

A L E R T

May 21, 2006 Election of an Armenian Representative in the Parliament of Cyprus will affect also the destiny of the Melkonian Educational Institute and the future of the Western Armenian Culture along with the defence of Human Rights

Who's Who & Win-Win Strategies in the MEI Crisis Responsibilities of Cyprus Citizens of Armenian Descent and C r u c i a l Q u e s t i o n s

We, the members of the Pro Edvcatio International Independents Worldwide bring to your attention the following facts and questions concerning the crisis involving the Melkonian Educational Institute (MEI).

The Central Board of Directors (CBD) of the Armenian general Benevolent Union (AGBU) is moving to dismantle MEI – a very important and strategically placed cultural base serving the Armenian Diaspora. AGBU does not own MEI. Therefore, AGBU is not empowered to close MEI with the ultimate aim of liquidating its assets. As for the legality of its CBD, it is questionable since 1990s. Yet its legitimacy is already reduced and limited to a very small circle of CBD members, few friends and relatives. How irony it is that AGBU, who had spearheaded Armenian education in the Diaspora by opening Armenian schools everywhere in order to keep alive the Western Armenian culture, now its CBD wishes to dismantle MEI, one of the best disseminators of the said culture.

While the spiritual tie to Armenia is strong, nevertheless, the Armenian Communities Worldwide, as citizens of different countries, have acquired a cultural heritage and life that is separate from the laws and regulations of the Republic of Armenia. These Armenian communities are integrated in the life of their adopted countries of which they are residents and/or citizens. The Republic of Armenia, whose culture is in parallel, could help to promote the Armenian Culture of the Diaspora just using its stately levers. This, according to the conveniences that the Armenians abroad do know better than others and above all they are politically only responsible of their fate. Therefore the officials of Armenia have always to remember this balance, instead of undermining it by claiming a jurisdictional supremacy and by colluding with a CBD to strike a blow to the dissemination of the Western Armenian Education & Culture. The silence of the government officials of the Republic of Armenia in this matter can only mean agreement with that CBD and their plan of dismantling MEI. The prominent leaders of the Armenian Church (in Etchmiadzin, Antelias and Jerusalem), the political bodies in Diaspora and even some people, especially Melkonian Alumni representatives in Cyprus, who until recently were loudly defending MEI's existence, have all joined in this silent chorus. What did happen ? Do they all hope to benefit from the dismantling of MEI since the power of the AGBU's present CBD purse appears to trump everything ?

In these circumstances the defence of the cultural entities falls upon individuals and upon groups with no conflict of interest. In fact this is a duty for everyone who holds culture to be an essential part of the system of human values – similar to the ecosystem of our Planet Earth. This is why non-Armenians defenders of human rights joined from everywhere in the defence MEI and its possessions. However, at the present time the defence of the MEI is incumbent on the Armenians of Cyprus, where MEI is based. Consequently, the Armenians of Cyprus should mobilise their cultural, political and social forces for the May 21 election in support of candidates to the legislature who favour the continued operation of MEI on the integrity of its own campus. Interested no-citizens, Armenian and non-Armenian alike, can help in field operation's logistics.

WHO'S – WHO and WHO IS DOING WHAT FOR MEI

There is an official seat for an Armenian representative in the Parliament of the Republic of Cyprus. The present holder of the position is a candidate for office in the upcoming elections of May 21. He was elected last October in an interim election to fill a vacancy. During his tenure he visited many places and spoke with many people. In an interview published in Azg, a daily newspaper in Yerevan, this Member of the Parliament, stated that "The MEI has to be reopened and part of MEI's real estate not actually used might be sold". Superficially this looks like a Win-Win scenario, in that MEI opens its doors. However it also leaves the door open for the evisceration of MEI by funding its operations through liquidating its assets. This is certainly a Lose scenario for the future of MEI. Who is selling whose property ? By which international public tender ? Where is the transparency of this operation ? Did the Honourable Representative study the provisions of the Melkonian Will, where it is clear that the trustees of the Will, present or future, are only entrusted with the management of the MEI not for the sale of its Assets ? Simply stated, MEI belongs to the Armenian Diaspora. The current trustee, AGBU and its CBD, have been poor stewards of the MEI. Lacking a vision for its continued success, they have run it down. Is the present or future Member of the Parliament, as well as any other person in and out of Cyprus aware that CBD have even leased the MEI campus to an academic institution of foreign origin ? In what capacity ?

The Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul, the original trustee of Melkonian Will, has filed suit in Cyprus Courts to prevent the disposal of the MEI assets. The judge has issued a stop order to AGBU pending the adjudication of the case. The Patriarchate is represented in the suit by the Melkonian Alumni Association of Cyprus and three Cypriot lawyers. The cost of the suit is underwritten mostly by the Melkonian Alumni & Friends Organisation registered in California, U.S.A. Gordon Anderson, the former resident representative of AGBU-CBD in Cyprus had violated the above mentioned order of the Court. At first the representatives of the Istanbul Patriarchate had objected to this violation, then they have compromised and allowed Mr Anderson to continue his infringement of the rights of MEI. Could somebody explain this state of affairs ? No doubt a pivotal role was played in that strange compromise by a relative-in-law (khnamy) of Mr Berdj Setrakian (President of CBD), who was rushed from Toronto to Nicosia via Paris as a mediator to formulate this so-called Win-Win policy. According to its authors, the policy would allow everyone in litigation to save face (a clear Win for CBD), avoid humiliation (another Win for CBD). Too bad that the policy will continue dismembering MEI and compromise its future integrity – unfortunately for MEI and the Western Armenian Culture (a clear Lose). After second decision of the Court on December 20th, 2005 in favour of the MEI, the lawyers of CBD presented their objections to the judge's

decision. The objection amounted to nothing more, than a delaying tactic to bring about a settlement out of Court. With regard to this, the scheduled visit of the Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II, to Istanbul in mid June of 2006 is pregnant with meaning, given his unconditional friendship to that CBD members and to the Chairwoman of the General Assembly of AGBU. Will it be a surprise if yet another so called Win-Win outcome is borne from the meeting of the H.H. Karekin II and H.B. Mesrob II ? This, despite the latter's statement in a December 16th, 2005 communiqué that he is "legally responsible to respect and to make others respect the Melkonian Will".

W A R N I N G

Cypriot Armenians will cast their votes to elect their representative to the Parliament of Cyprus on May 21, 2006 at the same time of the general election of Cyprus. The Armenian Representative will have the right and the responsibility of the representing the Armenian Communal interests in Cyprus. Although MEI is based in Cyprus, nevertheless it belongs to and serves Western Armenian communities worldwide, therefore the approaches of the Armenian Representative as well as the initiatives of the electors extends beyond the borders of Cyprus. Consequently, the Cypriot Armenians have an awesome responsibility to all Armenians in Diaspora regarding the survival of MEI when they chose their representative. They should closely examine each candidate's position in the MEI Crisis. Any candidate, affiliated with AGBU, who has not severed his ties from CBD and has not taken steps to ascertain the limits of its authority regarding MEI, is in conflict of interest and is ignorant of the facts. Such a candidate should be viewed with extreme suspicion as to his ultimate position in the Crisis and should be rejected by all Cypriot Armenians who believe in the MEI and its mission for the dissemination and worldwide propagation of Western Armenian Culture and values.

On Behalf of Pro Edvcatio*
Spokesman Dr Vartan Ozinian

NB: the names, qualifications and addresses of Pro Edvcatio members are attached to our letters submitted to the President of Republic of Cyprus, to the Members of the Government and the Parliament; as well as to the officials of the European Union.

* * The **P R O E D V C A T I O** is a Worldwide International **F O R V M** which deals with educational matters – taking into consideration social, economic and political dimensions of the cultural dynamics – together with geopolitical realities and related strategies for the development of human resources, respectful to legitimacy and legal conditions. The **P R O E D V C A T I O 's G R T A S S E R E** is a p a n e l – constituted by ad hoc Armenians of Diaspora and non-Armenians – which deals with Armenian educational issues.