THE POWER OF LEGITIMACY

Posted on February 9, 2022 by Keghart



Category: Opinions

By Levon Babajanyan, Yerevan, 6 February 2022

Armenia is not living its best days. In 2020 we lost the war which was terrifying due to its tragic consequences. For the past two years we have lived with the COVID pandemic. The economic situation is sometimes unpredictable: we are dealing with high inflation, the price of water and electricity has increased. In the coming months gas prices too will increase. The government has adopted a lot of environmental laws.

In this context opposing politicians, political, economic and social experts are surprised by the "indifference" of people. Why don't we see masses flood the streets and demand the resignation of the government? Most of the experts don't understand what is going on. Meanwhile, the ordinary citizen can envisage what would have happened if the country was ruled by Serzh Sargsyan or Robert Kocharyan. Probably the streets would be packed with protesters, the opposition would use the opportunity to demonize the government, and the police would press on the protesters and so on and so forth.

So what has changed? Where is the society which was once concerned in the political, social, and economic upheavals during the period of independence?

We may assume that our society has become indifferent and unable to demand its rights and for justice. This begs the question: what is the difference between the Armenian society in 2018-2022 and the one in 1991-2018?

At first, we may assume that Armenian society has been transformed into an indifferent society instead of being active and civic-oriented as in the past . Most of the current opposition politicians – majority elected in 2021 – grab every opportunity to blame the people for electing Nikol Pashinyan and his team. Some opposition politicians and the so called political experts describe Armenian society and especially the voters of Pashinyan as "plebs", "crowd", "dirt", etc.

The fact is our society has good reasons to be indifferent towards politics. We lost the horrendous war in 2020 and most of us are disappointed in the post-2018 regime: we haven't seen the promised transformation of our economy, political life and the judicial order. Moreover, we had exaggerated expectations from the new government. To make matters worse, Pashinyan's government failed to deliver the many promises it made during the 2018 elections. Thus, it is natural for society to be indifferent. But to be fair, our society — like other societies around the world — can be described with the characteristics of civic activism, political responsibility and so on. Political activity springs from small groups which may be respected and trusted by some sectors of the populace. Thus, they may trigger political transformations. The point is that society can't be active or passive. The drive for reform derives from politically active small groups who may or may not have the so-called "social capital": the trust and respect of the majority. Society is the same and the political figures in opposition are from the same political system and are mostly representatives of the previous political regime. So, it is no mystery that they don't enjoy society's trust.

Maybe the governing regime after 2018 is different from its precedents. Maybe Pashinyan's government is doing such a marvellous job that people trust him and his team and thus people don't feel the need to interfere in political and social life. In most democratic countries the majority doesn't participate in political life because it considers it boring or they're not interest in it. But despite their lack of interest, they still trust their political institutions. We should mention that people in democratic countries who do trust not their governments trust the political institutions which manage and control the political processes.

Armenia's new government differs from the previous ones and in many ways it does so in a positive manner. However, it's also true that the government is not the one we dreamt about. There is a great gap between the public's expectations and today's reality. The new government lost the war; it couldn't manage institutional reforms; it didn't punish the corrupt previous regime officials, and the criminal oligarchs. The current regime is less corrupt than the Kocharyan and Sargsyan regimes and there is no more systemic corruption. But it wouldn't be right to say that Pashinyan's government has the trust and confidence of most people. The last election was not about trust for Pashinyan's party. It was mainly about the distrust for the previous political leaders and parties. Thus, the "excellence" of the new government is not the main cause for society's indifference to politics and social life.

What is the main difference between the current social-political state of Armenian society and the one that existed prior to 2018? If we dig deep into the situation, we may notice that the main difference is the legitimacy of the current ruling political party. It's not their "excellence" or their "social capital". It's simply their legitimacy. Elections in 2021 were generally perceived by society as just and transparent. The previous regimes didn't come to power through fair and transparent elections. Thus, they were hamstrung by lack of legitimacy. That was the main cause why they feared their unjust and illegal actions might lead to an uprising. Pashinyan's government has many shortcomings but it still enjoys legitimacy. It is very important for our society to believe the government's power of legitimacy on the way to building a modern democratic state.

Comments



Vahakn – 2022-02-10 12:10:46
I fail to follow the logic of Mr. Babajanyan. He wrote: "We lost the war and most of us are disappointed in the post-2018 regime. We haven't seen the promised transformation of our economy, political life, and judicial order. Pashinyan's government failed to deliver the many promises it made during the 2018 election.. [the capitalization is mine] THUS, IT IS NATURAL FOR SOCIETY TO BE INDIFFERENT." The logic is new to me. Mr. Babajanyan is saying that because Pashinyan has been a failure, the electorate is indifferent to the governance of Armenia. This is a brilliant and original strategy to stay in power: the worse you do as a leader, the longer you stay in power.



Joseph Matossian – 2022-02-10 01:51:19
Yes we know and understand the short comings of the present administration as stated in this article. What are DEMOCRATIC solutions ?