

ARDAK AND MIRO

Posted on September 25, 2013 by Keghart



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By Berge Minassian MD FRCP(C), Toronto, 25 September 2013

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By some estimates there are now more Armenians in Moscow than in Yerevan. A huge number of these Moscovite Armenians are people fleeing Armenia to work in Russia's capital, paperless and healthcare-less, often in dangerous jobs such as construction. The ARMA obviously wants to help AMIC develop healthcare in Armenia, but is faced with the big challenge of finding ways to assist the "new Armenia" established in Moscow and other Russian cities.

I thought, being a recent and geographically nearby Diaspora, the Russian Diaspora would be different from our Western Diasporas. I was quickly disabused of this. The Russian culture and language have been so dominant in Armenia that most Russian-Armenians prefer to speak in Russian with each other. This included the servers at the two Armenian restaurants we went to, among them Lusine, with her classic beautiful Armenian eyes, which looked at me with bewilderment and confusion when I spoke in Armenian to her, and at my friend who tried our Eastern dialect. Among Armenians who prefer to converse in Russian were physicians at our meetings, who could understand Armenian, and often speak it, but who would speak to each other in Russian during the meeting while others translated for us.

I ought not have been surprised. We have been able to maintain Diasporas in ghettos such as Beirut, Aleppo, and Istanbul, but cannot do so in the West--nor it is clear in Russia. The Diaspora is where Armenia goes to die.

We then flew to Yerevan to join the AMIC neurology branch for our work to develop that field in the country.

Yerevan is bustling with activity. The villages all around the country are destitute and desolate. The village folk are in Yerevan, transiting to Moscow and elsewhere. The fabric of society is unraveling. Most people want to leave. They all blame the government and governance of the country. They don't think anything will change. They believe the current system and regime are entrenched to stay.

Germany is the popular destination for Armenia's doctors. Germany is going through a physician shortage, and headhunters are roaming Yerevan, offering jobs to Armenian doctors to work as physician assistants in Germany with benefits, healthcare coverage, and a track toward German and thus European citizenship. German schools abound everywhere in Yerevan.

Yerevan is full of Aleppo Armenians. Practically no one is planning to stay.

I do not know how people deny the fact that we are not governing our country properly. What other reversible factor can underlie this loss of nationhood, with families seeing no hope other than on their own in faraway places?

Just to give mere teasers, from the medical field, of how we are destroying our country. Practically all of Armenia's hospitals are private properties of the oligarchy ruling the country, including the president (correction, his wife). The recently stepped-down minister of health, alone, is estimated to own, privately, a third of all healthcare facilities in the country. Armenian hospitals have a huge surplus of beds that are open, and patients stay in hospital way longer than they should. Armenia's government is well-aware of this.

Why can this not be remedied? It should be obvious. Taxpayer, donor, and international money pours into the ministry of health, goes to fund these hospitalizations, and thus makes its way into the pockets of the hospital owners, and trickles up to the top of the oligarchy. Likewise, Armenia 'trains' way too many residents (doctors) than it needs. Why? Because unlike a normal country where residents are paid, in Armenia residents pay, and moneys go up the chain of command. There are now many private medical schools, utterly unneeded and of ludicrous quality. It would take a simple act of parliament to require licensing of physicians and medical schools, which does not exist. Why? Because the schools are again owned by the same band controlling the country, and are the source of the innumerable and poorly-trained doctors flooding the country, making nice paying residents, and competing against the better elements in the field. As such, a doctor's salary is \$200 a month in Armenia, enough to pay the fees at the German school.

Our group went on a gorgeous hike from Barz Lidj to Goshavank. I have hiked many trails across many mountains, but found paradise on the mountain we crossed in Dilijan. Vast green mountainsides dotted white with sheep here and there, thick green forests at the edges, sun and beauty all around. We sang old Armenian songs, whirling around not knowing which gorgeous spot in the scenery to absorb. A very young Aleppo Armenian, who had joined our group and who is on his way to Canada, led the singing, because he knew all the words of the songs, and we la la la'ed along. His voice broke, when toothless shepherds came out of the forest and joined us, and he cried, and we all cried.

We made it to Goshavank. The surrounding village, destitute and desolate, villagers selling their houses for \$5000. At the entrance of the monastery complex there is a new seated statue of Mkhitar  Gosh, the great Armenian jurist, carrying the legal scale in his hand. We prayed in the church. Might Gosh intervene with God to restore justice to Armenia.

Our guide on the hike was Ardak. His main job is to collect the delectable tree mushrooms from the surrounding forests. He is 30-years-old. He does not own a home. He has a wife. He has a horse, which carried some of us up the mountain. The horse's name is Miro, a gentle horse that loves Ardak; always follows him; obeys him; and cuddles about him. In the back lawn of the church is an immense tree several centuries old. We were saying our goodbyes to Ardak and Miro under the great tree, as the sun was setting, giving way to a gorgeous full moon.

"Ardak, soil of the earth, would you ever, EVER, think of leaving Armenia?"

Ardak: "Of course! I am preparing to go soon."

"Ardak, where would you go?"

Ardak: "I am going to Kiev."

"Ardak, what is in Kiev?"

Ardak: "I will work as a laborer, and I will make money."

We forgot to ask Ardak what would happen to Miro after he leaves. I guess it will be alone on that field on the mountainside, with those sheep, looking about, searching, searching, searching for Ardak.

This story should normally end here, but "Ov Hay joghovourt, ko miyak prgoutiouno ko havakagan ouji mech eh"(Charents). We must remove the oligarchy and replace it with a proper government.

No election will do this, because they control the election process. Revolution is too risky, and we don't know whether a new charismatic leader will be any better. Let us chose the only remaining way. The Nakhakorhrdaran in Armenia is constructing the alternative government, a government with all the proper institutions, systems, checks, and balances of a true democracy. Let us join them in the homeland, and support them from the diaspora. When the new government is constructed, the oligarchy will flee to their Swiss banks, and may they enjoy all they stole.

The Nakhakorhrdaran's concept and work are not easy, but it is the only logical solution out of our deadly spiral. "Ov Hay joghovourt", do not be afraid of taking the one way out. Learn about the idea, see its clarity and its logic, join, and let us save our mountains.

They have money. We have the Armenian nation.

