LOSING THE CORE

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Category: Opinions

By Hovann Simonian, hetqonline, 26 July 2010

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The topic of Turkified, Kurdified and Islamicized Armenians has become quite fashionable in recent years, having gained increasing popularity amongst Armenians both in the Homeland and in the Diaspora. The articles which mention Islamicized and Turkified Armenians tend to share two common themes: Turkified Armenians should be redeemed and returned to the Armenian nation, and discuss whether the Armenian people can accept a Muslim component the way it has accepted and integrated Catholic and Protestant communities.

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The topic of Turkified, Kurdified and Islamicized Armenians has become quite fashionable in recent years, having gained increasing popularity amongst Armenians both in the Homeland and in the Diaspora. The articles which mention Islamicized and Turkified Armenians tend to share two common themes: Turkified Armenians should be redeemed and returned to the Armenian nation, and discuss whether the Armenian people can accept a Muslim component the way it has accepted and integrated Catholic and Protestant communities.

The analytical weakness of the articles focusing on Turkified and Islamicized Armenians, however, stems from the fact that these articles do not appear to take into account the opinion of the very people concerned.
Also, some of these articles confuse admission of one Armenian grandparent with a desire to become a full-fledged Armenian. How many Kurdified or Turkified Armenians want to return to the fold of Armenianness?

Can the upbringing of these individuals as Turks and Muslims be erased on a whim? And even if a Turk or Kurd admits to an Armenian grandmother, does this mean that this person considers herself or himself to be Armenian?

With one Armenian grandparent, this individual still has three others who are not. Like Fethiye Çetin who authored a book on the topic, Turks who discover some Armenian ancestry may develop an interest in their origins and even sympathy for Armenians, but this does not imply in any way that they intend to exchange their Turkish identity for an Armenian one.

Consequently, the number of individuals with Armenian ancestry willing to return to the fold of Armenianness is probably limited to thousands or a few tens of thousands.

This author is certainly not suggesting that Armenians should not develop interest in the Turkified, Kurdified and Islamicized Armenians, as he has himself studied one such group, the Hemshin, or Islamicized Armenians of Hamshen.

However, the sudden interest for individuals who, as a result of the tragic events Armenians have faced throughout their history, have been displaced outside or on the margins of the Armenian ethos is rather puzzling, especially when the very core of the Armenian people is under major threat.

Indeed, why worry so much on bringing back into Armenianness at most thirty or forty thousand people when the developments of the past two decades in Armenia and the Diaspora are threatening to deplete the Armenian nation of millions of people?

Why worry about a few thousand Kurdified Armenians when an increasing number of Armenian families in Lebanon, once the heartland of the Armenian Diaspora, are sending their children to non-Armenian schools or when up to two million Armenians may have left Armenia since the early 1990s?

Before hoping and asking for Turkified Armenians to return to the fold of Armenianness, shouldn't the condition of the Armenian core to which Turkified or Kurdified Armenians are supposed to return be first examined?

A confluence of internal and external factors during the past two decades has thrown the Armenian people into turmoil and presented them with a number of challenges not seen since the tragic events the Armenian nation had to face at the beginning of the twentieth century.

However, it is perhaps only during this past year that the significance of these trends has begun to be understood, and this by only a very few individuals.

Moreover, these few observers appear to have caught only part of the unfolding developments, as their analyses are focused on only one or two issues and lack an overall perspective and synthesis of trends affecting Armenian society in Armenia and the Diaspora.

What are the developments we are mentioning, the persistence of which threatens the future of the Armenian people? The demographic decline of Armenia during the past twenty years constitutes without a doubt one of the most important of such developments.

Throughout the Soviet period, the population of Armenia steadily increased, with the immigration of Armenians from Azerbaijan and Georgia compensating for the decline in fertility which gradually set in from the 1950s on.

As a result of this trend, not only was the number of Armenians in Armenia increasing in absolute terms, but the proportion of Armenians living in their homeland was increasing as a percentage of the worldwide Armenian population as well.

The sudden influx of refugees fleeing pogroms against Armenians in Azerbaijan in 1988-1990

brought the population of Armenia to an all-time high of almost four million, almost all of whom, following the exodus of Azeris from the country, were Armenians.

This number, however, was not to be sustained for long. Within the next few years, the population of Armenia would fall dramatically as an estimated one-and-a-half to two million individuals would leave the country as a consequence of the economic collapse following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the war with Azerbaijan over Karabagh.

