

The Genocide and the Armenian Response in the 21st Century

Excerpts from the talk presented by Armen Ayvazyan, PhD
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What was the primary aim of the Armenian Genocide? Was it intended to destroy Armenia or the Armenians?

The foremost aim of the planners and perpetrators of the Armenian Genocide was the destruction of Armenia as a country with any perspective of reestablishing its long-ago perished independence.

The genocide was aimed, first, at the land and country of Armenia, which had a demographic, ideological, political and cultural potential of reestablishing an independent Armenian statehood. The Armenians and structures of their diametrically different civilization were subjected to genocide, in essence, concomitantly – as the vehicles of that possibility. Ultimately, the Genocide was directed against the possibility of Armenian statehood. The destruction of Armenians elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire was again meant to thwart any future claims by Armenians to their land.

Thus, the genocidal strikes have been primarily directed at Armenian demography on Armenian land.

One should have expected the Armenians concentrate at the recreation of their life in their homeland as a way of direct response to the Genocide.

However, the international setting, the totality of the Genocide, the vast inequality of forces and absence of independent Armenian political entity on world arena precluded the Armenian claim for their land held by Turkey. Soviet Armenia, the one-tenth fragment of Armenia, became the only place where the Armenians lived in their homeland with the culturally autonomous national power. Many could consider Soviet Armenia as an Armenian demographic success, and rightfully so: in just 70 years Soviet Armenia grew demographically more than five times: from 700,000 people in 1921 to 3,700,000 in 1989. Nevertheless, the growth could have been bigger, if the Soviet

repressive machine did not took the steam out of the Great Repatriation movement of the late 1940s.

Only after the collapse of the Soviet Union the Armenians were given a chance to make an attempt of building a geopolitically viable state.

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: a quite defensible territory (together with Artsakh and the liberated territories), the Armenian Army, which with all of its shortcomings is by far the most efficient army in the Transcaucasus region, rich and extremely diverse nature with rich natural resources (especially water resources, which would become extremely valuable within just a few decades), a possibility of right organization of Diaspora's potential, allied and friendly states, an 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.

Now is the time to address the land and demography challenge. There is a fledgling Armenian state with a pretty low level of management and high levels of corruption and "shadow economy".

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

The necessity of sustained efforts by Diaspora Armenian organizations and patriotic youth for achieving the comprehensive international recognition of Armenian Genocide is out of question. However, the recognition alone falls absolutely short of an effective and efficient answer to the existential problems of Armenia and the Armenian nation.

First, the comprehensive recognition of the Genocide by the international community could come years later. Meanwhile Armenia's problems of security, economic viability, demography, rule of law and democracy are pressing her immediately – “here and now”.

Second, almost all cases of international recognition and affirmation of Armenian Genocide have accentuated only its historical reality and moral repercussions and failed to address its dreadful material consequences still facing, and threatening, Armenia and the Armenians.

Let's ponder for a moment: what could be the use of the recognition of Armenian Genocide, if Armenia, squeezed by the Turkish-Azerbaijani double blockade, economic hardships, emigration and internal tensions, is forced to abandon Nagorno Karabagh and the liberated territories, exposing itself to further pressures and heavier concessions and thus returning to Turkish-planned status of a geopolitically non-viable state?

The Armenians themselves must address the material consequences of Genocide, securing the viability of nation on the ground – in Armenia, Artsakh and the liberated territories – by:

1. physically securing the land of more than 40.000 km² now under Armenian control;
2. furnishing that land with manpower for creative work and successful defence.

The land and demography – these two prerequisites for Armenia's survival – are our Achilles heel. All other problems are solvable for the Armenians: they WILL build a strong and flourishing economy (they have already started to make significant progress in this direction); they WILL improve and raise their education to the world-class standards (they do care about education), they WILL defeat the wide-spread corruption and nepotism (out of necessity, at least), and they WILL develop the rich traditions of their vast cultural heritage.

What they at this stage have a difficulty to do, however, is *manning their land* and thus providing it with both long-term security and strong development perspectives.

To meet the current challenges effectively Armenia lacks most of all an educated, decent and patriotic political elite, as well as nationally oriented bourgeoisie and mature strategic thinking, organized within and around its state structures. These shortcomings are absolutely recoverable.

The young Armenians from Diaspora could play an extremely important role in the formation of new political elite in Armenia, one that would be fully adequate for the requirements of the 21st century. Of course, first they should make a crucial choice of living their lives in Armenia and thus actively participating in homeland's political, economic and cultural processes.

I strongly believe that the Armenian Diaspora does not lag in patriotism and is capable of providing a vanguard of patriotic professionals for the homeland. For that, however, we need to lay down a clear set of all-national objectives.

Because of lack of discussion and articulation, our current objectives as a nation have become so blurred that even a veteran politician would fail to clearly identify them, preferring rather to go into a usual talk about Armenia “becoming part of Europe”, “integrating into the world economy”, “integrating into the regional energy and traffic projects”, “integrating into various military partnership programs with NATO or Russia”, even politically and economically “integrating the South Caucasus” and about all kinds of other “integrations”. These integration plans, in fact, are not, genuinely speaking, Armenian national objectives. They represent supposedly desirable directions for Armenia's development, partly they are just a wishful thinking (as in case with the “integration of the South Caucasus, that is including between Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Nagorno-Karabagh, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, parties to intransigent and prolonged conflicts).

