



OFFICE OF THE NAGORNO KARABAKH REPUBLIC IN THE USA

Artsakh Newsletter

VOLUME 6, No. 2

February - May 2004

LIBERATION OF SHUSHI, VICTORY AND NKR ARMY DAY MARKED IN ARTSAKH

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NKR Defense Army units during the celebration

May 9 marks a triple holiday in Nagorno Karabakh – Liberation of Shushi, establishment of the Defense Army and the victory of the Allies in the Second World War. Public celebrations and sport competitions took place throughout Nagorno Karabakh, drawing large crowds of people.

On May 8, an official delegation from Armenia, headed by President Robert Kocharian, arrived in Stepanakert to take part in the festivities. The following morning, the Armenian delegation joined President Arkady Ghoukasian and other senior officials in a wreath laying ceremony at the monuments of the legendary Artsakh Liberation War hero Ashot “Bekor” Ghoulilian and Marshal of the Soviet Union Hovhannes

Baghramian. The group also visited the Memorial Complex to pay tribute to the soldiers killed during the Artsakh War and Second World War.

The dignitaries visited Shushi, stopping on the way at the monument to the first tank that led the way to Shushi’s liberation in 1992, and laid flowers at the monument to the late Prime Minister of Armenia and Artsakh Hero, Vazgen Sargsian.

That night, an open-air concert was held in Stepanakert with a special performance by the units of the Defense Army. Popular singers and performers from Armenia and Artsakh entertained a crowd of several thousand people at the central Revival Square in Stepanakert. The concert was followed by a spectacular fireworks show.

NAGORNO KARABAKH PEACE PROCESS

On April 28 Presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan, Robert Kocharian and Ilham Aliyev met for the second time in recent months in an attempt to revive negotiations on the Nagorno Karabakh conflict. Both presidents characterized the meeting that took place on the sidelines of the European Economic Forum in Warsaw, as ‘very constructive’ and agreed to continue the dialogue. The French, Russian and US Co-Chairmen of the Organization of Security and Cooperation of Europe’s (OSCE) Minsk Group joined the first part of the meeting, leaving the leaders to negotiate one-on-one for the remainder of the talks.

The newly appointed U.S. Co-Chairman of the OSCE Minsk Group Steven Mann, who replaced Rudolf Perina, also characterized the meetings as very useful. On his visit to Armenia in early May, Mann met Armenian and NKR leaders and voiced the U.S. government’s support for continuing the peace process within the framework of the OSCE Minsk Group, saying that the peaceful settlement of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict was in the national interests of the United States. He also said that he intended to visit Stepanakert during his next visit to the region.



Aliyev and Kocharian after their first peace talks in Geneva

In related news, on February 23 the Rapporteur of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) on Nagorno Karabakh Terry Davis visited Stepanakert for the first time with a fact-finding mission. He met Nagorno Karabakh President Arkady Ghoukasian, the National Assembly Chairman Oleg Yesayan and other senior government officials. On March 17 President Ghoukasian met with an OSCE delegation headed by the organization’s Chairman-in-Office, Bulgarian Foreign Affairs Minister Solomon Passy. The president underlined the necessity of NKR’s participation in the negotiation process and called on Passy to create conditions for direct talks between Nagorno Karabakh and Azerbaijan. For his part, Passy pointed out the necessity of re-starting negotiations among the involved parties and also noted that as the current Chairman of OSCE he will make every effort to achieve it.

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The ARTSAKH NEWSLETTER is a publication of the NKR Office in the USA, the official representation of the Nagorno Karabakh Republic in the United States

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NAGORNO KARABAKH'S GDP GREW 20% in 2003



Prime Minister Anoushavan Danielian

At a recent cabinet meeting NKR Prime Minister Anoushavan Danielian announced that the real gross domestic product (GDP) growth reached 20 percent, while the exports amounted to \$14 million. He said that the growth was due to the government's decision to attract investors with significant tax incentives, market liberalization and elimination of monopolies. Since its introduction in 2000, the policy has had a great impact on the level of foreign investments and on the state of economy as a whole. Businessmen from Armenia, Australia, Great Britain, Iran, Lebanon, Monaco, Russia, Switzerland, United States have already invested in

