

THE STATE-BUILDING PROCESS OF POST-SOVIET
ARMENIA: THE ROLE OF THE DIASPORA IN THE
DEMOCRATIZATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA,
1991–2008

Two thirds of ethnic Armenians live outside of Armenia. Armenian communities are scattered throughout the world – from Canada to Australia and from Argentina to Siberia. The genesis of the Armenian Diaspora (“Spyurq”) started in the Middle Ages, but the majority of Armenian exodus from their homeland occurred as a result of two events: the 1915 Genocide in Western Armenia carried out by the Government of the Young Turks, and the Sovietization of Eastern Armenia (1920) which was previously part of the Russian Empire. Despite the chain of events, and the wide geographic range of emigration they caused, Armenian communities have developed and sustained themselves globally.

The aim of this paper is (1) to evaluate the influence of Diaspora on the state building process in the newly independent Republic of Armenia and (2) to analyze the Government of Armenia’s (GoA) position on the inclusion of the Diaspora in the Armenian political processes. The historical perception of Diasporan politics towards Armenia will be presented first, including the role of the Diasporan political parties in reinventing the independence and building new statehood in Armenia at the end of 1980s and the beginning of 1990s. Since independence, relations between Armenia and the Diaspora have evolved through more than a decade long intensive interactions. The opportunity to obtain dual citizenship was proposed to Diasporan Armenians through amendments made to the Constitution of Armenia in 2005. Despite this action, it remains unclear to what extent Diasporan Armenians are committed to repatriation or a stronger presence in the political life of Armenia. This paper will then focus on a case study of Diasporan organizations’ reaction to the post-electoral developments that unfolded in Armenia in February–March 2008.

Keywords: Armenia Diaspora relations, state building, democratization

IZGRADNJA DRŽAVE V POSTSOVJETSKI ARMENIJI: VLOGA DIASPORE V DEMOKRATIZACIJI REPUBLIKE ARMENIJE, 1991–2008

Kar dve tretjini etničnih Armencev živita zunaj meja Armenije. Armenske skupnosti so raztresene po vsem svetu – od Kanade do Avstralije in od Argentine do Sibirije. Geneza armenske diaspore (“Spyurq”) sega v srednji vek, večji del eksodusa Armencev iz domovine pa je posledica dveh ključnih dogodkov: genocida v zahodni Armeniji leta 1915, ki ga je zakrivila vlada Mladoturkov, in sovjetizacije vzhodne Armenije (1920), ki je bila poprej del carske Rusije. Kljub široki geografski razpršenosti emigracije pa so se armenske skupnosti razvile in obdržale vse do današnjih dni.

Namen našega prispevka je (1) oceniti vpliv diaspore na državotvorni proces v novoustanovljeni republiki Armeniji, kakor tudi (2) razčleniti odnos armenske vlade do vključitve diaspore v politične procese v Armeniji. Najprej bomo osvetlili zgodovino Armenije skozi percepcijo diaspore, predusem vlogo političnih strank diaspore v pridobitvi neodvisnosti in izgradnji nove armenske državnosti konec osemdesetih in v začetku devetdesetih let prejšnjega stoletja. Armenija in diaspora imata namreč za seboj že več kot desetletno zgodovino intenzivnega komuniciranja. Leta 2005 je Armenija sprejela ustavne amandmaje, ki Armencem v diaspori ponujajo možnost pridobitve dvojnega državljanstva, čeprav ni jasno, v kolikšni meri si ti sploh želijo vrnitve v domovino oziroma večje udeležnosti v političnem življenju Armenije. Članek v nadaljevanju osvetljuje tudi odziv diaspore na povolilno dogajanje v Armeniji februarja in marca leta 2008.

Ključne besede: odnosi med Armenijo in diasporo, izgradnja države, demokratizacija

INTRODUCTION

Two thirds of ethnic Armenians live outside of Armenia. Armenian communities are scattered throughout the world – from Canada to Australia and from Argentina to Siberia. The genesis of the Armenian Diaspora (“Spyurq”) started in the Middle Ages, but the majority of Armenian exodus from their homeland occurred as a result of two events: the 1915 Genocide in Western Armenia carried out by the Government of the Young Turks, and the Sovietization of Eastern Armenia (1920) which was previously part of the Russian Empire. Despite the chain of events, and the wide geographic range of emigration they caused, Armenian communities have developed and sustained themselves globally.

