concerns affecting the daily lives, thoughts, and culture as well as the future of a clearly defined population with a sense of historical memory and collective identity.

### The Timing

But what about Karabagh?

The young man must have been wondering about the paradox of the situation: The new environment of glasnost was necessary for the grievances to be aired, yet it would be expected that Karabagh could not be the only grievance that would surface.

A number of factors have been mentioned to explain the timing of the eruption. Karabagh Armenians felt that "the knife had reached the bone," to quote an often-repeated metaphor. Secondly, the atmosphere created by Gorbachev's glasnost (understood as the right to express grievances,) and perestroika (interpreted as the right to seek solutions to grievances through restructuring) had raised expectations.

It is also possible that the Azerbaijani government was contemplating further reduction in the powers of the Region's Soviet or Council, composed largely of Armenians. Previous changes in the Region's constitution had effectively reduced the ability of Armenians

to manage their affairs. Another move in that direction may have triggered the February 20, 1988 resolution by the government of the Autonomous Region to initiate the constitutional process for a change of boundaries.

While statements between October 1987 and January 1988 by Abel Aganbegian (chief economic advisor to Gorbachev), Zori Balayan (writer and Yerevan correspondent for Moscow's influential Literaturnaya Gazeta), Sergei Mikoyan (historian and journalist) and other Armenians with contacts in Moscow may indicate otherwise, Soviet Armenians in general have denied any previous consultations with the Soviet leadership regarding their possible response to a request on boundary changes.

The possibility remains, nonetheless, that in private discussions Soviet leaders may have expressed sympathy for such a demand: a matter of principle for correcting past wrongs on the part of Gorbachev or those close to him; a matter of either anti-Muslim sentiment or potential source of embarrassment for Gorbachev by those opposing him, at a time critical for his contemplated reforms in the political and nationalities areas.

#### Stepanakert and Yerevan: A Question of Centrality

But what about Karabagh?

Karabaghtsis are concerned that Yerevantsis will give up on the struggle or will compromise on the issue of Karabagh in order to extract concessions on other demands from Moscow.

The people and leaders of Karabagh are determined that they alone will define the course of their own actions, and not even Yerevan will determine their policies. Karabaghtsis do not understand why Yerevan does not always follow their lead in reacting to events. When Zori Balayan and Sylva Kaputikian, representing the demonstrators, returned from their meeting with Gorbachev in late February, they asked the demonstrators to go home, since Gorbachev had promised to review the situation. Close to a million Armenians in Yerevan did so. When the same request was made of Stepanakert demonstrators, they are supposed to have answered, "We did not ask you when to begin, you cannot tell us when to stop. We will stop when our demand is met."

In fact Karabagh never stopped its struggle. Work stoppages continued throughout. In late May these turned again into a general strike. Yerevan, as a matter of policy, regards general strikes as not useful for Armenia. Perhaps Armenians in Yerevan believe that a state cannot behave like a disgruntled people or that they need to maintain a support mechanism for Karabagh. It may also be that they fear that Armenia may be penalized a long time if it carries civil disobedience too far.

Yerevantsis were happy to see the army retreat to the barracks after the intervention on March 26. Their agenda is larger than any single province or right. And while for many Armenians in Armenia Karabagh is a natural answer to the scarcity of arable land and mineral resources, Armenia itself is too precarious not to be easily damaged by too much antagonism.

For Karabaghtsis national rights, cultural identity, and

political reforms are all integrated. Centuries of dependence and antagonistic overlords have developed a wholesome view of life. They see no hope that part of the equation may change without the others following suit. For the proud and determined citizens of Karabagh democratization, openness and restructuring cannot have too many meanings; neither are they negotiable.

Yet the sense of solidarity and a shared belief in the possibility of doom may lead to more radical activities in Yerevan, as they have in Stepanakert. According to the latest news, a hunger strike by students and widespread strikes developed in Yerevan did not end till the government announced that it would formally adopt a resolution supporting the demonstrators' demand for annexation.

The question from the young demonstrator, the son of a refugee from Azerbaijan, made those around him painfully aware of the dilemmas and complexities of the situation.

### Karabagh as Communion

The speaker was too far to have heard the question from the young man concerned that Karabagh was about to be forgotten. The answer came from a middle aged man standing a few feet away. "Karabagh is in our hearts, dear comrade. Isn't all of this Karabagh?"

Karabagh has become the code word for change, rejuvenation, daring, the ability to be true to oneself, to speak one's mind. It is said that during the now legendary February demonstrations street vendors distributed their goods freely, merchants helped everyone, even known criminals and thieves made cash available to those in need. A well known outlaw distributing rubles to strangers is said to have told surprised onlookers, "I was not born a criminal. I hope this will redeem me in the eyes of my people."

Karabagh established new criteria for separating "the men from the boys." Prominent leaders everyone thought would come and be with the people behaved cautiously and remained home. Young scientists and researchers with insecure jobs assumed leadership. "People expected greatness from their leaders," explained a writer. "Leaders fell like flies during those days in the eyes of the people."

"We still feel the moment," said another. "You give us good leadership and we will turn this republic into a model state in ten years."

Most of all, the moment in February 1988 seems to have given people self-respect: Armenians were surprised at their own ability to organize, to act responsibly and display dignity, to discuss and argue without losing sight of the essentials.

Just as it did for Armenians in the Caucasus and the diaspora, Karabagh has also been a moment of national awakening for those in the Soviet diaspora. Assimilated Armenians and others awaiting assimilation in different parts of the Soviet Union seemed to have looked at their brethren in the tiny republic making history. Karabagh provided a new reference, a new sense of collective identity and memory. In Moscow, in addition to demonstrations at the Armenian cemetery, students visited the offices of Soviet Armenia's ambassador

in Moscow (located at the renovated Lazarian Institute) and demanded that the ambassador take up the cause of Karabagh with the leaders of the Kremlin. "The ambassador sympathized with the cause," assured a resident researcher, "but of course he did not have the authority to undertake such a mission."