Thus, Armenia finds itself, twenty years after its independence, with only half the population it had at the end of the Soviet period.

The multiple threats caused by this demographic crisis, be they of a strategic, military or economic nature, are not difficult to imagine.

The demographic crisis has not been limited to Armenia but has affected Karabagh as well. Of the 145,000 Armenians inhabiting the province in 1989, at the time of the last Soviet census, losses due to war and migration may have left only half of that number twenty years later according to some estimates.

Armenians did win the war over Karabagh, but that victory might have come at the cost of half of Karabagh's Armenian population should these pessimistic estimates get confirmed.

The same last two decades have also witnessed two further interrelated developments threatening the future of the Armenian people, the decline of Diaspora institutions and the acceleration of assimilation trends within Diaspora communities.

In particular, the financial crisis which hit the Venice branch of the Armenian Catholic Mekhitarist Congregation took place a few years earlier, in 1984, and hence could be considered some sort of prelude to the decline of Diaspora institutions that would take place in the following years.

The Mekhitarist Congregation had played an eminent role in promoting the Armenian cultural renaissance from the early eighteenth century on.

Both Venice and Vienna branches were at the origin of a substantial cultural production – including numerous publications – and had founded and maintained a network of schools across the world from South America to the Middle East.

Hence the financial crisis was a powerful blow not only to the Mekhitarist Congregation itself, but to the entire Armenian Diaspora, within which the Mekhitarist Congregation enjoyed much prestige.

Ill-advised and cheated by a group of dishonest Italian financiers – the same involved in the Banco Ambrosiano scandal that affected the Vatican – to whom they had entrusted the management of their entire assets, the Venice Mekhitarists were almost completely ruined and only saved from bankruptcy by the Vatican.

They never recovered from the crisis. In the ensuing years, the Venice Mekhitarists were forced to close down some of the oldest and most prestigious schools they operated, such as the Collegio Armeno Moorat Raphael in Venice, originally established in 1836, and the Collège Arménien Samuel Moorat in Sèvres, near Paris, founded in 1846.

Both Mekhitarist branches also put an end to their printing and publication activities, limiting the latter to their flagstaff scholarly journals, Pazmaveb in Venice and Handes Amsorya in Vienna, both now published with great effort as single yearly volumes instead of the multiple, either monthly or quarterly, issues of years gone by.

In retrospect, the financial collapse of the prestigious Mekhitarist Congregation and the closing down of its centuries-old educational establishments were a stern warning for the entire Diaspora and a harbinger of challenges ahead.

The financial troubles of the Mekhitarists were not entirely to blame for the closing of their schools. Some of the problems of these schools were linked to political upheavals in the Middle East and ensuing demographic trends affecting Armenian communities there.

Thus, the Mekhitarist school in Venice suffered during the 1980s from the inability of the parents of Iranian-Armenian students to pay the tuition of their children as money transfers outside Iran were forbidden by the country's authorities.

More generally, the Mekhitarist boarding schools in Venice and Paris, as well as the Melkonian Educational Institute in Cyprus, suffered from the exodus affecting Armenian communities in the Middle East from the mid-1970s on as a result of the Lebanese Civil War, the Iranian Revolution, the Iran-Iraq War and political instability in Turkey, as it is these Middle-Eastern communities which supplied much of the student body of the Mekhitarist schools in Europe.

Short of money and short of students – or at least of students who could afford to pay the tuition – the Mekhitarist Fathers had no option but to close down the oldest and most prestigious Armenian educational institutions in Europe.

The closing down of the Mekhitarist boarding schools in Europe was only one of the negative consequences of the Armenian exodus out of the Middle Eastern countries.

At the beginning of this out-migration, though, assessments about its effects were mixed. There was obviously lament on the weakening of communities such as those in Lebanon or Iran, which had been strongholds of Armenian identity, but this regret was mitigated by the regeneration of Armenian communities in North America and Western Europe thanks to the new blood brought in by Middle Eastern Armenians.

Perhaps with a certain arrogance, the latter hoped to succeed where earlier generations of Armenians in countries such as the USA or France had failed, in creating resilient communities able to sustain the pitfalls of assimilation.

The trump card of Armenians migrating from the Middle East in their endeavors to transmit Armenian identity to the younger generation growing up in North America or Australia was the opening of Armenian day schools.

