

Remarks by The Honorable Ashot Ghulian
Speaker of the Nagorno Karabakh Republic Parliament
December 3, 2013 | Washington, DC

Honorable Members of Congress,
Your Excellency Ambassador Markarian,
Dear Compatriots,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

A few days ago, in Los Angeles, the biggest city of the West Coast with the largest Armenian community, the 16th All Armenian Telethon has taken place that has yet again united the Armenians worldwide towards the idea of realization of programs in Artsakh and Armenia.

Last year the American Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Louisiana and Maine State legislatures passed resolutions recognizing the Nagorno Karabakh Republic and urging the federal government to support the right of the people of Artsakh to self-determination and its democratic sovereignty.

And today we gathered here in the U.S. Congress to commemorate one of the most memorable events in the Nagorno Karabakh Republic's recent history - the day of Referendum on State Independence and the Constitution Day.

It's an honor for me to participate in a US congressional event dedicated to the Nagorno Karabakh Republic. I would like to extend my gratitude to the organizers – members the Congressional Armenian Caucus and all of those who supported this initiative: the Armenian Embassy, Artsakh Office, the Armenian National Committee of America and the Armenian Assembly of America.

December 10, 2013 will mark the 22nd anniversary of the day when my compatriots, living through difficult situation due to the collapse of the Soviet Union, have participated in a nationwide referendum, voting firmly in favor of independence of the already proclaimed Nagorno Karabakh Republic.

Three years prior to that, in February 1988, Armenians in Artsakh, for the first time in Soviet reality, have raised the flag of freedom and stood for their rights.

In fact, a quarter of century has passed since those events unfolded in Stepanakert, spreading later to Yerevan and all major centers of the Armenian Diaspora.

It was a very well-thought out decision. An empire, which during its formation has arbitrarily placed Artsakh under newly-formed Soviet Azerbaijan, was already disappearing from the political map.

By the end of the past century, the history has offered us a unique opportunity to restore justice. And we used the opportunity, acting in a full compliance with law.

I will not overload you by recalling in entire course of events that followed. I would just emphasize the fact that in response to the natural and lawful expression of will by the people of Artsakh, Azerbaijan unleashed a full-scale war, indiscriminately targeting the peaceful population.

The consequences of the war are well-known. It is the current de-facto reality on the ground. The last two decades have been the years of elimination of the consequences of Azeri aggression, restoration of economic and social infrastructure, development of democratic institutions and civil society, years of social, spiritual and cultural revival.

When talking about the elimination of the consequences of the war, we cannot but mention the assistance provided to the people of Artsakh by the American nation from 1998 onwards. Every year, the American Congress allocates funds that are directed at eliminating the devastating effects of the Azeri aggression. That assistance, which became possible due to the efforts of our congressional friends, allows us to solve many problems and urgent matters. However, there is a lot to be done yet. The people of Nagorno Karabakh feel the American assistance and are deeply grateful for it.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On December 10, 2006 the main law of the Nagorno Karabakh Republic – the Constitution – was adopted at a nationwide referendum, summarizing in a very special way the road we had passed. It is yet another manifestation of my people's will to lead a free and sovereign life – this time in the form of constitutional arrangements which has made the existence of the independent statehood of the Nagorno Karabakh Republic irreversible.

The coincidence of those two memorable dates in Artsakh's recent history is not accidental, since they are the two important final destinations of the road we have embarked on. The December 10, 1991 Referendum on Artsakh's independence showed the collective will of the people to independently decide its own destiny, fifteen years later on the same day ,now in 2006 a constitutional referendum came to reaffirm the determination of that firm will.

The motive behind all of these is the same: the rehabilitation and protection of human rights of the people of Artsakh, as human beings and as a people, in line with the spirit and the language of international law.

We did not invent new constitutional principles and mechanisms, of course. We tried to use the existing world experience to the best, including also the U.S. experience, of course, considering the historical receptiveness of our nation to universal democratic values.

We can state without exaggeration that our country faces unique challenges. Under constant danger of being subjected to a renewed aggression by Azerbaijan, we have ,nonetheless, managed to change the public administration system, by not only making it completely civil, but also democratic thus overcoming the current hardships stemming from the unrecognized status and the imposed blockade.

Since 1988 Artsakh Armenians reject the sovereignty of one nation over the other. We are not against the Azerbaijani people's right to independent statehood, but to the aspirations of the state of Azerbaijan to dominate over the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic and its people.

Two weeks ago, on November 19, a meeting of the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan took place in Vienna. The Nagorno Karabakh Republic has welcomed the fact of resumption of direct dialogue between the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan after a two-year break. We highly appreciate the efforts of the U.S. government and, in particular, that of Secretary of State, John Kerry, in steering up the Karabakh settlement process.

We have always said and continue to state on the need to restore the negotiation format set forth by the OSCE Council of Ministers that was further confirmed by the in 1994 Budapest Summit. That is to say, that Nagorno Karabakh should return to the negotiation table as a party to the conflict, which is being prevented by Azerbaijan.

The delicacy of the situation lies in the fact that the subject matter of the negotiations does not concern the relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia, but the future legal and political arrangements between Azerbaijan and Nagorno Karabakh.

No abstract solution was ever found or can be found in the future. It is not the theoretical elaborations that lead to mutual understanding and final consensus, but the practical steps taken in this direction. The Minsk Group, and above all, the United States of America, the Russian Federation and the Republic of France, as co-chairs, have pointed out on numerous occasions that there is no alternative to the peaceful settlement of the conflict. And while this is fully acceptable to us, the same cannot be said about Azerbaijan, whose leadership periodically, and recently more frequently, voices threats of settling the conflict by force.

The last 25 years have taught us a lot. They have also taught us not to allow any encroachment against our people and our country's security. We have always said this and we are ready to reaffirm that Artsakh's security cannot be a subject to bargaining. Today, more than 25 years later, we are ready to defend our independence and freedom, but we are well aware that the final resolution of the Karabakh conflict is possible only through the full formal, civilized, constructive negotiations.

And this is not only the opinion of people living in Artsakh, but the collective view and desire of all Armenians living in different parts of the world. And we have to the rightly assess the value of symbolisms that the Diaspora and Artsakh have become for each other. One of the most significant outcomes of the Karabakh movement should be considered the new incentive that it gave to Diaspora, and Diaspora in turn got dedicated to the protection and improvement of the Motherland. It is this formula of unity that will ensure our future victories.

May, 2014, marks the 20th anniversary of the cease-fire agreement. For two decades, peace in the Azerbaijani-Karabakh conflict zone has been preserved exclusively due to the balance of forces. I think this is the best evidence of the fact that the Nagorno Karabakh Republic has an important role in maintaining peace in the South Caucasus. Therefore, all those who are interested in maintaining peace and stability in the South Caucasus cannot ignore this reality.

Dear friends,

We welcome the fact that the presidents of the OSCE Minsk Group co-chair countries demonstrate a consensus position on the Karabakh issue and coordinate their actions. At the same time, we expect understanding and active mediation efforts aimed at ceasing the destructive policy of Azerbaijan.

Dear friends,

I want to conclude my speech by paying tribute to the memory of one of the greatest sons of the American nation, John F. Kennedy, the 50th anniversary of whose tragic death was marked only a few days ago. Slightly paraphrasing the inaugural speech of the 35th president of the United States, I would like to call all our opponents to take full responsibility for a continued search for peace for the sake of our peoples, before the destructive potential of the accumulated military arsenal leads us to another disaster.

Thank you. Peace to you all.