THE ARMENIAN CONNECTION

HOW A SECRET CAUCUS OF MPs AND NGOs, SINCE 2012, CREATED A NETWORK WITHIN THE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE TO HIDE VIOLATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL LAW

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THE ‘ARMENIAN CONNECTION’ NETWORK
**Introduction**

For several years, a network of non-governmental organizations and its connections within the Council of Europe has led a merciless propaganda campaign against Azerbaijan to benefit Armenia.

While no one assumes that Azerbaijan is a perfect and ideal State, it is clear that these unilateral and untruthful attacks are the tool of a hidden political agenda: to defend Armenia’s illegal occupation of Nagorny-Karabakh and to place the control of all Council of Europe activities in central and eastern Europe in the hands of a small clique that, despite appearances, hides its private interests behind the purview of the “defense of human rights.”

In this first report, we will try to unveil the extent of these activities.

1. **The Ariev case—a telling scandal**

On January 24, 2017, Ukrainian MP Volodymyr Ariev published a text on his Facebook “wall” explaining some MPs’ use, in recent years, of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe for private endeavours at the expense of truth.

Simultaneously, Volodymyr Ariev made public an operation conducted by 3 Armenian Council of Europe MPs: Samuel Farmanyan, Naira Karapetyan and Naira Zohrabyan. They had allegedly tried to bribe Ariev for him to modify his report about freedom of press and respect for international law. As it was publicly revealed, the Armenian MPs’ corruption attempt was meant to remove from Ariev’s report any mention of the Armenian occupation of the Azeri Nagorno-Karabakh territory.¹ Ariev said the 3 MPs tried to bribe him with an old bottle of Armenian cognac, 40 years of age and worth an estimated 1,400 euros.

If this corruption attempt with a cognac bottle can amuse some, it does not end here. Ariev’s refusal to submit to the Armenian demand was followed by a violent pressure and slander campaign. MPs from the Armenian delegation, including members from Ariev’s political party, led the charge throughout the winter 2017 parliamentary session. Even more

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¹ As a reminder, this occupation was condemned by the UN in the Security Council resolutions 822 (30.04.93), 853 (29.07.93), 874 (31.09.93) and 884 (12.11.93), over the course of the 62nd General Assembly session (March
disgracefully, the Ukrainian’s probity and independence were challenged by the Armenian group’s claim that he might be the descendent of an Azeri. One can only surmise these MPs reaction would be were their integrity to be questioned according to their nationality!

The Armenian MPs’ attempt to affect Volodymyr Ariev’s work through seduction followed by a destabilization campaign, both publicly reported by the Ukrainian MP, reveals the lack of hesitation that certain members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe have to act wrongfully and cause the discussions held by the Council to lose credibility. Indeed, practices such as corruption and libel campaigns can only hinder the serenity and impartiality of debates organized by the Parliamentary Assembly, a pattern that can be dangerous for the Council of Europe if no action is taken to end it.

This is even more preoccupying that the Ariev case is only the tip of the iceberg of an even more preoccupying systemic problem.

The report that we are publishing today is the first part of an investigation conducted for several months and which provides the proof of an organized network of various MPs on behest of Armenia and in violation of international law. The network, supported by various non-governmental organizations, conducts operations of influence peddling.

This political situation is unacceptable and interfering with the Council of Europe. It needs to be dealt with appropriately before the law as well as by Mr. Thorbjorn Jagland, the Council of Europe’s Secretary General, and Mr. Pedro Agramunt, the Council of Europe’s Parliamentary Assembly’s President.

We urge the reader to acknowledge the following facts. They provide irrefutable proof of the operations above-mentioned and which need to be examined by justice to establish their deserving penal repercussions.

2. **2012—The beginning**

The operations conducted within the Council of Europe began in 2012 when a new personality arrived at the institution in a high level position. We will call him “Mr. X” and will reserve the right to reveal his name when publishing the second part of this report.

Starting from this moment, certain individuals became close and were quickly called on to play a role in political manoeuvres aimed at discrediting the Republic of Azerbaijan. The lack of grounds on which the defamation was based creates a need to investigate these involved individuals’ aims.

Chrisophe Strässer joined the Council of Europe’s Parliamentary Assembly in 2006 as a member of the German socialist party but in 2012, he met Gerald Knaus, the mastermind of the discrete, if not clandestine, operation we are interested in.
Gerald Knaus is an Austrian economist who founded the “European Stability Foundation” (ESI) in Berlin in 1999. The ESI is one of the multiple think-tanks associated with the “Georges Soros Foundation.”