NK's economy, bringing in around \$40 million. The investments of Karabakh Telecom company (Lebanon), for example, have already reached \$10 million, while the tourism industry is being developed by Australian, Iranian and American investors. Foreign investments impact positively on the development of Karabakh's industry. As a result, in 2000, industrial growth amounted to 17 %, in 2001 it reached 22 %, in 2002 - 36 %, and in 2003 - 44 %. Danielian mentioned the Drmbon copper and gold mines as well as Martuni and Karmir Shuka wine distilleries as examples of successful businesses. Currently, about 18 business proposals, mainly in the energy sector, are awaiting investments. The Prime Minister hopes that in the near future NKR will be able to export energy. According to the National Statistics Service, a similar level of economic growth was registered in the first quarter of this year. In January-March 2004, the volume of the gross domestic product (GDP) made

6.1 billion drams (\$11m, \$1 = 550 drams) having grown by 23%. Nagorno Karabakh's industrial output reached 3.8 billion drams (\$6.9m) in the same period, having increased by almost 70% as compared with 2003. The volumes of realized production made 3.2 billion drams (\$5.8m), and the volume of production of consumer goods made 1.4 billion (\$2.5m) drams instead of 1 billion (\$1.8m) last year. The volume of agricultural production made 1.4 billion drams (\$2.5m) in the same period with an 8% increase over 2003. The average salary is 36,170 drams (\$66), having increased by 14% compared with the last year's average. In January-March 2004, the volume of foreign trade turnover made 14.7 billion drams (\$26.8m), having increased by 44% compared to the same period of last year.

KARABAKH HOSTS INTERNATIONAL CHESS TOURNAMENT

(BY EMIL SANAMYAN, ARMENIAN ASSEMBLY)



A scene from the chess tournament

A first major international sporting event concluded this week in Stepanakert amid largely unsuccessful efforts by Azerbaijan to undermine it. The Tigran Petrosian memorial tournament brought together some of the strongest chess players from Armenia, Latvia, Georgia, Iran, Poland, Russia and Switzerland. Petrosian, an Armenia native, was the world champion for much of the 1960s, before being defeated by Boris Spassky. Spassky, now a French national and retired from the game, was the guest of honor at the Stepanakert tournament.

Ilyumzhinov sent a letter welcoming the competition as contributing to the 'unique Armenian chess culture.' One of the world's strongest chess players, Garry Kasparov, welcomed the selection of Stepanakert as the site for the tournament as another confirmation that Karabakh has overcome the difficult post-war legacy. Kasparov, whose mother is an ethnic Armenian, was forced to flee anti-Armenian violence in his native Baku in 1990. The Azerbaijani government put pressure on chess federations of participating nationals to recall their players and judges, claiming that their participation was 'illegal.' Two players, a Georgian and Iranian were forced to withdraw towards the end of the tournament, which Spassky described as a 'real chess celebration.' In the end, Armenia's Karen Asriyan narrowly won the hard-fought series with six out of nine possible points. Bartłomiej Maciejka of Poland was a close second with 5.5 points and Gabriel Sargsian of Armenia was third with 5 points.

PRIME MINISTER DANIELIAN: RESTORATION OF SHUSHI IS OF PAN-ARMENIAN IMPORTANCE

Given Shushi's historical and cultural value, the restoration and repopulation of the town must become a priority for Armenians around the world. NKR Prime Minister Anoushavan Danielian proposed to organize a Pan-Armenian conference with the aim of turning Shushi into a cultural and tourist center of the South Caucasus – a status the town enjoyed until early 1900s.

Shushi was significantly damaged during the Karabakh war in 1991-1994. Taking advantage of its commanding position over Stepanakert, the capital of Nagorno Karabakh, after expelling its Armenian population, Azeris turned Shushi into a launching pad for artillery attacks. Karabakh Armenian forces reclaimed control over Shushi in May 1992.

Prime Minister Danielian said that if given priority, Shushi can be restored within 5 years.



Ghazanchetsots Surb Amenaprkich (St. Savior) Cathedral in Shushi