CRITICAL MOMENT IN ARMENIAN HISTORY: AN APPEAL

*Jirair Libaridian*

There are moments in a nation’s history when sustaining hope presents a serious challenge, when optimism can be maintained only if reduced to self-delusion, when indifference carries significant responsibility and when silence should inspire guilt.

The current moment in Armenia is just such a moment if, that is, one cares about Armenia as a state.

Emigration from the two decade old independent state has reached extremely dangerous proportions: Dangerous to the national security of Armenia, dangerous to the structure of statehood, and threatening to the concept of nationhood with any sense of worth that carries meaning beyond the awareness of a common past.

It is time to realize, as many are doing in Armenia, that the pace of current emigration brings us face to face with a calamity of historic proportions, a calamity larger than the very difficult problems cited routinely.

We pride ourselves for our knowledge of history and yet we display total ignorance of what that history may mean, what lessons it may teach us, if we are interested in learning any. So many of our leaders—political, intellectual, scholarly and religious—lace their speeches, articles, books and sermons—with references to the tragedies that fill that history. They also point to the necessity to learn from that history. And yet, they seem to be oblivious to the simple fact that Armenia is being emptied and that hard and cruel fact has its irreversible consequences.

It is quite well known that emigration from Armenia has a history that is at least one thousand years old. Our historians have marked many moments when massive numbers of Armenians left their homeland. Yet historians and others have not always appreciated the consequences of such exoduses. We know that the Ardsrunis of Vaspurakan built the Church of Akhtamar but we do not seem to care that they did so in order to celebrate their becoming kings at the expense of the central authorities of the Armenian kingdom, thus creating a very vulnerable mini-state while weakening the overarching Bagratuni kingdom; we also do not seem to care that, having become a prime target for Byzantine expansion, at the end of their “royal existence” the Ardsrunis exchanged their kingdom for property outside Armenia and left their land with tens of thousands of their subjects. This is the same Akhtamar Church regarding which major Armenian institutions, in Armenia and in the Diaspora, raised uproar recently. It seems, at times, that to feel like a nation requires no more than to appreciate the art of the past.

That and similar instances of mass migration explain, in part, as to why historic Armenia was lost.

The above-mentioned incident of mass emigration and similar events are tied directly to the most tragic and consequential event in our history, the Genocide during World War I. To varying degrees, the Genocide and the campaign for its recognition have consumed politics and political discourse in the Diaspora and in Armenia. Coming to terms with that calamity has taken decades; it is not all that clear that we have managed it yet. First we needed to narrate the events to ourselves, and then to the world. Some went on to explore the reasons for the policies of the Ottoman Turkish government. Meanwhile we decided that international recognition of the Genocide is where our efforts should be concentrated. We expected other nations to support our campaign because they and the rest of the world could learn lessons from the Armenian Genocide, from history, our history. Yet we have failed to ask the equally important question: Once they had decided that killing a people was desirable, why did the then rulers of the Ottoman Empire think they could execute the deportations and massacres necessary to achieve it? Why did they think it was possible to achieve what we now call genocide on such a scale? Why was it even an option, technically speaking?

The simple truth is that Armenians had been reduced to a minority in their own land and their numbers had fallen below such a threshold that any solution to their problems in their own hands had become impossible. A thousand years ago Armenians had constituted at least 90% of the population of historic Armenia, estimated to be somewhere between one and four million. In 1914 there were 2.2 million Armenians in the whole of the Ottoman Empire, if we are to accept the statistics provided by our own Patriarchate. Massacres until then can account for only a small portion of the lack of increase in those numbers reflecting natural growth in the population. Emigration by individuals, families and groups—albeit for valid reasons—as well as conversions account for the rest.