The Diasporan communities were cut off from the homeland almost for 70 years. The only opportunities to establish relationships between Diasporan communities and Soviet Armenia were cultural in nature. Moreover, for decades the active and strong Diasporan communities of the United States and Western Europe were located on the other side of the Iron Curtain, and were thus part of the ideological antagonism against the Soviet Empire and, accordingly, Soviet Armenia. The Armenian Diaspora sets its agenda and political goals independent from the Armenian homeland, which was in fact deprived of its own sovereignty. As a result of the absence of interrelations, two core priorities emerged for the Diasporan communities: protecting Armenian identity (“Hayapahpanutian”) in the new countries of residence, and achieving international recognition of the Armenian Genocide (“Hay Dat”). Meanwhile the agenda of Soviet Armenia, which would soon regain its independence, was shaped by completely different priorities.

After the collapse of Soviet Union a new phase of relations began between the newly independent Armenian state and the Armenian Diaspora. In response to the devastating earthquake in 1988 and the start of the war in Nagorno Kharabakh, the Diaspora provided significant humanitarian and financial support to Armenia. These actions contributed to the formation of lofty expectations for a “powerful Diaspora” in Armenia; it also gave Diasporan Armenians the chance to rediscover “the lost heaven, the holy land of ancestors,” which was suffering from war, natural disasters, blockades, economic collapse, and energy and social crises. Prior to Armenia’s independence, both sides had minimal information about the realities that existed on “the other side”, which resulted in lofty, but groundless expectations about the future roles of both sides. These often idealized notions of the potential interrelations between the Homeland and the Diaspora sometimes resulted in frustration, disappointments and conflicts on both sides. As time passed, several steps were taken by Armenian government to organize Armenian-Diasporan relations, particularly to increase mutual understanding, synchronize agendas and coordinate efforts. The activities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

of Armenia will be discussed in the text to analyze the policy of Government of Armenia to the Diaspora and the policy's effectiveness. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has initiated three pan-Armenian conferences and established networks between Armenia and the Diaspora communities, branding itself as the primary coordinating institution between Armenia and the Diaspora. At the same time, the Ministry is also one of the political institutions that have been significantly influenced by the Diaspora. Diasporan Armenians contributed to its development through technical assistance, such as supporting the establishment of embassies, and through political support by lobbying their home governments. The Diaspora's human capital was also directly involved in the formation of Armenia's foreign policy. Raffi Hovhannisian, the first Armenian Minister of Foreign Affairs, was a Diasporan himself and was succeeded by Vartan Oskanian, another Diasporan diplomat, who headed the Ministry for a decade (1998–2008).

THE ARMENIAN DIASPORA

Since Armenia gained independence from Soviet rule in 1991, many local politicians have considered the Armenian Diaspora one of the most significant advantages for the country in comparison to its neighbors in the South Caucasus (Georgia and Azerbaijan). Several politicians have declared that "our Diaspora is our Black Gold". This statement refers to Azerbaijan, an oil rich country, which leverages its oil resources as part of its diplomacy efforts and spends its oil money on building a stronger army (Yevgrashina et al. Christian 2008). The context of this comment is especially relevant since from 1992–1994 Armenia was involved in a war against Azerbaijan to defend Armenians of Nagorno Kharabakh. The war ended in 1994 through a cease-fire agreement. However, a final peace agreement was not reached and the possibility of escalation into a new war persists (International Crisis Group 2007).

The Armenian Diaspora is known for being substantial in size, organized and influential. Zbigniew Brzezinski, the noted author in the field of international relations, in his analysis of ethnic lobby groups and their influence on the implementation of the United States' foreign policy, described the Armenian community as the most influential, after the Jewish and the Greek communities (Brzezinski 1998: 41).

Organized ethnic communities in their host countries possess the potential to significantly shape the political landscape of their homelands, particularly in the promotion of democratization in those countries. A good example is the role that the Mexican community of the United States played during the presidential elections in Mexico in 2000. The 2000 elections brought an end to over 70 years of one party rule by (Huntington 2004: 446). However, some scholars find ethnic

communities' influence on democratization of the political process in their homeland is quite limited, as an example considering that the three largest foreign communities in the United States are the Chinese, the Arabs and the Mexicans. These groups maintain close ties with their homelands, and in two of the three cases, with their non-democratic governments (De la Garza 2001: 95).

