NAKHIJEVAN INSTITUTE PRESIDENT EXPLAINS MISSION

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Keghart.com Interviews Antranig Bedrossian, President of Nakhijevan Institute of Canada, 17 February 2011

Keghart: What is Nakhijevan Institute, and its mission?

Antranig Bedrossian: Nakhijevan Institute of Canada is a non-profit organization whose mission is to act as a centre for research and think tank on Armenian and international issues, among them the national question, globalization and regionalism, human security, civil society and theoretical debates. It's also to establish an international network of scholars and interested persons to act as a forum for discussion and critical analysis of the Institute's fields of interest. Finally, it's to organize and participate in civil society projects of cross-regional and cross-cultural exchanges in Canada and elsewhere.

Keghart: Where and when was it established? Does it have a board?

AB: Originally incorporated in 2000 as Nakhijevan Armenian Compatriotic Union of Canada, in 2008 it was officially renamed . After its reorganization, the Institute was established and located in Montreal. It has a board comprised of four persons. It has no branches. It has many external collaborators.

Keghart: What type of activities is Nakhijevan Institute involved in?

AB: To carry its mission, the Institute considers the use of a variety of activities: conferences; seminars; symposiums; speaker events; publications; production of audio-visual material and an on-line journal. As a civil society organization, it has participated in public debates on various issues such as a panel discussion on Armenia's ecological problems (2008), Armenian women's achievements (2010), and has issued a position paper on the Armenian-Turkish protocols (2009). It has published the following: Armenian translation of *« Nouveaux, pouvoirs, nouveaux maîtres du monde »* by Ignacio Ramonet Translator: Grigor Janikyan (Yerevan, 2008); Armenian translation of *« Il faut sauver les Arméniens »* by Jean Jaurès. *«Petk e Prkel Hayerin* Translator : Grigor Janikyan (Yerevan, 2009) ; and Armenian translation of *« Vers le socialisme du XXI siècle »* (acts of colloquium, Mémoire des luttes) *« Depi XXI Daru Enkervarutyun»* ("Towards 21st Century Socialism") Translator : Grigor Janikyan (Yerevan, 2009).

Keghart: **Does it have a budget and financial resources?**

AB: Its financial resources consist of contributions from individuals and institutions.

Keghart: What are your plans for the near and distant future?

AB: Currently we are concentrating on a series of publications of original research or translation of texts within the fields of interest of the Institute. First of these is the English translation of *Selected Works* by Garegin Nzhdeh, (translator Prof. Edik Danielyan, Armenia), scheduled for publication in Montreal, in 2011. Also, in partnership with organizations which have a similar approach, we are involved in planning a series of conferences and debates in Armenia on the following topics: global trends in social struggle, and the neoliberal mission of the European Union, with particular emphasis on the education field.

Keghart: Who are the Institute's leading executives?

AB: Currently the board has one researcher, with Ph.D in sociology; one expert in political sciences (international relations), as a Master's candidate; one retired professor from Armenia, with Ph.D in aero-dynamics; and one arts consultant (filmmaker). Outside experts are consulted whenever the need arises.

Keghart: Has the Institute collaborated with other Armenian or non-Armenian organizations?

AB: As our mission states, collaboration with other organizations is part of our objectives. This field of action is currently in process of being further developed with like-minded centres and institutes. We have working relations with *Mémoire de luttes,* a French association engaged in keeping the memory of social struggles alive, while paving the path for those of tomorrow. In 2009, we published the Armenian translation of their colloquium dedicated to the critical examination of the social movements of the world and possible future trajectories. We have also similar relationship with the Armenia-based *Institute for Democracy and Human Rights* (IDHR), working particularly in the arena of civil society. In Canada, we are collaborating with the *Armenian Women's Association of Canada* (AWAC).

Keghart: What is the relationship of the Institute with Nakhijevan?