Therefore let us try to identify two fundamental all-Armenian objectives for a mid-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;

2. **Objective No. 2:** 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 population².

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. 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.

² A demographic perspective drawn above by myself requires an average 50,000 annual growth, part of which could be provided by Diaspora.

6. Finally, **the ultimate engagement** is, of course, the 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. The April 24 demonstrations thousands of miles away from Armenia are admirable manifestation of Armenian Diaspora's patriotism still vibrating in its third and fourth generation. However, these demonstrations, while taking up the moral repercussions of the Genocide, are inherently incapable of addressing its consequences on the ground and alleviating the roots of the problem still facing the Armenians, which, as has been mentioned already, are LAND AND DEMOGRAPHY.

Therefore, I think that sooner or later an amendment to the practice of Diaspora demonstrations is needed, when after each of them at least one single Armenian announces his/her decision to repatriate to the homeland and receives all the necessary support from the others. Such a practice, even if originally insignificant in numbers, would sharply raise the effectiveness and efficiency of Armenian protest; it will strengthen the nation and state by giving an extremely strong moral boost to the homeland's population.

It is time to cure and compensate for the consequences of the enormous emigration from Armenia. It is time to plan and implement a massive, organized immigration, which should take the form not of willy-nilly repatriation, but rather should be based on solid research with clear solutions to key issues of employment and housing, to which I shall return in a moment.

Repatriation is, amazingly, absent from the agendas of both Diasporan organizations and the Republic of Armenia. Indeed, repatriation is almost a taboo at all manner and levels of Armenia-Diaspora meetings and deliberations, including the 1st and 2nd Armenia-Diaspora Conferences.

Neither the traditional structures of the Diaspora, nor the still feeble state of Armenia have shown any interest in organizing any kind of mass repatriation. Fortunately, compared to the past, the current historical circumstances and globalization, which has had a primarily negative and damaging impact on us, now presents unprecedented opportunities to address repatriation on both the individual and collective level, including Armenia's liberal visa policy, increased mobility of populations, media and information access world-wide, and the sufficiency of Diasporan capital to maintain a home and establish a business in Armenia.

The funding and investing in repatriation should become one of the most important national programs in the Diaspora.

Even a moderate sized organized repatriation would address many of the problems facing the Armenian nation and state:

1. **Demographic.** Only repatriation can avert the imminent crisis of Armenia's depopulation of Armenians.
2. **Economic.** Organized repatriation would improve the country's economic situation, since tens of thousands of Armenian families would be returning with the businesses they themselves established, which would be a great impetus to the country's economic development, significantly expanding the internal market and consumption. In addition, the repatriates will bring with them significant capital.³
3. **Moral and Psychological.** The repatriates will bring new energy and enthusiasm to the homeland, significantly improving the depressed psychological state of the population living in Armenia. They could contribute to relieving the tension in nearly all of the vital spheres of life, from

³ For example, each family of 4 returning from the US could bring, let's say, \$30,000 on average. Even calculating conservatively, 20,000 families (80,000 people) could bring \$600 million, 40,000 families (160,000 people) \$1.2 billion, 60,000 families (240,000 people) \$1.8 billion, and 100,000 families (400,000 people) \$3 billion.

defense and the economy to the legal rights of the population. Many of our compatriots living abroad in recent years (of course, not all) have lived in better conditions than those who stayed in Armenia. Repatriates would play the same role that reinforcements play in a battle, when it is essential to replace tired and worn-out troops with specially selected reinforcements.

4. **Legal.** Those establishing permanent residence in the homeland will not tolerate abuses of power. They will bring a completely new and vigorous impetus to the on-going struggle for social justice and equal rights in Armenia. This will in particular be fostered by their having a certain economic independence and self-reliance and by their being organized in groups from their own circles. In this way civil rights and the legal framework will experience an unprecedented period of development.
5. **Cultural.** Those establishing permanent residence in Armenia will have the goal of teaching their children Armenian, becoming involved in Armenian culture, and living with Armenian mores and customs (implicit in their desire to return to Armenia). They would deliver a jolt to the anti-national, anti-cultural distortions that have suffused Armenia recently.
6. **Scientific.** A number of young people would enter Armenia as native speakers of foreign languages, who in the future could make major contributions to Armenian scholarship and science.
7. **Health.** Repatriation would permit Armenians from different, often distant, subgroups of the Armenian nation to meet and mix diversifying the genetic make up and improving the health of the next generation.
8. **Maintaining Armenian Identity.** Repatriation will save Armenians in foreign lands from the inexorable process of assimilation. After all, the preservation of Armenian identity in Diaspora cannot be seen as an end in itself. And what could be the true meaning of this preservation, if not the ultimate reunification of the violently dispersed nation under its own independent authority on its own land?

The acknowledgement and condemnation of the Armenian Genocide is not worth a penny if it does not entail a process of compensation.

Today Armenia and the Armenian nation live in a time of great challenges and great dangers lying ahead. Either we will be able to cling to the opportunities and create a full-fledged Armenian statehood, or we will lose everything (and I mean *everything*). The road we took is split: we can proceed to glory or to ashes. There is no return: bridges are burnt. There could not be a lengthy stop either. We shall move forward and move fast.

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