

THE ETHNIC MINORITIES OF ARMENIA

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Garnik Asatryan
Victoria Arakelova

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PREFACE

This work is intended to give basic information on the ethnic minorities inhabiting Armenia.

Despite being institutionally represented in Armenia's authoritative structures monitoring the minority issues and quite vigorous work being done by the minority members themselves and their public entities, there has never been a more or less generalizing vademecum reporting specifically on this country's ethnic and ethnic-religious groups.

Most of the topical publications elucidating this subject deal with reflective the problems confronting the communities rather than of the descriptions of the minorities. Such an objective does not seem to have ever been initially targeted, for both the communities and their organizations had in the first decade of Armenia's independence been in the process of forming, adapting to the new public and political realities. Therefore, the publications of this period carry an imprint of looking for solutions to problems of ethnic minorities par excellence. Incidentally, there has been a long-time need for a positive academic description of Armenia's ethnic groups, to provide their integral images with distinctly outlined problems.

Significance of this manual, highlighting the issue with no bias or emotional evaluations, can hardly be overestimated at least in regard to determining the number of national communities in Armenia. Clearly, the concepts of ETHNIC MINORITY, COMMUNITY and PUBLIC ORGANIZATION are more often than not being frivolously interchanged thus generating confusion and indeterminacy. Moreover, most of the publications have presented the histories of individual nations identified with Armenia's ethnic minorities, with regard to the conventionally acknowledged cultural traditions obviously by reason of the authors having had no specialized training or professional approach. The scholarly evidence academically interpreted can hardly coincide with the popular interpretation of historical details circulating within the relevant cultural environments. A due tribute to the legendary history of any one nation being an important layer of spiritual culture and a component of self-awareness, should not discard the academic approach, based primarily upon historical evidence when publishing the reference books.

According to a common definition, a national minority is a numerically non-dominant group of people characterized by the ethnic, linguistic and religious features differentiating it from the rest of the population. Meanwhile, members of a given community have to display, at least implicitly, a sense of solidarity aimed at preserving the common culture, traditions, religion and language (*see F. Capotari. Study on the Rights of Persons belonging to Ethnic, Religions and Linguistic Minorities, 1991, § 568*). In other words, the minority status is determined not only by or not to the measure of its originality or possession of certain discriminatory features, self-awareness, etc., but rather by the collective volition of its membership. However, the subject in this connection may be still more clarified with regard to contemporary realities by adding two points:

- The concept of ethnic minority is relevant only with regard to the politically organized ethnic domination, i.e. when there is a state-forming or the Title Nation, as it were. Otherwise, the national units, independent of their numerical strength, within the formations having no politically dominating ethnos, have to be regarded as part of the total population mosaic of the given area. Thus, the national minority is explicated solely within the framework of a political entity: a state and autonomy, etc.

- One represents a national minority if one is a citizen of the given entity or, in certain cases, has a long-time residence permit.

Although the total weight of national minorities remains numerically within three percent of the population, Armenia may easily be regarded as a multi-national country, the status of minority being a non-quantitative factor. Inhabiting Armenia today are about twenty ethnic units, mainly Yezidis, Russians, Greeks, Assyrians, Ukrainians, Poles, Germans, Jews, Kurds, Georgians, most of those have their own mother states, except the Yezidis, the Assyrians and the Kurds. Most speak the languages of the Indo-European family, the Iranian Group being represented by the Yezidis and Kurds, while the Slavic Group by Russians, Ukrainians, Belorussians, Poles; the German Group by Germans and the Greek Group by Greeks. The Assyrians and Jews are carriers of Semitic dialects, while the language of Georgians belongs to the Kartvelian Group of the Ibero-Caucasian family.

The current publication is a compilation of individual essays on the peoples inhabiting Armenia, alphabetically listed and patterned as follows: 1) historical reference, data on language and culture, 2) information on the emergence of the given ethnic unit in Armenia, 3) regional distribution, 4) population, 5) lifestyle, social stratification, particularly the degree of integration. Each essay is terminated with the inventory of the community's non-governmental organizations. The essay on the Greeks is written by Eduard Polatov.

As for the number of minorities' populations, it is however to be noted that it is currently infeasible to quote data with any precision. Migratory processes of the last decade have substantially modified the demographic picture of Armenia; moreover, the latest census of 1989 is not reflective of the entire range of ethnic situation in Armenia. As to the recently held general population census in Armenia, its results still remain unpublished. Thus, our cited numerical data may have a sufficiently large degree of error despite having considered the relevant corrections and the general trends of migratory processes.

We have depicted in more detail the stateless nations, particularly the unique culture of the Yezidi, which can be traced only in academic literature or in special sources inaccessible to the public at large. Bringing up the array are small essays on other ethnic formations including the sub-ethnic groups of Armenians, this subject being unconnected with the target theme, but nonetheless relevant with regard to the ethnic demography of Armenia in its entirety.

Garnik Asatrian,
Professor, Dr. Sc.

THE ASSYRIANS (Aisors)

Endoethnonym: ATHURAYA, SURAYA. The name in the current usage by the Armenians: AYSORS, by the Persians and the Arabs: SURYANI. There also exist other designations: KHALDEANS, SYRO-KHALDEANS, NESTORIANS, SYRIANS. This type of terminological variations applied to the same ethnic group creates confusion even with experts.

Assyrians are descendants of the Aramaean-speaking population of Asia Minor who adopted Christianity in the 1st century A. D. and pioneered this religion in the area.

The Nestorian or East-Syrian Church, later also called the Chaldaic of Assyro-Chaldaic, emphasizing the human nature of the Savior within its Christological doctrine is one of the world's oldest religious organizations that flourished in the 7th century. In the 13th century, its Patriarch

ruled 25 Archdioceses and 130 Episcopacies, from Syria to China. In Central Asia and China there were flourishing Syrian colonies and religious centres. The spread of Christianity among the Iranians, Turks (Uygurs), the Chinese, the Indian-Dravidians resulted largely from the activities by the Syrian Missionaries. In Malabar India, e.g., over 2 million ethnic Dravidians belong to the Syrian Orthodox Church.