The movement to open Armenian day schools in North America had started in the 1960s – with the first school opening in 1964 in the Encino suburb of Los Angeles – but it was in the 1970s that it gained momentum in North America, more particularly in the Los Angeles and Montreal areas with their high concentration of Armenian immigrants from Lebanon, Iran, Turkey, Egypt, Iraq, Jerusalem and Syria. As a result of this effort, around a dozen schools had opened in the Los Angeles area by the mid-1980s, Toronto, Montreal, Boston and New York/New Jersey counted two to three schools each by the same period, and Philadelphia, Detroit, Fresno, San Francisco and Orange County counted one school each.

By the time the movement to open Armenian day schools came to a gradual halt, around the mid-1980s, however, the total enrollment of Armenian days schools in the United States was around six thousand pupils.

This number meant that even though the movement had succeeded in the objective of establishing schools where Armenian families willing to do so would have the possibility of providing their children with an education including Armenian language, culture and history, only a rather small minority of school-age children were enrolled in these schools.

In Los Angeles, at least sixty thousand Armenian students were enrolled in American public schools – to which should be added an unknown number in private American schools – ten times more than children attending Armenian schools all over the United States.

Also, the opening of Armenian schools in North America was certainly not a compensation for the exodus from the Middle-East. In spite of reduced communities of around sixty to eighty thousand Armenians each, the Armenian communities of Beirut and Aleppo, boasted, during the same period, the mid-1980s, more students enrolled in their Armenian schools than were enrolled in all such schools in the United States, even though the Armenian community in the latter country, estimated at between six to eight hundred thousand individuals, was tenfold that of Beirut or Aleppo.

Yet, the effort should not be dismissed or underestimated, for it was a valiant one. The mere existence of Armenian schools in North America was no small victory, achieved in spite of overwhelming odds, and the belief, held by many in the American-Armenian community, that Armenian day schools could not and should not operate in the United States.

Had the momentum not been lost at the end of the 1980s, new schools might have continued to be opened and existing ones could have been expanded, possibly resulting in a much more successful – or more larger-scale – outcome than the one achieved.

Two factors can be mentioned to explain the halt in the growth of Armenian day schools in the

United States.

The first was the economic downturn that affected California and the United States during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Many families could not afford to pay school tuition anymore, and raising donations for new schools or for expanding existing ones became much more difficult.

The second, more determinant, and longer-lasting factor, was the precipitous set of events affecting Armenia from 1988 on. The struggle for the reunification of the province of Karabagh (Artsakh) with Armenia, which came to the limelight in February 1988, brought the homeland to the attention of the Diaspora.

However, it is the devastating earthquake that shook northern Armenia on December 7, 1988, which most affected the course taken by the Diaspora, its priorities and the allocation of Diaspora resources.

The Diaspora suddenly found itself with a new task on its hands, that of coming to the rescue of earthquake victims and of helping to rebuild what the earthquake had destroyed.

The task was compounded and the Diaspora's burden was made heavier when Armenia became independent at the end of 1991 as a result of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and when Armenia's conflict with Azerbaijan over Karabagh turned into a full-fledged war.

Whether the amount of Diaspora support was sufficient to make a difference for Armenia and whether it corresponded to the level of expectation among Armenia's Armenians is beyond the purview of this article.

What is relevant is that the help provided to Armenia by the Diaspora diverted personal and material resources which would otherwise have gone into Diaspora institutions and projects.

Busy with Armenia and its troubles, the Diaspora has mostly neglected itself during the two decades following Armenia's independence in 1991.

No serious assessment has been made of its condition and the ailments affecting it during this period, and hence no possible remedies to the Diaspora's pains have been sought.

Yet such an assessment is highly necessary as the challenges faced by the Diaspora were already present during the 1990s and are becoming increasingly visible as time goes by to anyone paying attention.

The situation of the Armenian community in Lebanon as it emerged at the end of the civil war in that country in 1990 constituted a striking example of overlooked and unaddressed problems.

Considered the heart of the Armenian Diaspora with its dense network of churches, schools, clubs, papers, printing houses, publishers and cultural associations, the Armenian community in Lebanon suffered extensively from the civil war that took place there between 1975 and 1990.

A greater part of this community left the country during the War, and emigration continued in the following decades mainly because of the country's poor economic conditions, under which it was particularly difficult for young people to find employment there.

The conditions produced by the Lebanese Civil War generated new social dynamics that allowed assimilation trends to make inroads into a community which until then had appeared immune to them.

The reduction in numbers meant that it became increasingly hard for young Armenians to find their spouse within their own community.

