

**PRESS RELEASE//FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE//PRESS RELEASE**

For further information, please contact:  
Gloria Caudill, Administrator  
Armenian Studies Program  
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor  
gcaudill@umich.edu  
(734) 763-0622

**PROF. DUM-TRAGUT DISCUSSES LANGUAGE AND CULTURE IN ARMENIA  
SINCE INDEPENDENCE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN**

On February 10, 2009 Dr. Jasmine Dum-Tragut spoke to a full audience as a guest of the Armenian Studies Program at The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Her lecture was titled "The Changing Face of Armenia: Language, Culture, Religion and Minorities since Independence." She was a Manoogian Simone Foundation Visiting Scholar with the Department of Near Eastern Studies at the University of Michigan, sponsored by the Armenian Studies Program.

In her lecture Dr. Dum-Tragut addressed the current situation of minorities in Armenia, and the religious, cultural, educational and linguistic environment in the country. There is no reliable census of religious minorities in Armenia, but in general the problem of religious tolerance is acute. Time changes, but the church maintains its conservative ideology, which adds to the atmosphere of religious intolerance. Yet while there is a strong link between Armenian ethnicity and the church, she does not think that the Church is as strongly connected to national self-awareness as it was before 1991.

Dr. Dum-Tragut argued that more than armed conflict and economic crisis have shaped Armenia since the end of the Soviet Union. Notably, language policy has played an important role in forming a new national identity in independent Armenia. The strengthening of Armenian language use in schools at the expense of Russian-language instruction was directed against Russian-speaking Armenians, but had significant demographic consequences for minorities and many left in the 1990s. Despite all these nationalistic, pro-ethnic Armenian moves, however, she argued that we should bear in mind that Armenia is perhaps more heterogeneous in its ethnic, religious, and cultural values than ever before.

In response to a question about the cultural importance of the Church since 1991, Dr. Dum-Tragut argued that it is still important, but many Armenians are not practicing their religion, even if baptized, so the role of the Church is complicated. Further, some Armenians have Christian denominations other than the Apostolic Church and even outside. After another question about what defines Armenians, she responded that the main features were origin, religion, language, culture, and territory, being born in Armenia and knowing the Armenian language:

Jasmine Dum-Tragut teaches at the Department of Linguistics, University of Salzburg and is Head of the Department for Armenian Studies, Mayr-Melnhof-Institute for the Christian East, Salzburg.

She was awarded a PH.D. in General Linguistics and Russian Philology 1994 from the University of Graz (A), after having studied from 1988-1990 in Armenia and having obtained there several diplomas in Armenian and sociolinguistic studies.

Dr. Dum-Tragut has received a number of grants for research in Armenian linguistics and medieval literature at a number of European institutions.

Starting from 2003 she has been acting as scientific advisor and project manager at the archaeological excavations of the University of Innsbruck (A) in Aramus/Armenia; she is also guest scholar at the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig (D) and at the Chair for Armenian Studies at Leiden University (NL).

She has published more than 40 papers and 11 monographs referring to Armenian studies and general linguistics and lectured extensively worldwide.