Knaus is a well-known personality of the NGO network funded by the American billionaire who is suspected of trying to destabilize certain eastern European countries, the influence sphere of the former USSR.

This opens the possibility for the ESI and other NGOs to introduce themselves as civil society contributors that allegedly defend just causes but instead act as lobby groups on behest of Georges Soros, insuring their control of the Council of Europe and advocating Armenian Republic interests.

Why have so many Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly reports, written statements and adopted motions in the recent years been against Russian, Turkish and Azeri interests? Why have these condemnations reflected Georges Soros and Armenia’s agendas, which are notably similar, so perfectly?

According to “ONG Monitor”, an organization specialized in the analysis of transparency and good governance of non-profits, the Soros Foundation has an endowment of 4,000 million euros and contributes to the financing of 50 European NGOs including “Human Rights Watch”, “Amnesty International”, “Human Rights House Foundation”, “Open Dialog”, “European Stability Initiative”, and “Helsinki Committees on Human Rights.”

It is evident that there are transparency failures within each of these organizations that are supported by the Soros Foundation.

As evidence of this statement, and against all standards that should be held for an NGO that worries about the ethical code of non-profit organizations, the ESI has not provided any public information regarding its financial sources and expenses, a guilty discretion policy that the Human Rights House Foundation has been enforcing for 6 years.

3. When NGOs serve financial interests

After the fall of the Soviet Union, there was an escalation of occurrences of major political events in the former Soviet sphere of influence. The ex-Soviets states’ access to independence, which did not always have the intended consequences, was at the root of violent upheavals.

Recall the events that took place in Georgia in 2003 and the intense tension that still plagues the Southern Caucasus.

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3 See: [http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/partners_20090720_0.pdf](http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/partners_20090720_0.pdf)
It is also noteworthy to point out the 2014 Ukrainian “revolution” which is still contested and led to the annexation of Crimea by Russia and ongoing tensions in the Donbass region.

Regardless of opinions held on the Georgian “Rose Revolution” or the Ukrainian “Orange Revolution,” attention must be paid to the role played by the Soros Foundation’s NGO and Think Tank network during those events.

Specifically, it is important to note the leak of compromising documents that show that the United States, under President Obama’s administration, allegedly used the Ukrainian popular revolution movement to organize a coup to the benefit of their opposition to Russia.

Other document leaks showed that Georges Soros personally plays a very important role in Ukrainian politics and that he used in this operation privileged links with President Obama’s higher cabinets as well as with European national and transnational institutions.4

The transcript of an enlightening phone conversation between Victoria Nuland, former Under-Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, and Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pratt, clearly substantiated the theory of a Washington-led coup in Ukraine.5

With regard to Georges Soros, documents released by the French website “Mediapart” validated Soros’ acquired importance in the highest Ukrainian spheres of power, with individuals he strongly advised on decisions regarding questions of economy, finance, and defence, even recommending the training of Ukrainian armed forces in Romania, a NATO member, by US instructors.6

This “private diplomacy” conducted by Georges Soros is forbidden by the Logan Law, a federal American law that forbids any US citizen from negotiating with a foreign government or trying to influence foreign policy. Still, Georges Soros seems to believe he is above the law and is planning on staying there.

Multiple NGOs played an important role in the Ukrainian crisis. Many of them, including those financially supported by the Soros Foundation, participated in the Ukrainian popular upheaval, perhaps thinking that Washington was preparing its support to a coup which would advance its political and financial interests.

Georges Soros’ putting pressure on Ukraine is not recent. For a dozen years, his NGO and Think Tank network has focused its libel on Azerbaijan, attempting to make one of the most stable and secular Caucasus countries on the border of Iran seem to be an autocratic and corrupt dictatorship.

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Azerbaijan’s *Human Development Index* (HDI) has been consistently increasing since 2010, proving the country’s good governance, despite being confronted to a massive influx of interior refugees due to the Republic of Armenia’s occupation of part of its territory.

**NGOs are brandishing waves of political arrests without specifying that 105 of them were of jihadists from Syria and Iraq.** This shows an obvious case of disinformation that aims to *discredit Azeri authorities despite them having taken perfectly legal and justified measures to fight a problem within their borders, contrary to those taken by European democracies to deal with the same issues.*

Still, these defamatory attacks are in pursuit of a rational objective. To destabilize a State whose political, social, and economic success is a model of development in order to attempt to establish in its place a regime that is beholden to special interests which eye with interest the hydrocarbon reserves of the country.

Within this context, we can better understand the motivation of individuals who discretely associate themselves with the Republic of Armenia. They don’t find in it inherent democratic or socio-economic qualities. Instead, they practice the adage “My enemy’s enemy is my friend.”