That depletion and the diminution of the population is responsible for genocide becoming a plausible solution of the “Armenian problem” the Young Turk government perceived and, once adopted, for the successful execution of that policy. And this, despite the heroic deeds of *fedayees* before the war and the heroism of many in the centers of Armenian resistance during the Genocide itself. The outcome of history, nonetheless, is not conditions by speeches and ideologies, not even by the heroics and courage demonstrated by so many; it is the objective realities that evolve around us, realities that are formed over time that we must account for.

Our numbers had fallen below a certain threshold, to a level that had made an Armenian revolution against the state in the Ottoman Empire impossible and successful self-defense against Genocide by and large hopeless. In fact, the rare place where resistance assured the survival of significant number of Armenians during the massacres and deportations was where Armenians constituted a compact majority, such as in northern Van province. We are all humbled by the courage of individual heroes, the resolve of so many communities to act with dignity in the face of certain death and, at the end, the death of a people: but all of these do not necessarily compensate for the absence of strategic and realistic thinking or for the necessity today to assess the lessons of that calamity.

Nearly a century later, we may now be reaching a similar threshold in the Republic of Armenia, where the decreasing level of the population closely linked to the unresolved conflicts with neighbors that is threatening the viability of the economy and national defense.

This is not an accusation against our people or any of its members who find no other solution to have a dignified life but to weigh the option of leaving; individuals make decisions regarding their own present and future on the basis of their own needs and possibilities. These possibilities for a dignified future are created, ultimately, by those who lead and run the state and determine its policies. Many other nations have been invaded and massacred but not all peoples subject to such crimes have left their homelands. Leadership counts in Armenian as in any other history, as was the case of the Ardsrunis. In contemporary times democratic processes should place some controls over the actions of leaders; but when votes are tempered with systematically and on a massive scale individual citizens end up with limited or no input in state policies.

Emigration and its accelerated tempo have not been a hidden process. After all, there are hardly any families in Armenia that do not have relatives abroad; and statistics regarding the number of arrivals into Armenia versus those who are leaving cannot lie. Certainly there have been those, especially in Armenia, who have discussed it in public forums; a few have sounded the alarm. It is possible that we are finally witnessing a discussion of the subject as a primary concern for many in the homeland.

But for most, especially in the Diaspora, so many citizens leaving their land has been seen just as another deplorable situation, one of many the Republic has faced since independence. The enormity of the problem has not been sensed, it seems. Intellectuals and scholars have hardly ever raised this issue with the proper alarm. We certainly have not seen a joint declaration of the three traditional parties—the Dashnaktsutiune, Ramgavar, and Hnchakian parties, or any joint declaration by Diasporan organizations--—expressing concern for the depopulation of Armenia. Even if such a statement had been at the unfortunate level of the issued in October 1988 against the Karabakh Committee, at least it would have reflected a serious concern shared by all. The reader may remember that the Karabakh Committee had made the defense of Karabakh a priority and was moving toward Armenia’s independence; a joint declaration that trusted Moscow for a resolution of the Karabakh problem and practically argued that these parties saw the future of Armenia only as a member of the Soviet Union. I know many would like to forget that declaration and the policies that generated it; after all, we have our own amnesia problem with regard to our past. The logic was that Turkey would annihilate the rest of us in Armenia, should that last remnant of a homeland become independent. Armenia has been independent for 20 years now and Turkey has not decimated its people. Most of Armenia’s people are not being provided with the option to stay and make a decent and dignified living, while the option to emigrate is either coming as the only available option or as the most attractive one, sometimes made attractive by concerned relatives abroad or by Russian initiatives to populate Siberia. And that possibility is not bringing our parties and organizations together.

Nation states can survive wars and pestilence, famine, bad governance, corruption and other hardships; they can even survive authoritarian, totalitarian and dictatorial governments. But they cannot survive the critical loss of what makes and justifies a state, its people.

There have been dictatorships that have provided a solution to at least one problem by some objective standard, and redeemed themselves, even if partially. Armenia has had its share of such an experience during the Soviet period. The non-democratic and often brutal regime did bring industrialization and modernization to whatever was left of historic Armenia and developed a strong cultural and state infrastructure. Although economically and politically bankrupt at the end, it was possible to change the regime as well as the political and economic systems and still create the possibility of a viable country. How many believe that a viable Armenian state could be maintained once it has lost a critical segment of its population?