### The Organizers: A Question of Leadership

The ambassador of Soviet Armenia did not have authority to bring up the subject in Moscow and the government he reports to in Yerevan passed a formal resolution officially raising the question only in mid June. By what process did a poetess, Sylva Kaputikian, and a journalist, Zori Balayan, end up meeting Gorbachev on behalf of demonstrators in discussions that ended the demonstrations in late February? Clearly, with few exceptions, Karabagh has produced a new leadership that is not drawn from the official circles of Soviet Armenia, whether in the political or intellectual arena. This leadership consists of three categories.

The first group is made up of party/government leaders of the Autonomous Region. Karabagh maintained a tradition of autonomy and self-government even after the fall of Armenian dynasties, and its local leadership has on occasion turned against the authorities both before and during the Soviet era. As in the past, the local leadership tends to articulate popular grievances when conditions deteriorate to the point of hopelessness. As in the past, in 1988 too there seems to be near unanimity between the leaders and people in Karabagh around a decision to struggle till the end under these circumstances.

The second category of leadership is largely informal and plays an advisory but critical function: this group includes scientists, academics, and intellectuals largely in Yerevan, such as the poetess Sylva Kaputikian, but often individuals born in Karabagh such as the historian Bagrat Ulubabian, the journalist Zori Balayan, and the actor Sos Sargsian. It does appear that a significant number of scientists and mathematicians in the University and at the Academy of Sciences trace their immediate or distant origins to Karabagh, and they have played an active role in adopting the cause and turning it into a pan-Armenian issue. They are consulted, listened to. Some constitute the link with local and Moscow authorities, others with the Karabagh leadership.

The third group is loosely known as the "Karabagh Committee" or the "Organizing Committee" (kazmkom, for short). This is the group that determines the timing and character of actions, the strategy of the movement, and the articulation of issues in Soviet Armenia. The group has changed membership over a period of time, but continues to be made up of men in their twenties and thirties, students and junior researchers in various fields.

A few seem to have had some experience from the demonstrations of 1965, when large numbers of Armenians took to the streets demanding the return of Western Armenian lands to the Armenian people on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary Commemoration of the Genocide of 1915. Interestingly enough, on that occasion it was the Catholicos or

Supreme Head of the Armenian Apostolic Church, Vazgen I, who had the moral authority to address the demonstrators and diffuse a potentially explosive situation.

None of the leaders are figures known in governmental, academic, or intellectual circles. Most seem to have acquired their position because of their courage to articulate views and develop perspectives, their ability to organize, and their willingness to criticize the conventional leadership.

While I was unable to identify any women in the highest position of the Organizing Committee, women seem to occupy responsible positions in the hundreds of local committees. They certainly are often the more determined and the quicker to focus on the issues when reacting to news and to speakers.

Party, government, academic, cultural or church leaders who until February claimed and received the respect of the people as guardians of the national heritage and the nation's concerns but who failed to assume the leadership of the "movement" or side clearly with "the people," have been discredited in the eyes of the "people." The "people produced its own leaders" is a statement often repeated. The former first secretary of the party in Armenia was repeatedly singled out as one who failed to even "make a statement sympathetic to and understanding of the people's grievances, while the Azerbaijani leader led and defined the counterattack." Even Catholicos Vazgen I was criticized for failure to side with the people, although many appreciated his late but wise words, and his predicament.

Prominent figures, once considered pillars of strength, have been discredited. Others, "who don't even have a spare pair of pants" or were viewed as "sissies" turned out to have more "backbone and picked up the slack."

In private conversations and public statements organizers asserted that, although respected for his beliefs and long years in prison, Paruyr Hayrikian had little to do with the Karabagh Committee. Hayrikian is a long time dissident jailed for his nationalistic views. In the 1970s he was imprisoned for having founded a new party favoring independence. More recently, he called for the secession of Armenia from the Soviet Union. While some on that Committee sympathize with his views, the majority seems to think that his views, his presence, and his contributions would have a negative impact on the cause.

During one of the demonstrations, a speaker suggested that Hayrikian's most recent jail term, ostensibly on jaywalking charges in Moscow, is more a ploy on the part of the Demirjian machine to derail and discredit the movement by making Hayrikian the focus and the hero of the movement. "How else can one explain," argued the speaker, "the jailing of a man who has little to do with us, who has tried to speak here but has been asked to leave as demonstrators do not share his position, and who has in fact left the podium, a man who in no way could be construed to represent a danger to the security of the state, who is less threatening to the government in the streets than in jail." A few have suggested privately that he may already be only useful to Western agencies; one has stated that he knows for sure that Hayrikian received an exit visa in January 1988 but is now attempting to solidify his support outside before he actually leaves the Soviet Union and thus avoid the fate of other dissidents whose moment of

notoriety disappears soon after they give their first interview. Hayrikian remains, nonetheless, an important factor and symbol of resistance for those who are only now entering the battlefield.

### The Committee: Process and Function

The Karabagh Committee members seem to be "elected" by public and voice vote by a core group of supporters. The membership of the committee has changed gradually since February, due to a variety of factors, including the need to avoid taking extreme positions. The committee meets openly, often in a cafe, and its deliberations are preceded and followed by open discussions, in small groups, in or around the cafe or at the Opera Square now dubbed "democracy square." The deliberations of the committee are affected by the Stepanakert leadership, by that of the public following the discussions, by the views of the unofficial advisors, and by representative of hundreds of "Karabagh committees" in institutes, factories, university departments, markets, and towns and villages outside Yerevan.

These local committees also constitute the skeleton of the network that communicates decisions of the Committee.

A major function of the committee is to communicate reliable news, given the reluctance of the state information agencies to cover all events. While some in the government, both in Moscow and in Yerevan, find that rumors are more dangerous than officially transmitted bad news, the committee remains the main source of communication. On occasion gatherings are called "informational," to differentiate from those that are "demonstrational." To accentuate the difference, gatherings of the first category were convened often in other parts of the city. Spontaneous demonstrations are known to have also occurred in places such as the University.

