

From: Hratch Der Stepanian <stepover@adelphia.net>
To: Armenian News Network <groong@usc.edu>
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Subject: ANKARA: Lawsuit Over Armenian Properties Worth \$150 Million

Lawsuit over Armenian Properties worth \$150 Million

By Sefa Kaplan, Ýstanbul
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The Armenian Democratic Liberal Party (ADLP) was formed by Turkish Armenians in 1908, has been active overseas since 1915, and has been a participant in Armenia's political life since 1991. The party has now launched an ugly attack against Patriarch Mesrob Mutafian. A statement issued by the party's central committee in Boston and published in its official press organ Azg directly targets the Armenians of Turkey and their patriarch. The statement alleges that Mutafian was elected patriarch with the support of the Turkish Republic, that he has not made any efforts to defend the rights of Armenians, and that he has not raised his voice against injustices. It adds that Diaspora Armenians have been monitoring Mutafian's actions with anxiety for a long time, that no one in the [Turkish Armenian] community has dared to criticize this "young patriarch," and that Mutafian is not on good terms with [Turkish] Armenian intellectuals.

Unbridled Ambition

Charging that the Patriarch of Turkey has been working to bring other Armenian churches under his influence to satisfy "his unbridled imperial ambitions," the statement of the Boston Central Committee says:

"Patriarch Mutafian refuses to answer our criticisms and sees the views of the ADLP as a bankrupt ideology. The ADLP's ideology that Mutafian says is bankrupt is based on the democratic system and stands for the recognition of the Armenian genocide and the independence of the historic homeland of the Armenians (Eastern Anatolia). Only a community that lives under the fearsome rule of the Turkish army could declare these ideals to be bankrupt."

They Cannot Belittle Us

In the meantime an article penned by Murat Bebiroglu and published on the HyeTert Website <<http://www.hyetert.com/anasyfa.asp>> says that the reason for these allegations is the international legal action Mutafian has taken to recover the funds and real estate that was bequeathed to the Patriarchate by Garabed Melkonian of Kayseri in 1921. The Bebiroglu article says: "The Armenians of Turkey are strong enough to defend the Patriarch. We cannot allow anyone to belittle us."

The Melkonian Gift

In 1921 Garabed Melkonian of Kayseri bequeathed his wealth of millions of dollars and real estate holdings to the Armenian Patriarchate of Turkey for the construction of an orphanage and school in his name. Because the conditions were more attractive [in Cyprus] the school and orphanage were built in Nicosia under the name Melkonian in 1924. However because of the uncertainty of the future of the Patriarchate, in 1926 all authority over

the Melkonian school and its endowment was turned over to the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU), which is an auxiliary organization of the ADLP, on condition that the AGBU comply with the terms of the Melkonian trust and that it pay a symbolic donation to the Patriarchate each year.

Last year the AGBU decided to close the school without giving warning to anyone and to sell its properties for \$60 million. On the surface, the goal of this action was to open a college in Armenia. Melkonian alumni and Armenians in all corners of the world oppose this decision vehemently. It has now been determined that the real estate that was said to be worth \$60 million is actually valued at \$150 million. In contrast the planned college in Armenia would cost only \$3 million to \$5 million. Lawyers researching the background of the dispute eventually knocked on the doors of the Armenian Patriarchate of Turkey which appears as the legal beneficiary in the trust deed. Mutafian had the issue examined by his own lawyers and filed a lawsuit against the AGBU. After the lawsuit was filed in Paris [as published], criticisms against Mutafian turned into an ugly attack.