Mixed marriages were also facilitated by the increased number of links and greater solidarity which developed between Armenians and the other Christians communities of the country, as all found themselves living together in the "Christian Heartland" located to the north and east of Beirut and sharing many of the same social and political concerns.

As a result, mixed marriages skyrocketed during the War and afterwards, passing from a mere 10 percent to over half of all marriages. Most of the children born out of these mixed marriages were not sent to Armenian schools and were not taught the Armenian language at home.

It is only when these children came of age, during the 2000s, that the realization set in that a new generation of Lebanese-Armenians unable to speak the language of their ancestors had appeared, a development unprecedented in the history of the post-Genocide Armenian community of Lebanon.

Thus, according to one study, some 25 percent of students at the American University of Beirut (AUB) with an Armenian last name do not speak Armenian.

However, it is not only children born to mixed marriages who are not being enrolled at Armenian schools in Lebanon.

Armenian schools did not emerge unscathed from the Civil War, having lost much of their student body to emigration and suffered severe financial strains.

They failed to recover after the end of the War as a vicious cycle set in, whereby upper-middle class and middle-class families, worried about the quality of education provided at Armenian schools, withdrew their children from these schools and enrolled them in non-Armenian institutions.

The loss of students with the ability to afford tuition led, in turn, to a contraction in the budget of the schools and a further worsening of school conditions, which encouraged more parents to withdraw their children.

While Armenian schools in Lebanon and other Middle Eastern countries had enjoyed financial support from US-based Armenian philanthropic individuals and organizations, such support did not continue in the 1990s and 2000s as American Armenians were diverting their support to Armenia.

It was only in 2006, in the aftermath of the conflict between Israel and the Hezbollah, that Lebanese Armenian schools received a donation from the Lincy Foundation.

It is not only for the quality of teaching that many parents chose not to enroll their children in Armenian schools in Lebanon. In a country where jobs and careers often depend on personal contacts and patronage, many parents, already worried about the economic uncertainty of the country, chose non-Armenian schools for their offspring hoping the latter would meet and befriend there the children of wealthy or influential Lebanese families.

As the following anecdote will show, for some parents, the association with anything at all Armenian is considered as jeopardizing the future of their children.

The principal of a non-Armenian school where a large number of Armenian students were enrolled thought he would make these students and their families happy by offering courses of Armenian language and history.

He visited the Catholicosate at Antelias, located near his school, and asked the Catholicos to provide him with Armenian teachers, a demand which the Catholicos gladly satisfied.

The initiative, however, rather than being welcomed by the families of Armenian students, provoked a riot of discontent.

Parents told the unfortunate principal that they had withdrawn their children from Armenian schools so that their children would not have to be taught Armenian language or history anymore, and that they had no intention of letting him set up Armenian classes in his school.

It is not only in Lebanon that a once vibrant community has gone into perhaps irremediable decline during the past two decades.

Within the former Soviet Union, the Armenian community of Abkhazia, because of the multi-ethnic nature of the population of that province – a mix of Abkhazians, Georgians, Armenians, Russians and other minority groups – enjoyed a privileged status.

It retained cultural rights, in particular schools, that were denied other Armenian communities, such as the ones of Baku or Tbilisi; the latter saw their Armenian schools closed down during the 1940s and 1950s.

Abkhazia Armenians, as well as those of the neighboring Russian region of Sochi, were mostly composed of Armenians originally from the Black Sea Coast region of Turkey, and hence also had the specificity of speaking a Western Armenian dialect, that of Hamshen.

As in Lebanon, the conflict between Abkhazians and Georgians which devastated Abkhazia during the early 1990s left its mark on the Armenian community here as well. Half of the latter left Abkhazia, mostly for neighboring Russia.

And as in Lebanon, Armenian schools paid a heavy price to the conflict and to the social and political changes it generated.

Not only did schools lose the students who left the country, but an increasing number of parents chose to give their children a Russian education rather than an Armenian one, knowing that the future of their children might well lie in Russia given the poor economic condition of Abkhazia and the uncertainty about its future.

The choice of Russian schools over Armenian ones also says a lot about the opinion of Abkhazia Armenians regarding Armenia's future prospects and any desire, or absence thereof, to resettle there one day.

What is unfortunate is that no help – with the one-time exception of the support by the Lincy Foundation to schools in Lebanon in 2006 – came from North America or Europe based Armenian associations or wealthy individual donors to the rescue of troubled Armenian institutions in Lebanon, Abkhazia and elsewhere in the Diaspora.

