

# PATRIOTISM AND STATEHOOD

*Posted on April 24, 2022 by Keghart*



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***(An excerpt from Dr. Marutyan's "The Local and Global in the Armenian Genocide Memorial" in International Journal of Armenian Genocide Studies: Volume 6, No. 2, 2021)***

Visiting the Armenian Genocide Memorial, different feelings arise in each and every Armenian. Initially there is a feeling of loss, as well as of patriotism, which is very important. To state that it is manifested unambiguously and very directly might not be right. US President Donald Trump in his speech at the 74th UN session particularly emphasized:

"Like my beloved country, each nation represented in this hall has a cherished history, culture, and heritage that is worth defending and celebrating, and which gives us our singular potential and strength.

The free world must embrace its national foundations. It must not attempt to erase them or replace them.

Looking around and all over this large, magnificent planet, the truth is plain to see: If you want freedom, take pride in your country. If you want democracy, hold on to your sovereignty. And if you want peace, love your nation. Wise leaders always put the good of their own people and their own country first.

The future does not belong to globalists. The future belongs to patriots. The future belongs to sovereign and independent nations who protect their citizens, respect their neighbors, and honor the differences that make each country special and unique."

The memorials dedicated to the victims of wars, in one way or another, have a function: to strengthen statehood. In the Armenian case, the Genocide memorial built during Soviet times, through its rising obelisk, was promoting the idea of a peaceful life built by the efforts of Soviet forces and within the large and powerful Soviet state. After Armenia regained independence, the accents on statehood were altered and the idea that the absence of a state and army assisted in the perpetration of Genocide was endorsed in different forms. Consequently, to face the modern challenges of the global world, a powerful state and a strong and efficient army is needed.

If, within the area of the Genocide monument and memorial in general only the idea of victimhood was stressed and heroism as a role model had no place there until 1990, then as a result of the First Karabagh war, the idea of heroism showed itself by the burial of five freedom-fighters in the vicinity of the memorial. Those graves directly emphasize the idea that the only way to avoid genocide is to struggle, and when necessary, to resort to arms.

In this sense "patriotism" and "democracy" are directly linked. The sense of patriotism among the Armenians visiting the memorial is probably reflected in the view that just one hundred years ago

the nation lost Western Armenia, with about two-thirds of its people being killed. Surviving Armenians found refuge in one-tenth of historic Armenia and have built and are building a new, free and independent country that needs protection in order to prevent the repetition of the past.

A vivid proof of what is said is the strong connection between the past and the present at the memorial. The point is that over the past half-century, the developments and challenges faced by Armenia and its citizens have, to some extent, been reflected in the memorial's area. This connection is indicated by two other things: the khachkars (cross-stones) dedicated to the victims of the Armenian pogroms (1988-1990) in Sumgait, Kirovabad, and Baku and the graves of the five freedom fighters killed in the Armenian-Azerbaijani border battles (1990-1992)



***Khachkars (cross-stones) devoted to the memory of the victims of the anti-Armenian pogroms in Sumgait, Baku, and Kirovabad (1988, 1990).***

The above-mentioned cities are in Azerbaijan. However, the massacres of the Armenian population of those cities were the response of the Soviet Azerbaijani authorities to the events that took place

many kilometers beyond those cities. As early as in 1921 Nagorno-Karabakh (94.6% of the population of which was Armenian then) located in the former Elizavetpol district of the Russian Empire (which became one of the constituent territories of the newly formed Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan in 1918) was, by the decision made by the Caucasus Bolsheviks and with the direct involvement of Stalin and Lenin, transferred to Soviet Azerbaijan as an autonomous region, instead of being joined to Armenia. Over the next six and a half decades, due to the policies followed by the Soviet Azerbaijani authorities, the Armenian population decreased substantially to 75%.

In 1985 Gorbachev proclaimed the political policy of "perestroika" (restructuring), which also implied changes in national affairs. On February 20, 1988, the parliament of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region decided to apply to the USSR Parliament with a request to unite the region with Armenia. Mass demonstrations took place in the capitals of Armenia and Azerbaijan (Yerevan and Baku). On Gorbachev's request, they were suspended on February 26. Starting on February 27 and for three days on, in the presence of Soviet army units, "mass disorders" took place in Sumgait during which, according to official data, "26 citizens of Armenian origin were killed." The method of killing was the same as used by the Turks during the Genocide of Armenians at the beginning of the twentieth century: they were beaten, tortured, raped, and thrown out of windows, slain with metal rods and knives, chopped up with axes, beheaded and burnt alive... The aim of these criminal actions was to block any possible solution of the issue, to terrorize Armenians and, in particular, to alarm the central Soviet authorities with the threat of further bloody actions and to force them to forego the demand for a just solution to the Karabakh issue.