Organized ethnic communities in host countries tend to focus on the issues related to representing and protecting their ethnic interests. If those communities also have an independent homeland, then they support interests of their native state and advance their national interests by financial, political, diplomatic and professional means. In this examination of the political influence of transnational ethnic communities, the direction of influence is largely *from* the historical homeland and ethnic communities *to* the host countries (Huntington 2004: 430–456). This is indeed the case for the Armenian Diaspora: Armenian political organizations are focused on influencing the institutions of their host countries to achieve their goals, rather than trying to directly influence the political institutions of Republic of Armenia. This applies most to the activities of Armenian communities in Northern America and Europe, and specifically the organizations that lobby the governments and parliaments of their host countries.

The trend described above does not fully explain the limited influence of Armenian communities on the democratization process of Armenia. The extent of influence must be contextualized in the genesis and history of the Armenian Diaspora and the potential role the Diaspora could play. Armenian communities began to spread to foreign countries in the Middle Ages, when Armenia lost its statehood (respectively, Armenia in 11th century and Cilicia in 14th century, which was an Armenian kingdom outside of historical Armenian territories, populated mostly by immigrant Armenians). However, the majority of Diasporan communities developed in the beginning of the 20th century as a result of the Armenian Genocide in Ottoman Turkey.

The Armenian Diaspora is quite multilayered (Liparityan 1999: 204). By geographic and cultural criteria it may be grouped as follows:

1. Countries of the Middle East, such as Lebanon, Syria, Iran, Iraq, and Egypt. Armenians that survived the Genocide established and branded strong and organized communities. Those communities are known as the "Traditional Diaspora" (Avandakan Spyurq). During the last four decades, a significant number of Armenians have left those communities for Western countries. As a result, the Traditional Diaspora naturally started to weaken and loose its central role, where the most cultural, social and political developments had been taking place. The emigration of the Traditional Diaspora from Middle Eastern countries was largely related to certain Middle Eastern phe-

nomena, such as civil and interstate wars, Arabization, and Islamization that continue today.

2. Western European countries and North America, particularly the USA, France, Canada, Belgium, Great Britain and Netherlands. A small number of Armenians had immigrated to these countries before the Genocide, but they expanded after the Genocide, as well as after the later wave of the aforementioned emigration from the Middle East. In addition, prior to the fall of the USSR, Armenians under Soviet rule began to immigrate to Western European and North American countries. Today, these Diasporan communities are composed of two groups of Armenians with different backgrounds. The first group is made up of the generations of Genocide survivors who emigrated in the beginning of the 20th century. The second group is composed of migrants from the Soviet Union and later from the independent Armenian, Azeri and other former Soviet republics over last two decades. The latter group is less influential and less organized in the host countries, but is more familiar with the situation in post-Soviet Armenia. Many of the latter are still linked to Armenia through family ties, common traditions and culture, including similarity of the Eastern Armenian dialect, and are more attuned to the internal political developments in Armenia. This relatively new group has the potential to catalyze Diasporan efforts to support the democratization of Armenia.

Furthermore, these two groups differ from each other by the degree of integration into their host country and maintenance of an Armenian identity. These ranges from largely assimilated Armenians to Armenians who often do not have legal citizenship status in their host countries (Tölölyan 2001: 9). Therefore, the interests and influence of Armenians in these communities vary greatly.

3. Armenians that continue to live in former Soviet republics. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, these communities found themselves within the borders of foreign countries. The Russian Federation and Georgia are the best examples of former Soviet republics with Armenian communities. In the case of the Russian Federation, the self-organization of the Armenian community in ongoing since immigration that started two decades ago continues.

For more details on the history and features of Armenian communities and different subgroups, and the differences in the agendas, expectation and attitudes of the Republic of Armenia and the Diaspora, refer to the comprehensive survey of public opinion and expert interviews carried out by the "Armenia2020" organization (Miller et al. 2003).

Since the majority of Diasporan communities inhabit countries that are not democracies, they are less likely to be focused on diffusing democratic norms and values. With the exception of organized communities in a number of Western countries (especially the USA and France), other Diasporan communities do not have the democratic precedents to share in the process of democratization with their compatriots in the Republic of Armenia. As indicated in Table 1, the majority of Diasporan communities live in countries with low democracy indexes.¹



1 Based on the Freedom House rating as criteria to measure how democratic the countries are. Freedom House is a well known non-governmental organization in the United States of America. *Freedom in World* is one of the most cited products of this organization, which contains comparative assessment data of political rights and civil liberties in 193 countries and 15 related and disputed territories. It has been published annually since 1972.