The Western Syrian or the Jacobite Church, like the Armenian Apostolic, the Coptic and the Ethiopian Churches, reject the doctrine of the double nature of Christ adopted in 451 by the Chalcedonian Ecumenical Council, accepting his divine nature only.

The Assyrians today mostly confess the Nestorian or Assyrian Church of the East, the Jacobite Monophysite Church and the Assyro-Chaldaic Church affiliating the Nestorians who joined the Unity with the Roman Catholic Church. Most Assyrians in Armenia and the SIC countries confess Orthodoxy.

The Assyrians speak the new-Aramaic dialects going back to the Old Aramaic (the North-Western Group of Semitic Languages), the principal language of administrative communication over a huge space embraced by the Ancient Persian Empire. Therefore the Old Aramaean is sometimes called the Imperial Aramaic (Reichsaramaesch). Several parts of the Bible are written in this language, while its later variety known as SYRIAC, generated an opulent theological and historical literature.

The literary Assyrian language was developed in the 19th century based upon the Urmia dialect. The writing is based upon the Syrian alphabet – *Estrangelo*.

The first appearance of the Assyrians in Armenia is dated at the time of the Russo-Persian war of 1826-28 having moved from around Lake Urmia in Iran where 80 000 of their compatriots still reside today. The immigrants promptly adopted Orthodoxy with an approval of the Russian authorities. The places of their original settlement remain to date as the major areas of their residence: the villages Koylasar (currently Dimitrov), Dvin-aysor (Verin Dvin) of the Ararat District.

Schools with Assyrian attendance practice elective instruction of the Assyrian language. Virtually all members of the Assyrian community are fluent in Armenian and Russian. Allocated to them annually by the RA Ministry of Education are hors de concours places at the Department of Oriental Studies, Yerevan State University, within the framework of training teachers from among National Minorities.

The current Assyrian population in Armenia is of the order of 8 000, about 500 reside in Yerevan. The total population worldwide is 350 000 (Iran, Iraq, Syria, Turkey, Georgia, Russia, Western Europe, US). Most indicated countries have the Assyrian cultural entities, issue periodicals in Assyrian, Turkish, Arabic. Also operational are political parties aiming to integrate all the Assyrians by creating an independent Assyrian state in the Northern Mesopotamia, e.g., the Asyristan Liberation Party (Asuristan kurtulu? partisi) established in Turkey with affiliations in other countries.

The traditional economic activity of the Assyrians in Armenia is agriculture, gardening and viniculture; distant-pasture stock breeding is prevailing among the Assyrians of Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria; in Russia it is the handicrafts. A large stratum in Armenia is also constituted by the intellectuals, including the class of government employees. To be noted as a whole, is a high degree of integration.

The mixed Assyro-Armenian marriages are quite high on the percentage scale, this situation being also noted in the Diaspora with adjacent Armenian and Assyrian communities.

Historically, the Assyrians have always been described as men of gallantry, nearly always siding with the Armenians in rebellious situations. Along with other Christian populations they have been the subject of genocide within the Ottoman Empire. The Armenian and the Assyrian nations have always been attached not only by confessional consensus, but rather by many centuries of

collaboration and the correlative historical predestination.

NGOs

- The Assyrian Youth Center “ASHOOR”

I. Gasparian – Chairman.

Address: 105, Teryan St., Bldg. 4,
room 4102., Yerevan, Republic of Armenia
Tel.: 598 515

- The Assyrian Association “ATOOR”

P. Tamrazov – Chairman

Address: 11, Pushkin St., Yerevan, Republic of Armenia
Tel.: 565 151

THE GREEKS

The Greeks (endoethnonym: ELLINES). A nation of the Indo-European origin, carrier of a very ancient culture called the Hellenic, which has deeply influenced the world civilization.

The majority of the Greeks, both in the Greek Republic, the parent state, and in the Diaspora, confess Orthodoxy. The Greek Orthodox Church has traditionally good and close relations with the Armenian Apostolic Church.

The Greek population of Transcaucasia emerged as a result of several waves of migrations having started mainly in 2nd to 1st centuries B.C. and continued on until 13th century, i.e. the period of the Seljuk and Mongol invasions. Nonetheless, the core of the Hellenic ethnic element in Georgia and Armenia are descendants of the mining workers invited in late 18th century to Armenia and partially relocated to Central Georgia in the 1820s, as well as migrants from Asia Minor and the inner Turkey.

Armenia’s Greeks, as in the whole of Transcaucasia, speak the Pontic dialect, an extension of the Ionic dialect of the Old Greek language. A certain layer is occupied by the migrants from Trabzon city and Kars region in the 19th – 20th cc. (endoethnonym: ROMEYUS). All Armenia’s Greeks are fluent in both Armenian and Russian.

The Greek population in Armenia today is about 6 000, with 300 in the Republic of Nagorno Karabakh.

The main areas of Greek residence in Armenia are the canyon of Alaverdi and the Lori Highland, as well as Yerevan, the capital, the cities Noyemberian and Giumri.

In Karabakh the Greeks mostly inhabited the village of Mehmana of Mardakert Region, which was burnt to the ground by the Azerbaijanis during the war. Today, part of that community, over 200 persons, have been relocated to Stepanakert, Mardakert, Shooshi, Mataghis and other locations in Karabakh.

The chief domain of Greeks’ activities in Armenia are agriculture, horticulture and handicrafts, in the cities they make part of the skilled labour, particularly in copper mining industry. A significant percentage of the city dwellers belong to the science and engineering community. Participation in the power structure, the governmental entities as well as in the public and political sphere is also quite appreciable.