This informal, fluid, simple yet effective organization has added another dimension to the legendary role of Karabagh in bringing out the best in people.

### A shortage of food?

The Karabagh legend, in its past and present versions, is one of the reasons why it has been difficult to deal with such mundane matters as nutrition and other needs for the embattled region. The pressures from the Azerbaijani controlled areas are aggravated by refugees now in Stepanakert from Sumgait and from Armenian villages in outlying areas.

The Writers Union in Yerevan has undertaken a major relief effort that uses the existing network for the Karabagh movement. A lesser known writer's office has become the headquarters for receipt and dispatch of foodstuffs, largely canned food to Stepanakert. Medicine, also needed, was in short supply everywhere, so it was not even listed, although it was possible to arrange for some. A bank account has been opened in the name of a well known actor, and all cash donations are deposited there in order to enable the organizers to account for every kopek.

One assistant to the writer took care of telephone calls. He answered questions on what was needed and advised contributors to avoid bringing in cash. A list of needed foodstuffs was posted outside the door, and many came to check before making purchases. Visitors were usually representatives of various institutions, factories, and associations bringing in their collective contributions.

Transportation of the collected goods was achieved usually through the Nayiri airport where "our men are in charge and will receive packages and ensure their delivery to Stepanakert either for 10 kopeks per kilo or for free." In late May Stepanakert had arranged for a truck to be driven to Yerevan to pick up the cargo, accompanied by a Russian soldier, a symbol of soviet authority in the eyes of the Azerbaijanis controlling the entrances to Karabagh. The writer arranged a second truck and a driver during a brief call to the vice-minister of transportation, after assuring him that the undertaking was legal, that no goods other than the five listed on the government permit would be sent to Stepanakert, and that the Writers Union would pay for the expenses involved.

Apparently Karabaghtsis had also asked Yerevan to send books in Armenian on history, philology, historical novels, etc. The piles of books were almost as high as the foodstuffs.

The writer coordinated his efforts with a member of the Karabagh Committee, who appeared for a meeting and last minute arrangements. All issues were discussed and arrangements made while at least 10 and at some point 30 individuals were milling in the office, listening to the latest news, depositing contributions, accepting instructions for logistical support, answering phone calls, or merely debating. At one point a young man walked in to say that he had received an angry phone call from one of the leaders in Stepanakert. "We don't need food, we don't need supplies, we don't need relief," the Karabaghtsi had shouted. "If you want to help, just give us a political solution, fight for annexation." The young man was startled and suggested that perhaps the relief effort should be stopped. The writer, himself quite young, explained that Karabaghtsis are too proud to admit to such needs, that it had been determined medically that children were suffering from vitamin deficiency, and that Yerevan would continue to provide as much as possible while working for a political solution.

It was suggested by a few in Yerevan that the relief effort was really not needed and that its function was essentially covering up a political failure and making some people feel good. It is difficult to ascertain the charge, particularly when some in Yerevan feel the need to justify their own inaction.

### Sumgait

The writer's office had also functioned as one of the oral history centers, where accounts of eyewitnesses of events in Sumgait were being recorded on cassette tapes. The writer emphasized the need for "good Japanese" tapes and recorders to continue the work.

Sumgait has come closest to suspending critical judgement

among the Soviet Armenians than any other recent event. It is an event which they still have difficulty explaining, although some inevitably dismiss the need to explain since "after all, the criminals are Turks."

My partial explanation of the Sumgait pogrom--as a successful and historically proven method to change the agenda from reforms to law and order--provided some food for thought to an audience composed of social scientists and researchers at the Academy of Sciences. Some at the Institute of history agreed readily and wanted to know more about theories of mass killings.

While the question of motivation can be debated, the result may not be: it became difficult to think of change without violence. In fact, with the threat of further massacres, Azerbaijan terrorizes the Soviet government. The massacre also revitalized an old argument legitimizing the sovietization of Armenia: without it Eastern Armenia and Western Armenians would have been subjected to the same fate as Western Armenians and Western Armenia. Finally, Sumgait reinforced the "Ligachevian" definition of the state as the necessary coercive power as opposed to a state that is the product of a social contract.

The details of the events in Sumgait are emerging gradually. Eyewitness accounts are being gathered by a number of sources, and there are at least three different attempts at determining the exact number of those killed by compiling a detailed and specific list. Even then, it is still difficult to ascertain the number of Armenians killed during the pogrom. Very few in or outside Armenia accept the official number of 32; no one ever mentioned the figure 1,500 as was reported in some sources in the diaspora.

Of the sources compiling names of victims of the massacres, one placed the figure between 45 and 60, another around 90. The range of 200-400 was mentioned often, without any claim to documentation. The interesting item was the numbers proposed for all victims of Sumgait. One source who proposed the figure 400 as "certain" for Armenians killed also asserted that there were close to 150 soviet soldiers and officers killed by the Azerbaijani mob, in response to which the soviet army machine gunned or otherwise killed over 750 Azerbaijanis. These, again, are figures difficult to verify at the present time, although the total number of those killed by this account, 1,300, comes close to the figure 1,500 mentioned above, with the exception that this number includes all killed, not just Armenians. There is general agreement that, in addition to Armenians who were killed, there were also many hundreds, perhaps over a thousand wounded. The total of killed and wounded too may produce a number close to 1,500.

A few sources suggested that those eyewitnesses who had seen the worst of the violence or had been wounded severely were being kept incommunicado in special camps in Azerbaijan and their stories have not as yet been recorded. A large number of sources mentioned the existence of either a 28 or 45 minute videotape of actual atrocities as they were occurring in Sumgait. Ostensibly the video was taken by a Finnish tourist who happened to be there. None of the sources had seen the video now "kept in a KGB vault" and very few knew of any one who had. I was able to meet one person who said he had seen over 15 minutes of the video. He recounted in vivid detail a scene where a



Russian soldier, left behind by a soviet army unit defending Armenian quarters from the mob and retreating to regroup, was stabbed by someone in the mob. Another scene showed a soviet officer thrown out of a third or fourth floor apartment, where he had gone to investigate a cry for help from an Armenian family.