In contemporary times emigration from Armenia started in the 1970s, as a side product of the USSR decision, under US pressure, to permit Soviet Jews to emigrate. The economic collapse of the Soviet Union that presaged independence was accentuated in Armenia due to the Karabakh war and the energy blockade. Emigration from Armenia accelerated and has continued in the 20 years since independence, overwhelmingly for social and economic reasons, most recently intensified by hopelessness.

The first few years after independence constituted the most difficult period in the recent history of Armenia: collapse of the bankrupt Soviet economy, the obsolete state of its industrial basis, the energy crisis, the war with Azerbaijan, the earthquake that devastated one third in the north of the country, the influx and often immediate departure of some 300,000 refugees from Azerbaijan, and the tentative nature of many of the systemic changes characterized that period, just as emigration did.

The difference between those first years and the recent decade or more is that by 1996 some important challenges facing the country, other than the successful management of the war, were resolved: the energy crisis was resolved, the systemic changes had been placed on a firmer footing, reconstruction of the earthquake zone had been placed on a more organized, even if slow footing, and the refuge situation had been stabilized. There remained the question of the resolution of the conflicts with Armenia’s two neighbors, Azerbaijan and Turkey. These two unresolved conflicts had economic, security and strategic dimensions for both Armenia and Karabakh; these too could have been resolved.

Further, there have been major differences in the thinking of the first administration, of which I was part, and those that followed it. One difference was that the first administration considered resolving the problems with our neighbors essential for Armenia’s economic future as well as for its long-term security. The republic was created and independence pursued to provide a better and more secure life for its citizens. That sense of primary responsibility for the security of its territory and citizens was extended to Karabakh and its Armenians inhabitants. Calculated strategizing against all odds, the will of the people in Armenia, the endurance of the people of Karabakh and sacrifice of our young from Karabakh and Armenia, and a few from the Diaspora, as well as strategic and tactical mistakes committed by the leaderships in Azerbaijan secured the positive outcome of the war. The Karabakh war ended in 1994—at least its most recent phase —with a victory that was a real one, and not a moral one, however much the latter may matter more to some.

Yet what we have seen following those early years has been phenomenally inept, at best, and tragically wasteful, at worst.

It is unfortunate that the years under the second president can best be characterized as the “Wasted Decade,” to be charitable as a historian. None of Armenia’s remaining major problems were resolved during those crucial years; in fact, it appears that everything was done to make sure these problems were not resolved, statements to the contrary by those responsible notwithstanding. The construction of new buildings and opening of new cafes and expensive boutiques in the center of Yerevan, usually to launder monumental amounts of money accumulated illegally by a few, do not amount to what is known as economic development. They merely constituted a peculiar kind of economic activity. Otherwise, the artificial edifice heralded by over 10% annual growth for so many years would not have dissipated at the first sign of financial malaise.

Those ten years should have been used to resolve Armenia’s conflicts with its neighbors by pressing for the maximum advantage Armenia had achieved but could not conceivably maintain forever. After all, it was obvious to all, except for those who had decided to ignore the larger picture that these advantages would dissipate over time. Instead of making decisions worthy of statesmen, those leaders engaged in duplicitous behavior—claiming one thing and making sure the opposite occurs--, a behavior which was applauded by most of the Diaspora organizations, including those with vested interests in the campaign for the recognition of the genocide as the most important item on the national agenda, as proof of the purest in patriotic behavior.

These years were used, instead, to make unprecedented use of the power such leaders held to accumulate their own wealth and enjoy the execution of arbitrary power. In the meanwhile they turned Armenia’s fledgling and admittedly imperfect democracy into a system that was certain to fail, for the benefit of the few. These were the same leaders who argued that the status quo in the conflict zone could be maintained while sustaining strong economic development and that Diasporan capital investments could be the equivalent for Armenia’s economic development as oil and gas income would be for Azerbaijan.

