

NEW ENGLAND NEWS - NEW ENGLAND NEWS - NEW ENGLAND NEWS

Entrepreneurs Report on Socio-Economic Conditions in Armenia at NAASR

BELMONT, MA - Economic conditions in Armenia since the fall of the Soviet Union and Armenia's prospects for future economic development were discussed at length during a recent gathering of entrepreneurs from Armenia. The May 7 event, "Armenia In Transition: Socio-economic Conditions and Business Opportunities," was co-sponsored by the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research and the Cambridge-Yerevan Sister Cities Association (CYSCA) and took place at NAASR's Center and Headquarters here.

The panel discussion included seven members of the Hrasdan business delegation (Hrasdan is an industrial city northeast of Yerevan) who are being hosted by CYSCA as part of the Community Connections program cofunded by CYSCA and the United States Information Agency. The participants spent three weeks visiting and interning with counterparts in American businesses in the Greater Boston area and attending seminars and workshops organized by CYSCA. The discussion was moderated by Hrach Tchilingirian, a researcher in sociology at the London School of Economics. Tchilingirian also served as



ENTREPRENEURS FROM ARMENIA (left to right): Hasmik Zamkochyan, Olga Grigorian, Ishkhan Mkrtychyan, Rosa Martirosova, Sevak Baghdasaryan, Anna Hovannisyan, Tsolak Safaryan, and Vigen Gevorgyan.

ries" of the Armenian economy, as represented by the seven panel members, instead of the all too common litany of conflicts, disasters, and shortages. He then briefly outlined some of the obstacles which have interfered with the growth of the Armenian economy.

The debilitating combined effects of the 1988 earthquake, the Karabagh conflict and its attendant blockade of fuel and supplies by Azerbaijan and Turkey, and the ongoing instability in Georgia which has limited important trade routes brought production nearly to a halt by 1992.

However, the reopening of a major bridge to Iran in 1992 helped, as did the radical, highly

it is "a viable state with a viable economy." In order to do this, Armenia must demonstrate political stability, the ability to move capital freely, a willingness to combat corruption and, perhaps most of all, a clear sense that foreign investors can make money there. He believes that Kocharian is sincere in his commitment to these issues and capable of working towards solutions.

Each of the members of the panel then gave a brief description of his or her work and goals. Although all were optimistic about Armenia's future, they did not shy away from noting the problems that they and other Armenian entrepreneurs face

market economy, then, are new concepts to most Armenians; and it is hoped that through programs such as those organized by CYSCA these skills can be

learned and refined. Indeed, all of the panel members spoke of their positive learning experiences in America visiting businesses or factories relevant to their individual fields.

The panel and Mr. Tchilingirian fielded countless questions from an audience eager to learn of conditions in Armenia and what steps can be taken to improve them. The discussion continued over refreshments long after the formal program ended.

More information about NAASR or its programs for the furtherance of Armenian studies, research, and publication is available by calling (617) 489-1610 or writing to NAASR, 395 Concord Ave., Belmont, MA 02178.

NEW YORK/NEW JERSEY NEWS

Greg Keleshian Honored by Wal-Mart

YONKERS, NY - A \$500 Wal-Mart Foundation grant, which was recently presented to Kevin Cacace, executive director of the Yonkers Chamber of Commerce, by Rich Brosseau, manager of Wal Mart's local outlet, Sam's Club of Elmsford, recognized Greg Keleshian, president of Westchester Office World here.

Keleshian, who started repairing typewriters 20 years ago in a store on Tuckahoe Road, expanded his business to office fur-

an occasional interpreter for the panel.

Panel Members Part of Armenian Delegation

NAASR Board Chairman Manoog S. Young began the proceedings by noting the long and fruitful relationship between NAASR and CYSCA, dating back more than a decade to the latter organization's inception, and turned the podium over to CYSCA Vice President and Community Connections Project Director Jack Medzorian, who introduced the participants in the evening's panel.