Table 1: The democraticness of major host countries of Armenian Diaspora

Country	Number of Armenians ²	% of Diaspora	Freedom House rating ³
Argentina	130,000	2.2	Free since 2004
Australia	35,000	0.6	Free
Belarus	25,000	0.4	Non Free
Belgium	10,000	0.2	Free
Brazil	40,000	0.7	Free since 2003
Bulgaria	30,000	0.5	Free
Canada	40,000	0.7	Free
Czech Republic	10,000	0.2	Free
France	450,000	7.6	Free
Georgia	450,000	7.6	Partly Free
Germany	42,000	0.7	Free
Greece	20,000	0.3	Free
Hungary	15,000	0.3	Free
Iran	100,000	1.7	Not Free
Iraq	20,000	0.3	Not Free
Jordan	51,500	0.9	Partly Free
Kazakhstan	25,000	0.4	Non Free
Lebanon	234,000	3.9	Non Free
Poland	92,000	1.5	Free
Russia	2,250,000	37.8	Non Free
Syria	150,000	2.5	Non Free
Turkey ⁴	40,000	0.7	Partly Free
Turkmenistan	32,000	0.5	Non Free
Ukraine	150,000	2.5	Free since 2006
United Kingdom	18,000	0.3	Free
USA	1,400,000 ⁵	23.5	Free
Uruguay	19,000	0.3	Free
Uzbekistan	70,000	1.2	Non Free
Total	5,948,500		



2 It is quiet difficult to find exact number of population in different Diaspora communities. The data provided is sourced from <http://www.armeniadiaspora.com/> according to 1st April, 2008. Web site maintained by Ministry of Foreign Relation of Republic of Armenia. Only communities that have 10,000 or more population are reflected in the list.

3 Freedom in the World 2007 survey, Freedom House, Inc. <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=15>

4 According to the mentioned online source, the number of Armenians in Turkey is 2,080,000; which possibly includes the so called "hidden Armenians". But the number of Armenians involved in community is mentioned at about 40,000, which is considered to be more accurate. See: Hofmann, Tessa (2002) "Armenians in Turkey Today. A critical assessment of the situation of the Armenian minority in Turkish Republic." Washington: The EU Office of Armenian Associations of Europe working papers (<http://www.armenian.ch/asa/Docs/faae02.pdf>, 3. 9. 2008).

5 This number is quite popular and is being widely mentioned also by Armenian organizations of US, though during census in 2000 only 323,701 people mentioned themselves as American Armenians. See: King, David and Miles Pomper (2004) "The U.S. Congress and the Contingent Influence of Diaspora Lobbies: Lessons from U.S. Policy toward Armenia and Azerbaijan." *Journal of Armenian Studies* VIII, 1.

As it is shown in the table only nearly 40% of the Diaspora Armenians live in countries that are “Free” according to the Freedom House. It is also worth to mention that some of those countries gained that status only recently. Another interesting finding is that 31%, the significant part of those 40%, are centralized in two countries, which are the United States and France. It should also be taken into consideration that, though many Diasporans or their parents now live in democratic countries, a large portion were born and lived in non-democratic countries such as Syria, Lebanon, Iran, Turkey, and the USSR. Therefore, the Armenian Diaspora has varied exposure to institutionalized democratic traditions.

On the other hand, Armenians established in Western countries, especially in the United States, have effectively used the democratic mechanism of political participation to lobby their governments and legislators (King and Pomper 2004: 4). In summary, the activities of Diaspora organizations are based on democratic principles, but their priorities, as it was mentioned in the introduction, are not to support the democratization the process of state building in the Republic of Armenia. For example brief analysis of missions of Diapsoran organizations in Europe listed on the www.armeniadiapsora.com web site proves that democratization of Armenia is not in the agenda for those 21 organizations.⁶ This statement also applied to other ethnic Diasporas, such as Chinese community in US and other South East Asian countries.