The occupied Azerbaijani lands outside of Karabakh remained under Armenian control, yes, but Armenia and Karabakh kept bleeding, losing dangerous numbers of their population, thus endangering the foundations of these states themselves. The status quo did not mean the freezing of everything; and the dynamic processes did not proceed in our favor.

We had to understand, and we did, that if Armenia wanted to continue as a viable state and if Armenians wanted to be there and live there, we had to get along with the neighbors we had, we had to resolve the conflicts we had with them. Today Armenia has an antagonistic relationship with one neighbor; in the absence of a peace treaty, it is practically on a war footing with the second, Azerbaijan; and because of that state of affairs with the first two, it has unhealthy relations with the last two, Iran and Georgia and a fragile relationship with Russia. To imagine that today’s Armenia can be a viable state—viable to its people—under these circumstances is to allow the imagination to reach the level of the fantastic. The chances that anytime in the near or even distant future Turkey and Azerbaijan would pack up their bags and leave and be replaced by, for example, Finland and Luxemburg, are not that high. In fact, we had to realize that the problems we faced were our own problems, that we were part of the problem because what we wanted was in conflict with what our neighbor thought was hers, that we had to resolve these conflicts rather than wait for others to do it for us; that, in summary, we were not guests visiting the region, but were there to stay. Finally, we believed that these remaining problems could be resolved while protecting the vital interests of Armenia and Karabakh.

Some did think that preserving the status quo on the ground was the most important achievement the Armenian state could attain, for itself and for Karabakh. Such major players included the second president of Armenia and his accolades. Idolized by some for his promotion of the historically important Genocide recognition issue to the level of state policy, the second president despised history and any lessons it might humbly offer; the Genocide issue for him was just a weapon that could be used tactically to humble Turkey so it would no longer make progress in a Karabakh settlement a precondition for the normalization of bilateral relations; the Genocide recognition issue was also critical in his thinking that such promotion of the Genocide recognition issue to the level of state policy would secure the geometric increase in Diaspora investments in Armenia.

For many of the supporters of the second president Genocide recognition was only the first step toward reparations, although the second president himself rejected such claims on behalf of the Republic of Armenia. I know many would like to expand Armenia and Karabakh to include more territories. I will be happy to support such thoughts if a plausible strategy is attached to such a goal. When I was very young I too entertained such goals; I found them justified. In response to my questions, when I was slightly older, as to how we are supposed to achieve those goals, I was told that there is secrets only the leaders know and we have to trust and follow these leaders. Time passed, it became clear that no one had the magic formula.

Relying on Russia—Soviet or otherwise—, it appears, was the non-magical part of that non-existing strategy. Russia has had both positive and negative impact on our history, including on the history state formation, the extent of that state and the size of its population. It would be a mistake to underestimate either.

One cannot forget, however, that Russia acts according to its own interests, and not ours; and we have to learn to accept and work with that fact. Russia has not accepted and will not accept Armenian control of districts in Azerbaijan outside of Nagorno Karabakh as delineated during the Soviet period. While Armenia itself appears to be safe at this point, from the Russian point of view Karabakh is a negotiable entity; after all Moscow has many more issues to resolve with Baku than with Yerevan. Real politics cannot rely on wishes or wishful thinking; real positions by political parties must rely on proposed strategies to resolve issues, not just to proclaim and “demand” them. Demanding the maximum may make one feel good. Who does not want to feel good? But since when feeling good is the basic measure of wise decisions and policies regarding the future of a nation or a state? Are we walking into history or into a bar?

These “feel good” issues—we want more land, we want all, we won so we can want what we want-- above have been obscuring the real problems for some time. And they have led us to this point where change has occurred despite our desire for the status quo—“Don’t give anything back”—and that change has occurred at the foundation of our whole system, at the level of the people that are supposed to populate the state and justify its existence.

