

The Enhancement of Armenia-Diaspora Relations as a Way of Addressing the Challenges Facing the Armenian Nation

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The lecture views the qualitative improvement of Armenia-Diaspora relations as a major way for addressing the current challenges of the Armenian nation, including the perspectives for the settlement of Nagorno-Karabagh conflict, the Armenian-Turkish and Armenian-Azerbaijani relations, the problem of Javakhk and the demographic and social-economic situation in Armenia.

In the last decade and a half Armenia has already made enormous sacrifices and set up fundamental prerequisites for the building of mature statehood, which include:

1. a quite defensible territory (together with Artsakh and the liberated territories).

Because what is modern Armenia? Today's Armenia is not just the Republic of Armenia, but also the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic together with the liberated territories, altogether – over 40,000 sq km, or, if you want more accurately, about 43,000 sq km. Although this is not yet an internationally recognized legal fact but it is a strategic fact, i.e. – a military, geographic, sociopolitical, sociopsychological and economic reality! All we have to seek for is attaining the international recognition and legitimacy for this reality, which, however, would continue for years and decades to come. Thus, **modern Armenia is the territory controlled by the Armenian armed forces.**

2. the Armenian Army, which with all of its shortcomings is by far the most efficient army in the Transcaucasus region,
3. the possession of rich and extremely diverse nature with rich natural resources (especially water resources, which would become extremely valuable within just a few decades),
4. the possibilities for right organization of Diaspora's potential,

5. the allied and friendly states,
6. the educated and industrious manpower with their inherited ancient culture, national language, literature, fairly advanced education system and strong academic traditions and structures (though many are in decay).

Significant advances have been made on the economic front: after the catastrophic earthquake of 1988, very significant losses during Artsakh liberation war and simultaneous collapse of Soviet economy, Armenia has started a gradual and visible economic recovery. According to official statistics, in relation to the past year, in 2001 Armenia's GDP has grown by 9,6%, in 2002 by 12,9%, in 2003 by 13,9% and in 2004 by 10,1%¹.

At the same time, the realization and utilization of these strategic opportunities requires a much more effective governance, including the drastic reduction in levels of "shadow economy" and corruption.

Demands are pressing:

The Armenian-Turkish/Azerbaijani conflict does not demonstrate signs of ceasing in a long run. We have to look on Armenia's problems precisely from the perspective of this ongoing conflict (not just the conflict over Nagorno-Karabagh).

- a) Economy investments in Armenia vs Azerbaijan in 2004 (300 mln vs 4,5 bln in USD).
- b) Military budgets (125 mln vs 250 mln), if continued, this discrepancy would definitely change the force balance in the standoff.
- c) Demography.
- d) Javakhk.

Two fundamental all-Armenian objectives for a mid- and long term period, having in mind our real challenges in land and demography:

1. **Objective No. 1: Preservation of land** – Armenia and Artsakh should retain all the land they are in control now for the coming decades;

¹ Armenia's GDP for 2004 was officially estimated at \$3,549 billion.

2. **Objective No. 2: Demographic growth** – by 2025, Armenia should have 4 million, by 2050 – 6 million, and by the turn of the century – be a country with 10 million-strong population.

These two short points are authentic and, in my opinion, realistic Armenian national objectives. Such demographic perspective requires an average 50,000 annual growth in the coming 20 years, and 100,000 annual growth for the subsequent phase. Especially after 2015, this growth should be assisted by immigration from Diaspora. The coming decade would be crucial: by 2015, Armenia should make progress to the point, when it can manage to organize repatriation on larger scale.

Let this be said bluntly: even in the 21st century the land is still the most precious strategic asset. The Armenians must be aware of this elementary strategic reality better than anyone else. Ironically, too many of them lack this awareness. Why does Russia, which seats on almost 1/6th part of the land mass, refuse to hand over a tiny portion, about 1% of its territory, the Kuril islands, thousands miles away from its capital, to Japan? Some Armenians do not ask themselves a simple question: why does Azerbaijan, which has already secured control over previously Armenian-populated large areas, particularly entire Nakhijevan and lower Karabagh, still so eager to conquer Karabakh and the surrounding territories which comprise only about 1/7th of its Soviet-time territory, while many Armenians do not see that Artsakh together with the liberated territories comprises more than 1/4th of modern Armenia (sic – not of the Republic of Armenia).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, one of the currently apparent outcomes of the deep transformation within the international political system has been the rise of the cult of power, that is a severe devaluation of the so-called international law (its value has never been absolute though), and a sharp increase in the physical manifestations of potency of a state, including especially the size of territory hold, its manpower, its national security system, the quantity and quality of its armed forces and their morale, and the level of its population's consolidation over the all-national objectives as well as the economic potency.