In commemoration of the Armenian victims of Sumgait, a monument-khachkar (crosstone) was erected in front of the Genocide memorial on April 24 1988. Another is dedicated to the massacres of Armenians in Baku on January 13-20, 1990, in which according to unofficial data, 200-400 people fell victim. The third khachkar is dedicated to the Armenians of Kirovabad (the second-largest city in Azerbaijan) who were killed or expelled. These crimes were regarded by the Armenians as a manifestation of genocidal policy and were compared to the Armenian Genocide, the memory of which immediately came to the fore. It is worth mentioning that Azerbaijanis share the same ethnic origins with the Turks.

It should be said that the Armenian Genocide is not a very distant story; but the massacre and exile of Armenians, seven decades after the Genocide, in 1988-1992, is a repetition of it on a small scale. Everything should be done to prevent it happening again. Indicators of this mentality are the graves near the memorial wall, which forms part of the memorial. Five freedom fighters are buried near the Genocide memorial who, in the absence of Armenian armed forces, defended the borders of the country from Azerbaijan in 1990-1992 at the cost of their lives. In this way, the slogan "Never again" acquires a second meaning within the confines of the memorial, going beyond the boundaries of the Armenian Genocide (the purely historical past) and being closely linked to present-day reality. Some of the actions linked to the "Never again" slogan are the annual visits to the Genocide memorial by

Armenian army conscripts and high school students. Such visits are also aimed at strengthening the rarely-mentioned but very important element of civic education - patriotism.

The ideas of Genocide memory, concerns for the future of the country (in other words, patriotism) and democracy in the memorial complex were strongly intertwined three decades ago during the years of the First Armenian Revolution (Karabagh Movement) in 1988-1990. In particular, rallies were banned in Yerevan in 1988 and the spring of 1989. In both cases, however, on April 24, Armenian Genocide commemoration day, mass marches were held at the Armenian Genocide memorial with hundreds of thousands of people participating. The marches were not only dedicated to the victims of the Armenian Genocide, but directly linked the future of the country's democratic development and the Armenian Genocide topic of 70-75 years ago. That is, the citizens relied on the past in their verbal and visual attitudes but were discussing the present and looking to the future. All this happened at the Genocide memorial, which became a political platform. So, in the posters and banners that were displayed in those days, the following several things were stressed:

- The Soviet Union was criticized for not officially recognizing the Armenian Genocide but, according to civil society, if it did, it would pose as a barrier to massacres on the ground of ethnicity in a multinational country;
- The Armenian Genocide and Sumgait massacres were put on the same level, as ideologies of Pan-Turkism, Stalinism, Fascism and Nazism;
- The Soviet authorities were required to make a political statement on the Sumgait events;
- A demand for condemnation of the perpetrators of the Sumgait massacres, who were perceived by demonstrators as enemies of perestroika (restructuring). Some expressed doubts that the organisers were among the USSR leadership and in the Kremlin;
- The absence of punishment was interpreted as the inability of the Soviet courts to hold a trial impartially and fairly, which was perceived as an overall weakness of the Soviet system;
- The conviction was that the citizens of Armenia should protect themselves, and not rely on the Soviet Union, the Soviet army or the Russians;
- It was highlighted that there was no need to mourn, but to resist, to fight and, for that purpose to have an army of its own;
- Finally, the prevention of future genocides or massacres was seen in the consolidation of Armenians and the establishment of a democratic and independent Armenia.

During the First Armenian Revolution/Karabagh Movement (1988-1990) the Armenian Genocide memorial became one of the places used for the expression of revolutionary ideas. Ideas that eventually appealed to the citizens of the country not only to remember the innocent victims of the Armenian Genocide and to claim justice for the solution of the Armenian issue, but also to fight for democratic freedoms; fight against national and legal

discrimination; fight for the country's independence from the Soviet Union; fight for the restoration of national dignity; demand implementation of the constitutional provision of equality before the law envisaged by the constitutions of the USSR and Soviet Armenia.

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Every year, from early in the morning till late night on April 24, nearly a million people visit the Armenian Genocide memorial. They lay flowers at the Eternal Flame dedicated to the victims of the Armenian Genocide as a sign of respect for the memory of the 1.5 million innocent victims of the Armenian Genocide (1915-1923) and bow in gratitude before the martyred and surviving heroes who struggled for their lives and human dignity, reiterating the commitment to achieve worldwide recognition of the Armenian Genocide, the restoration of rights, the establishment of historical justice and the elimination of the consequences of the Genocide.

### [Remarks by President Trump to the 74th Session of the United Nations General Assembly](#)

Measurement has not been made of the prevalence of this idea through quantitative or qualitative research, percentages, or interviews; such thinking has come from years of personal conversations by the author with various people.

Marutyanyan, Iconography of Armenian Identity, 93-94.

## Comments



**Tavo** – 2022-04-24 22:25:06

Turkey and Azerbaijan have genocide on their minds even today. This must not be forgotten.