The events of Sumgait continue to baffle the soviet people. Some details were discussed in a lengthy and major documentary on the Karabagh and the February events in a much respected soviet television program "Positsia", anchored by a well known personality, Paravik. Moscow News, a publication of Novosty Press, reporting the case of an Armenian family that defended itself for over seven hours with electric wires and hot water and was refused help from the police during that time, was wandering if anyone could help them understand how something like that could happen.

Ultimately, Sumgait has raised as many questions about the impact of Soviet rule as it has provided answers. An elderly Armenian who claimed to have listened to every speaker at the Opera Square since the beginning of the demonstrations in February, said that he was waiting for someone to explain as to how, after seventy years of soviet policies and education, some citizens could commit such atrocities against others for so long.

On April 24, 1988 students at the Yerevan State University carried a specially ordered khachkar from the house of the mastermason in Yerevan to Dsidsernakaberd, the Martyrs' Monument, 7 kilometers away. The khachkar, in memory of the victims of Sumgait, was placed on the left side of the walkway leading to the main monument that commemorates the victims of the Genocide of 1915.

The next caller from besieged Stepanakerd to the Karabagh Committee admonished, "What are you doing for Karabagh? Why aren't you going all the way? Are you waiting for more Sumgaits so that more khachkars can be added in Dsidsernakaperd?"

#### Yerevan seen from Moscow

Few official statements have been made in Moscow that may indicate whether the tragedy has had an impact on official thinking. The argument presented by many Armenians, that Sumgait proves that Azerbaijan should be denied the right to administer Karabagh, does not seem to have had official takers at this point. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that it is Moscow that must be convinced.

As stated earlier, every effort is made in Yerevan to avoid the label of nationalism/extremism. Yet the terms were used by some Moscow leaders and media to denigrate the movement within the framework of official ideology still at work. Convincing Moscow of the contrary is a difficult task, given the quasi-total ignorance of most soviet citizens on issues related to a peripheral and minor region, the Caucasus, let alone to conflicts between peoples in that region.

This is a problem easier dealt with as a story--one of hundreds circulating in Yerevan--of the encounter in Yerevan between politburo member Dolgikh, dispatched to bring an end to the demonstrations in Yerevan while Pravda had labeled the organizers

"extremists and nationalists," and astrophysicist and chairman of the Academy of Sciences Victor Hambartsumian, an ardent and unwavering supporter of the movement. It is said that to Dolgikh's long introduction of his own titles Hambartsumian introduced himself as "Victor Hambartsumian. Extremist, nationalist."

The absence of public means of communication has also hampered the task of Armenians to get their story understood by other Soviet citizens. Despite some efforts to report events as they occur, Soviet media are still extremely limited in the way and extent to which they can cover controversial issues. Armenians have made a substantial effort on individual bases to communicate to colleagues and acquaintances outside of Armenia the substance of their claims. They have also been able to get a number of prominent Soviet scientists and intellectuals to contribute essays and letters on the subject. Most households in Yerevan have some collection of copies of such documents, along with newsclippings from the Soviet press.

Armenians complain that they have little help in Moscow from compatriots who are well placed in Soviet government and the party, since most are assimilated, while Azerbaijani individuals do everything possible to help the position of that Republic. Azerbaijanis, of course, complain about too many highly placed Armenians in Moscow who create problems for Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan, of course, does not need others to create problems for itself. With Sumgait it created a problem which it may never be able to overcome, even if it does not lose the territory and people of Mountainous Karabagh following the atrocities. I asked a Russian soldier stationed in Karabagh whether he considered the organized killing of innocent civilians in a soviet city an affront to his profession and insult to his patriotism. The soldier turned red and responded, "That question should not be addressed to me. I am too unimportant to answer a question like that."

#### A May 28 affair

The period of my stay in Yerevan coincided also with the 70th anniversary of the declaration of independence and establishment of statehood in Armenia. A special committee called upon the public to celebrate and to demand that May 28 be recognized as the date of the establishment of statehood and that historians and leaders revise their appreciation of events and individuals connected with that date. The demonstrators may not have known that archivists and historians have started the process of reevaluation already, following the example of other republics. And while Soviet Armenia has built a monument celebrating the battles which made statehood possible, official Armenia still shuns the date May 28, celebrated only in the Diaspora by the Dashnaktsutiune, the party that lost power to the soviets in late 1920 and which still believes in a free, independent, and united Armenia.

To the best of my knowledge (two visits to the site and reports from others) at different times during May 28 a minimum of 800 and a maximum of 5,000 demonstrators attended the rally on that date. Demonstrators carried the red-blue-orange flag of the Republic

of Armenia (often seen as a symbol of anti-sovietism) and sang revolutionary and nationalist songs. I was also told that at midnight the tricolor flags were replaced by the regular banners, indicating a return to the question of Karabagh. I saw no evidence or was reported none that the major focus of the demonstrators was the demand to free Hayrikian, as reported by the Western press.

A report that the group that had organized the May 28 rally had consulted the Karabagh Committee before undertaking the event may be substantially correct. The Karabagh Committee is supposed to have informed the May 28 committee that while they could not support the rally, they would also not oppose it. Possible explanations for this attitude must await further developments.

It is difficult, nonetheless, to consider my estimate of 5,000 attending the May 28 rally, or the Western media report of 50,000, as the measure of support for the idea or symbol of independence. While some who were there were merely continuing their uninterrupted support for the cause of Karabagh, many more stayed home because they suspected that such a rally at this time may be used to dilute the Karabagh issue or divert the movement toward an anti-Soviet direction.

#### May 1988: The End Or a New Phase?

The euphoria and optimism of February 1988 have been replaced by the waiting and hard politics of May-June 1988.

