DIASPORAN MONEY CORRUPTS GOVERNMENTS, STUDY FINDS

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Category: Opinions

By Avedis Kevorkian, Philadelphia PA, 28 December 2008

Avedis Kevorkian represents a dissenting voice that many may not share, but it's worth listening to for the benefit of planniing a healthier way to conduct financial affairs between the Armenian Diaspora and its motherland.

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Often, I am asked (even by myself), "If you are so smart, why ain't you rich?"
To which I answer (even to myself), "Probably, because I am not so smart."

Then, recently, I realized that there is hope for me yet.

For years (since 1991, actually), I have been saying that the Armenian Diaspora should not support Armenia in any way--especially financially.

My reasoning was that the crooks and thieves and thugs who run the country (in the first two presidential administrations, and why should anyone expect the third presidential administration will be any different?) will take the money for themselves or will steal the money one way or other. Admittedly, my view was based on a feeling, on observations, on what I read about Yerevan, and on what I saw on two visits. But, nothing scientific and not on any research--though my failed attempts at helping Armenia in the 1990s went a long way to forming my opinion.
And, I am often -- No, usually -- severely criticized. Some people even question whether I am Armenian, because I don't succumb to the lure of the siren song of the crooks and thieves and thugs in Yerevan that I (or you) in the Diaspora owe a duty to the "homeland"/"Motherland."
To that argument I retort that "This is my 'homeland' and I don't owe Armenia a damn thing." But, let us not go down that path, right now.

Suffice it to say, I have maintained that the only way for the crooks and thieves and thugs to see the light, to get religion, to decide to walk the straight and narrow path of honesty, and to serve the people of the country is to deprive them of Diasporan money.

However, it appears that I am pretty smart -- so I expect the money to roll in, soon.

A recent study conducted under the auspices of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has found that "remittances may actually encourage government corruption and ineffectiveness."

The study looked at 111 countries between 1990 and 2000, and researchers found that high levels of remittances often lead to greater corruption and irresponsible economic policies. (Isn't it wonderful how delicate can be the language of these reports?)

What the study revealed was that the officials in the remittance-rich countries are often -- to give them the benefit of the doubt -- let off the hook for failing to provide basic services, thus freeing them to divert resources for their own purposes. "Surprise, surprise!"

According to one of the report's co-authors, "The government says 'I know you are getting money;

what's my incentive to fix situation?" This, the co-author says, is because there is less incentive for citizens to demand reforms and will turn elsewhere to get the services they need.

In effect, the study suggested, if the crooks and thieves and thugs who run Armenia had planned to spend, let us say, one-thousand dollars to help the still-poor victims of the 1988 earthquake who are still living in shipping containers, and the crooks and thieves and thugs learn that the poor had received one-thousand dollars from Armenian suckers in the Diaspora, they (the crooks and thieves and thugs) will say, "since you have one-thousand dollars, you spend the money on yourselves, and we will divert our intended one-thousand dollars to another cause." And, what other cause can be more worthy for the crooks and thieves and thugs than to buy another valuable trinket for their villas, or to be put toward the purchase of a new BMW or Mercedes (since the ashtrays of their present limos are getting full)?

In most functioning democracies, people leave government and enter the private sector in order to make real money. In Armenia, people enter the government to make real money. If the world thinks that the trouble during the recent farce called "an election" was solely about who governs Armenia, it is only partially correct. The real dispute was about who gets his nose in the money-trough. Unfortunately, much of the money there comes from the mis-guided Diaspora.

However, should the voiceless poor ever find their voices and decide to complain, we know what will happen to them. In Armenia, complaining about the corruption can stunt one's growth.

Why the authors of the long study bothered to spend so much time and effort to examine so many countries, is beyond me. A couple of months in Yerevan would have been all that was necessary for them to learn what they needed to know about governmental corruption in countries with a generous (but foolish) diaspora.

Having, now, been reassured that I am, indeed, smart, I have alerted my bank to expect my meager account to grow by the millions.

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