Since 2012, they have tried to encourage the Council of Europe to adopt this motto.

Soros does not only meddle in the backstage of European power. He is still active in the United States where he uses his philanthropic network to conduct an intense pro-Armenian diplomacy. To this effect, he made the “*Open Society Institute’s*” (OSI) Yerevan branch a key element to his Armenian diplomacy. Simultaneously, Soros relied on the powerful American Armenian lobby to reinforce his strategy to “play with Armenia in order to destabilize Azerbaijan.”

*George Setrakian, the President if the “Armenian General Benevolent Union” listens carefully to Georges Soros over the course of a dinner in New York.*
4. **The storming of the Council of Europe**

On January 25, 2001, the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia both became members of the Council of Europe, leaving hope that a common adhesion to European ideals would incentivize a constructive dialogue between both states. Unfortunately, on the contrary, Azerbaijan became the target of unjustified and continuous attacks which have escalated since 2012 and the arrival of previously-mentioned “Mr.X”.

As a reminder, **Gerald Knaus**, the President of the “**European Stability Initiative**” (ESI) and a member of the board of the Soros Foundation, rapidly instigated hostilities towards Azerbaijan by publicizing the country as a corrupted corruptor, without however backing up these accusations with proofs.

Gerald Knaus has made a living out of attacking the Republic of Azerbaijan’s reputation by using all existing resources to try and destabilized this democracy in the Caucasus.

In 2012, when “Mr. X” arrived and started developing an anti-Azerbaijan network inside the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, **Knaus went above and**
beyond by publishing a slanderous and violent report through the ESI entitled “Caviar Diplomacy.”

The publication of this report had as only goal to create climate of suspicion based on slander to form a network of MPs that would engage in a political war against Azerbaijan.

To act efficiently within the Council of Europe, the man from the Georges Soros Foundation needed to infiltrate it by placing faithful partners within the Parliamentary Assembly. While it was obvious he would have no difficulty in gaining the unconditional support of Armenian MPs, he needed the help and loyalty of MPs from other countries and preferably representatives from European Union member-states.

This was successfully achieved when Christophe Strässer and MPs that we will describe below adhered to the anti-Azeri project.

Strässer, a personal friend of Knaus’, is well known for his legitimate and respectable affection toward the Republic of Armenia. He was the only representative from the German government to participate in the commemoration of the Armenian genocide in Erevan on April 24, 2015. While this engagement is perfectly respectable, it also ensured that Strässer would be a perfect candidate to ensure Armenian interests, including the illegal occupation of the Nagorno-Karabakh, a region recognized by the UN as being legally under Azeri territoriality.

Until February 2016, Strässer was the German Federal Government’s Commissioner for Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid. He resigned from this position when an investigation was launched into him by the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU) political party. This did not prevent him from aspiring to become the Commissioner for Human Rights within the Council of Europe. This ambition seems fickle for a politician who has forgotten that an Azeri national territory is still illegally occupied by Armenia and that one million Azeri men, women and children are still refugees in their own country following the Armenian aggression.

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7 A second chapter of this supposed investigation was published in 2016 to further the attack against the Republic of Azerbaijan.
Strasser and Knaus, an unwavering friendship

As the following documents will demonstrate, Knaus and Straser united to attack the Republic of Azerbaijan by organizing a conference to support alleged political prisoners. The former acted as a service to the interests of Georges Soros and the latter blinded by a friendship that is, despite being respectable, a source of injustice.

The European Stability Initiative and Christoph Strasser, Federal Commissioner for Human Rights of the German government, have the pleasure to invite you to a conference that will take place in Berlin in the first week of June entitled: "Towards a Europe without political prisoners"

Palais in der Kulturbrauerei
Schönhauser Allee 36
10435 Berlin
2 June 2014, 16:00-18:30

Supported by the Open Society Foundations.

We are inviting senior European policy makers, parliamentarians, and human rights activists to discuss what different institutions – of Europe, the European Union and international human rights organisations – must do to realise the vision of a Europe without prisoners in the near future.
To be clear, as previously mentioned, Strässer’s friendship for the Republic of Armenia is respectable and no one is claiming that there are no problems in Azerbaijan, a young and stabilizing State. What is not acceptable is his unilateral engagement and his untruthful repeated attacks against the Republic of Azerbaijan which only serve to conceal the fact that Armenia is occupying Azeri territory, breaking international law. What is wrongful is the political desire to hide the truth, and more importantly, to contribute to the destabilization of Azerbaijan to cover up this truth.

