

# From east to west

Armenia's Ambassador to Ireland, Dr Vahe Gabrielyan, speaks to **METRO ÉIREANN** about his country's links with Ireland, conflict in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, and reconciling Armenia's close Russian ties with its European aspirations

**D**R VAHE Gabrielyan was appointed Armenia's Ambassador to the United Kingdom in March 2003 and to Ireland in December 2005, becoming the first ever Ambassador of the Republic of Armenia to this country.

Before his ambassadorial tenure he was press secretary for the President of Armenia from 1998 to 2003. At the same time he served as the president's interpreter, and previously worked at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia in various capacities from 1994 to 1998. He has held positions at the UN, OSCE and later Unesco desks of the Department of International Organisations of the Ministry, and he has also worked at the Constitutional Court of Armenia.

Dr Gabrielyan took the time to answer our questions on various topics, from the links between Ireland and Armenia to the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, and his country's future in Europe.

**Metro Éireann:** You are the first ever Ambassador of Armenia to the UK with an added brief in Ireland. Can you give your impression of Ireland during your visits?

Dr Vahe Gabrielyan: I had special feelings for Ireland, the Irish people and their history even before I was considered for the job and felt really privileged and proud to be appointed Armenia's Ambassador to Ireland, moreover the first ever one.

All my visits to Dublin have been enjoyable, whether on my own or accompanied with my family. Of course, the most memorable day was the one when I presented my credentials. All the officials from the Foreign Ministry and the President's office were very welcoming and helpful but I was most impressed when I met President Mary McAleese.

The ceremony was very solemn and inspiring and the inspecting of the guard was an obliging experience, however I was touched by the President's warm welcome to myself and my family and her knowledge of Armenia and our history. I was very pleased for her assessment of the resemblance between our two nations' histories, fate and character and her offer of assistance in my mis-



sion was indeed encouraging. These were words every diplomat wants to hear. I just hope we will see her visit Armenia before long and share this mood with the Armenian people.

**ME:** What is the exact nature of Armenian-Irish relations? On what cultural, political and trade matters do we cooperate?

VG: We should realise that Armenian-Irish relations on a government-to-government level are in their very young days. We have had contacts earlier, of course, but on an official level we are in the initial stages, although I must mention with satisfaction that we have already had high-level contact.

Not long after my appointment, the then Foreign

Minister Mr Dermot Ahern TD invited our Foreign Minister of that time, Mr Vartan Oskanian, to visit Dublin in the beginning of 2007. This was the first ever visit of an Armenian Foreign Minister and we covered a lot of ground, [including] ways of developing co-operation between the two nations.

There are indeed many areas where we can closely cooperate. We are interested in

Ireland's experience of European integration, economic achievement and conflict resolution, in regulating relations with a large diaspora, etc.

Apart from the political dimension, which we intend to expand on, we are very keen on developing comprehensive economic co-operation. From my very first visits I had meetings at the Chambers of Commerce of Ireland and we started a process of establishing co-operation between them and the chamber of commerce in Armenia. The process has stalled for a while but we plan to rejuvenate it.

on both sides to more seriously look into doing business with each other.

**ME:** In what areas do you see prospects for economic relations between our two countries?

VG: Apart from the traditional branches of economy such as mining, heavy industry, chemical industry, textiles and agriculture, Armenians have always been good, like the Irish, in spheres of economy requiring high-standard education, advanced skills and brainpower, spheres such as infor-

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Being small countries quite far apart geographically obviously causes some difficulties, and having no embassies in each other's capital cities does not help either, therefore we have nominated one of our compatriots, a successful Armenian-Irish businessman, to be our honorary consul who, being a Dubliner for decades, can pursue trade issues on a much more regular basis. We have received the consent of the Irish authorities and hopefully, pending some legislative amendments to our respective procedures in Armenia, will appoint him before long.

We are also in the process of finalising an agreement on avoiding double taxation which will be a good start, encouraging the business communities

mation technologies, hi-tech software development, research, banking as well as industries for which geographical barriers and transportation costs are not important – diamond cutting and refining, jewellery making, etc. Tourism is one of those with the highest potential, as are organic food production, food processing and intellectual services.

I would like to go back to the previous question for a moment and add that cultural relations of course are not at the bottom of our list. It is not by chance that the first thing we did in Ireland was organise an exhibition of photographs in the Central Library in Dublin, depicting the beautiful scenery, history, architectural and cultural monuments and everyday