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Armenian National Committee of America

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RM

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May 9, 1994

George Stephanopoulos
Special Assistant to the President
Office of the President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

263897

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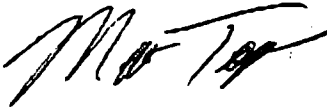
Dear George:

The last time we had spoken, you had offered to see if Leon Panetta could attend our June 9, 1995 Armenian Independence Day celebration in Los Angeles. The program is approaching and we still do not have an answer. We need to know if he can attend so that we can advertise for the event.

As you know, the President's April 23rd statement has caused widespread disappointment throughout our community. The presence of the Chief of Staff at this events would generate sorely need good will for the Administration.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. The details of the program are attached. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Warm regards,



Mourad Topalian
Chairman

Armenian Independence Day Celebration

Who: Armenian National Committee of America, Western Region
What: Celebration of Armenian Independence Day
Where: Pasadena Ritz Carleton Hotel
When: June 9, 1995
7:00 pm, reception
8:00 pm, dinner and program

The celebration of Armenian Independence Day represents the determination of the Armenian people to live in freedom. The establishment and accomplishments of the first Armenian Republic (1918 to 1920), in the face of tremendous challenges, is a continued source of pride for Armenian Americans.

Expected attendees include: House Democratic Whip David Bonior, Richard Tannenbaum (author of Justice Denied), Mayors of Los Angeles, Glendale, Pasadena, Burbank, Orange County, and Montebello. Also Sens. Feinstein and Boxer and Reps. from southern California. California Constitutional officers and State Assemblymen and Senators.

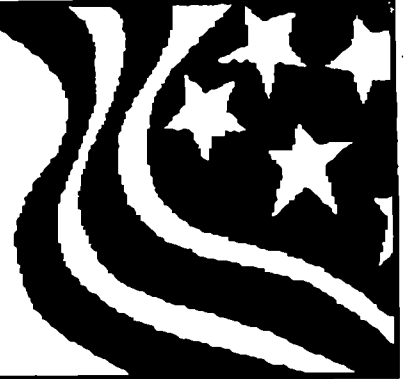
500 to 700 Armenian American community leaders are expected to attend.

Armenian National Committee of America

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To: George Stephanopoulos

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Number of pages (including cover):

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Armenian National Committee of America

888 17th Street, N.W., Suite 904, Washington, DC 20006 (202) 775-1918

April 28, 1995

**Mr. George Stephanopoulos
Special Assistant to the President**

Office of the President

4 WORLD NEWS

The autl

Rights have been trampled and cracks
beginning to show in Armenia's facade
stability, writes James Meek in Yerevan

VOSKAN Manigian has not seen his computer since he logged off for the night three days before the new year and drove home through the cold, quiet streets of the Armenian capital.

Minutes later he was racing back to the offices of Yerkir, the country's biggest daily newspaper, having just seen President Levon Ter-Petrossian's televised denunciation of alleged terrorist cells within the opposition party which backs the publication.

It was too late: the three-storey building near Yerevan's opera house was sealed off by police and troops. The newspaper was, and remains, closed.

They asked everyone to leave the building, to leave all their papers, all the material for that night's edition, which

was almost ready," Manigian. "It is out that everything confiscated — all papers, accounts, archives."

Armenia, united in war with the government of Azerbaijan, still a Western well-organised ways pitted island of stability in a violent Caucasus neighbouring Georgia. Azerbaijan, still racked by Soviet war, still authoritarianism.

Now the cracks in democratic ruling in Doubting over the legislative parliamentary election following the closure of opposition publications month suspension of

Authoritarian route to democracy

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political party they had ties with, the ARF-Dashnaktsutun, known as the Dashnaks. Relays of the American-funded Radio Liberty and Radio Free Europe by local medium wave transmitters were also halted. In all, 800 journalists and media workers found themselves out on the street. The government is unrepentant, saying it had to act when

it did, and forthcoming public trials of 19 people accused of murder and drug-trafficking would reveal all. "That party was leading the republic to instability ... the people would have lost faith in the government and the rest of the opposition," said a presidential aide, Jirair Liberidian, a United States citizen and a Dashnak member until 1994. "The Dashnaks would have presented themselves as the only party disciplined and powerful enough to restore law and order. This president will never allow Armenia to become a Weber republic. "Better to trample on the rights of the few temporarily, so that the republic has stability and continuity to have a change of power in a legitimate manner. I'm perfectly willing to see Armenia a little less democratic now — if that's what this means — as long as it's democratic for the next 50 years." President Ter-Petrosian's television address on December 29 followed the murder 16 days earlier of the former mayor of

Yerevan, Hrant Babikian Galstian, a businessman-politician and former associate of the president who had subsequently fallen foul of the authorities. In his speech, President Ter-Petrosian announced the discovery of a secret terrorist organisation, DRO Special Services, operating under cover of the Dashnaks and functioning in Armenia since 1988. Although he did not accuse them directly of Galstian's murder, the president said the DRO's Armenia battalion had carried out at least three assassinations, all neatly recorded in code in an archive, seized by police, of 600 computer diskettes and dozens of handwritten files. Murder was recorded as "printing" or "publishing". The president said the DRO had raised money through heroin trafficking, five kilograms of the drug had been seized, along with arms, ammunition, explosives and forged passports. The following day, a presidential decree suspended the ARF-Dashnaktsutun's activities. On January 12, Armenia's

supreme court legalised the move as a six-month suspension — meaning the ban will be lifted a week after the elections. Even critics of the move accept that the concrete nature of President Ter-Petrosian's allegations implies some hard evidence against the suspects now held on remand. But why, apart from political expediency, with the president himself acknowledging that most Dashnaks were unaware of the clandestine group, should he outlaw the whole party and shut down so many publications? Polls suggest the ruling Armenian National Movement, led by Mr Ter-Petrosian, would have lost out at the elections to both the Dashnaks and the communists. Under the terms of the ban, the Dashnaks will be able to stand only as non-party individuals. "These elections are unfair right from the start," said Sekran Baghdasarian, a Dashnak MP. "It's not a level playing field. My opponents have a newspaper, they have finance,

they have a structure allowed to operate, they can use television. I don't have these opportunities because the activity of my party has been stopped." Although the president's decree was based on the DRO allegations, the supreme court decision was on different grounds: that the Dashnaks' ruling Athens-based "bureau" broke Armenian law by having foreign citizens as members. Mr Baghdasarian accepted that a majority of bureau members were not Armenian citizens — out of 18, one is Iranian, one Canadian, one French, three Lebanese and one Greek. But he said the court and the justice ministry had refused to explain how he should legally cover the Armenian party's ties with the bureau. The US has expressed concern over the suppression of the opposition. But foreign governments are also conscious that, the less the voice of the century-old nationalist Dashnak movement is heard in Armenia, the easier it will be for the Ter-Petrosian administra-

tion to compromise with baidan over Nagorno-Karabakh. Even the diaspora is anxious lest Dashnak protests harm the formidable lobbying power of Armenians abroad. Despite many similarities between the Yerevan-Karabakh and the Belgrade-Bosnian relationship, the US congress has been persuaded to treat the former as victims and the latter as aggressors. Yet concern remains about a compromised election and a general swing towards authoritarianism. Another opposition paper, Azg, backed by another party with its roots in the diaspora, was fire-bombed twice last year and two of its journalists were beaten up. "Authoritarianism? Against a background of closing these papers, banning the party, the fact that entrepreneurial activity can't develop freely in Armenia because they immediately sort you out if you tie yourself to the media structures now in power — you could say it was true," said Hakop Asatryan, an Azg reporter.

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