It is noteworthy to add that Strässer was quick to collaborate with the Italian journalist Milena Gabanelli to attack the Republic of Azerbaijan.
In November 2016, Gabanelli, a renown Italian journalist known for her leftist tendency and supported by the Italian political left that controls the Italian public television channel RAI 3, aired a scandalous and deceptive show that attacked Council of Europe MPs with the only intent of defending Armenian interests.

Milena Gabanelli is without a doubt a successful journalist and her investigative TV-show on RAI 3 receives high ratings.

As previously mentioned, she is also a politically engaged woman with forward and respectable leftist convictions.

This left-leaning woman is not only a successful TV-anchor, she is also a sensible manager, as is depicted by the fact that Georges Soros is a benefactor of her production through the intermediary of his foundation.
Compellingly as well, in 2013, Milena Gabanelli was a member of the jury for the Italian literary contest “Tiziano Terziani” which Georges Soros won for his book *Financial Turmoil in Europe and in the United States*. This was a justified win given the American billionaire’s societal engagements!

It is important to add that Gabanelli is also an “old friend” of Armenia. She was a press correspondent on the Armenian side of the Nagorno-Karabakh war and since then has always provided her support to Erevan, without worrying about the fate of Azeri refugees or the illegality of the Armenian occupation, or the debatable situation of democracy in Armenia.

Her unilateral engagement commitment have made her a star of Armenian media.
Returning to Strässer, he not only provided his services to Gabanelli, he also appeared in a TV report alongside Samuel Farmanyanyan, one of the Armenian MPs that tried to corrupt the Ukrainian Volodymyr Ariev. This closeness is quite suspicious and revealing of the state of Christophe Strässer's impartiality.
As a matter of fact, Christopher Strässer is subscribed to anti-Azeri and anti-Turkish events organized by his friend, the manager of the Soros Foundation, Gérald Knaus.

Here accompanied by American billionaire Bill Bowder who is also invested in NGOs

What is to be said about the obvious closeness between Strässer and Knaus; the complicity between an MP and a leader of the Soros Foundation, knowing that Georges Soros' pro-Armenian advocacy is evident?

The truth is, MP Strässer is not capable of the impartiality that his position requires of him.

This lack of independence is detrimental to the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly's activity. Unjustified attacks against the Republic of Azerbaijan are escalating and the occupation of the Nagorno-Karabakh, while undoubtedly condemned by the UNSC, is ignored there, as is the tragedy experienced by the million Azeri refugees.

Another case has to be analysed, that of the Dutch national Pieter Omtzigt, a PPE MP who joined the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly in 2010.
During the 2 first years of his term, Omtzigt expressed his concern regarding the political situation in Armenia multiple times.

Suddenly, in 2012, Omtzigt completely backtracked and started targeting Azerbaijan. He suddenly discovered a “passion” for the Human Rights conditions in Azerbaijan. This change was not justified in any way by a change in politics in Azerbaijan.

So what happened? Pieter Omtzigt bears the responsibility to explain himself but let us recall the campaign for the 2012 legislative elections in the Netherlands. Omtzigt had been eliminated by his political party that had given him the 39th place on the electoral list, assuring him a loss. Pieter Omtzigt still led an impressive campaign and was surprisingly elected with a 36.750 vote majority. What is certain is that his sudden change in positions and closeness with the Republic of Azerbaijan dates back to these elections.

Pieter Omtzigt during a protest organized by the Armenian community of the Netherlands
Once again at another Armenian event in the Netherlands

In a meeting with Armenian lobby representatives in the Netherlands
Omtzigt in the offices of the Armenian National Council of the Netherlands

Omtzigt at the 100th memorial of the Armenian genocide
Omtzigt at a ceremony for the edification of a memorial dedicated to the Armenian genocide

Let us not forget that he also contributed to events organized by the Armenian lobby defending the illegal occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh:

**Press Release**

**Petition to Dutch Parliament on Nagorno-Karabakh**

The Hague, 5 April 2016 – Today, the Joint Armenian Organisations in the Netherlands submitted a petition on Nagorno-Karabakh to the Chairwoman of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs of the Parliament, Mrs. A.M.C. Eijsink. Several MPs attended this meeting: Mr. Pieter Omtzigt of the CDA faction, Mr. Raymond de Roon of the PVV faction, Mr. Sjoerd

**European Friends of Armenia Participates in Hearing about Nagorno-Karabakh in Dutch Parliament**

European Friends of Armenia was part of a delegation which participated in a Dutch parliament hearing about Nagorno-Karabakh and the recent increase of violence along the Armenia-Azerbaijan border. The hearing was organized by the Dutch parliamentarian Pieter Omtzigt.
Without making any assumptions as to why Pieter Omtzigt abruptly decided to specialize in attacks against Azerbaijan, we must lament the fact that a Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly member would stay mute about the occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh. What is even more worrisome is that he is becoming an objective accomplice of Erevan’s politics that justifies the occupation of the Azeri territory despite condemnations by the UNSC.

