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LETTER FROM M. Vahan PAPAZIAN
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA

TO

Mme Catherine LALUMIERE
SECRETARY GENERAL TO THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

TRANSLATION

MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA

Mrs Catherine LALUMIERE
Secretary General of the Council
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Dear Madam,

Allow me to take this opportunity of addressing to you my best wishes for the New Year and wishing the Council of Europe success and perseverance in its endeavours to promote peace, democracy and human rights.

This past year has not seen the substantial development which we would have liked of relations between Armenia and the Council of Europe.

Our participation in the Partial Agreement on major hazards has certainly met one of our expectations in the field of scientific co-operation and has afforded us great satisfaction.

But there has been no progress on the granting of special guest status. Nor has Armenia achieved inclusion in the Council of Europe's programmes of assistance to and co-operation with new democracies.

Lastly, I am bound to express concern at the draft recommendation presented by the Political Affairs Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly on Council of Europe enlargement, which appears to exclude all prospect of Armenian membership of the Council of Europe.

That is a very retrograde stance compared with the conclusions on the same subject which the Bureau of the Assembly approved in April 1992.

The conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, about which the Council of Europe is legitimately worried, has been much invoked to justify the Council's present reservations about the further development of relations between us.

We believe, however, that the Committee of Ministers has not given sufficient weight to a number of considerations.

1. First, it is important to have a clearer understanding of Armenia's position in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and to take into account its constructive attitude in the CSCE peace talks.

The Nagorno-Karabagh conflict is not a territorial conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan; international stances, be they the United Nations resolutions, the proposals of the nine members of the CSCE Minsk Group or statements of the European Union, have shed light on the conflict in this respect.

In none of those texts was there any mention of Armenian military involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, or of the existence of any territorial dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

On the contrary, successive references, in those official texts, to local forces and to Nagorno-Karabakh as a party to the conflict have made it clear that the Nagorno-Karabakh authorities were the necessary interlocutors of the Azerbaijan authorities.

Armenia for its part has always advocated dialogue between Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh in order to put an end to the escalation of violence and bring about a negotiated political settlement of the conflict.

It has been tireless in its efforts within the CSCE-brokered peace negotiations.

Agreeing to the plans which the nine countries in the CSCE Minsk Group put forward for implementing the United Nations resolutions, Armenia brought all its weight to bear bring about Nagorno-Karabakh acceptance of the proposals by the authorities of Nagorno-Karabakh, and Nagorno-Karabakh has in fact agreed to the latest plan, which among other things, provides for withdrawal of Nagorno-Karabakh forces from recently occupied Azerbaijan territories, recognises Nagorno-Karabakh as a party to the conflict, and lays down a timetable for cessation of the hostilities and opening the Minsk Conference.

In winning the agreement of the Nagorno-Karabakh authorities, Armenia did all in its power to make it possible for peace to be restored in the region.

Azerbaijan's rejection of a plan which had the approval of international institutions has delivered a serious blow to the peace process and shown that the Baku authorities are still bent on a military solution to the conflict.

2. In addition, I believe it is important to take into consideration internal developments in Armenia.

Here, I would particularly stress Armenia's internal stability.

Armenia is now the only republic in the Caucasus whose democratic institutions have operated normally and uninterruptedly since it gained independence in September 1991.

Human rights and basic freedoms (including freedom of expression, freedom of conscience, and freedom of assembly) are guaranteed and there is a multiparty system which is a major feature of Armenian political life.

The adoption of the reform of the judicial system and the current debate on the new constitution testify to my government's determination to lay the foundations of a State based on the Rule of Law.

Despite the serious economic crisis, which is mainly due to the embargo on energy supply to Armenia, democracy has been preserved in Armenia.

Also despite the crisis, a start has been made on economic and agrarian reform and on the privatisation of small and medium-sized businesses as part of the transition towards a market economy.

In the light of these various considerations we believe the Committee of Ministers should reassess the situation.

For that purpose we would welcome a visit to Armenia by a delegation from the Council of Europe Secretariat.

It would be a pity for Armenia to be unfairly penalised and denied any longer the possibilities of closer co-operation with the Council of Europe.

Finally, allow me to say again how keen we are to forge closer links with the Council of Europe and to join, eventually, the European family which the Council of Europe unites in a community of values and culture.

Please receive the assurance of my highest consideration.

Vahan PAPAZIAN