There had been a general agreement in early April that the point had been made and now Gorbachev must be given a chance to get ready for the June conference. President Reagan's expected visit to Moscow was also a reason why the Karabagh Committee had suspended demonstrations by early March.

In April 1988 there was also a general concensus that steps already taken by Moscow had all but ended Azerbaijan's grip on Karabagh. Economically, the Autonomous Region was to become a ward of Moscow; culturally, it would be integrated with Armenia; and while remaining within Azerbaijani jurisdiction, its political development would be defined by Moscow and Yerevan. In addition, there had been a promise by Gorbachev on March 9 that the question of Karabagh would be reexamined at the next party conference scheduled to begin on June 28.

The conclusion had been reached despite arguments from Stepanakert that all these were short term solutions, that Azerbaijan would use the time to neutralize the pressures built on Moscow, and that only annexation to Armenia could guarantee the basic rights of the people of Karabagh and its viability as an Armenian region.

In May the situation had started deteriorating. There was a pattern of behavior that worried Armenians. Azerbaijan was building up pressure on Karabagh; there were threats against Armenian villages in areas outlying the Autonomous Region; there were rumors, for example, that the region of Shaumian there, the old Gulestan, would be divided administratively between neighboring regions so as to dilute its Armenian majority.

Moreover, the long awaited replacement of the first secretary of Armenia, Demirjian, had been announced at the same time and in the same format as that of Azerbaijan, Bagirov. "We all wanted to see

Demirjian go," explained a social scientist, "he had outlived his usefulness, he was presiding over a corrupt and inefficient administration, he opposed reforms, and he failed to provide leadership, even understanding of his people, during the critical months since February," confirming the general assessment of the discredited leader. "But," she continued, "he was no criminal. He did not preside over the massacre of innocent civilians as did Bagirov. They had no right to insult our people and republic by lumping him with a criminal."

The worst provocation had come from Ligachev. During the May meeting of the Central Committee of Azerbaijan that included five Armenian members from Mountainous Karabagh, Ligachev is reported to have insulted and humiliated the Armenian members of the Central Committee, opening the way to new threats from Azerbaijani leaders. It was also on this occasion that he had declared the issue of Karabagh closed.

The Armenian representatives had returned to Karabagh and informed Yerevan by telephone of Ligachev's position and of the aggressive and threatening attitude of Azerbaijan's leaders. Armenians in Yerevan, meanwhile, had been in a positive mood. Gorbachev had dispatched to Yerevan politburo members Yakovlev, a historian, and Dolgikh, to arrange for the transfer of power from Demirjian to Harutiunian, the new first secretary of Armenia. Armenians were very impressed by Yakovlev's visits to the Matenadaran and, especially, to Dsidernakaberd. And there had been no word of a change in the agenda of the party conference.

Yakovlev was known in general as sympathetic to the cause of Karabagh. Upon reading poetess Kaputikian's now famous open letter on the question of the annexation, Yakovlev is supposed to have exclaimed, "This is a cry from the heart of the Armenian people, a cry heard in Moscow."

Ligachev's statements had raised questions on the symbolic meaning Armenians had attached to Yakovlev's acts and words. Ligachev touched off the debate still continuing on whether Ligachev is expressing personal and partisan views or speaking for Gorbachev as well.

Demonstrations were resumed then. These were daily events beginning in fact on May 24, continuing until June 15, when the government of Soviet Armenia adopted a resolution formally requesting the annexation of Karabagh. The number of demonstrators ranged from 5,000 to 60,000 during my stay there and appears to have increased substantially since.

Speakers debated the meaning of statements, recounted events, analyzed options, offered alternative interpretations. More specifically, demonstrators demanded a statement from Moscow that Ligachev's position did not reflect the views of the government in Moscow or a change in its March position that the question of Karabagh would be reviewed in June. Instead of a rumored statement from Moscow, came a declaration from a member of Armenia's Council of Ministers, that the March 9 promise is not reneged.

The discussion that followed focused on the question whether a local minister's statement could be accepted as a denial of Ligachev. The students from the faculty of philology accepted the statement as

such. Those from the faculty of physics concluded otherwise and settled in for a long sit-in at the Opera Square. A core group turned the event into a hunger strike. As of June 10, one student was rumored to be close to death.

On May 29 the Karabagh Committee was informed by Stepanakert that the Azerbaijani government had ordered the end of workstoppages and threatened party leaders with dismissal from the party and managers with dismissal from their jobs if all Armenians were not back to work on May 30. Stepanakert had informed Yerevan that Stepanakert would instead begin a general strike, so should Yerevan. The Karabagh Committee decided against a general strike, but began planning for a long June, when the party convenes in Moscow.

The battle for influence over Moscow has reached new heights. By mid June daily demonstrations had already reached gigantic proportions again. The new first secretary, after appealing for the cooperation of the people and receiving none, had no choice but to legitimize his government by promising the demonstrators that the government of Armenia would formally make a request to the Soviet Union for the annexation of Karabagh. Whether the move had also the practical purpose of keeping the item on the party's agenda is not clear. The soviet government continues to insist that the constitutional process allows for changes in internal boundaries only if the two affected republics agree on the change and of Moscow approves it, thus giving a veto power to Azerbaijan and denying self-determination to the people of Mountainous Karabagh.

### Prospects

Speculations by the Western press and experts that Moscow will never agree because it would open up a can of worms seem to forget that

1. Gorbachev's economic and political reforms are ultimately more unsettling to the Soviet Union than border changes;
2. The pressures to review nationalities issues are as explosive--and dealing with them unavoidable--as those emanating from economic stagnation and political bankruptcy;
3. Nationalities policy is part of the basic structure of Soviet society, constitution, and government, unlike "ethnic politics" in the U.S. Just as economic reform is deemed impossible without political reform, it is possible that Gorbachev may see reform in nationalities policy as essential for political reform;
4. It is always possible to pair reforms in the nationalities area, such as return of Karabagh to Armenia and return of Crimean Tatars to Crimea, so as to minimize the appearance of favoring a particular religion or nationality, while settling long-standing grievances that refuse to disappear.