Yet, with a relatively modest effort, the vicious cycles which had been set in motion in various Diaspora communities might have been broken and the decline of these communities stopped before points of no return were reached.

In places like Abkhazia, very little amounts of money could have gone a long way during the 1990s and 2000s to support schools and other Armenian community institutions.

Similarly, some support could have helped the Armenian community of Bulgaria – which had been victim to repressive measures under the Communist regime, including the mandatory closing down of Armenian schools – to succeed in its efforts at renaissance following the Communist collapse in 1990.

Another example is Ajaria, where helping to modernize the Armenian school in Batumi would have prevented many Armenian parents from preferring the nearby Russian school.

Such examples abound, but it is not necessary to list them all as the few mentioned above suffice to provide a clear picture of the situation in so many Diaspora communities and the opportunities missed there.

It is not only in countries torn by war and affected by large-scale migration that developments worrisome for the future of Armenian Diasporia communities are occurring. In the United States, whatever was achieved with considerable effort from the 1960s to the late 1980s now appears to be in jeopardy.

The early signs of decline started to appear around half a decade ago and were limited during that initial period to a few Armenian day schools; during the past couple years the decline has extended to include almost all of these schools.

For over two years now Armenian educational institutions in North America have been suffering from a significant drop in the number of students, from budgetary crisis, and from a more general, existential malaise.

The economic crisis of 2008 only helped to bring this latent crisis to the surface. Families with modest income are wondering whether they should continue tightening their belts to send their children to Armenian schools, while wealthier ones are choosing expensive private American schools, which they hope may open the doors of Ivy League universities to their children.

The truth is that a large number of immigrant Armenian families chose to enroll their children in Armenian schools not so much out of the wish to maintain their children's sense of Armenian heritage as out of the desire to provide them with a safe environment.

Once they became more familiar with the country they had settled in, their self-confidence increased, and they realized that not all American schools were a hotbed of crime and drugs, these families started considering the other options available to them based on their means and needs.

Yet the biggest failure is one of leadership, as people in charge of Armenian educational institutions failed to anticipate these problems and look for solutions to them, preferring instead to turn a blind eye.

An element of the Armenian Diaspora leadership does not appear to mind the decline of Armenian schools or even rejoices in it.

The Armenian General Benevolent Union is as a case in point. It first shut down the small school it owned in the Boston area.

Then, in what became a shattering symbol of the Diaspora's decline, it decided to close down the Melkonian Educational Institute in 2005.

Much has been written about the closing down of Melkonian by its parent organization, so it is not necessary to return to it.

The AGBU also apparently intends to close down its school in Athens but has been prevented so far from doing so by the local Armenian community, and it wants to reduce classes in the school it operates in Toronto.

To its credit, and perhaps to compensate for the criticism it generated throughout the Diaspora by closing down Melkonian, the AGBU opened a new school in Pasadena, a suburb of California. One factor which was neglected in the discussion over the closing of Melkonian, however, was that the Cypriot-Armenians who criticized the AGBU were not entirely blameless, as an increasing number of them had been sending their children to non-Armenian – generally British – schools rather than to Melkonian.

It appears now that Diaspora communities in Northern America and Western Europe are headed in

the same assimilation-bound direction as they were over thirty ago, prior to the great influx from the Middle East.

The pattern is clearly more apparent in smaller communities, such as Geneva or London, yet it is visible everywhere. Mixed marriages are the rule rather than the exception, whether in the East Coast of the United States or in France.

A majority of children born in Northern America or Western Europe to parents who migrated from the Middle East speak Armenian poorly if at all.

Everywhere, it is only a modest fraction of the estimated numbers of Armenians which maintains any kind of Armenian-related activity, such as attending an Armenian church, belonging to an Armenian association or subscribing to an Armenian paper.

A vast majority of the people of Armenian background or heritage have simply no links to or interest in anything Armenian.

In the middle of this bleak picture, might some solace be found in believing that the massive migration out of Armenia over the past two decades would reinforce the Diaspora communities of the receiving countries and hence delay the assimilation of these communities?

In theory at least, this could have been expected, and it did happen to a limited degree in some communities, such as Moscow, where a relative revitalization of the community has been noted.

Furthermore, in some countries where no prior Armenian presence existed, such as Spain, the arrival of immigrants from Armenia led to the creation of new Armenians communities.

The positive aspects of migration out of Armenia, however, stop there. The gap in mentality between Homeland and Diaspora Armenians often prevents or makes difficult interaction between the two groups.

