

CRISIS FOR HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES in National Academy of Sciences of Armenia

by Lisa Natcharian

To American Armenians, "Armenian Studies" often connotes memories of Armenian Language School, and perhaps articles on the Genocide. In fact, Armenian Studies includes a vast panorama of scholarship, covering in its sweep, indigenous Armenian architecture, archeology, art history, ethnography, numismatics, literature and literary criticism, paleography, lexicography, linguistics, ethno-musicology, and other social sciences. These are the key to understanding the Armenian heritage and preservation of a rare treasure for future generations of Armenians. The Armenian National Academy of Sciences encompassed all these fields in addition to stellar performance in the natural sciences. The institution is currently at a critical pass because of funding, and the state of Armenian Studies in Armenia has become fragile and precarious.

During the Soviet period, the Academy was supported adequately by the government. Since independence, the budget of the Academy has been cut drastically, and distinguished scholars have been reduced to penury, trying to maintain life for themselves and their families at incomes one-tenth of the minimum livable wage. Worse yet, they are often not paid when their salaries come due. It should be no surprise that reputable scholars have migrated elsewhere, and that the rate of emigration is accelerating. But the problems do not end there. In their transplanted locations, the imigris are having difficulty in getting their work supported or even published. There remains little or no incentive for scholarship. Worst of all, the serious graduate students who normally would support and ultimately replace the senior scientists, understandably lack interest in committing their lives to Armenian Studies.

Not all scholars have the alternative of emigrating. Those who remain in Armenia are forced to find menial work as janitors or farmhands. What a waste of trained capability! Let us consider one case out of hundreds:

Hagop Anasyan, one of the most renowned Armenologists of our times, a prolific and productive scholar during the Soviet period, was forced to emigrate, ending up in California. Upon his death, his major undertaking, a comprehensive and voluminous encyclopedic bibliography of ancient and medieval Armenian literature remained unfinished. Under normal academic circumstances, he would have had graduate students to continue the work and bring it to publication. Under the best of present circumstances, there is no more than a small chance that a similarly trained scholar will pick up the pieces to prevent loss of the arduous work done by Anasyan. Only a trained Armenologist can appreciate the extent of what is at stake!

The preservation of Armenian Studies is now falling to the Diaspora. A group of concerned American Armenians have organized the Armenian National Science and Education Fund (ANSEF) to provide short as well as long term financial funding to scholars in Armenia and to support the Armenian National Academy of Science. Present emphasis understandably is for providing short term funding for specific studies. Operat-

ing under the Fund for Armenian Relief (FAR), control of the funds will remain in the U. S., and will be distributed under the surveillance of a Board of Directors in response to evaluated proposals from Armenia deemed worthy of support.

Tax-deductible contributions to ANSEF may be made to FAR (Fund for Armenian Relief), 630 Second Avenue, New York, NY 10016. For additional information, call Mrs. Nouné Sukiasian at (212) 889-5150. Contributions in the form of securities can be accommodated.