NGOs

- “PONTOS” – THE GREEK COMMUNITY OF THE STEPANAVAN REGION.
A Christophoridi – Chairman
ADDRESS: 43, Eritasardakan St., Stepanavan, Armenia. Tel.: 2 29 04
ADDRESS: 12, Pionereri St., Suite 27, Hrazdan, Armenia
ADDRESS: 29/22, Arghutian St., Yerevan, Armenia
- “OLYMPUS” – THE GREEK COMMUNITY OF NOYEMBERIAN.
T. Tamazian – Chairman.
ADDRESS: 3, Kamoi St., Noemberian, Armenia. Tel.: 2 20 98
- “ANASTASI” – NGO
K. Avgitov - Chairman
- “ROMEIUS” – THE GREEK COMMUNITY OF ALAVERDI.
A. Klinikarova – Chairperson.
ADDRESS: 197/1a, Andranik St., Alaverdi, Armenia
- “PONTI”, THE GREEK COMMUNITY IN YEREVAN.
Chairman: F. Nikolaidi.
- “PONTI”, THE GREEK COMMUNITY IN VANADZOR.
Chairman: V. Nikolaidi.
ADDRESS: 40, Gr. Lusavorich St.
- “PHAETON”, THE GREEK COMMUNITY OF GIUMRI
K. Tosunidis, Chairman.
ADDRESS: 29, Rustaveli St., Giumri, Armenia.
- “ELLIDA”, THE GREEK NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION
A. Khitarov, Chairman.
ADDRESS: 48, Tigran-Metsi St.
- THE GREEKS’ FEDERATION OF ARMENIA
A. Klinikarov, Chairman
ADDRESS: 69, Tavrizian St., Yerevan, Armenia
- THE GREEKS’ PUBLIC ORGANIZATION OF ARMENIA AND KARABAKH.
E. Polatov, Chairman
ADDRESS: 2, Vardanants St. Tel.: 56 50 91
- “PONTI”, THE GREEKS’ COMMUNITY OF YEREVAN
P. Lavrent – Chairman
ADDRESS: 49/2, Komitas Ave. Yerevan, Armenia

THE GEORGIANS

Endoethnonym: KARTVELI. A nation of highly developed ancient culture. The Georgian

language belongs to the Kartvelian branch of the Ibero-Caucasian family of languages. Writing is based upon the Georgian alphabet.

By far most Georgians are Orthodox Christians belonging to the Georgian Orthodox Church. The Ajars and the groups of Meskhi and Ingiloy are Sunni Muslims. A small part of the Georgians, the so-called Freydanians (after the Freydan region in Iran) who had been forcibly relocated to Iran by Aga Muhammad-khan Kajar in the early 18th century to Iran, confess Shiism.

Historically, the Georgians and the Armenians are related very closely. Despite the very dissimilar entanglements of their mutual history, the two autochthonous nations of the South Caucasus are extremely close in their cultural traditions, religion and popular outlook.

Eastern Armenia (Armenia today) has never harbored any Georgian settlements; living in Western Armenia (Eastern Anatolia) are the Lahzes – Muslims, members of the Cartvelian subethnic group.

Georgians residing in Armenia today have settled there through mixed marriages, the population being very insignificant, about a hundred persons in all, mostly intellectuals, with practically no migration, living in the capital city only.

NGOs

- “IVERIA”, the Georgian Society.

T. Asatiani – Chairperson.

ADDRESS: 18/12, Bagramian Ave., Yerevan, Armenia. Tel.: 524 823

THE JEWS

Endoethnonym in New Hebraic: YEHUDIM, in Yiddish: YID. The Russian designation of HEBREWS is going back through Old Slavic *Ebrayos* (“Jew”). The Armenian HREAY may have originated from the Parthian *HUDYA (“Jew”), from YEHUDI.

Old Hebrew, the ancestor of New Hebraic, the official language of the State of Israel, is related to the Khanaanean group of Semitic languages. Yiddish – a Germanic dialect – the language of East-European Jews is spread in Eastern Europe and throughout the Diaspora.

The religion is Judaism represented by several versions: the traditional Orthodox, the Khasid, the Reformist, etc.

The Jews, an ancient and highly developed nation, have largely contributed to the Near Eastern civilization.

The original data on the Jewish settlements in Transcaucasia are related to the 4th – 3rd cc. B.C. It is also known that in the 1st century B.C. the Armenian King Tigran the Great settled a multitude of Jews in Vaspurakan, Western Armenia (the Lake Van area, in present-day Turkey). More specific data, however, on the Jews residing the Old Armenia, are lacking. It is nonetheless possible that in the remote ages there was a certain number of Jews in Eastern Armenia, which is incidentally corroborated by a recently discovered archeological evidence of a Jewish cemetery in Eghegnadzor (currently under investigation).

After the Russo-Persian war in the 19th c. and the annexation of Armenia by Russia, a Jewish community resettled to Armenia from the region of Urmia, Salmast and Khoy (Northern Iran). Those were mainly members of the Kurdish Jewish subethnic group, the so-called Kurdish Jews, speaking the Assyrian language. Multiple communities of Kurdish-speaking Jewish Jews living in the Province of Kermanshah almost entirely emigrated to Israel in the 1950s.

The Kurdish Jews that settled in Yerevan, counted 924 by the census of 1897. By that time there was a synagogue in Yerevan. Later the community relocated to Georgia.

The fuzzy criteria of ethnic affiliation trivialize the subject of determining the precise number of Jews residing in Armenia today, however, the 1989 census puts it at 676.

The community is numerically insignificant, perhaps a few hundred people now, mostly scientists and engineers who had arrived from Russia, Belarus and other areas of USSR, some had settled in Armenia through mixed marriages. Many a Jewish woman has joined an Armenian man in matrimony. Most live in the capital city.

Despite the negligible number of the community, activities of the Jewish NGOs are very vigorous, and the synagogue is functioning.