The panel members were as follows: Sevak Baghdasaryan, a hotel/restaurant owner; Vigen Gevorgyan, who owns a packaging and shrink wrap plant; Olga Grigorian, a music school director; Anna Hovhannisyan, who with her husband is involved in the manufacture of electrical connectors and other products; Rosa Martirosova, a manufacturer of children's clothing; Ishkhan Mkrtchyan, a stone-cutter and fabricator; and Hasmik Zamkochyan, who works in semi-precious gem fabrication. Tsolak Safaryan, involved in television and video production, was unable to attend the event.

Success Stories a Welcome Change

Hratch Tchilingirian opened the program with an overview of conditions in Armenia since it gained independence. He pointed out what a pleasure it is to be hearing "some of the success sto-

ries," as the country's rapidly accelerated privatization plan pursued by former President Levon Der Bedrosian.

Although Armenia is not today in strong economic shape by most Western standards, Tchilingirian expressed the belief that its economy bottomed out several years ago and has since stabilized and begun to show encouraging signs of growth.

What Does Armenia Offer?

The big question is: "What does Armenia have to offer to the rest of the world?" Although the country is small and is not rich in natural resources, it has traditionally (i.e., in Soviet times) produced textiles, leather, chemicals, synthetic rubber, agricultural produce, mineral water, wine, and brandy; and, surprisingly, it was a substantial producer of gold. The fuel crisis and lack of modern machinery have hindered nearly all of these industries. Under Soviet rule, Armenia was a major producer of computer technology; and since this is an industry that does not demand vast raw materials, its revival is a potential boon to Armenia. Similarly, banking and financial services are promising areas of growth since they too rely less on materials than human skills.

Tchilingirian is hopeful that under new president Robert Kocharian Armenia can progress beyond being "held hostage" by the Karabagh crisis and demonstrate to the rest of the world that

Several on the panel noted the dire straits of the Armenian infrastructure, which, combined with fuel shortages, create enormous difficulties in transporting products.

Progress Being Made in Many Areas

Sevak Baghdasaryan observed that three years ago the situation was much worse; now, at least, there are increased job opportunities, reliable electricity 24 hours a day, and generally greater stability. Hasmik Zamkochyan pointed out that while in the past Armenian products — like most Soviet products — were not well regarded, today many can compete with American and European products. But, she added, there is still much to do; for example, there are still no laws that protect the rights of employees as there are in America.

Due to the multiple crises, many of Armenia's best and brightest left the country, contributing to the brain drain. Certainly, the seven panel members could have been among those who left, but they decided to remain and work for the future of Armenia.

Problematic Legacy of Soviet Rule

Perhaps as relevant as any tangible problem facing business owners in Armenia is the fact that Armenia was for 70 years run under the Soviet system of socialism, which, of course, stifled entrepreneurial spirit. Developing and maintaining a

niture and accessories in his own building at 25 Central Park Ave. Wal-Mart Stores Inc. established the Sam Walton Business Leader Award in 1995 to recognize local business people who best exemplify the principles of Sam Walton, its late founder.

Office Hours By Appointment

KAZANJIAN HEALTH CENTER

GREGORY A. KAZANJIAN, D.C.

477 Bergen Boulevard
Ridgefield, NJ 07657

Phone: (201) 945-0555

Fax: (201) 945-6476

Pager: (201) 231-6291

Chiropractic • Medical • Rehab • DX Ultrasound

Clinical Electrolysis

Permanent Hair Removal for Women & Men

FREE Consultations
Day, Evening or Weekend
Hours by Appointment Only



Board Certified Electrologist
Recommended by Physicians
Hospital Quality Sterilization

When both your health and appearance are a priority call:

Lisa H. Vartabedian, CPE at 201-703-5212

Private Professional Office Conveniently Located in Fair Lawn, NJ

Matt Melkonian
Financial Consultant

SMITH BARNEY

516-932-4864 / 800-645-3248

A Member of The Citicorp Group

SMITH BARNEY INC.
100 Jericho Quadrangle, Suite 120
Jericho, NY 11753
FAX 516-931-7893