That the above considerations make a just solution possible or desirable in Moscow is not all that obvious. There are certainly other considerations which may mitigate against the concept or timing of an annexation of Karabagh to Armenia.

Under the circumstances the least that can be hoped for is more direct control over Karabagh from Moscow, with

cultural/educational policy being developed and implemented in conjunction with Soviet Armenia. While Azerbaijani nationalism may be satisfied by that republic's formal control over the region, Azerbaijan would be denied the means by which to change the ethnic composition of the area, define its character, or delay its economic development.

The suggestion is to break the problem into two parts: the denial of Azerbaijani jurisdiction over Mountainous Karabagh is not the same as its annexation to Armenia. Mountainous Karabagh can, in fact, become autonomous, whether by practical policies or by a change in its legal status from an Autonomous Region to an Autonomous Republic, the latter being less subject to quirks of personality or interpretation in Moscow and Baku. Such a solution would have two advantages: it will not inflame Azerbaijani nationalism and fanaticism, and it will bypass the constitutional requirement that both republics affected by a change of boundary approve of the change. Making Karabagh really autonomous does not, by all appearances, constitute a change of boundary.

It is also necessary to remember, though, that as soon as such a compromise is formalized, the Azerbaijani pressures on Armenian towns and villages not included in the Autonomous Region of Mountainous Karabagh will be increased and systematized so as to force Armenians out of the area and eliminate any chance that popular action can create further difficulties there. Mountainous Karabagh can, in fact, be turned into a real enclave with a siege mentality deeply affecting future development. The cost of the Karabagh Movement, regardless of the outcome for Mountainous Karabagh, may be a final determination by Azerbaijan to turkify the rest of Mountainous Karabagh not currently within the Autonomous Region.

The basic decision will be made in Moscow, and the actions of Armenians may have, at best, an influence on degree, nuance, and style, rather than substance of that decision. Given the precariousness of the situation, such an input may be important for the present and critical for the future.

The question of leadership in Armenia, in addition to that in Moscow, becomes then central. At this point no leadership can take its power and authority for granted, except for raw force. The "old order" and its representatives have been discredited, at least made irrelevant. Yet there is also no other mechanism but the party. The new leadership, the Karabagh Committee and its core supporters, represent a value as a collective body, not as individuals. Unless events take a turn for the worst or the Karabagh Committee declares itself an alternative party, the new secretary is the only person who can emerge with authority.

For this Suren Harutiunian need not guarantee the solution to all the problems. But he must side with the people with regard to the basic demands (Karabagh, pollution, corruption, democracy), appear sincere in his efforts to achieve results, ally itself with the progressive intelligentsia, and clean the government and the party of the anti-reformist elements. He must channel the new energies and hopes unleashed by Karabagh toward constructive undertakings. He must bring Armenia into the fold of perestroika while satisfying the problems people have defined in the areas of national viability and

quality of life.

Upon resumption of his duties Harutiunian faced his first test when instructed by Gorbachev to meet Vezirov in the village of Ghazakh on the Azerbaijani-Armenian border. It is not clear what has been discussed other than population exchanges: Sumgait Armenians would take over houses in Armenia now belonging to Turks living there who wish to move to Azerbaijan and Turkish citizens of Armenia would occupy Armenian houses in Sumgait.

in early June Harutiunian's also appeared at the Opera square and promised his support for the annexation of Karabagh and for a resolution soon after passed by the government of Armenia. These moves gave him a good start with the demonstrators and enabled him to tackle the less emotional and controversial aspects of a reformist program. Soviet Armenians, generally eager to see him succeed, are reluctant to hope for too much and be disappointed again as was the case when Demirjian had assumed power in 1974. "We will see what he does," is the most common position Soviet Armenians take when asked about the new first secretary.

#### Positions of Various Governments

For events which shook and shocked the world in their magnitude and potential impact on the course of events in Soviet history at a critical moment, very few governments have had anything to say either about Karabagh itself, or the events at Sumgait.

There is no doubt that Turkey has been working diligently behind the diplomatic scene to ensure that no boundary changes take place in Armenia's favor. Turkey has also been spreading rumors to an uninformed media that an international treaty between Turkey and the Soviet Union gives Turkey the right of veto on border changes in the Caucasus. This refers to the first treaty, the 1921 Treaty of Moscow, between the Turkey and Soviet Russia which included an article giving veto power to Turkey against any future transfer of Nakhichevan to Armenia. A historically Armenian province to the southwest of Soviet Armenia, Nakhichevan too was awarded to Azerbaijan in 1921 despite its Armenian majority and the fact that its is not contiguous to Azerbaijan. But even that article was eliminated when the Treaty of Kars in the same year replaced the Treaty of Moscow. At any rate, the article did not apply to Karabagh.

It is important to note, that if not officially, at least indirectly, Turkey continues to intimate Pan-Turanian designs, the first phase of which would be to link up with Azerbaijan. The annexation of Karabagh to Armenia would be a move in the opposite direction. Yerevantsis remember the story of Turkish troops being amassed at the border in 1943, awaiting the news of the fall of Leningrad, in order to proceed with the destruction of Armenia and linking up with Azerbaijan.

Turkey would also be nervous about Karabagh being annexed to Armenia because that would constitute a precedent of territorial transfer which would put more pressure on Turkey regarding Armenian claims on Western Armenian territories.

Iran's position on this issue remains unclear. There have been

unconfirmed rumors that Iran had objected to the Soviets regarding any potential transfer of Karabagh to Armenia. Some sources insisted that the contrary is true.

No formal statements have been issued, as far as we know, from Western governments. We know that the U.S. State Department, when asked about events in the Caucasus, suggested that "demonstrations in Yerevan are manifestations of the anti-Muslim environment in Moscow."