Such leaders will have to answer to history for the damage they have done to the future of the last remnants of Armenian statehood.

With respect to emigration, at least one resounding difference separates the first and subsequent administrations: while we thought of emigration as a problem that had to be resolved, subsequent administrations seem to think of it as a solution to one or more problems.

No less than the Prime Minister of Armenia made a statement recently which let it be know that he considers emigration as a positive process because such emigration will deplete the ranks of discontented citizens who would be potential participants in a “revolution.” Somehow, one is not surprised by the logic and, more importantly, by the naïveté, or as some have characterized it, the cynicism the statement reveals. After all, it highlights the political culture that has been fostered for a decade or more, the kind that tolerates such absurdity, not to say “national treason,” and the character of a dauntingly crude administration built on the corpses of peacefully demonstrating citizens killed by some unit of the armed forces with the prior knowledge, if not command, of the second president.

Without even reaching as far back as the Second World War to take note of atrocities by so many sides against their own citizens—Jews and Gypsies in Europe, Chechens and others in the USSR, to name but a few—one cannot but remember the killing of a half million Indonesians who were considered threats to the military in that state because of their “Communist sympathies,” or the two million Cambodians killed by their own Khmer Rouge government because their social standing as urbanites was inimical to the ideology of the government.

But why not speak, in this context, of the one million or so Armenians killed by the Ottoman Turkish government because they were perceived to be immediate or potential threats to the regime and to the vision these rulers had of future Turkey?

Of course I am not accusing the current leadership of Armenia of genocide. The commonality between these processes is obvious, nonetheless: if you can make your opposition disappear, you can hope to extend your rule. It appears that at least some recent leaders of Armenia are ensuring that actual or potential opponents of the regime “self-deport” as one way of neutralizing them, one by one, slowly but steadily. Besides, emigrants will likely contribute to the remittances a good portion of the population lives by: exporting labor is also a solution it seems.

And yet quantitative change translates into a qualitative change and history is transformed accordingly, as one wise philosopher noted. Critical change that can transform history does not have to be the result of a cataclysmic event; more often it is the result of accumulating forces that end in a calamity or two; more importantly such changes end up placing severe limits on the options available to resolve problems. Or, one can refer to the popular straw that broke the camel’s back. And what will then remain of “Armenia” in Armenia? What will Armenia mean, and to whom?

I do not wish, at this point, to carry this logic to its logical conclusion. It is too painful. I also hope we are not there yet. I do hope there is still time before, once again, we reduce the problem of Armenia and that of being its citizen into another existential battle where the only thing that matters is being alive, where the quality of life, the quality of collective existence do not matter, where culture and science are forgotten, where, above all, there are no real options worthy of a citizen and where the only choice to have a dignified life is to stay as a peon or pack up and leave. In other words, can we imagine an Armenia that is not just a theme park for diasporan tourists, a Disneyland style territory, run as a corporation?

My concern is not the perception of any particular president or administration. Each has had its common failings and failures. I am concerned with the more basic logic that motivates each leader and each administration and with the long-term impact of policies that might otherwise look innocuous.

It is time for the leaders of Armenia to recognize that they are facing a problem of historic proportions, may be the last challenge to the history of Armenian statehood, and that is as serious a responsibility as any Armenian has faced. Western Armenia was lost. For its existence Karabakh depends on Armenia, notwithstanding the insistence by some that Karabakh is more essential to Armenia than Armenia is to Karabakh. Armenia is reaching, if it is not there already, a critical point. I know that it is hard to make the right decision when the regime depends so much on the interlocking interests of so many different groups; and for most of these groups—as in so many other countries—the larger interests of society and long term needs of the state do not matter. It is time for the current President of Armenia to decide whether he is the leader of a clan of the superrich or the leader of a proud people that is also wise and understands its history better than some of its ideologues, oligarchs, and some very intelligent but spineless officials who also lack wisdom supporting him. It is time for the leaders of the regime in Armenia to realize that they bear primary responsibility for what is at stake.