NGOs

- “MENORA”, THE JEWISH CULTURAL CENTER

W. Weiner – Chairman.

ADDRESS: 5a, Vardanants St., Yerevan, Armenia, Tel.: 525 882

- THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF ARMENIA

R. Varzhapetian – Chairman.

ADDRESS: 2/1, Griboedov St., Yerevan, Armenia, Tel.: 236 533; 534 924

THE YEZIDIS

The Yezidis (endoethnonym: EZDI) – an ethno-confessional group, whose main identity is religion – YEZIDISM or SHARFADIN, as it is called by themselves). Yezidism was shaped during the 11th – 13th cc. in Northern Iraq (Sinjar), remaining the centre of this religion to date, with the main shrines located in Lalesh valley.

The Yezidis also live in Syria, Turkey, Georgia, countries of Western Europe, mainly Germany, as well as in Russia (the regions of Krasnodar, Vladimir, Yaroslavl, Moscow, etc.)

The old culture of the Yezidis, the greatest wealth of folklore, the social structure of the Yezidi society, as well as the customs and norms of behaviour - all is stipulated by the unique religious outlooks of this people. Yezidism has for a long time remained an enigma for the researchers, travellers and even the neighbouring nations because of the closed character and the esoteric nature of their religion. This misinformation resulted in a wrongly applied epithet of Devil-worshippers to the Yezidis (Satan’s worshippers, Toufelsaneltern, adoreurs du diable). Yezidism is a syncretic doctrine. It combines the belief in Sole God with the veneration of the Holy Trinity – MALAK TAWUS (PEACOCK ANGEL), SHAYKH ‘ADI and SULTAN YEZID (all being the incarnations of God), as well as an extensive popular Pantheon including a number of divinities, saints and patron-deities having their parallels both in the Iranian and Semitic traditions. MALAK TAWUS – the principal member of the Holy Trinity – an ambivalent figure combining the features and attributes of a divinity with the characteristics of the fallen angel. Therefore existing in Yezidism is the so-called Apology of Satan – a ban on any abusive treatment of his person and even a taboo on the word “Satan” itself. The Yezidi concept of Satan, with regard to the closed character of the community (Yezidism cannot be adopted, as a religion, a Yezidi can only be born from the Yezidi father and mother), are most probably the main reason of the misapprehension of Yezidism by the general public and the emergence of the idiom “Devil worshippers”. The apology of Satan in many ways approximates the Yezidi doctrine with Sufism traced fragmentarily in some other aspects of this unique religion.

Most features of Yezidism are reflected in specimens of the abundant folklore carefully retained by the Yezidis throughout the centuries. The so-called Holy Scriptures of the Yezidis – “The Book

of Revelation” and “The Black Writing” contain by far less data on the Yezidi doctrine than the specimen of religious and ritual folklore.

The Yezidi society is a caste system including three main components: the Shaykhs, the *Pirs* (clergy) and *murids* (laymen). Of course, the hierarchical structure of the Yezidi society is far more compounded and is represented by some more laminations, e.g. *Kochaks*, *Faqirs*, *Qawwals*, *Farrashes* et al. which are meaningful only for the spiritual centre of Yezidism where they are functionally significant: the temple service, organization of religious festivals, etc. Incidentally in Diaspora, as a rule, coordination between the three basic castes is absolutely necessary. Each Yezidi, regardless to his caste affiliation, is entitled to have spiritual tutors from the Shaykh and Pir families, and, above all, a “brother” or a “sister of the Next World”. The spiritual tutorship is a crucial element of the Yezidi society, the basic element of cultural and religious preservation and self-awareness. Not a single significant event in the life of a Yezidi can occur without the spiritual tutors taking part. Moreover, an important objective of the spiritual tutorship is preservation of the three basic principles of Yezidism determining the persons identity with the Yezidi community: ban on caste mixing, ban on mixed marriages, inexorable pursuance of the Yezidi religious canons.

The Yezidis speak Kurmanji, a Northern-Kurdish dialect related to the North-West Iranian dialects). In order to underscore their separate identity the Yezidis call their language *Ezdiki* although it is a pure Kurmanji *patois*.

The Yezidi identity, in the course of its multi-century development, has elaborated the two clearly recognizable components: the distinct delimitation from Islam religiously and from the Kurds ethnically. That may have been spurred by the permanent harassment of the Yezidis along with Christian communities (Armenians, Greeks, Assyrians) in the Ottoman Empire on the part of the Turks and the Kurds . The persecutions suffered by the Yezidis have been mentioned in many sources, including the messages by the Christian missionaries of the late Middle Ages reporting on the miserable life of the non-Muslim minorities. Resulting from these persecutions was the migration of the Yezidis to Transcaucasia in mid-19th and later – early 20th century to Armenia, and thence further to Georgia. Those two countries with friendly Christian environment have become the homeland for this small nation.

It was in 1920s in Armenia that the first schools for the Yezidi children were opened, and the first ABC-book was published. Usub-Bek, one of the first Yezidi intellectuals and Member of Parliament of the First Armenian Republic of 1918 – 1920, came out from within the walls of the Gevorkian Christian Seminary in Echmiadzin.

The lack of metropolis necessitates special measures to be taken to preserve the unique stateless culture threatened by extinction each time the identity of the Yezidis is questioned.

A vivid example of that is the USSR censuses held since the 30s to the late 80s. Neither of them identifies the Yezidis as an individual minority. The Soviet policy of unification of small nations, particularly the ethno-confessional minorities, the very existence of which used to be disregarded within the atheistic system, resulted in the Yezidis being completely identified with the Kurds through the linguistic classification. However, the last years of the USSR for many a nation have been characterized by the raise of self-awareness.

The Yezidi movement erupting in Armenia in 1988 appealed to the 3rd All-Armenian Yezidi Assembly convened on 30 September 1989 (the two previous Assemblies occurred at the dawn of the Armenian Soviet Republic’s history, in 1921 and 1923) to challenge the Government for the official recognition of their identity. As a result, the Yezidis were presented as a separate minority in the USSR population census of 1989. According to this very census, the total count of Yezidis in Armenia was 52700. Thus, of ca. 60 000 persons formerly classified among the Kurds of Armenia, 88% identified themselves as Yezidi.