It is also necessary to add that to our knowledge no government issued a condemnation of the massacres of Sumgait. None may have been specifically solicited by Armenian organizations.

### Links to Other Factors

There are no currently published sources which investigate possible links, direct or indirect, between the Karabagh issue and other factors such as

1. The Iran-Iraq War
2. The Kurdish Movement
3. The pullout from Afghanistan
4. Muslim fundamentalism
5. Russian nationalism
6. The Palestinian uprising

or other issues. While some of these may seem farfetched, they must be investigated for any connections. At the least, it is necessary to realize that those making decisions with regard to Karabagh, and others having an input on those decisions, look for such links as a matter of routine and are certainly considering any impact proposed solutions may have on a variety of regional and international factors, including those listed here.

### Final Remarks

Armenians in the Soviet Union are continuing their struggle on behalf of Karabagh and Karabagh continues to be critical for Soviet Armenians and for the Soviet Union.

It has become obvious to us that Karabagh represents much more than the future of a territory: it is the symbol of the rejuvenation of Soviet Armenia. The struggle for that question is also the struggle for the opportunity of Armenia to realize its potential in the economic, political, and cultural spheres. Finally, Karabagh continues to represent one of the important arenas where different worldviews and solutions to problems are being tested.

For those reasons, it is necessary to appreciate the question in all its dimensions. Then it may be possible to understand how an aging poetess, a newspaper correspondent, or an unknown young man in blue jeans and shortsleeves and without a "spare pair of pants" can become leaders.



## THE QUESTION OF KARABAGH

### NOTES

#### The Problem

In February 1988 the question of the Autonomous Region of Mountainous Karabagh reentered Armenian consciousness and became news worthy of international attention because of massive demonstrations in its capital, Stepanakert, and in Yerevan, Soviet Armenia.

The people of Karabagh demanded that the Autonomous Region, part of Soviet Azerbaijan, be annexed to Soviet Armenia as the solution to a seventy year old historic injustice and decades long anti-Armenian policies of Azerbaijan. For the citizens of Soviet Armenia, Karabagh soon became the code word for the need for changes in many areas of Soviet Armenian life.

The momentous events in the Caucasus were echoed in supportive activities in the Armenian diaspora, bringing a new source of identity and liveliness to the communities.

The events also required documentation and analysis. The relevance of the Karabagh question to developments in the Soviet Union at a critical moment in its life invited intense interest in the issue within Western governments and media. At the same time, there was ample room for misinformation and manipulation, given the survival of cold war mentality and other vested interests.

#### The Diaspora Response

The diaspora communities responded with demonstrations in support of Soviet Armenians' demands, with willingness to bring an Armenian perspective on the events, and make their views known to representatives of the Soviet and, to a lesser extent, other governments in their respective countries.

In general organizations avoided anti-Soviet positions and the overwhelming events in Karabagh tended to act as a unifying force. The Armenian Assembly of America and the Armenian National Committee were active in providing basic data on the historical and demographic aspects of the issue. The Assembly's newsclipping service served quite well the need to follow the American press. The Assembly also made an effort to secure the publication of articles written by Armenian scholars. The Armenian National Committee was able to use its organizational support to mobilize support for the cause of Karabagh within and without the community. Among the newspapers, the Asbarez daily made a special and often fruitful effort to obtain first hand information from Yerevan. The Church too has been involved in providing support, particularly in the initial stages when the movement was far less clearly defined and the danger of manipulation and charges of political interference from the outside were greater. Many of the early demonstrations in the diaspora were sponsored by the Church.

Yet the dominant pattern of diaspora reaction--short term

outbursts of emotional energy--demonstrated a number of weaknesses in the response to a major national crisis that is Karabagh. The Karabagh movement has been developing for some time, and is tied to other issues in Armenia. Most importantly, unlike many issues in the diaspora which tend to be abstract and subjectively defined, the question of Karabagh has objective bases.

Due to these disparities and problems in diaspora structures, the question of Karabagh brought out the following weaknesses:

1. No organization or institution had a file ready for dissemination on the issue, despite the 6 month old campaign by Soviet Armenian intellectuals to raise the issue and indications that the issue may become a factor in contemporary politics.

2. There was no mechanism in the community that could act as a reliable and credible source of information for non-Armenian media. The few feeble attempts in that direction tended to discredit the sources because of the unproven, if not false, information presented.

3. There was no evidence anywhere in the community of a process of ongoing analysis of events, their causes, timing, character, relations to other events of regional or worldwide significance, or of likely developments in the future. There have not been analyses of the variety of factors that may influence such developments. If there were organizations that in fact proceeded along these lines, there was no external evidence. The Armenian press usually reproduced the Western press, adding much enthusiasm and emotion but little original political analysis. What went for analysis was essentially the assertion of the historical justice of the cause. With the pogroms of Sumgait, once more the drama of massacres managed to paralyze critical assessment. Once more Armenians decided to be right rather than do right.

4. While Armenians in the diaspora understood, consciously or unconsciously, the significance of the threat of depopulation of Karabagh--the diaspora itself being the result of such a process following a more brutal process beginning in 1915--diaspora organizations acted, rather reacted, more as if the events in the Caucasus were staged in order to provide diaspora Armenians a source of pride and identity. People were more disappointed that the New York Times or CBS may no longer find events newsworthy than the fact that Karabagh still remains under Azerbaijani jurisdiction, perhaps in a worse predicament than in January 1988.

5. No mechanisms have been developed to deal with the problem as an ongoing issue. No mechanisms have been developed, nor have existing ones been used, to influence US or, in general, Western policy toward this issue on a long term basis.

6. There were very few scholars/intellectuals who were adequately informed on the issue, and no mechanism existed to prepare spokesmen who could articulate a historically accurate and politically wise position to the media, once the media had an interest in looking at the question. Despite two decades of seminars and public relations experiences, few spokesmen knew how to deal with the media. Our experts were more concerned with the issue of proving historical knowledge rather than making a politically relevant point. Others became instant experts.