It is time for these leaders to realize that the social and economic policies of the last decade or so have failed, that the increasing monopolization of power and capital has led to an impasse, and that the critical and difficult decisions that must be made to offer Armenia a new course cannot be made without making possible the election of legitimate authorities through open and fair elections. At this time it is difficult to imagine that the problem we are facing can be resolved without freely elected authorities that can take the difficult decisions on hand and still maintain the support of the people. It is time to give hope again to those who remain in Armenia and who would rather stay there.

Armenia is not the first and it will not be the last to face these problems, including that of emigration. The difference here is that, while others can afford delaying solutions and suffering sustained losses, Armenia and Armenians cannot afford such luxuries.

It is time for Diasporans—leaders of organizations and the rest of us—to reevaluate our strategies with regard to what and how to do in Armenia. I know that many organizations are dedicated to improving life in Armenia and Karabakh and that their efforts, at the end, should make a difference and stem the tide of emigration. And yet, all the aid from the Diaspora has not been able to counteract the policies and practices in place that result in the encouragement of citizens to leave.

It is time for those in the Diaspora who have the ear of the Armenian authorities—from president to ministers to judges—to argue the “case” for a sustainable Armenia with a population whose dignity remains intact, to use a terminology that has been applied to another cause.

It is particularly time for those who in the Diaspora and Armenia have made the recognition of the Genocide a primary issue above all else to decide whether it is more important at this time for a president of the US or some other country to use the term Genocide or for a village in Armenia to acquire sufficient infrastructure for the villagers to create a sustainable economy that will make it possible for them to remain in their own country rather than emigrate to Siberia.

It is as simple as that.

It may not be appropriate for a historian to ask this question, but it may permitted to a concerned Armenian: If it were possible to ask a victim of the Genocide what would constitute the more enduring and redeeming tribute to her martyrdom, a recognition by a state or the life of a village in what remains of Armenia, what would the answer be? After all, the victim knew what happened to her, to her family, how her village or town, and her people, were forced to leave and her first priority would not be expect a confirmation of these facts. I would suspect she would prefer that we focus on ensuring that a village nearing death in independent Armenia be given life support to thrive once again.

Is there any reason not to know that the Armenian emigration from Western Armenia by Armenians between the 1860s and 1914 was related to the dramatic worsening of the socio-economic conditions under which these subjects of the Ottoman Empire were living? It would be so useful if the leaders of our traditional parties look at the origins of their organizations and draw the necessary conclusions. Historians have done the research in Armenia, Soviet and independent, and in the Diaspora.

The questions raised here are not related only to the priorities and necessities that we might be wise to reconsider but also to the relationships between our current priorities and the ability to resolve our conflicts with our neighbors and, finally, to the strategy used to bring about recognition of the Genocide by the Turkish state itself. These questions are hardly raised, our strategies are not looked at critically; they are taken for granted.

This is an appeal to the leaders of Armenia and Diasporan organizations and parties to rethink, fundamentally, their priorities and strategies in view of the possibility that the analysis presented above-- the looming danger of the depopulation of Armenia and Karabakh; this is also an invitation to my colleagues, intellectuals and scholars to bring their own contribution to this debate and raise the level of public discourse.

Historians often claim to have achieved superior knowledge because theirs is the art of understanding the character and consequences of the evolution of events over long periods of time. Politicians claim to manage that evolution.

Is there a student of Armenian history or a political leader who considers some other issue more important for the survival of the Armenian state than the problem of the depopulation of Armenia and Karabakh? And is it possible to separate that problem from the way Armenia’s foreign and domestic affairs have been managed?