Acknowledging the Yezidi identity enabled the Yezidi community to revive: a programme was established at the Armenia’s National Radio, publication was started of “DANGE EZDIA” (The

Voice of the Yezidis), new non-governmental organizations emerged with the Yezidi minority as the stakeholder, the Yezidi Clerical Council was registered at the Committee of religious affairs under the Council of Ministers of Republic of Armenia, etc.

Schools located in Yezidi ethnic enclaves instruct the Yezidi students in their native language. Virtually all Yezidis, along with their vernacular, are fluent in Armenian, a high proportion know Russian. Used by the Armenia's Yezidis for writing is the Cyrillic, however, depending on residence the Yezidis have used diverse graphics: Arabic (In Syria and Iraq), Latin (in Europe and Turkey), Armenian (in Armenia), etc.

The Yezidis live en masse and scattered mostly in rural areas of Aragats, Armavir, Ashtarak, Talin, Artashat, Abovian, Echmiadzin, Masis, et al. regions as well as in the cities of Yerevan, Echmiadzin, Armavir, Ashtarak, Artashat, Gyumri, etc.

The Yezidis have mostly retained the traditional lifestyle. Nomadic stockbreeding is the major occupation, but some do gardening. The queries done by the Caucasian Center for Iranian Studies within the programme "The Yezidis of Armenia: the Current Status of the Community" have shown that most Yezidis, including those in rural areas have a vocational training (motor mechanics, fitters, etc.), however they prefer traditional occupations, combined with other activities.

The Yezidi intellectuals, journalists, lawyers, physicians are mainly city dwellers. The Yezidis as a whole are not too actively involved into the administrative structures, however lately, due to the emergence of NGOs, some members of the minority get involved into the public and political life of the country and its governmental structure.

The Armenia's Yezidis many times showed gallantry and patriotism, particularly during the Karabakh conflict when many of their volunteers spilled their blood in the defense of this country.

With regard to the high level of economic exodus from Armenia, the Yezidi population has certainly been reduced to perhaps 45 000. Most migrants are laymen, while the clerical castes charged with keeping the traditions are less subject to migration processes. The migrants established new communities in Russia without however severing the links with kin and tutors in the home country.

The communities based in Russia and in Europe, having started in the last two decades, have certain specific character. In Russia it is stipulated by the colourful ethnic environment, inferior quality of the communities (lack of clergy or tutorship), as well as by the need for speedy integration in the new economic environment. Despite the latent assimilating effect of the environment, today the Yezidis in Russia retain their distinct self-awareness striving to preserve the language, traditions, and cultural patterns.

Meanwhile in Germany the transformation of self-awareness among the migrants has produced a new complex identity of the Yezidi-Kurds resulting from the Yezidis being engaged into the cultural and political dynamics of the Kurdish movement and attracting them with advantages for integration. The objective historical processes transforming the identities and cultures typically occur in this world thus underscoring the need for special awareness to be dedicated to the irreplaceable stateless cultural systems.

In Armenia there are old academic and cultural traditions of the Yezidi Studies. On the turn of the 20th century the Armenian scholars published the initiatory works on the Yezidi anthropology, ethnography, history and folklore; in Soviet Armenia, too, many works were published on the Yezidi religion, culture, ethnography. However, all research and proceedings concerning those problems have been officially classified as Kurdological, under the conditions of denying the Yezidis identity. The first ever documentaries on the life of Yezidis presenting a great ethnographic value, were created in Armenia.

The problems of Yezidism, the study of Yezidi religion, history and culture is an important subject pursued by the Armenian Orientalistic Scholarship within the framework of the activities developed by the Caucasian Centre for Iranian Studies in Yerevan and the Department of Iranian

Studies at the Yerevan State University. That is one of the most successful and promising bearings of contemporary Iranian studies: within the last few years issued in Armenia and elsewhere were a number of academic publications by the Armenian Orientalists on the problems of Yezidology: Yezidi religious texts were published with an Armenian and English translation, a large monographic work on Yezidi religion is in preparation.

Incorporation of the Yezidi ethno-confessional minority within the palette of minorities of an altogether a monoethnic and monoconfessional country is equally both an asset enriching our culture and a measure of responsibility for a state committed to stipulate the preservation and development of a nation unambiguously regarding Armenia as their homeland and fully sharing in its destiny for two centuries so far.

The Yezidi Program of National Radio, Republic of Armenia

Kh. Tamoyan, chief executive.

ADDRESS: 2, Mravian St., Yerevan, Armenia.

Tel.: 520 773

The Yezidi Clerical Assembly under the Committee for Religious Affairs under the Republic of Armenia Council of Ministers.

NGOs

- **THE YEZIDI NATIONAL COMMITTEE**

T. Namatian – Chairman

ADDRESS: 23 Anhakht St., 3 floor

Tel.: 240 068

- **THE YEZIDI NATIONAL UNION OF ARMENIA AND THE WORLD**

Ajoyan-Tamoyan – Chairman

ADDRESS: 2, Arshakunian

2nd floor

Tel.: 538 691

- **THE YEZIDI NATIONAL UNION**

Ajoyan, Chairman

ADDRESS: The District of KOTAYK, village ZOVUNI

THE KURDS

The Kurds are one of the Iranian-speaking nations of Near East. The endoethnonym: KURD, KURMANJ. The language belongs to the North-Western group of the Iranian dialects.

The geographic area of distribution embraces several states. The total number of the Kurds is estimated at 17 to 20 million, viz.: Turkey – 7 m., Iran – 5-6 m., Iraq – 4 m., Syria – 1-2 m. Several score of thousand Kurds live in the CIS countries, mainly in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan. In the late 20th century significant Kurdish communities have been built up in Western Europe, mainly in Germany. Meanwhile, the ethnonym “Kurd”, having a rather late tradition of indicating an individual nation (since the 19th century) is integrating a group of tribes and tribal confederations which are ethnically, linguistically and confessionally extremely diversified.