POLITICAL AGENDA OF ARMENIA AND ARMENIAN DIASPORA

The existence of Diasporan organizations in democratic countries does not imply that those organizations view the democratization of the Republic of Armenia as their priority and are ready to implement activities to promote that process in Armenia. The missions of Diasporan organizations are not the democratization of Armenia (Manaseryan 2004: 21). There are actually significant differences between the political agendas in Armenia and in the Diaspora. The following factors should be taken into consideration in order to understand those differences:

- a/ During the Soviet rule, the Diaspora was largely cut from the Armenian homeland, which resulted in a poor understanding of the situation on the ground in Armenia by the Diasporans and vice versa. Even in every day practice and routine traditions there is a gap between Diasporans and the Armenians from Armenia (Hayastantsi) (Manaseryan 2004: 6).



⁶ The website is maintained by Foreign Ministry of Armenia and has comprehensive information on Diaspora: <http://www.armeniadiapsora.com/europe/index.html>

One of the most significant examples of the misunderstandings and differences in political agendas between the Armenian Diaspora and the Republic of Armenia is the issue of the reunification of the Republic of Nagorno Kharabakh (then Autonomous Region of Nagorno Kharabakh) to the Soviet Armenia. All of the traditional political parties active in Diaspora share a position on the reunification. The commitment to reunification was made through a statement in October 1988, when the Karabakh movement was popular and had already mobilized a majority of the Armenian society and the Armenians living in Nagorno Kharabakh. This statement was signed by all the prominent Diaspora political parties: the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaksutian), the Democratic Liberal Party (Ramkavar) and the Social Democratic Party (Hnchak). The joining together of these parties was a rare occurrence in Diasporan politics. The statement all three parties signed took a tolerant position towards the Soviet leaders of Armenia and Nagorno Kharabakh, expressing hope that the leadership would find a “... fair solution to the problem”. However, the statement calling to their “brothers in Armenia and Kharabakh to abandon extreme methods of struggle, such as strikes, radical calls, which is disturbing public order in the homeland” (Libaridian 1991: 128–129). This kind of trustful and positive attitude towards the Soviet leadership, which was undergoing a serious crisis of legitimacy, and the careful and excusable attitude towards the national movement, that had mobilized the majority of the country, surprised and upset compatriots living in Armenia and Nagorno Kharabakh. The statement was widely criticized in Armenia, especially since it was signed by the Armenian Revolutionary Federation; the party that had been championing the idea of Armenia’s Independence since its Sovietization and had been a known critic of the Soviet Union.⁷ The two other parties, however, were known for their loyal attitude towards the Soviet Union even before this statement.⁸ As put by Kachig Tololyan, an author on Armenian Diaspora relations, this led to a situation of “general bitterness and disillusionment ... which will remain a major issue for some time to come as homeland and Diaspora leaderships both recognize that the transnation’s different segments, though temporarily united by crisis, do not share the same political goals and principles” (Tölölyan 2001: 22).



7 See, for example: Libaridian, Jirayr ed. (1991) *The response letter to Diasporan parties from Union for National Sovereignty, party from Armenia in Armenia at the Crossroads. Essays, interviews, and speeches by leaders on the national democratic movement in Armenia*. Democracy and Nationhood in the Post-Soviet Era. Watertown: 130–134.

8 In 1923 Social Democratic Party (Hnchak) announced that by Sovietization of Eastern Armenia Armenian Cause is solved, while Democratic Liberal Party (Ramkavar) accepted this fact as pragmatic reality and implemented policy of supporting Armenia through support to Soviet government.

b/ Another important factor in the gap between Diasporan and Armenian goals is the fact that, on a personal level, very few Diasporans are interested in the internal political developments of Armenia on daily basis. As citizens of other countries, Diasporans are likely to be more interested and involved in the politics of their host countries. This phenomenon is reasonable, given that the basic political decisions governing Diasporans' lives are made by the governments of their host countries and not in their historical homeland. Furthermore, some Diasporans with a Western Armenian background (Genocide survivors) do not perceive the Republic of Armenia and the territory it covers (Eastern Armenia) as their historical homeland. Instead they perceive Western Armenia (Eastern Anatolia of the contemporary Turkey: towns and villages that their parents were forced to leave because of the Genocide) as their historical homeland. There is a even special terms for those territories, "*Yergir*" (the land, the country), which does no include the territory of modern Republic of Armenia.

c/ The democratization of the Republic of Armenia has not been part of the missions of Diasporan organizations since their founding. Most of those organizations identify their priorities as the Armenian Cause (Hay Dat), recognition of the Armenia Genocide, organization of Armenian communities and conservation of Armenian identity (Hayapahapanum). Some organizations were established in 1960-1970s, when collapse of the Soviet Union was hardly foreseen. This is often why the priorities of these organizations were related to solving the internal problems of Diasporan communities. However, since the Soviet Union fell and Armenia gained its independence, Diasporan organizations have focused their activities in Armenia on the following causes:

- Humanitarian assistance to the Homeland, which was devastated by an earthquake in Spitak in 1988, the war in Nagorno Kharabakh, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the ensuing economic crisis.
- Financial aid for developing the infrastructure of the collapsed Armenian economy.
- Diplomatic and political support to the newly independent Armenia. The activities of Diasporan Armenian lobbyist groups in the US Congress in the early 1990s can be viewed as a success story. Due to these lobbying efforts, Armenia receives one of the highest rates of per capita foreign aid in the world.⁹ The aid money has also been spent on democracy promotion programs. As a result, Diasporan lobbying orga-



9 For details see the official web site of Armenian office of US Agency for International Development (USAID) <http://www.usaid.am/main/en/23/>

nizations have indirectly become involved in the process of “fundraising” money for democracy promotion programs in Armenia.

Most of the activities of Diasporan organizations have been defined by catastrophic situations Armenia was experiencing and were of vital importance to the country. During the fifteen years following the 1988 earthquake, more than 900 million USD were provided to Armenia through only 14 Diasporan organizations (Manaseryan 2004: 2).

d/ Many Diasporan communities and organizations are not democratic themselves, which is mostly related to the challenges of the preservation of Armenian identity (Hayapahapanutyun). “Individuals with alternative opinions on certain issues are leaving the community and being assimilated in the citizens of host countries. Very few are trying to found alternative institutions/organizations, fewer succeed” (Libaridian 1999: 154).

Diasporan political parties have not adopted the democratic traditions of their host countries, as stated by Libaridian, Diasporan academician from United States, former adviser of, the 1st president of Armenia, “In Diaspora Armenian parties continue practices of non transparent activities.” Libaridian views this as a legacy of the practices of those parties in the Ottoman Empire and later in the Middle Eastern countries (Libaridian 1999: 181). It is interesting to mention, that, for example, the most organized and powerful political party in Diaspora, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, has not revisited its political program since its founding in 1890s, though the realities and challenges facing the Armenian nation then were completely different from contemporary challenges.

e/ During the late 1980s, when independence movement was developing in Armenia, many Armenians expressed the hope that Diasporan political parties would support pluralism in Armenia, institutionalization of the party system and implementation of democratic practices. Over the course of the 70 years that the Soviet Union existed, Diasporan political parties have transformed themselves from into grassroots organizations into organized political parties (Melkonyan 2005: 103–104). One of the most important functions of a political party is political participation, specifically running for elections, winning political offices and implementing the political agenda, while the party holds the power. Except in Lebanon, where Armenian political parties hold guaranteed seats in the parliament and government, Armenian political parties “in exile” have mostly remained out of the main political processes. In scientific terms it would be more correct to define Diasporan political parties as ethno political structures, the activities of which are being carried out in different, alien political systems and are aimed at championing the interests of the ethnic group they represent.

These ethno political structures played important role in Diaspora's self-organization and identity preservation, but were cut off from the realities of Soviet Armenia. The parties returned to Armenia in 1990, which demanded a rethinking and reorganization of their structures. However, this transformation process was implemented in a rush, and many individuals sought membership in parties even without knowing their ideology and history. Instead, membership the parties were perceived as an opportunity to gain political power or personal advancement (Melkonyan 2005: 106).

POLITICAL INTERACTIONS OF DIASPORA AND THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA

The opportunity for Diasporan political parties to get involved in political arena of Armenia was a chance to bridge gaps with Armenian, on the ground realities. However, these parties were not able to adapt to these new realities. In the case of the Democratic Liberal Party (Ramkavar) a growing number of "accidental members" resulted in a division of the party. Moreover, these parties, which in Armenia consisted mostly of citizens of Armenia, turned into the bearers of the Armenian reality. In December 1994, Levon Ter-Petrosyan, the first president of Armenia, banned the activities of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, the most powerful party among the traditional parties, citing that their actions were breaking the laws of the Republic of Armenia. The parties were not officially reinstated until 1998, when it became evident that a new generation of party members from within Armenia had already been formed. This new generation occupied the leading role inside the parties. Once Armenia gained independence and the traditional political parties moved to the Homeland, many local Armenian citizens joined the parties, and their agendas very quickly turned from international affair to inter-country activities.