We have missed opportunities to resolve our problems with our neighbors and to become part of regional developments that would have anchored economic and social development in Armenia to the wider dynamics of the region and increased the level of independence of these states. Is there an economist worth his salt who believes that an isolated and blockaded Armenia can have sustainable development that will unleash the energies and talents developing in Armenia? Despite the conditions and despite the brain and talent drain, Armenia is capable of offering its people the opportunity to live a secure and decent life; to provide for their children’s education and health; to create art, culture and science; and provide a dignified life to its senior citizens.

There were those who believed it was possible for Armenia to institute and secure sustained development because they believed Armenia was unique, that it could survive blockades and isolation because the Diaspora could be counted on to invest the necessary capital for economic development; all that was needed, they argued, was to satisfy the Diaspora in its yearning for the adoption of the Genocide recognition agenda by the government of Armenia, particularly important for the Diaspora. And so it was that the first president was forced to resign in 1998. In came a new president and a new administration. They had 10 years to make their hypothesis work. And now we are in the third year of the tenure of the third president, installed by the second. Isn’t it obvious that considering the long term we are in worse shape than we have been in the last twenty years?

If the third president has a different analysis, we have not seen it, although he has made some unusual moves. But what is needed now is not some moves but a whole strategy that recognizes the extent and depth of the problem the state of Armenia and, by extension, Karabakh, is facing. And to act accordingly, in the interest of the state he heads and the people he wants to lead. Beyond his personal stake, it would be horrible for Armenia and Karabakh if the third president went down into history as the leader who completed the chain of irresponsible strategizing initiated by the second president. The third president could be the leader who reversed in time the policies of his predecessor, even if that reversal might, at the end, require the dismantling of a system of which he has been part and cost him his position.

I know that there are those in the Diaspora who have given up on Armenia as a state and reverted to a sense of a diasporan Armenian identity that does not require an Armenian state for its sustenance. Such an option may be inevitable, considering our long history of diasporization; if some Armenians are satisfied with constituting solely an ethnic community in some other country, that is understandable; it is also a different story; that would be story built around a self-definition that is anchored in church, some cultural institutions, and an imagined shared past that can be manipulated to fit the needs of an ethnic community according to the country, and a wonderful cuisine.

But that is the story of ethnic communities, not of a nation or of a state. If it had been possible to sustain identity through the strategy of ethnic identification, the size of the Armenian Diaspora today should have been possible a hundred times what it is today. May be nation and state do not matter to some; that, too, is an accumulation of choices by individuals. It is possible to understand that the underlying reluctance of some—conscious or otherwise-- to see the problem of depopulation as a critical one is related top the process of diasporization; diasporans, by definition, are those who left the homeland at some point or their progenies, who are in a state of transition in their self-definition as Armenians, who are not likely ready to return. This is possible to understand; but that kind of attitude is not justifiable, if one is engaged in a discussion of issues on an Armenian national and state level.

Can anyone forget how strong our “community” institutions were in Istanbul, at least for two centuries, in Aleppo and in Beirut, without forgetting Paris and Boston, and now Los Angeles? I would not even dare mention our Diaspora in medieval Eastern Europe and later southern Russia, where we even had our constitutions in some cities.

For those who consider the state of Armenia an important dimension, if not an anchor, of their Armenian identity beyond an ethnic dimension, then there should not be a question as to the urgency of the problem of depopulation of that last remnants of Armenian statehood.

At the end, when the history of Armenia and Armenians is written in another century, we will all be responsible for what we said when we had a chance not say it, not to and did not say, when we had a chance to say it; for what we did and we should not have done it, and did not do when we could have done it.

At that time the next group of lauders of community institutions, the troubadours of diasporan institutions and historians who feel obligated to justify the results can twist and distort facts and figures, argue and counter argue. The result will remain the same, as stark as the result of the Genocide. The only task left for the future will be, then, to designate a new date representing the latest tragedy, the one to come, a date to be remembered annually; and then to play the blame game: who lost the last remnants of Armenia? But such anniversaries will not change the result: the result will depend on question: what WE inject into the situation TODAY.

The rest then becomes irrelevant.

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