

DEPOPULATION CRISIS IN ARMENIA

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October 2013

The Kololian Foundation of Toronto, in cooperation with the International Center for Human Development (Armenia, Yerevan), announced the completion of a one year research project in Armenia aimed at identifying the root causes of emigration from Armenia. The research also resulted in the making of recommendations to reverse the de-population tide. The research report was presented on October 8, in Yerevan, at a United Nations conference. The full report is available for download from the [website](#) of Depopulation Crisis. Other topics include "Rule of Law", "Demographic Crisis", "Corruption", "Reasons and Solutions", "Repopulation" and "Repatriates from the Middle East".



The research was conducted by four distinct academic groups: the Russian-Armenian (Slavonic) University, the Research and Business Center of the Faculty of Economics at Yerevan State University, the Hrayr Maroukhian Foundation and an independent group of academics who present the case of repopulating Kashatagh and Shahumyan.

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Armenia's demographic and emigration trends have reached crisis proportions. This acutely threatens the very existence of Armenia. Drawing on statistical data, other research sources, media reports, focus groups and original surveys, the researchers in Yerevan assembled various analyses to show common patterns. Together, these sources have produced a set of policy recommendations through which the Armenian government and other stakeholders can take action to reverse population decline.

This appears to be a first class piece of work and addresses the painful issues which we are all familiar with. But, the most important thing is that the research was done by young people on the

ground in Yerevan. Three of these young people are going on a speaking tour in the Diaspora, Europe and the Americas.

In addressing the issue of declining population, The Report examines the following areas:

- Employment and educational systems
- Corruption and the lack of Rule of law
- Economic and judicial reforms
- The need for Government accountability
- Business environment
- Lack of a cohesive parliamentary opposition
- Tax and customs policies
- The need for civic activism and legal consciousness.



Open Letter From the Sponsor of the Research Project, Vahan Kololian

October, 2013

Dear Compatriots:

Re: **The Study on the depopulation crisis in Armenia**

The shrinking population of Armenia is a very serious issue. "One day we shall have a free and  independent Armenia" had become the battle cry of all Armenians for 70 years, following the genocide and the Bolshevik revolution. At the time of Armenian independence in 1991, the population of Armenia stood at 4.0 million. Today it is below 3.0 million. A free, independent Armenia was achieved, and yet today we are witnessing the dissipation of Armenia, resulting from unprecedented levels of emigration. This exodus is now at crisis proportions. It represents an existential threat to the country. Armenia's adversaries are watching. They continue their blockade, and watch with satisfaction as Armenia empties itself.

Background of this Research Project

While it would be easy to lodge criticism at current government policy, particularly from the diaspora, we felt that a more constructive and researched based approach was called for. It was felt that a research project should be launched from within Armenia on the demographic trends and the de-population of Armenia.

In co-operation with the International Centre for Human Development ("ICHHD") in Yerevan, a selection process was conducted, resulting in four research institutions or groups being selected:

- Russian-Armenian (Slavonic University) Research Team
- Research and Business Center of the Faculty of Economics of Yerevan State University

- Research Group of Arshak Balayan, Armen Gakavian and Avetik Mejlumyan
- Researchers from Hrayr Maroukhian Foundation

The role of the Kololian Foundation has been to fund the research and its related costs. The independence of the researchers has been maintained throughout the project.

Objective

It was felt that an academic and disciplined approach needed to be taken, to search for the root causes of population decline.

Limitations of the Study

The real desire of those supporting this study, and of the researchers themselves, is for this paper to be a catalyst for a robust national dialogue, not resulting in finger pointing, but consisting of real self-examination of what needs to be done by all state and non-state actors in Armenia and the Diaspora. Only when the taboos come down and we bare our souls to one another, can we begin the process of addressing the fundamental issues which are driving citizens out of Armenia.

Some Positive Developments

There are some initiatives being taken by the current government that are commendable. One such initiative is the Ministry of the Diaspora's Syrian-Armenian resettlement project. It is early days, but one hopes that Syrian Armenians will stay in Armenia, long after Syria returns to a post-war calm.

There are also some positive signs where the private sector is participating in nation building activities. Micro Lending is being developed by certain banks as an active way to make loans to job creating enterprises and projects. Artsakh Bank is a good example of Micro Lending where micro loans are increasingly a part of its commercial activities. Artsakh Bank reports good take up of its micro lending program, in agriculture, processing and small scale manufacturing. And most importantly it reports a very low failure rate, where their portfolio has performed above expectations.

Follow on Work Required

This paper does not pretend to address all issues or offer all solutions. The issues not addressed in depth in the current paper, which need to be examined are:

- the need for organized and effective parliamentary opposition;
- a study of citizens' purchasing power, where basic goods and services in Armenia are 3 to 4 times more expensive than neighbouring countries. Blockades and other trade barriers such as tariffs need to be studied. The question must be asked, "is there a section of Armenian society that benefits from such restricted trade by driving and maintaining higher prices?"
- the need to review Armenia's post high school education where more emphasis could be put on trades and less on the arts and humanities;

- the need for private ownership of land, in combination with expansion of an agricultural policy, where land grants are made (similar to "Homesteading" in North America, 1800 – 1900), to families who show capability to farm such lands. Such a program can be supported financially by the Diaspora.
- better co-ordination of diaspora support. Since independence, diaspora organizations such as The All Armenia Fund, The Armenian Relief Society and AGBU have donated money to bricks and mortar projects, schools, clinics, and hospitals. Is it time for the state to take over funding infrastructure and the diaspora to fund programs in health, housing, job creation, relocation, and most importantly, enticing and integrating of immigrants?

The sponsor and the researchers of the current paper, invite others to take up these issues and join us in bringing forward ideas for the betterment of Armenia.

Let's be Positive

It is important that we approach the issues afflicting Armenia with a sense of optimism. Negative tone and negative attitude produce negative results. Let's remember the words of William Saroyan:

"Go ahead, destroy Armenia. See if you can do it. Send them into the desert without bread or water. Then see if they will not laugh, sing and pray again. For when two of them meet anywhere in the world, see if they will not create a new Armenia."

The resilience and determination of Armenians is legendary. Let's turn these attributes to addressing and conquering the social issues of Armenia.

Respectfully,

Vahan Kololian

The Kololian Foundation

Toronto, Canada

vk@mosaicinstitute.ca

vk@kololianfoundation.com

