

Prof. Stephan Astourian lectures for OCAPS at UCI.

On Saturday afternoon, April 26, 2008 the Armenian Professional Society of Orange County (OCAPS) held a lecture at the Social Science Plaza Building on the University of California, Irvine (UCI) campus.

The guest lecturer, Prof. Stephan Astourian, is the Director of the Armenian Studies Program at the University of California at Berkeley, and Adjunct Professor at the same university. He addressed the recent events that led to the "Turmoil in Armenia". More than 50 guests attended the lecture, among them, Yeghig Keshishian, District Representative of Congressman Ed Royce's office in Fullerton.

Serge Tomassian, president of OCAPS, introduced Professor Astourian. The speaker analyzed the pre election period, the elections and the March 1, 2008 events in Yerevan, against the political, economic and social background of the country. He took the audience back to 1995-1996, during Levon Ter Petrossian's presidency, when, according to Astourian, corruption and suppression of political opposition prevailed. "It was interesting to see Ter Petrossian, who was absent from the political stage for almost ten years, reemerge and lead a huge opposition", said Astourian.

The lack of real opposition in the parliament, the attitude of the political parties, and a political system that follows the model of the Russian system, helped Ter Petrossian to gain popularity and a huge number of followers during the last elections. The fact that some of the Yerkrabahs or the Veterans of the Karapagh war joined Ter Petrossian was a reflection of their disappointment with the government. According to Astourian, the masses were disappointed with a system that was not working for them. The DVD that Astourian shared with his audience showed the demonstrators chanting: "Levon, Levon, Levon", making Levon Ter Petrossian look like a hero. However, unlike the colored revolutions, such as the ones in Georgia and the Ukraine, which were triggered by rigged elections, Armenia's elections were recognized as "fair" by the West.

According to Astourian, Levon Ter Petrossian was not interested in dialogue. His intention was to delegitimize the system and to take revenge on the government that ousted him in 1998. According to Astourian, a government facing turmoil within its country, is a weak government at the negotiating table over Karapagh. Ter Petrossian resorted to false rumors, accusing the Kocharian government of planning and executing the killings in the Armenian Parliament in October 1999. Astourian insisted that any statement that is made with no evidence should not be taken seriously. Astourian went on to say, that misinformation in Armenia dominates the peoples' mentality and attitude.

The audience's reaction to Astourian's speech was very positive: "He was very informative and very objective. Unfortunately, the truth hurts", said Ani Ozdere, the treasurer of OCAPS.

Before Prof. Astourian's speech, Sylvie Tertzakian, vice president of the same organization, announced that there was a surprise announcement, and she introduced Prof. Touraj Daryaee to make the announcement. Prof. Daryaee is the Associate Director for the Center for Persian Studies and Culture, and Prof. of History of Iran at UCI. Prof. Daryaee announced the founding of the Armenian Studies Program within the Center at UCI. As part of the program, Prof. Alina Ayvazian will teach Ancient Armenian History in this fall. Prof. Levon Marshlian will teach Modern Armenian History in the Winter Quarter. In addition, there will be visiting professors to lecture on Armenian History and Culture. The audience welcomed the announcement with excitement.

There will be a follow up article about the Armenian Studies program at UCI.