In addition, as is shown in the documents below, Omtzigt continued to unjustifyably and unjustly attack the Republic of Azerbaijan from his seat at the Council of Europe Parliament, undermining the serenity of his colleagues’ work.

In addition Pieter Omtzigt made no effort to hide his relation to Gerald Knaus’ ESI and collaborated with him in the second chapter of his report “Caviar
Diplomacy.” He was assisted in this last scandalous endeavour against Azerbaijan’s honour and integrity by Frank Schwabe.

Omtzigt alongside Mrs. Stiegelmayer, ESI’s #2

Schwabe joined the Council of Europe’s Parliamentary Assembly in 2011. Since, he has aligned his political views with his colleague Christoph Strässer, most likely in an attempt to find support climbing the ladder of the SPD, the German socialists. This strategy made him a perfect recruit for an anti-Azeri network.
Strässer and Schwabe are, within the SPD, the main actors of a campaign promoting the recognition of the 1915 Armenian genocide. This political engagement
wouldn’t be intolerable if it weren’t for the politicians’ use of a century old tragedy to deny the Nagorno-Karabakh occupation. Attention must be kept on this political balancing of on one side, the memorialization of a tragedy, and on the other, the overlooking of a current violation of international law, and even worse, the ignorance of the inalienable right of one million Azeri refugees to return home.

Schwabe on the German Parliament floor to defend the recognition of the Armenian genocide. When will we see him demand the Azeri sovereignty on the Nagorno-Karabakh region?

Most likely never! Schwabe does not hide his deliberate hostility towards Azerbaijan. This hostility lacks any rationale but instead favours shocking images instead of reasoning as is demonstrated in this post Schwabe released on Twitter during the 2015 elections. It lacks content and makes-do attacking without any explanation.
Two other MPs, French this time, play an important role in the network we are looking at.

These MPs are René Rouquet, the President of the French-Armenian-friendship socialist parliamentary group, and the centrist François Rochebloine, who presides the “France-Karabakh” Circle. Rochebloine has made a habit of organizing “solidarity” trips to the Nagorno-Karabakh region occupied by Armenia.

The 2 men, who met Bako Sahakian and Ashot Ghoulyan, the “Presidents” of the auto-proclaimed Nagorno-Karabakh Republic and its Parliament respectively, have multiplied their efforts to have the French authorities and population recognize this political deception. They are pursuing this goal despite international law and resolutions adopted by the UNSC. We must question the motivation of these 2 men engaged in a political battle despite, once again, international law.

Below a selection of explicit documents:
Rochebloine and Rouquet with Bako Sahakyan, “President” of the auto-proclaimed Nagorno-Karabakh Republic

Rochebloine and Rouquet with President Sargsyan during a visit to the Republic to Romania
5. **Conclusion**

In essence, the creation of a partnership between various MPs belonging to one or multiple parliamentary groups could be a good thing. It is important and interesting for movements to assemble to defend principles, the advancement of democracy or the development of good governance, crossing the rifts of political divide.

The emergence of convergences around common ideals within the Council of Europe’s Parliamentary Assembly is an undeniable sign of the vitality of debates held there.
Similarly, it is normal and healthy for civil society, represented by NGOs, to participate in political debates and to associate with MPs from time to time.

**Regardless, the facts that we have just denounced are far from any desire to defend great and noble ideals.**

**Since 2012, we have witnessed the creation of a shady network within the Council of Europe that endlessly conspires against the Republic of Azerbaijan.**

The network's tactic has been to multiply defamatory attacks and slander, **risking (or willing) to destabilize Azerbaijan with the end goal of dissimulating the illegal occupation of the Nagorno-Karabakh region** by the Republic of Armenia.

These dangerous politics that associate MPs and larges NGOs must immediately stop. How can the Council of Europe accept the existence within it of a network that colludes to conceal the illegality of an occupation condemned by the UN Security Council?

**What is taking place now goes beyond Azerbaijan and Armenia's interests. It is the credibility and foundation of the Council of Europe that are threatened by this pro-Armenian network's activity.**

The second part of our investigation will expose new evidence concerning this network's activity and will expose the need to block its endeavours.