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THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF GEORGIA, GRIGOL VASHADZE, LIES TO THE FRENCH PARLIAMENTARIANS ABOUT THE CASE OF THE JAVAKHETI ARMENIAN POLITICAL ACTIVIST VAHAGN CHAKHALYAN

On November 25, 2009 during his visit to France, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, Grigol Vashadze, had a meeting with the members of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the French Parliament, and responded to the questions of the parliamentarians.

The French parliamentarian, Chairman of the "Armenia-France Friendship" parliamentary group François Rochebloine asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs to clarify the situation in Javakheti, the region of Georgia predominantly populated by ethnic Armenians. Drawing special attention of the Minister to the trial of Vahagn Chakhalyan, who was arrested in July of 2008, the French parliamentarian noted, in particular, that the Javakheti political activist was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment on dubious, if not trumped-up charges, and the Court of Appeals after 15 minutes of consultation left the sentence of the Court of First Instance intact.

Mr. Rochebloine put the Minister on notice that the father and younger brother of Vahagn Chakhalyan were sentenced to suspended terms of imprisonment. It was also mentioned that the Georgian justice has flagrantly violated the right of Chakhalyan to engage a French defense lawyer to protect his rights in court. The parliamentarian also noted that the relevant structures of the Council of Europe and personally the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, Mr. Hammarberg had already been notified on this issue.

In response to the deputy's question, Mr. Vashadze said, particularly, the following: "The Georgian citizen of the Armenian origin, you mentioned, was arrested on very serious charges - he transmitted information to a third country. I cannot mention – which one, and I leave you to make you guess. Unfortunately, our legislation does not allow foreign lawyers to participate in the court hearings, but they can join the defense team as advisers. By the way, Mr. Chakhalyan, appealing the verdict in the Supreme Court, had two or three lawyers of different origin. Despite the biased coverage in some media, especially - in the Armenian Diaspora, he is sentenced due to serious allegations put forward against him and not because of his Armenian origin, or because he was defending the rights of the Armenian population. Had he been an ethnic Georgian, he would suffer the same fate".

(The full text of Mr. Rochebloine's question and the response of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia is available on the official website of the French Parliament at <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/13/cr-cafe/09-10/c0910019.asp>).

Consequently, by this statement on the Chakhalyans' case the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia is, in fact, trying to intentionally mislead the members of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the French Parliament and, indirectly, the international community.

Thus:

1. The assertion of Mr. Vashadze that Vahagn Chakhalyan is accused of "transmitting information to a third country" is a complete outright lie. In fact, the Javakheti political activist has been sentenced solely for "possession of weapons and ammunition", allegedly found in his home and the office by the Georgian special forces, as well as for "organizing activities that disrupt public order" and "hooliganism against a government representative". The last two charges are based on the distortion

of the facts of his political activity in 2005-06 aimed at protection of the rights of the Javakheti Armenian population.

Moreover, Vahagn Chakhalyan, his father and his juvenile brother at the time of their arrest were accused solely of “possession of arms and ammunition”, and the other charges were added against Javakheti political activist only after the beginning of the trial.

2. Mr. Vashadze "forgets" to mention that prior to July 2009, participation of foreign lawyers in court proceedings was allowed by the Georgian laws, and only after the application of Vahagn Chakhalyan to register his French lawyer the Georgian parliament hastily passed the law removing this provision from the Code of Criminal Procedure.

Based on the aforementioned facts and having reasonable concern that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia spreads such flagrant disinformation with respect to Chakhalyan's case also on other relevant occasions, the “Yerkir” Union calls on the European and international structures concerned about the problems of Javakheti Armenians and the fate of Javakheti political leader to continue raising consistently the questions during all the contacts, taking place with the Georgian officials.