### 3. The Institute's Efforts

As a center for contemporary Armenian research and documentation, the Zoryan Institute undertook the publication of documents and supportive materials on the question of Karabagh. The Karabagh File. Facts and Documents, 1918-1988, a 200 page compendium covering events to March 10, 1988 appeared on March 21, 1988. A 215 page French translation, covering events to March 31, appeared in Paris on April 10. An Armenian translation is currently being edited for publication.

To date this volume remains the only substantial, organized and published source of information on the subject, and major community organizations were informed of the inception and progress of the project. Yet, for reasons which are not too obvious at this point, no organization came forth to ensure the distribution of the volume published by the Institute, to those individuals in government and media who may be in positions to interpret events and thus influence policy toward the Karabagh question. The Institute itself developed a temporary mechanism to achieve that, despite our long-standing reluctance to act as a center "representating" Armenians.

The Institute has been collecting documents as events evolve, including videotaped evidence. It also organized a panel discussion at the University of Toronto and a lecture at Concordia University in Montreal on the subject. The Institute provided research support to a number of speakers. I was interviewed on over 15 occasions by radio, television and print media in the U.S., Canada, France, and Soviet Armenia.

When The Karabagh File was published, the Institute staff was more than aware of some of its shortcomings, while also certain that the end of coverage of the region by the media does not signal the end of the problem, that newsworthiness is a different concept than political or historical significance. The Institute left open the possibility of publishing a revised version of the volume, as well as issuing a second volume on Karabagh, one that would include current documents and in depth analyses.

In addition, the Institute decided to

1. Organize a unit of researchers whose task it would be to monitor events through every possible source of information, update and expand the file already organized, and prepare preliminary reports on developments and special issues;
2. Develop an international "analysis unit" composed of individuals whose experience and training could help the Institute produce a body of analytical thought on the subject;
3. Wait until the director completes his trip to Yerevan and Moscow and presents a report to the staff, volunteers, and associates of the Institute, before making final determinations on future publications and related efforts.

### 4. A timely trip to Yerevan

On May 19, I left for Moscow (3 days) and Yerevan (8 days) as a member of the first academic delegation from Cambridge, Mass. This was part of the Cambridge-Yerevan Sister City agreement that had been signed by the two cities a year earlier. The visit's official character constituted a barrier against visa cancellation which has become common since February.

The delegation included 13 academics and one businessman, mostly of non-Armenian background. It was led by Deborah Welsh; I was asked by my colleagues in the delegation to act also as spokesman for the group.

In Moscow and Yerevan I met with a varied group of individuals, including government officials, senior and junior academics, members of the Karabagh Organizing Committee, advisors and consultants to the committee, demonstrating and passive citizens, Karabagh Armenians long living in Yerevan or newly arrived from the troubled area, eye-witnesses to events in Sumgait, journalists, and a Russian soldier stationed in Karabagh.

While in Yerevan, demonstrations erupted again and continued throughout the week. My observations and discussions form the substance of this preliminary report. The report also incorporates observations by other visitors to Yerevan, particularly Institute Associate Prof. Wahe Balekjian of the Department of European Law, University of Glasgow, the "Karabagh unit" of the Institute and the Institute staff.

Some of the points raised here were touched upon in The Karabagh File, or in interviews with the Western media.

I am gratified to report that the appearance of The Karabagh File has been greeted in Armenia and Karabagh as a major achievement and a critical form of support from the Diaspora. Soviet Armenians of various convictions approved unanimously the interpretation adopted by the volume and urged its further dissemination in governmental, media, and academic circles in the West as well as the Eastern countries. I was honored to have been interviewed in Yerevan on live television on the Institute's various projects, including those related to Karabagh. I also had an opportunity to discuss the issue with colleagues at various institutes of the Academy of Sciences and the Writers Union. I will soon forward a report of other activities in Yerevan which led to the conclusion of two important agreements of cooperation between the Academy of Sciences and the Zoryan Institute.

## 5. Recommendations

This report constitutes a preliminary attempt to bring a variety of concepts and issues together and to offer parameters for future discussions. The final report, most likely to appear in a second volume on Karabagh, will also reflect further analysis and additional input by our associates.

This may also be the most important issue Armenians will have to deal with at the present time.

As our staff had predicted, Armenians in the Soviet Union are continuing their struggle on behalf of Karabagh and Karabagh continues

to be critical for Soviet Armenians and for the Soviet Union.

It has become obvious to us that Karabagh represents much more than the future of a territory: it is the symbol of the rejuvenation of Soviet Armenia. The struggle for that question is also the struggle for the opportunity of Armenia to realize its potential in the economic, political, and cultural spheres.

In addition to an overview of the problem, this report points out weaknesses in the Diaspora's response to the crisis. The report indicates what the Institute has done so far and what, in our view, must be done in order to provide the necessary support to Armenians there.

At the present time, we need to

1. Organize on a permanent basis the information gathering unit already established at the Institute;
2. Realize the planned establishment of an ongoing analysis group which may produce the necessary interpretation of events and the dissemination strategy of articles and reports to media, governments and academic circles;
3. Train more scholars and spokesmen for public appearances and media interviews;
4. Track down the quiet propaganda undertaken by the governments of Turkey or other countries against the annexation of Karabagh to Armenia, or other adequate solutions, and prepare materials and strategy for helping Armenian organizations counteract to them;
5. Prepare reports on the position of various interested governments on the question of Karabagh and provide the scholarly basis for appropriate responses;
6. Publish occasional reports and papers to establish facts in specific areas;
7. Publish a revised version of The Karabagh File;
8. Publish a second volume of essays and analysis on the problem in a way that presents it in the right perspective;
9. Finalize the editing of the Armenian translation of the volume and publish it; and,
10. Develop the model for the organization of information, research and analysis for future crises in contemporary Armenian life.

With the help of the community, we will be able to realize these projects.