AB: From 2000 to 2007, our organization was operating under its former name, and was in close collaboration with the Yerevan-based National Council for Nakhijevan Armenians. Our role was to promote the Nakhijevan issue in North American Armenian electronic media and to assist financially and editorially their monthly newspaper, "Nakhijevan", by providing subscriptions, donations and articles of interest. We gave public conferences in Montreal and in Ottawa about the Nakhijevan political issue. We ended that aspect of our mission, when our counterpart in Armenia ceased its activities. We also participated in the public debate on the white paper on Canadian Foreign Policy (2003), as well as in a Canada-wide conference on "*Youth and ethnic groups and their identity in the Canadian multicultural context: The Armenian community in Canada*", held consecutively in 2004 in Montreal, Ottawa, Vancouver and Toronto. In 2005, we also financed the publication of poetry dedicated to the life of Monte Melkonian by Socrat Khanyan, a poet from the University of Artsakh.

Keghart: What is the Institute's attitude re the WAN-Congress?

AB: At this point, our Institute does not have a particular stand on the WAN-Congress. However, issuance of a position paper is being considered.

Keghart: So far the Institute has maintained a relatively low profile. Does the Institute plan to become more visible?

AB: Yes, as the Institute goes through a review of its manpower, financial and organizational needs, becoming more visible will be the normal course of events. Within Institute's field of interest, we intend to seek the collaboration of researchers and thinkers who belong to the critical and alternative school of thought, as different from the mainstream neoliberal approach. Financially, we are taking a careful and balanced position so that contributors' participation does not inhibit Institute's line of thought. As for organizational needs, they will develop in line with the scope and depth of activities that will be undertaken by the Institute in the future.

Keghart: Does the Institute bring something unique to the "Armenian table"?

AB: Yes, and in many respects. **Firstly**, the Institute's field of interest goes beyond Armenian issues, integrating topics of discussion that are prevalent in the 21st century: The national question; globalization and regionalism; human security; civil society debates and theoretical approaches that express different worldviews of international relations.

The *national question*, under various forms, is an important field of interest in today's world and it is subject to

evolutionary change in theory and in practice. Armenians have an unresolved national question. However, under today's global processes, this question needs a renewed and critical approach on a comparative basis.

Globalization, both as a process and a reality, is another field that needs constant study as its processes affect all the peoples of the planet, including Armenians. What is the ideology behind this process and what are the underlying social forces? What are the dynamics of this process? In what way are Armenian Diaspora and Armenia affected by and involved in its dynamics? What is the role of the Armenian economic elites in this process?

Regionalism is another phenomenon that appears today in the world. How is this related to the globalization and its underlying social forces? Why South Caucasus, to which Armenia belongs, is targeted for regional construction? What are the interests behind this proposed regionalism of South Caucasus? What is the role of international institutions and states in regionalism?

Human security is a concept that encompasses security of human beings, citizens and societies as different from the security of states. In what way social conflicts, environmental problems, civil wars, biological warfare, water and food problems, affect the security of human beings in the world and in Armenia?

Civil society issues are another field of study, touching domains of democracy and social justice, but not limited to it. How do these issues progress in the world? What are the implications on the Armenians in Armenia and in the Diaspora? And finally, the debate of theoretical issues around various worldviews-- the mainstream approaches (realism/neo-realism, liberalism/neo-liberalism) and alternative ones (socialism/Marxism and feminism) is important in understanding and explaining the transformations in the world.

Secondly, we adopt the alternative approach in our researches and presentations, as different from the mainstream approaches.

Thirdly, some of our publications involve translation into Armenian of texts of the alternative thinking which will be useful in Armenia and in the Diaspora to the coming generations.

Fourthly, we advocate the dissemination of knowledge about the experience of other regions of the world, thus contributing to the understanding of these issues on a comparative basis.

As you can see, the fields of study of the Institute are defined, interrelated and encompass various sub-fields which necessitate the contribution of many scholars, researchers and individuals knowledgeable in these fields, and yet ready to take an engaged position from a critical and alternative perspective.