

A VERY DANGEROUS SITUATION FOR ARMENIA

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Prof. Osheen Keshishian, [The Armenian Observer](#), 16 March 2011



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Armenia's major problem is emigration — people are leaving the country. Actually it is the most important issue facing Armenia. More and more people are leaving Armenia emigrating to different countries— basically to Russia, 65% of those wishing to leave prefer Russia, then the Ukraine. The United States is a dream, and it is the third most wanted place to go, but it is not easy to immigrate to the United States.

Statistics vary, depending who is conducting it. Recently, Gallop conducted a thorough poll and found out that at least 40% of the citizens of Armenia are anxious to leave their homeland. There is emigration from all countries. Even from the United States, but the number of people leaving the US compared to the number of births and immigration, is negligible. There are more than 7 million Americans living abroad and according to the latest reports, more than 3 million American citizens a year are moving out. Amazingly, the number is very interesting — most of them are between the ages of 25 to 35. But, the population of the US is over 300 million and the exodus is about 1%.

Armenia is a different story, and a very sad one. Myself and others had delivered several talks in Armenia some 15 years ago, later on 10 years ago, and almost any time the occasion presents itself. People did not want to hear it. Now, finally, Prime Minister Tigran Sargsyan in a February 22 interview, declared his concern and worry about emigration. "We are very concerned over the figures we get from the Migration Service," he said. "So we approved special programs to reduce migration and create favorable environment for our nationals that are willing to return, " he asserted.

During the past eight years alone, between 1992 to July 2010, more than 1.1 million people emigrated from Armenia, according to the Migration service. The majority of Armenians emigrate to Russia and Ukraine, specially to Moscow, but also to Altay, Voronezh (where there are aircraft factories), Kaliningrad, Kaluga, and other regions. Russia offers palatable conditions, gives them homes, offers work, transportation expenses of their belongings and bonus money — a one time deal somewhere between \$4000 to \$5000 and specially gives them citizenship within a year. It is the Russian law to lure migrants, people unhappy in the Motherland. According to some figures, 70,000 people leave Armenia annually while other place the figure higher.

It is a very dangerous situation. a catastrophic future awaits Armenia if the trend spirals downward

and a serious remedy is not found to stop or at least to slow down the exodus.

Emigration or exodus takes place when someone wants to change the country he/she is living in and wants to move to a better place, simply stating. Anthropologists and sociologists have studied emigration and immigration patterns over the years and have come up with certain theories, rules and understandings.

Someone leaves the country for the following reasons, broadly speaking: religious oppression; political oppression; social oppression; lack of justice and economic advancement. Naturally, lack of justice advances corruption, cronyism, and crime. There are sub-reasons also — changing the climate, marriage, joining relatives, etc. but basically the five above mentioned reasons are the primary ones. Many times, for instance, obstruction of justice leads to social and economic dire conditions forcing individuals to move out.

Although there are inputs in Armenia — like the establishment of the American University, AGBU sponsored programs, ARS directed activities to improve social conditions, IT inputs from Armenian firms, churches, organizations, and so on, — but because the laws are not enforced (despite European Union and Human Rights organizations insistence) the population is unhappy and is looking outwards. It is unfortunate for Armenia if this situation continues and there doesn't seem to be a light at the end of the tunnel.

The exodus of scientists, educators, physicians, has taken a very serious turn. Even government statistics indicate that "twice as many men as women seek to leave Armenia, most of them being between the ages of 30 to 50. (It is government figures! And what is the government doing?)

I know people do not like to hear negative, bad or sad news about our Hayastan. But it is out there and everyone knows about it. Without misunderstanding, I have to ask — how many people know that more than 50 Armenian diplomatic corps members have not returned to the homeland and are living in a different and a more comfortable country and they say: People have one life to live, and we want to live in better conditions.

Every fifth Armenian lives in abject poverty — I am not saying it. It was mentioned in a letter addressed to the government written by an independent Parliamentarian Victor Dallakyan, who also stated that poverty has raised the rate of suicides and asked "what efforts is the government taking to reduce poverty and create jobs?" How can some people become millionaires in a decade and others go the opposite direction, and can't even have decent nutrition or health service or education.

The government should really step up to the plate and get its act together with bold programs tailored to fit the needs of the ordinary people and improve their lives, providing medical assistance, education, nutrition, social life and all the amenities for a normal life.

The way to improve the situation is to eliminate as much as possible all the political oppression, establish freedom of speech, create democratic means, work towards social justice, eliminate

corruption and so on. Everyone has the prescription, and this is nothing new.

Because, even if the government figures are deflated, when 75 to 80,000 people are emigrating Armenia, in a decade Armenia will lose a million people, since birth rates are down and death figures are up.

Don't get me wrong. I love Armenia.

