

# ON CAMPUS IN KARABAKH

It's like any other university. There is an administration building, some classrooms, offices, faculty and students. It also has some things other universities don't have. A memorial wall, for example, of neatly arranged rows of framed photographs. Just like everywhere else in Karabakh, the memorials to the dead are in plain view, and the State University of Mountainous Karabakh is no exception. Walking into the university building, one is struck by the pictures of more than 100 once-enrolled students who will never graduate.

Every day, thousands who hope to complete their studies, walk through the doors of a rather large institutional building in Stepanakert. During this last year, for the first time since its establishment in October, 1992, the course of study at the State University of Mountainous Karabakh (SUMK) was not interrupted by war. The 18-month old ceasefire is holding and the students are coming back. A student body that was nearly entirely female for several years has now gone co-ed.

The SUMK is not a new institution in Karabakh. It used to be the Pedagogical Institute of the Mountainous Karabakh Autonomous Region, with Armenian, Azeri and Russian divisions. With the start of the Karabakh Movement in 1988, it became a division of the Kirovakan Institute in Armenia; in 1989, SUMK became a part of the Yerevan Agricultural Institute. After Karabakh's declaration of independence, together with the reconstruction and renovation of public buildings, the strengthening of state infrastructure and the rehabilitation of various institutions, the government of the war-weary enclave spurred on the establishment of an independent university which would incorporate the existing institute program and develop new academic departments, as well.

And it has.

Current rector Levon Yepiskoposian, 44, a biologist from Armenia, and former rector Arpat Avanesian, together instigated the establishment of departments of civil engineering, airport construction, telecommunications, electropower and technology,

military studies, milk production, wine production, natural resource utilization, food preservation and economics, among others.

This far-reaching academic program is jointly administered by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Armenia and the Ministry of Education of Mountainous Karabakh. Together, 44 departments, within seven faculties, are staffed by a faculty of 200—mostly Karabakh natives. A majority of the professors were trained in Armenia, some in Moscow—all have chosen to return after years of professional experience outside their homeland.

"The Azeris would not let us serve here," one explained.

At a time when it appeared Karabakh has many other things to do than to worry about a university, the government thought otherwise. When he appointed Yepiskoposian as rector last fall, Karabakh President Robert Kocharian affirmed his hope that the university would become a center for valuable human resources, by educating and training the skilled cadre of professionals who would serve the scientific,



public, political and social needs of Karabakh. Yepiskoposian acknowledges that this will happen only with better financing, and perhaps as early as next year, some students will have to begin to pay tuition, even as the government attempts to provide for part of the university's budget.

Indeed, as the prospects for peace appear more plausible and unlike their martyred classmates, this second generation of the "Karabakh movement" has a chance of contributing to the advancement of Karabakh society—not with guns, but with education.

PHOTOS AND TEXT BY HRATCH TCHILINGIRIAN

The university building, below, and the entryway with the memorial to martyred students, above.

