DIASPORA VOICE IN ROA LEGISLATURE PREMATURE CONCEPT

Posted on May 1, 2011 by Keghart

Category: Opinions

Following Hon. Hranush Hakobyan's announcement, in California, of a second "chamber", there has been renewed talk of Diaspora Armenian participation in RoA's legislative body. The idea goes back to the early days of the Third Republic. Prof. Osheen Keshishian of Los Angeles has been there from day one. In February he published, in ***The Armenian Observer****, a two-part article on the topic. Posing valid questions, he describes why people are not embracing the initiative.--***Editor**

A Chamber or an Advisory Council
Prof. Osheen Keshishian, The Armenian Observer, February 2011

The Armenian President, through the Minister of Diaspora Affairs Hranush Hakobyan, announced that he intends to get Diaspora Armenians more involved in Armenia and Armenian affairs, and thus wishes to establish a second legislative body to the Armenian government structure. A second chamber, but it does not say in what number, or other particulars. Of course, there is a lot of time to discuss details.

Following Hon. Hranush Hakobyan's announcement, in California, of a second "chamber", there has been renewed talk of Diaspora Armenian participation in RoA's legislative body. The idea goes back to the early days of the Third Republic. Prof. Osheen Keshishian of Los Angeles has been there from day one. In February he published, in ***The Armenian Observer****, a two-part article on the topic. Posing valid questions, he describes why people are not embracing the initiative.--***Editor**

A Chamber or an Advisory Council
Prof. Osheen Keshishian, The Armenian Observer, February 2011

The Armenian President, through the Minister of Diaspora Affairs Hranush Hakobyan, announced that he intends to get Diaspora Armenians more involved in Armenia and Armenian affairs, and thus wishes to establish a second legislative body to the Armenian government structure. A second chamber, but it does not say in what number, or other particulars. Of course, there is a lot of time to discuss details.

Minister Hakobyan announced this notion at a reception in Burbank, California, on Sunday, January 30, 2011 in the presence of various organizational representatives, community activist and the Armenian media — local as well as from Armenia. No Armenian government official in Yerevan knew about the announcement and neither was the media aware of this development. Maybe some were aware; if they were, they have not expressed their opinions. Naturally, the Minister did not speak about the mechanism of forming this legislative body nor did she expound on the authority and power of this body, which will be formed by Diaspora representatives.
The idea is not new for those who seriously and closely follow the developments in Armenia. Some people are very excited in the Diaspora, but in Armenia, a glance at the newspapers will show that there is a large negative segment against the idea and many of them have expressed their opinions

by signing their articles with initials…Even sarcasm is ubiquitous in most newspapers not controlled by the government. Of course, the operational details of this new venture have not been discussed yet.

Many people have expressed similar notions in meetings and even in the Armenian Parliament.

The first President, Levon Ter-Petrossian, had similar ideas but he did not announce them in public almost as a done deal, but had meetings with Diaspora. There were several meetings in Los Angeles at that time, just to explore the possibilities.

During the early part of Armenia's independence, several meetings were held, again, exploring possibilities of establishing an Advisory Council, yes, an advisory council. All the political parties and organizations were contacted, but again, it did not work.

Several Armenia-Diaspora meetings were held in Yerevan (I participated in all of them), but nothing came out of those gatherings either. I don't want to go into details now, but was there an assessment as to the results of those meetings, with the participation of over 1,000 people? If something happened, please feel free to speak out about them.

The President is thinking of making the legislative body bicameral and introduce changes in the Armenian Constitution. After all, the 64th article says that a delegate should have resided in Armenia continuously for five years before he/she can get elected and participate in the proceedings.

Introducing changes and amendments to the Armenian Constitution, or any other nation's constitution, requires a long and arduous process. One important aspect is to foresee the ramifications of the changes…In the case of Armenia, where the intention is to establish a bicameral body in the Armenian government with the participation of Diaspora representatives, should not have been announced prematurely without seriously studying the operational issues as well as consulting some of the leaders of the Diaspora about its feasibility.

Does the loosely organized Diaspora want or can participate in political and civic issues and establish legislation? Who is the Diaspora? In itself, the Diaspora is wide and spread in different countries which have moulded (or changed, may be) the Armenian character, according to where they live. Armenian-Americans vary from coast-to-coast and definitely are different from Armenians living in France or South America. People will argue and will get angry (it has happened at gatherings in Glendale) that "we are all Armenians", yes, "don't put distinctions between Armenians". Yes, but living in different societies we have been acculturated and have different set of values in the United States than the Armenians of Iran or Australia or somewhere else.

In case the Diaspora is represented in Armenia, how do we expect the Diaspora to think alike, when even Armenians in Armenia have different set of values, views and opinions about issues, for instance, the Turkish-Armenian Protocols. There are people who are for it and there are people who are against it. I am sure there are people who will argue that "How can any Armenian be for it?"

Are the Armenians in Armenia supporting this notion of involving the Diaspora in deciding their fate and destiny? Is it tailored to meet their needs? Maybe Armenia should shape up first by eliminating the tension, corruption and poverty rampant in the country and not finding excuses that as a new country, it requires time to improve.

Will a country accept its citizens to be elected to a Parliament in a foreign country without creating suspicion even if the country is a friendly one and allows it to happen? And in case there comes a moment when a decision has to be made where the choice is the country of your citizenship and Armenia, what would happen? Do countries like France, Italy, Germany, Lebanon, Argentina or any other one, have the same approach and attitude to this issue?

I think we should start with an Advisory Council, or even have the expert and professional consultants to the President, as the U.S and other countries have.

The issue needs a lot of thinking, researching, and consulting until we reach a common ground.