GOOD INTENTIONS, MISGUIDED DECISIONS

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Himnatir Khorhrtaran ("Founding Parliament") until recently known as *Nakhakhorhrtaran* ("Pre-Parliament") is an important civilian initiative in Armenian life. Established in 2012, the Armenia-based group believes "there is a moral, psychological, social, economic, demographic and administrative crisis in Armenia which threatens the State…" *Himnatir Khorhrtaran* (HK) says the "criminal-oligarchic system, social polarization, dependence of the judicial system, the unsustainable use of natural resource and growing dependence on outside forces" have sunk Armenia into an abyss which had led to country-wide apathy and to costly emigration.

Those who follow Armenia politics would have a tough time challenging HK views on the state of affairs in Armenia. Unfortunately, the group has been unable to amass sufficient following to make it a serious player in Yerevan. HK has adherents, called Renaissance, in half-a-dozen countries but membership numbers are believed to be low. Renaissance members promote HK activities in the Diaspora and help it financially.

Among HK prominent leaders are Jirair Sefilian, ex-military commander of the Artsakh War; ex-ombudsman Larisa Alaverdyan; filmmaker Tigran Khzmalyan; ex-ASALA member Alexander Yenikomshian, and ethnographer Hranush Kharatyan. The group is led by Karekin Chugaszyan. Its membership in Armenia and in the Diaspora represents a cross-section of both societies with a significant participation by professionals.

In essence, HK wants to establish an Armenia which enjoys proper governance: a country where the rule of law is supreme. It's no surprise that the group has been persecuted by Armenia authorities. Last November cars belonging to HK members were torched on Yerevan streets. Several of its high-profile members have been beaten. Undaunted, the group has continued its campaign to bring about positive and peaceful change.

One of the more effective ways the group disseminates its views is through public gatherings up and down the country and through auto "marches". Despite intimidation by the authorities, people have come out to hear what HK has to say.

While Keghart.com supports HK's agenda, two recent blunders of the group have to be condemned. These missteps can hurt HK, the dream for a democratic Armenia, and the Armenian Nation.

In January HK organized an auto march to Artsakh, although it was told the marchers would not be welcome. At Berdzor—the "border" between Armenia and Artsakh—HK members were met by police and civilians, some of the latter in masks. They ordered the marchers to return to Armenia. HK members wisely decided to retreat. While doing so, they were beaten by the police and the civilians.

When asked on Armenia TV ("Realpolitik") why HK had organized the march, HK leader Chugaszyan said that since Artsakh is a province of Armenia, he didn't see any reason not to proselytize there. He

also rightly stressed that the status quo between Armenia/Artsakh is changing against the interests of the Armenian Nation and that a "Great Wall of China is being built between Armenia and Artsakh." It seems the march was intended to force President Sargsyan's hand and to make him declare the borders of Armenia/Artsakh inviolable.

So far so good. But why take women and children along on a political mission that HK leaders must have known could end violently? In the weeks following the beatings, some HK members merrily reported that the attacks had roused interest among many Armenians. At what price?

A more serious HK blunder could be in the offing on April 24, at the Yerevan commemorations of the Genocide. The group is planning to hold another—and bigger--march on that day to show its opposition to the regime. The HK website states: "The aim of the auto march is to convince our people not to believe in Serzh, criminal oligarchs and fake opposition leaders, as they are different heads of the same regime; instead people must stand up for their country and on the 100th anniversary of the Genocide, on April 24, 2015, they must come out into streets and **remove** (our bolding) the regime jointly and start the creation of new quality national state." These are fighting words.

For a century we have told our story at every opportunity presented to us. Next April 24 is the best platform—in one-hundred years-- to tell our story to the world—formally, convincingly, and in a dignified manner. Unseemly events would not only embarrass Sargsyan but hurt our Sacred Cause. The intentional/unintentional hijacking of the day by HK and public divisiveness would tell the world that Armenians don't know what they want and can't even agree among themselves. In the words of a HK leader, it "will be a watershed moment." Watershed means dramatic. Dramatic as in violent?

As well, knowing the propensity of some Armenia police to resorting to violence, it would be unwise to goad them into baton-swinging. HK leaders should note the media axiom: "If it bleeds, it leads." The international media would love to see dramatic violence. Some HK people maintain that April 24, 2015 would be the safest day of the year because the authorities wouldn't dare heavy-handed tactics when the world is watching. That may be true, but what's to stop security people from photographing the "trouble-makers" and persecuting them when foreign dignitaries and media have gone home?

At a recent Toronto gathering organized by Renaissance, an attendee cautioned that such public resistance may encourage Ankara to send agitators to Yerevan on April 24 to induce violence and sabotage the commemorations.

HK owes Armenians the assurance that its members/adherents will avoid violence, especially when the organization has always preached non-violent change in our homeland. The best option for HK is to persuade political parties to join the group in organizing a national work slow down or a general strike. Sargsyan's goons can't drag the whole work force to work.

Meanwhile HK has to clarify matters on two crucial fronts. In the socio-economic field there exists a dangerous level of polarization. The unemployed, the underemployed and the underpaid form the majority of the populace. If the concerns of this economic underclass are not met, "change" will remain just a slogan without much traction.

Armenia and Transcaucasia are in the centre of simmering international conflicts. HK, by design or neglect, has not addressed this issue. It has not come up with a clear view, thus leaving the door wide open to the possible hijacking of the movement, infiltration by *saboteurs*, agitprop manipulation and ultimately to an imported "color revolution" which could be disastrous for Armenia and Armenians.