The return/entrance of the traditional parties into the Republic positively impacted democracy by increasing the competition between political parties in Armenia. And, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation became one of the most significant political parties in the young Republic of Armenia.

In the first years following the Independence of Armenia, its Diaspora had direct, but minor influence on the democratization taking place in Armenia. The limited extent of influence was natural given that Armenia and the Diaspora were separated from each others realities and furthermore, there were immediate challenges and vital problems to solve that affected the very existence of Armenians in Nagorno Kharabakh and Armenia. Since issues of survival were at stake and attempts to solve those issues were the priorities, issues related to democratization were not of a high importance and receded into the background. No steps

were taken to clarify the differences between the political agendas of Armenia and Diaspora and to adjust those agendas.

In the late 1990s, changes in administration as well as some steps were undertaken affected changes in Armenia-Diaspora relationships. Change was needed partly due to the fact that Levon Ter-Petrosian, who resigned from in the presidency in 1998, had a bad image in Diaspora. He had banned the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) and had fired Diasporan Armenian Raffi Hovhannisyan, the first Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, because Hovhannisyan had stated that international recognition of the Armenian Genocide was a priority in the foreign policy agenda of the Republic of Armenia. Robert Kocharyan, Ter-Petrosyan's successor, took a different position, lifted the ban on the ARF, spoke openly about the international recognition of the Armenian Genocide in different international forums, and stated the necessity of intensifying and coordinating Armenia-Diasporan relations. He appointed Vardan Oskanian, another Diasporan Armenian, as a Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, who headed the institution for a decade (1998–2008). Kocharyan also had initiated a process of introducing dual citizenship through constitutional changes.¹⁰

In September 1999, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia organized the first Armenia – Diaspora Conference. However, the Conference did not succeed in achieving its main goal: determining the main directions and areas for cooperation. Even after the second conference, there was no observable outcome (Manaseryan 2004: 21). More tangible results were achieved during the third Conference, which took place on September 18–20, 2006. Several directions for Armenia-Diaspora cooperation were worked out (such as rural development, poverty reduction), but the promotion of democratic processes was not included. At the end of the third conference a declaration was signed, which contains only one sentence about democratization of Armenia and state building: “We are sure that democratic approach, human rights and liberty have priority meaning for the activities on the governmental and community levels.”¹¹ However, no suggestions were made and no recommendations were incorporated as to Armenia-Diaspora cooperation for the promotion of democracy and democratization.

A public opinion survey carried out by the Asian Global organization provides interesting data to understand the nature of cooperation between Armenia and the Diaspora, and the expectations linked to that cooperation (Miller et al. 2005). The survey was conducted in both the Diaspora and Armenia in 2003 and 2005.



10 For more detailed analyses on dual citizenship, see: Danielyan, Emil (2007) “Armenia allows dual citizenship amid controversy”, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav022607.shtml>

11 The official web site of the conference: <http://www.armeniadiaspora.com/conference2006/declaration.html>

The results of the survey indicate the expectations of the participants and are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: The most productive support to Armenia from the Diaspora will be (results are reflected in percentage)

	Armenia 2003	Diaspora 2003	Armenia 2005
To invest money in business	71	64	57
To assist development of charitable and cultural organizations in Armenia	46	31	51
To support study abroad programs	34	16	38
To present and lobby the interests of Armenia in foreign countries	28	38	37
To help in professional licensing, sharing with expert knowledge	45	40	26
To buy Armenian production and use local services	17	24	24
To be well informed about Armenia. To support the mission of Armenian Embassies (Representations) worldwide	14	22	18
Not to participate directly in country's internal politics	13	7	16
To organize communication networks	9	25	15
To participate directly in the politics of the country	18	11	14
To do nothing	1	1	2

The above data shows that only a small percentage of Diaspora and Armenians would like Diasporans to be actively involved in the internal political development of Armenia. Moreover, a comparison between the 2003 and 2005 surveys demonstrates that the percentage of interviewees sharing that point of view has increased (13% and 16% respectively), and the percentage of those who consider direct participation of Diasporans in Armenian politics to be productive has decreased (18% and 14%, respectively). Overall, the survey shows that the expectations of Armenians and Diasporans have become more specific and realistic.