Most Kurds confess the Shafiite *Mazhab* (religious-juridical school) of the Orthodox Sunni Islam and belong to the Qadiriyya and Naqshbandiyya Sufi Orders. The remainder are mainly the Extreme (heterodox) Shia sects – the Alevis, etc.

The ethnic territory of the Proto-Kurdish tribes is the central area of today's Iran, whence they spread to the North, particularly to the areas of Northern Mesopotamia up to the boundaries of South Armenia. However, a massive penetration of the Kurds into Western Armenia (East Anatolia) occurred in the early 16th c., following the Chaldiran Battle of 1514 between Turkey and Iran, when the Ottoman administration started the targeted lodging of Kurds on the Armenian lands to create an anti-Iranian stronghold.

Eastern Armenia (today's Republic of Armenia) saw the Kurds appear in the early 19th century (1813, 1818), later, before the turn of the century most of them moved to the territory of the contemporary Azerbaijan Republic, to a religiously congenial environment, 150 000 Kurds residing there to date.

With regard to the issue of Yezidi identity (see the Section on the Yezidis), there had been 6 000 Kurdish residents in Armenia, mainly in the Azerbaijani enclaves. Most of them, by virtue of confessional and cultural relatedness (children attending Azerbaijani schools, mixed marriages, etc.), left Armenia along with the Azerbaijanis at the onset of the Karabakh confrontation, in spite of the efforts by the Armenian authorities and the public to prevent the population shift.

As of today, Kurdish intellectuals residing mainly in the cities, as well as rural residents living scattered in the Abovian and Masis district count about 1000 persons.

Some schools in Armenia provide instruction in the Kurmanji. Beside the vernacular, all Kurds are fluent in Armenian, while the intellectuals also know Russian.

The rural population are mostly occupied in agriculture, horticulture, melon plantations. The Kurdish intellectuals in Armenia – engineers, lawyers, doctors, scientists – are active in public life: publishing the tabloid “RIA TAZA”, formerly the only Kurdish paper all over the Soviet Union, broadcasting on the radio in Kurdish. Being developed now are new school textbooks in Kurdish. The Writers' Union of Armenia has a department of the Kurdish writers of Armenia.

Armenia's Orientalistic scholarship retains long-time traditions of Kurdish Studies. In the last decades Armenia has been pioneering the world in publishing the scholarly research in Kurdological problems as well as in publishing translations and fiction in Kurdish. It was here that the first ever films on the Kurds have been taken, containing abundant ethnographic material.

Formerly the Institute of Oriental Studies, National Academy of Sciences, and now the Caucasian Centre for Iranian Studies and the Department of Iranian Studies at the Yerevan State University have been doing research on the Kurdish language, literature, History, Ethnography. At the Department of Iranian Studies there is the MA course on Kurdology.

NGOs

- “KURDISTAN COMMITTEE”

K. Chachanian – Chairman

ADDRESS: 62/19, Terian St., Yerevan, Armenia

Tel.: 582 207

- THE KURDISH COUNCIL OF INTELLECTUALS

Sardarian – Chairman

ADDRESS: 2, Arshakuniats, Yerevan, Armenia, 12th floor

Tel. 529 612

THE GERMANS

Endoethnonym: DEUTCHE. Language: German, related to the Germanic group of the Indo-European family of Languages. Writing – Latin-based. Belonging to diverse confessional groups - Catholics, Lutherans, as well as sectarians: Baptists, Adventists, Mennonites, Pentacostalists, et. al.

In Transcaucasia the German colonies appeared in 1817-1819. Those were the arrivals from Wurthenberg inspired by the idea to meet the end of the world at the foot of the sacred mount of Ararat. Later the German communities were joined by migrants of other nationalities, the arrivals from Western Europe: the Swiss, the Dutch, the Italians.

There are no places in today's Armenia densely populated by the Germans. They are a small community, many live in Yerevan, the rest in the cities Vanadzor, Giumri, Armavir, Abovian, Garni, Biurakan, in districts Noemberian, Artashat, etc.

The urban dwellers are mostly intellectuals, the rural residents mostly farmers.

Most Armenian Germans are Russian-speaking. They learn German as a foreign language within the public school curriculum. The linguistic factor along with the economic problems of the last years and the newly established opportunity to leave for Germany, their historic homeland, has largely affected the migrational processes among the Germans.

The Community is in close cooperation with the German Educational and Cultural Centre of Armenia helping to organize linguistic courses, cultural events, etc.

NGOs

- “ISTOCHNIK”, THE GERMAN SOCIETY

Yaskorsky, Chairman

ADDRESS: 14, Pushkin St.

Tel.: 580 300

THE POLES

Endoethnonym: POLYATSI. The language: Polish, belonging to the West Slavic group of the Indo-European family of languages. Writing based upon Latin letters. Mostly Catholics, but there is an insignificant number of Protestants. The Poles living in the CIS countries had been subjected to assimilation in all of its aspects: linguistic, cultural, etc.

In Armenia the Poles appeared in the early 19th century. Those were the servicemen from the Russian Army billeted in Transcaucasia or Turkey and having started families: after the Armenian Genocide of 1915, part of those who had originally settled in Western Armenia, relocated to Eastern Armenia, which was part of Russia. Among the first Polish migrants were some political figures exiled to the Caucasus for political dissent. However, most Poles living now in Armenia came here in the mid-20th century through the massive exile of the Polish military by the Soviet authorities in 1939 to the remote areas of USSR, whence some moved to Transcaucasia, as well as through the evacuation during World War Two.

The number of Poles in Armenia is insignificant, perhaps a few hundred persons. More precise data are not available, since more often than not the poles would prefer to be registered as Russians, Ukrainians, etc. in the population census.

Living scattered, mostly in cities: Yerevan, Giumri, Spitak, Vanadzor, Echmiadzin.

