DEBATE & DECISION

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Category: Opinions

Dr. Berge A. Minassian, Armenian Renaissance, Toronto, 9 August 2015

On one point no informed Armenians disagree: that Armenia (and Armenians' Mother See) are governed, at best, as oligarchies. This alone is shocking, yet for one valid (though incorrect) reason is considered by many as normal. There is no discord on a second point: that an oligarchy invariably fails. Why does the Armenian nation, which walked the trail of genocidal annihilation, which was so crushed that in the words of its poets it turned diamond, which in its Diaspora and homeland is among the most educated societies on Earth, tolerate this?

The reason is surprisingly simple, and surprisingly there's one reason only: "We need Russia to defend our borders. A democratic Armenia will not be tolerated by Russia, because Russia itself is an oligarchy." In other words, little Armenian "mafiosi" are an extension of the grand Russian "mafia", and that if the latter does not receive the "protection money" from Armenia, it would withdraw its "protection", and Armenia would be eaten by the big bad Turkish and Azeri wolves. I think this is a valid reason, one espoused by many honest, serious and thoughtful friends, but it is wrong.

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Before I explain why the above fear is wrong, let me discuss the nefarious consequences of countenancing oligarchy as our national governance system. What is a nation? Whatever it is, at its core are solidarity, caring for each other (yes, love, love of the one family drenched in rivers of blood), and common purpose. What is oligarchy/kleptocracy? It is the strong few stealing from the majority; robbing our people and their children their future. In other words, it is the complete opposite of nation.

When oligarchy is the norm (please see the opening statement of this essay), and a whole people accepts this as 'normal', then there is no solidarity, no caring for one another, and no common purpose. There is no longer nation. No longer is there a shared project of nation-building on our shared and cherished land. What there remain are individual families, separate and alone. When oligarchy is the norm, what remains is depopulation, and the evidence is clear: this year again as in each of the recent years Armenia will lose 100,000 people. The count for the first six months is 75,500.

Russia is an oligarchy, but it is not only an oligarchy. Russia is also a superpower. This superpower's influence is threatened by other powers. Jettisoning Armenia because it may lose some measly fraction of pittance from the little local Armenia mafia is nonsensical. Armenia can govern itself well and remain Russia's most loyal ally. We can do it. It is a goal worth pursuing; a risk worth taking. A strong and willingly loyal vassal state is much more valuable to Russia than a grudging, hating, unstable, weak one.

It is time to settle this debate and decide that we can, at the same time, together, build a democracy and be Russia's strongest ally. It is time we say no to oligarchy and to its representatives and its symbols, from the regime on down to the medals it bestows on our disgusted Diasporan hearts. It is time we each have the courage to unequivocally call for democracy, i.e. for respect to all Armenians, solidarity and common purpose. It is time we decide not to be afraid. If this we decide, we will live. If not, we will not.