

The Meeting between Mr. B. Setrakian and Dr. V. Atamyan

Re: the issue of MEI

May 1, 2006

Note: On March 15, 2006 another version of this writing was submitted to an Armenian newspaper in U.S.A. Apparently its publication was not considered worthy of the said paper. This is the reason of this late e-mail.

As a preface to my writing, I foremost like to emphasize my assumption that it will be read by those, who are well cognizant of the issue, so that it will be assessed in some context. However, I will not be surprised, if some over zealous advocates of AGBU, would still rush to their pens and write about all the good deeds that AGBU has done in the past and still doing etc. I will only consider them as deviations from the subject. I am also aware of all these deeds and appreciate them fully. However, I also consider it as the duty of any person to speak up, to blow the whistle if you like, when certain mistakes are being made and try his/her best to call for more diligence. After all, the AGBU does not have a parliamentary setup that provides an official opposition to question their actions, as a result of which, that duty falls on the shoulders of those who do not blindly follow their actions.

Presently the Central Board of Directors of The Armenian General Benevolent Union (The CBD), being devoid of any convincing reasons to justify its decision of closing The Melkonian Educational Institute in Nicosia, Cyprus (The MEI Issue), is in an impasse of its own making: Still one pending court case; The most reputable and the only boarding high school having been closed; A situation which does not allow The CBD to consummate a purchase and sale transaction of the property which was its original intention .

The unexpected events that led to the meeting between Mr. B. Setrakian (The president of The AGBU) and Dr. V. Atamyan (The recently elected representative of The Cypriot Armenians in the Government of Cyprus), was a God sent opportunity to Mr. Setrakian. As reported in The Armenian Reporter Int'l (Feb. 4, 06), Dr. Atamyan came to New York and met with Mr. Setrakian. During the meeting, Dr. Atamyan, most probably with good intentions, suggested to Mr. Setrakian to form a committee to deal with The MEI Issue. Surprisingly, unlike his previously uncompromising behavior on other but related occasions, Mr. Setrakian agreed with it.

This committee would include Representatives from the Cypriot Government; Armenian General Benevolent Union; MEI Alumni and Armenian Cypriot Community. The function of this committee would be twofold:

- a) Suggest specific programs which would best benefit the Armenian Community of Cyprus
- b) Continue honoring the legacy of The Melkonian Brothers.

When I read this news, I was just baffled. I could imagine the enormous joy that Dr. Atamyan might have just caused to Mr. Setrakian. This was the golden opportunity for The CBD to gain time, until it decided how and when it would be the most opportune time to execute its so far unknown or undecided plans, on the fate of the property or perhaps the reopening of the MEI. The mere announcement of the formation of the committee, would at least give the impression that, The CBD was humble enough to still sit down with interested parties, in order to reconcile and reconsider its decision on The MEI Issue. Undoubtedly this would boost The CBD's somewhat tarnished image because of The MEI Issue. In addition, its timing would make it all the more valuable, because of the currently ongoing centenary celebrations, of The AGBU. However even if the formation of the committee is remotely possible, one should not be carried away with hollow hopes and expectations that it can achieve any radical results for the following partial list of reasons:

- a) The MEI Issue can only be resolved by the reopening of the school as it was before and nothing less.
- b) Pursuing any beneficial program for the benefit of the Cypriot Armenians is a different issue. Dr. Atamyan may have all the rights and obligations to pursue it as their representative. However he does not have any mandate to speak for any other interested party and try to resolve The MEI Issue partially on selected items.
- c) Mr. Setrakian most probably will try to seek Dr. Atamyan's assistance eventually to be able to the highest authority of the Cypriot Government. I suspect that during such a meeting Mr. Setrakian will

hammer the benefits of the closing the MEI, rather than the merits of its reopening. Otherwise, I for one would all Wholeheartedly be in favor of such a meeting.

- d) The legacy of the Melkonian Brothers can and should only be continued at its birth place: Nicosia Cyprus.
- e) The committee should, among other parties, necessarily include the Patriarchate of Turkey.
- f) Considering only the participation of the alumni brings to mind the fact that the alumni are spread all over the world. Selecting their representatives will need months of work that will cause unnecessary delays for resolving The MEI Issue.
- g) Because of the number of the participants and the existence of some ideological differences, achieving an agreement is less than likely. This failure will itself create more problems than solutions.

From the forgoing analysis it is quite evident that the idea of the forming of the committee can not and should not be entertained. At a time when The MEI Issue is in the hands of a court (to my best knowledge), it becomes all the more important that the idea of forming the committee has to be forgone.

In conclusion, I wish most humbly to say to Mr. Setrakian: The CBD, in making up its decision to close down the MEI, probably had nothing else in mind than all the best intentions for the good of the MEI, its benefactors and the Armenian nation as a whole. However, it is not a fact that good intentions always achieve the right results. Please make the responsible and honorable decision with the members of the CBD and announce the reopening of the MEI. We all are human beings and human beings do make mistakes. It is only those humans whose acceptance of their mistakes and changing of their course that make them super humans. Let the CBD devote all its energy, time and resources on other worthy issues that it has embraced to take care of.

Antreas Kalayjian MSc.Eng. - 15 Stornoway Crescent - Thornhill, Ontario - Canada L3T 3X8

I am a graduate of Melkonian, class of 1955. Like most of the Melkoniantsis, I am very deeply concerned about the closing of the MEI.