The Armenia's Poles are Russian-speaking, though many are fluent in Armenian. A competence in Polish is almost zero. However, in the last few years an increased interest is detectable towards their own culture, history, etc. – the phenomenon actually occurring in all national groups residing

within the Former Soviet Union.

Most Armenia's Poles are intellectuals: educators, engineers, musicians, lawyers, etc. There are many mixed marriages, including those with the Armenians. The migration is inappreciable.

NGOs

- POLONIA, THE POLISH BENEVOLENT PUBLIC ORGANIZATION

Kuzminskaya, Chairperson

ADDRESS: 65, Komitas St., Apt. 55

Yerevan, Armenia

Tel.: 231 630; 568 004

THE RUSSIANS

RUSSKIE (endoethnonym) – an East-Slavic nation, having largely contributed to the Slavonic and the world civilization. The earliest Russian-Armenian contacts date back to the 11th century when the first Armenian settlement appeared in the Kievskaya Rus'. Later, under Peter the Great, the vivid Armenian-Russian relations are traceable, to say nothing of the activities of the Armenian tradesmen as well as military and political figures within the Russian territory having occurred at all times.

However, the presence of whatever substantial Russian ethnic element in Armenia is noted only after the inclusion of Eastern Armenia into the Russian Empire in the first half of the 19th century. The Russian sectarians, officials, military structures, etc., are the first manifestation of the Russian presence on the demographic map of Eastern Armenia. A substantial inflow of Russians to Armenia occurred only after the establishment of the Soviet Power.

The largest number of resident Russians was noted by the late 1970s – 70 000, including the Molokans (Old Ritualists). However at the Union-wide census of 1989 this number was reduced to 51 000, while now, due to the general migration processes, the country retained only 7 – 8 thousand Russians, barring the Molokans (see THE MOLOKANS).

Despite the numerical reduction of Armenia's Russian population, the status of the Russian language is sustainable, as far as an unofficial language can go: there are Russian newspapers, societies, TV- and radio programming, books in Russian are published extensively in science, education, fiction, etc. The Slavic University is a recent establishment with Russian as the language of instruction, departments of the Russian language and literature are functional at the Yerevan State University and at the V. Briusov Linguistic University; there are Russian schools, classes, etc.

NGOs

- THE FITNESS CENTER AND SLAVONIC CULTURE

O. Marokin, Chairman

ADDRESS: Sherjanain 2/2, Yerevan, Armenia

- “BERIOZKA” – THE BENEVOLENT UNION OF RUSSIANS

M. Zlobina - Chairperson

- “POKROVO-BOGORODITSKIY” – THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX COMMUNITY

I. Abakumova – Chairperson
ADDRESS: 54/1 Kanakertsi St., Apt. 5

- THE FRIENDS OF ARMENIA SOCIETY

ZINOVIEV – Chairman
Tel.: 534 438

- “SVETLANA” – THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX BENEVOLENT SOCIETY

M. Iurtana – Chairperson
ADDRESS: 20, 4th Gastello St., Apt. 2
Tel.: 240 809

THE MOLOKANS (Old Ritualists)

The Molokans – a confessional group, descendants of Russian sectarians exiled from Russia to Transcaucasia in the early 19th century.

Rejecting the orthodox orthopraxy, like Lent whereby they ate ferial food like milk, the Molokans were persecuted in their homeland and were forced to emigrate to the remote areas in Siberia, the Altai, the Crimea and Central Asia. In Transcaucasia the Molokans were allowed to settle in the boundary areas only: those of Tiflis, Erivan, Elizavetpol and Shemakhi.

Adaptation to new conditions and contacts with the local population resulted in stock raising, handicrafts, etc. being added to the traditional occupation of the Molokans – agriculture. The communities of Transcaucasian Molokans had been fully flourishing until the 30s of the 20th century when the USSR started the policies of nationalizing the rural households. The ruination of peasantry entailed a massive migration of the Molokans to the cities. In today’s cities the Molokans are mostly active in public facilities and construction works. Among the city Molokans there is a small percent of intellectuals.

Within the last decade a high level of migration was noted among the Molokans, although it is below the total Russian average. Migration in this case is both an economic and a cultural event and result also from the reduction of the Russian-language educational establishments following Independence.

The Molokans today reside in cities Yerevan, Vanadzor, Dilijan, Hrazdan, Sevan, as well as in villages Fioletovo and Krasnoselsk. The total Molokan population is ca. 5 000. They have virtually no mixed marriages.

The Molokans of Armenia are educated at Russian-language schools or classes. Beside their native Russian, they are fluent in colloquial Armenian.

Most Molokans, being sectarians, retain the communal mentality. That had allowed them for nearly two centuries to retain their cultural and religious customs and traditions. On the other hand, individual cases of active integration have always resulted in a departure from sectarianism, which did not necessarily cause the lost of self-awareness. That is traceable in the Molokans who had departed from traditional lifestyle by getting the higher education, doing research work, administration et al.

NGOs

- “THE FOUNDATION FOR AID AND FACILITATION TO THE RUSSIAN COMPATRIOTS”

I. Semenov, Chairman
ADDRESS: 10, Orbeli, Apt. 16
Tels.: 228 933; 390 863

THE UKRAINIANS

The Ukrainians, endoethnonym: UKRAINTSI, were also called CHERKASY in the 16th – 17th cc, as well as MALOROSSY (Minor Russians) prior to 20th c. The language: Ukrainian, related to the East Slavonic branch of the Indo-European family of languages.

A fairly high percentage of Ukrainians living in CIS outside Ukraine underwent linguistic assimilation, like the Ukrainians in Armenia who are Russian-speaking.

Most Ukrainians confess Orthodoxy, the rest, mainly in the Western regions of Ukraine are Greek Catholics.

The first Ukrainians in Armenia appeared in the min-19th century after the relocating to Transcaucasia “the Kazaks from Minor Russia” to fortify the Empire’s Southern borders. The main occupation of the migrants was agriculture.