Yet more problematic is the overarching concern of Armenian emigrants to integrate as quickly as possible in the countries they move to, often at the expense of their own Armenian identity and that of their children.

This concern remains very high for the few parents who choose to send their children to Armenian schools.

Thus, a teacher at an Armenian school in the Los Angeles region narrated how she is often confronted by mothers of her students, who come to protest when they perceive their children are assigned what they consider to be too much Armenian homework. “Armenian is not important” is a sentence she claimed to have heard regularly from the mouths of these mothers.

In their hurry to integrate, immigrants from Armenia appear to have decided to shed the Armenian language and culture in twenty or thirty years, the space of one generation, while it took the post-

Genocide Diaspora in Western countries some eighty years to reach that stage, not to mention medieval Armenian migrants to Poland, who preserved their identity for hundreds of years before succumbing to assimilation.

In some cases, Armenians emigrants remain hostage to the means they adopted in their desperation to leave Armenia.

Thus, some 20,000 Armenians, claiming to have Pontic Greek ancestry, were able to take advantage of the Greek government's repatriation program offered to Pontic Greeks inhabiting the former Soviet Union.

Most of these Armenians, however, were of only partial Greek ancestry, having at most one Greek grandparent or great-grandparent, or had no Greek ancestry whatsoever.

Settled by Greek authorities in northern Greece, they prefer to avoid any association with Armenians, worried that such association may betray their lack of Greek credentials.

A similar story took place with the few thousand Armenians moving to Israel after having "rediscovered" Jewish origins, and who generally tend to avoid contacts with Armenians, fearing their lack of authentic Jewishness may be betrayed by such contacts.

One can only imagine how thoroughly assimilated the next generation of these Armenian migrants in Greece and Israel will become.

A 2006 article in Transition Online revealed that in the Krasnodar region of southern Russia, where hundreds of thousands of Armenians from Azerbaijan, Armenia and elsewhere in the Caucasus have settled, it is prevalent racism that is pushing many of these Armenians to exchange their Armenian family names for Russian ones. However, racism is not the only cause of the change in family name.

Individuals who were born in Krasnodar or who migrated there at a young age consider the Kuban their homeland and do not feel a similar connection with Armenia.

The fifteen or twenty years since their parents moved to the Kuban may be a short period in absolute terms, but to these individuals, this period represents their entire lives.

According to the head of a local Armenian association, there may be a more general problem with Armenians settled in the region, who "do not care about their culture, language, or history."

At the beginning of this article, the decline of the Mekhitarist Congregation, the interruption of its publishing activities, and the closing down of its once prestigious schools were mentioned as a symbolic starting point for the decline of Armenian Diaspora communities.

Perhaps, then, the shutting down of another prestigious Armenian institution, the daily paper Haratch from Paris, should be mentioned as part of the conclusion of this article.

While ten years ago, in 2000, the paper still had a readership of around 3,000 subscribers, this

readership was down to 700 by the time it published its last issue in 2009, which says a lot about the decline of the Armenian language in France.

Equally telling of the decline of the Western Armenian language in the Diaspora is the recent classification by UNESCO of Western Armenian as a "definitely endangered" language.

The saying that one should not throw stones at other people's home when one's own home is made of glass is well-known. In the Armenian case, an adapted version of this saying deserves to be crafted, stating that one should not invite people to move in into one's home when that home is falling apart.

Within twenty years, over half of the population of what constituted the "Armenian core," i.e., Armenia and Middle Eastern communities, have moved out of their homes to settle in countries where they have been engaged in an accelerated process of assimilation and alienation from Armenian culture.

With two million inhabitants, Armenia now is a dwarf among nations, while the Diaspora as we know it will be gone in one generation.

Under these tragic circumstances, the recent frenzy over Turkified and Kurdified Armenians is hard to understand.

It is not very clear why Armenians worry about re-armenianizing Armenians Turkified over a hundred years ago when Armenians who lived until very recently in Armenia are shedding their names and identity right before our eyes in the Kuban, northern Greece and Israel to pose as Russians, Pontic Greeks or Israelis.

Rather than naivety or poor judgment, the discussion on Turkified and Kurdified Armenians might be a most telling sign of despair. Armenians hoping to see Turkified Armenians return to the fold of Armenianness may not be oblivious to the condition of the Armenian home.

They are perhaps aware of it, and in their despair, hope that these Turkified Armenians will save the Armenian home by moving back into it.