Too many Armenians in Diaspora relish a national identity, which is devoid of psychological attachments and commitments to the home**LAND**. A Diaspora identity of

this type is deeply flawed and doomed to speedy acculturation and assimilation. Too many Armenians have never engaged with the homeland.

I want to mention here available ways of engagement:

1. **Direct economic engagement:** the opening of a business in Armenia;
2. **Political engagement:** lobbyism of the interests of Armenia in the decision-making structures of the host countries;
3. **Ideological engagement:** the promotion of Armenian interests in mass media of the host countries and neutralization of Turkish-Azerbaijani anti-Armenian propaganda;
4. **Cultural engagement** such as contribution to the education, science and cultural life of Armenia (a variety of effective open-ended programs have already been launched in these fields);
5. **Entertaining engagement** such as tourism in Armenia.
6. Finally, **the ultimate engagement** is, of course, **repatriation** with its huge development potential.

Each of these engagements has tangible economic, psychological, political and many other benefits for both Armenia and Diaspora.

An ultimate engagement in the form of repatriation contains the answers to almost all Armenian problems.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union the relations between Armenia and Diaspora have not been structurally adjusted to the new situation.

Neither in Armenia, nor abroad new bodies dealing with the qualitative and quantitative rise of relations were created. Let us review the structural situation in Armenia and Diaspora.

Situation in Armenia

- The Spiurk Committee (the Committee for Cultural Relations with the Armenians Abroad), instead of being reformed into a larger body with politically different agenda, was disbanded.
- The weak attempts of dealing with the Diaspora-Armenia relations within the framework of the MFA (a post of a Deputy Minister) was virtually abandoned. Current Section in MFA is extremely small for a serious work and is devoid of any real powers. Besides, the MFA is inherently not the best body for dealing with a vast Diaspora. Its functions are in the significantly different fields of bilateral and multilateral inter-state relations.
- The current capacities of the “Hayastan” Foundation have metamorphosed it into an organization, which even remotely does not resemble a structure it was originally envisaged and intended to be.
- Armenia-Diaspora Congresses Numbers 1 and 2 have failed to produce any concrete tangible results in structural sense.

Situation in Diaspora

- New structures, such as the Lincy Foundation, United Armenian Fund are doing extremely important job – but the aid programs do not involve masses into Armenian life.
- Lobbyism is an important and necessary work, however this work by itself also does not involve masses (though I’m talking now in a major lobbyist organization), if not supported by accompanying measures that would deal with the situation on the ground – the issues in Armenia. After all, lobbyism is a passive way of struggle, if left alone.
- Attempts to establish a representative all-Diaspora organization have been generally unsuccessful for a host of reasons not to be elaborated here, and, at this stage, could hardly be seen as realistic.

Thus, until now major organized Diasporan engagement with Armenia has gone along the old ways:

- 1) aid programs,
- 2) lobbyism, mainly in the USA,
- 3) political patronage or favoritism or preferential treatment of specific political groups in Armenia.

Other forms of engagement with Armenia have occurred on an unorganized level, including business activities, tourism, professional collaboration, and, of course, repatriation.

To achieve the necessary results of growth at this stage the priority for the Armenians should be the drastic increase in self-organization in both Armenia and Diaspora as well as between Armenia and Diaspora. Homeland, with all of its problems and shortcomings as well as many successes is the most effective pivot, and in many aspects the only one, around which the Diasporan life and identity could be built and cultivated.

The Ministry for Spiurk affairs in Armenia

Establishment of a new Diasporan institution with branches all over the world and the single point in its agenda – to provide all possible support for repatriation, including financial, informational, judicial, as well as ideological backing. This new institutions should act independently from all other Diasporan organizations and Armenian state.

To finish, the enhancement of Armenia-Diaspora relations envisages:

- (1) vibrant and constructive discussion about Diaspora's participation and engagement in the homeland's life, including in the ultimate form of repatriation,
- (2) creation of new structures in both Armenia and Diaspora dealing with Diaspora's engagement in homeland's life,
- (3) significant changes and new specific stipulations in Armenian law regarding Diaspora's engagement in homeland's life,
- (4) the enhancement of individual activism on the part of patriotic Diasporan youth to work and live in Armenia against all odds.

ADDENDUM: Change of the point in lobbyist activities in the U.S. Emphasis on the lifting of Georgian blockade rather than Turkish one.