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS'08 IN ARMENIA AND THE REACTION OF DIASPORA

Despite these differing preferences, the Diaspora remains interested and involved in internal developments of the Armenian political system to a certain extent. The recent developments in Armenia following the Presidential elections in February 2008, and the subsequent reactions of American-Armenian lobbying organizations are an interesting example of democratic development in Armenia and the effectiveness of Diasporan activities. Following the presidential elections, tens of thousands people protested the controversial results through 10 days of ongoing sit-ins, strikes and demonstrations. Parallel rallies in support of the demonstrations in Yerevan were held in several cities outside of Armenia (such as Moscow and Los Angeles). On the 1st of March, ten protestors in Yerevan died in clashes with police, which were trying to disperse the demonstrators early that morning. As a result, President Robert Kocharyan declared a 20-day state of emergency in the country, which included a ban on public gatherings and the imposition of severe restrictions on the media.

Jirayr Harutunian, former Chairman of the Board of Directors of one of the most influential Armenian lobbyist organizations, the Armenian Assembly of America, answered the question “Will the Armenia Elections Crisis Affect Lobbying in Washington?” by saying that “The violence of March 1 and serious charges of electoral manipulations are certainly causing discomfort among our friends in Congress and is being exploited by Turkish and Azerbaijan-funded lobbyists” (Haratunian 2008). In one of her recent interviews for “Jamanak Yerevan” (Yerevan Times) newspaper, Arpi Vartanian, Country Director for Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh of the same organization, once again confirmed this idea by noting that “those events makes it harder to lobby in US Congress, particularly in pushing them to allocate more funds for implementation of democracy promotion programs in Armenia” (Vartanian 2008: 4). The disbursal of these funds has been on the decline in the last several years (Armenian Assembly of America 2007). The author of the “Jamanak Yerevan” article concludes stating: “Thus the Armenian Assembly of America calls Yerevan to take immediate steps for political and social reconciliation. We hope that all political forces will be guided by sober judgments. Citizens of Armenia deserve nothing less than that and that is needed also for us, who are working for free, prosperous and democratic Armenia.”

Another notable example of Diaspora’s reaction to the post-electoral developments in Armenia was the joint statement of the leading organizations of the Armenian community in the United States: Armenian National Committee of America, Armenian Assembly of America, Armenian General Benevolent Union, the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America (Eastern/Western) and the Prelacy of the Armenian Apostolic Church of America (Eastern/ Western) made

on March 18th, 2008: "We join with all Armenians in reaffirming our people's common commitment to the security of Armenia and Artsakh (Armenian name for Nagorno Karabakh, note by author) in a challenging and often dangerous region, and to cooperate toward our shared aim of strengthening an open and democratic Armenian homeland, based upon the rule of law, social and economic justice, freedom of expression and the media, and equal opportunity for all" (Armenian National Committee of America (2008).

These reactions by the Diaspora demonstrated their concerned position on political developments in the Republic of Armenia. But at the same time it should be noted that those positions were quite general, without concrete suggestions for reconciliation. They were also a response to crisis rather than a reflection of Diasporan organizations focus on democratization. The controversial elections and ensuing protests were unexpected and shocking for the citizens of Armenia and Diasporan Armenians. They also provided the potential opportunity to review perceptions of the political systems, and define the priorities of the Republic of Armenia with regards to national security and social-economic development. The elections may serve as a breaking point to change the agenda of Diasporan organizations and demonstrate the need to focus on political reform in the Republic of Armenia ("Armenia2020" 2005).

CONCLUSION

At present, the role of the Armenian Diaspora in promoting democratization in the Republic of Armenia is limited and marginal, both at an institutional and individual level. There is potential for Diasporan individuals to increase their influence through increased involvement in the internal life of Armenia. This involvement can be economic, cultural, professional and even political. Through involvement in Armenia's internal life, Diasporans may be more attracted to the prospect of permanent residency. One of the most important preconditions for that is further modernization of Armenia, and this development should not be detached from the democratic path. For example rule of law, anti-corruption measures and antimonopoly policies can encourage Diasporan businessmen to invest in Armenian economy. Policies of tolerance and pluralism can help to overcome the existing cultural gaps between Diasporans and Armenians from Armenia. Effective and transparent governance would promote increased financial and technical aid to the Armenian national and local government bodies. And just on contrary, undemocratic Armenia would decrease the interest of Diaspora Armenians towards the Republic of Armenia (except for touristic purposes). That may also have a negative effect on representing and advancing the interests of the Armenian communities in abroad, particularly championing for the interests of the Republic of Armenia may become very difficult.

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