
Vartan Oskanian's Farewell Speech To MFA Staff

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I asked that you all gather here today so I can say thank you - to all of you: To the diplomats who have worked with me for these 10 years, and longer. To the technical staff who have made our work here and abroad possible. To our ambassadors who have worked hard, against great odds, to maximally promote our interests.

We can all be proud of our work, and we can all feel satisfied that we are performing a civic duty. We are all citizens of Armenia - you by birth, I by choice.

For me, the decision to pack up and return to Armenia after independence was a default decision, a non-decision, an obvious choice. Having come, I'm not now preparing to go.

I've been here since almost the beginning, working with you, to create something out of nothing, to build a new institution and a new kind of institution. I have served as Foreign Minister since the beginning of President Kocharian's term. I had served as Deputy Minister and First Deputy Minister under President Ter Petrossian. In other words, I have served not a man, but a people and a country. Together, that's what we have done since independence -- we have served the state, the Republic of Armenia. I am proud of the work we have done together.

During these 10 years, I believe much has changed in the nature of our work. Of course the Republic of Armenia has changed and progressed such that many objective conditions have changed - we don't wait 2, 3, sometimes 5 months to get paid. We have paper on which to print treaties, conventions and documents. We are not hostage to irregular flights into and out of Armenia.

There are other differences, too. Diplomats, and all staff, are accepted solely on merit and not for any other reason. Diplomats are assigned postings solely based on professional circumstances and not for any other reason. This ministry has a reputation now for being the cleanest, the most professional, the best regulated, and not corrupt. And that's no small reason to be proud.

This ministry is a place where people are treated with dignity, with respect and with tolerance. I'm proud of that and I believe that that tradition, once begun, cannot be easily undone. On the contrary, it becomes contagious. I believe that to build a democratic society, we must begin, and we have begun, by building a transparent, accountable ministry, and by treating each other with dignity.

The world has changed too in these 10 years. Russia is no longer in retreat. Europe is much closer than it used to be. The US is more insistent on having partners who are democratic. Azerbaijan is looking to oil for solutions to all problems. Turkey is living both in the past and in the future. Georgia is walking a fine line between beleaguered and bold. Iran is caught between the world's perceptions and its own self-image.

And Armenia? Armenia has demonstrated that we understand that diplomacy and defense do not replace each other, but work in tandem to secure a nation's future. Armenia has proven that economic growth is possible, even with the absence of natural resources and open transportation corridors. Armenia is living proof that one can be a respected member of the international community and at the same time swim against the global tide to assure self-determination and security for Nagorno Karabakh. Armenia has become a

trustworthy and I can say, full partner in international organizations with a full agenda of reforms, insights and action items. Armenia has established good relations with all major world centers - Russia, the Americas, Europe, Asia, the Middle East and Latin America.

But each of the successes I just mentioned have brought with it a set of new challenges and new problems. And that's our job - to make the best of each opportunity and minimize all threats.

Now, we must perform our job in the changed environment of the last several months. When we allowed the political tensions and emotions of the election and post-election period to reign, they demonstrated that we sometimes imagine that revolution can be an alternative to reforms, and that revenge can take precedence over reconciliation. No one knows better than we in this building that that is false. No one knows better than we that our domestic strength, integrity, stability, morality and perseverance are our best - actually our only - calling cards in the international arena.

If those were our assets, today we work with a deficit. The capital we had accumulated internationally has been squandered. That means my successor, each of you, and all of us who live in Armenia, must work even harder to regain our respectability and our confidence in ourselves and our future.

I will continue to work with you. I don't intend to terminate my public engagement, but to enter a new phase. I don't intend to be foreign minister but I intend to work domestically to help the next minister to succeed internationally.

The weeks after March 1 were the most difficult of my entire career. On the one hand, I am part of an administration which, at the end of the day, is responsible for what happens in this country. On the other hand, from the beginning of their campaign, I disagreed, publicly and privately, with the tactics, methods and goals of the opposition.

Just as it is not in my nature to follow blindly, it is also not in my nature to be in bitter opposition. I believe in carrying out the responsibilities I have undertaken. I believe I have done so these 10 years, sometimes before the TV cameras but more often behind the scenes.

My commitment to Armenia and its future did not begin when I became foreign minister. It will not cease now that I am no longer foreign minister.

Instead, it will change. I will undertake a new set of responsibilities that will focus on fashioning a relevant, inclusive civic and political forum and that will work with the public and with the existing political forces on mending the torn fabric of our society, on finding genuine paths to political consensus by reconciling our differences, not suppressing them. I will partner with those who wish to create the mechanisms that replicate the experience of other developed countries and offer serious, convincing political alternatives that are not destructive, extreme and self-serving. Most of all, or first of all, I will work to strengthen the institutions which will decrease our people's cynicism and readiness to believe the worst about ourselves, that will empower people to say what they believe and believe in what they say.

The work that you and I will do will be complementary.

I feel a part of this family. And that's not going to change. I would like it to remain that way, and I know it will be hard to pass by this building, or through Republic Square in general.

Thank you.