The Ukrainian population of Armenia was considerably reinforced during the Soviet period when the Republic hosted the representatives of the intellectual classes mostly – engineers, educators, scientists. Moreover, the arrivals to Armenia frequently resulted from mixed marriages.

According to the 1989 Census, living in Armenia were 8.3 thousand Ukrainians. However, with regard to the migrational processes of the last decade, today that number has perhaps been reduced by half. Beside the economic motivation of migration, an important role had been played by the “Language Law” in the Independent Armenia, reduction of Russian-language schools teaching Ukrainian children, as well as departure of the military personnel after the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

The Ukrainians in Armenia mainly live scattered: in cities – Yerevan, Gyumri, Vanadzor, Dilijan, and in districts of Abovian, Hrazdan, Charentsavan, Echmiadzin, Sevan, Akhurian, Ararat, Masis, Megri, Vardenis. Half of them are engineering personnel, and also medical doctors, educators, economists, lawyers, et al.

Following the breakdown of the USSR and the establishment of the Ukrainian statehood there was a growing tendency of reviving the national culture, including the one within the Ukrainian Diaspora. An emergence of ethnic self-awareness occurred, along with the heightened interest to the native language, history and culture and the integration of the Ukrainians in national communities.

The Ukrainian community helped establish the folk musical groups, open the Sunday school for learning the Ukrainian language, a bilingual newspaper “Dnipro” is published in Ukrainian and Armenian. Armenia’s National Radio airs a program in Ukrainian.

NGOs

- **“UKRAINA” – THE FEDERATION OF ARMENIAN UKRAINIANS**

R. Yavir – Chairperson
Address: 2/1, Giulbenkian, Apt. 52
Tel.: 258 101; 258 101; 545 409

- **“UKRAINA”, THE BENEVOLENT FUND**

V. Ocheredko, Chairman
Address: 2/1, Giulbenkian, Apt. 52.

OTHER PEOPLES

Beside the minorities reviewed herein, there are representatives of other ethnic groups in Armenia, either having no organized representation through scarcity and scatter, or identifying themselves with a larger minority, like the Belorussians counting about 160 in Armenia, and joining the Russians, being both Russian-speaking and ethnically close to the Russians.

Also to be noted are individual Lithuanians, Central Asians, Azerbaijanis, Tartars, Persians, Indians, Afghans, Arabs. Most live in Armenia by virtue of marital relations with Armenians. Some have acquired residence permits as political immigrants or businessmen implementing long-time commercial transactions in Armenia.

NGOs

- THE SOCIETY OF BYOLORUSSIANS IN YEREVAN

V. Varuzhan-Krishtolik

ADDRESS: 5, Gogol St., Apt. 7, Yerevan, Armenia

Tel.: 395 938

- THE UNION OF NATIONALITIES, REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA

V. Chatoev – Chairman

ADDRESS: 8, Tigran-metsi St., Yerevan, Armenia

Tel. 525 594

SUBETHNIC GROUPS OF ARMENIANS

Of the formerly fairly large sub-ethnic groups of Armenians – the Armenian Gypsies and the Armenian Tats, very few of their representatives still remain in Armenia. The reason for this is that the predominant area of residents for both of those groups have been other territories of Historic Armenia, rather than Eastern Armenia that includes the Republic of Armenia as it is today.

The Armenian Gypsies used to inhabit mainly the Province of Vaspurakan and Vilayet Erzurum (present-day Turkey), Javakhk (South Georgia) and in Tiflis. Armenian Tats occupied a number of villages (several score in the early 19th century) on the Apsheron Peninsula (present-day Republic of Azerbaijan), mainly villages Kilvar, Madrasa and Khachmas.

The Armenian Gypsies, having a special ethnonym BOSHA are Christians of the Armenian Grigorian Confession, followers of the Armenian Apostolic Church. They are descendants of Gypsies who came to Armenia perhaps in the 11th – 13th centuries as part of a large Gypsy migration from East India, their historic homeland. The armenization of the Gypsies who had settled in Armenia must have occurred perhaps in the 14th to 16th cc., anyway by the early 19th they did already have an Armenian identity, though had retained their language (an Indo-Aryan dialect), a particular lifestyle and a feeling of belonging in a group. Incidentally, some Gypsy (Bosha) families gave forth a number of prominent figures of the Armenian culture in the 19th century.

The Armenian-Gypsy system of first and second names as well as all personal attributes have Armenian characteristics. Considering the Armenian self-awareness and originality at the same time, the Armenian Gypsies are to be related to the groups having the so-called complex identity.

The traditional endogamy has not been retained to date: mixed marriages with the non-Gypsy Armenians have become commonplace.

The language of the Armenian Gypsies, having occupied a special place in the system of Gypsy dialects, had been still in use in the late 19th century, but rather as a clandestine slang. It is now

spoken by very old individuals and is quite degenerated.

The Armenian Gypsies now live in Yerevan, Gyumri, and in Georgian cities Akhalkalak and Akhaltsikh. Their principal economic activity is smithcraft, basket weaving, producing the household effects, which is quite common among the sedentary Gypsies. In contrast to other Gypsies, the Bosha do not practice fortune telling or magic.

To determine the numbers of the Armenian Gypsies is impossible, however by approximation they can amount to a few thousand persons in Armenia and Georgia.

As to the Armenian Tats, they, like the Bosha, possess all the Armenian features: the names, confession, identity, etc. At the same time the Tats retain their language and the sense of their self-awareness, although at an everyday-life level. At the social level, however, the facets and features are being obliterated.

The Armenian Tats speak a particular language, a North-West Iranian dialect; they designate it as FARSI, i.e. PERSIAN. Now this language is unfortunately spoken only by individuals over 50.

The Tats live in Armenia currently in a tightly populated community in the village of Nor Madrasa (New Madrasa) near Ashtarak city. The village was established by the migrants from Azerbaijan where the Karabakh conflict triggered a massacre of the Armenian Tats, so that they had to flee to Russia and Armenia. Living now in Nor Madrasa are about a hundred families of the Armenian Tats.