



News Release

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Thomas Jefferson Law Professor Lectures in South Caucasus Countries *William Slomanson Meets with National Dignitaries in Nagorno Karabakh in Azerbaijan*

SAN DIEGO -- Thomas Jefferson School of Law (TJSL) Professor William Slomanson, the author of a widely used casebook on international law, traveled this month to several countries in the region along the East European/Southwest Asian border known as the South Caucasus, lecturing on the topic of "Remedial Secession in South Caucasus." Accompanied by TJSL Professor Chris Guzelian and third-year TJSL law student Mike Pehlevanian, both of Armenian descent, Professor Slomanson also met with national dignitaries in the Armenian-held Nagorno Karabakh enclave inside Azerbaijan.

The South Caucasus region remains one of the most complicated in the post-Soviet area, and comprises three heavily disputed areas: Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, and Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan. Several wars, including the 2008 South Ossetia war, Ossetian-Georgian conflict and the Nagorno-Karabakh war have been waged in this region, which for centuries has experienced political, military, religious and cultural rivalries.

Professor Slomanson gave his first presentation on August 2 at the Free Tbilisi University, located in Tbilisi, Georgia's capital. Seven members of Georgia's Foreign Ministry attended the event. The YouTube version of the presentation is available at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=NH2N4NGtbGQ&feature=share&list=UUGsIH8OoAgATLQmfCET-Icw. On August 6, Professor Slomanson spoke at the American University Armenia in Yerevan, the capital of Armenia.

The specific focus of his talks was the three South Caucasus unilateral secessions, announced by the Georgian provinces of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and Nagorno Karabakh (NK). The former were central features of the 2008 Georgia-Russia war. The latter secession is at the heart of a frozen but simmering conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. NK lies wholly within Azerbaijan.

According to Professor Slomanson, this powder keg has the potential to destabilize the region, especially if the Azeri sniping and Israeli drones at the front lines of this currently low-intensity conflict causes it to boil over into a more heated clash. He recommends an informative website that provides what he describes as an "intriguing snapshot" of the present conflict at <http://hetq.am/eng/multimedia/slideshows/59>.

"The highlight of this trip was what would have been an otherwise lengthy journey—from Yerevan to the former Soviet oblast Nagorno Karabakh—with Professor Chris Guzelian and student Michael Pehlevanian," said Professor Slomanson. "Sharing this time with two very knowledgeable Armenians yielded unparalleled insights into the richness of Armenia's history, culture, beauty and the ugliness of this looming conflict."

Professor Slomanson, who teaches International Law and Civil Procedure at TJSJ, is a Visiting Professor on the Pristina University faculty in Kosovo, and is aware of the intricacies of life in conflict and former conflict zones. As with Kosovo, prior to its United Nations (U.N.) administration, various U.N. Security Council and U.S. congressional resolutions did little to control these geopolitical hotspots, says Professor Slomanson.

Professor Guzelian also was enthusiastic about their visit to the South Caucasus. “I am so pleased that my colleague Bill Slomanson, a renowned expert in international law related to secession has taken such interest in the autonomous region of Nagorno-Karabakh (“Artsakh” in Armenian) and its case for secession from Azerbaijan,” said Professor Guzelian. “I am also especially grateful to TJSJ student Michael Pehlevanian for his exceptional translation skills and legal reasoning during our visit.”

“Thanks to American University of Armenia and dedicated representatives of Artsakh’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, we were received by the best set of hosts imaginable, including Artsakh’s Prime Minister and its Speaker of the Parliament. We learned much about Artsakh’s current nation-building dynamics. Perhaps just as importantly, Professor Slomanson’s keen legal acumen was an impressive and instructive display for our hosts. He confirmed their sentiment that Artsakh does indeed have one of the best cases worldwide for lawful secession. However, Professor Slomanson stressed to our eagerly attentive hosts that Artsakh must adopt a more nuanced understanding of international law to provide objectively persuasive support for legal secession.”

After several days of state visits in NK, Professor Slomanson was asked to give another talk, this one on the general principles of international law. “I declined because of the intensity of my just under two week visit to the South Caucasus,” he explained. “It required six days of travel just to get to and then move between the three capitals, visit various government and military installations, etc. Now that I’m over thirty, I wisely asked Mike to take this assignment in my place. Given his fabulous performance in my International Law class, I knew that he would sparkle in that role. Needless to say, he made TJSJ proud!”

Another development of the trip which pleased Professor Slomanson is that the Rector of Nagorno Karabakh’s Stepanakert University has invited TJSJ to work with him to staff a major international conference there in 2013.

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Editors: Professors Slomanson and Guzelian are available for interviews and photos also are available of their meetings with Nagorno Karabakh’s Prime Minister and Speaker of the Parliament.