

NATION IN CONSOLIDATION

Posted on May 7, 2016 by Keghart



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 **A. Adamyan**, Ontario, 7 May 2016

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The Armenian leadership, which has never enjoyed popularity among the citizenry, saw a consolidation around it of public support. In the past many opposition leaders, who had pointed out the elite's corruption, had questioned the possibility of people coalescing around the authorities. The Armenian public, with its immediate and resolute response to the war, demonstrated the enviable maturity of an independent nation able to self-organize when needed. By not panicking and through immediate volunteer initiatives--fundraising to volunteering to serve in the army--the Armenian people psychologically strengthened the frontline. Moreover, Armenian soldiers many of whom were not even born during first Artsakh war demonstrated that a new generation born and raised in independent Armenia is full with courage and unlimited devotedness in protecting the country.

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independent Armenia is full with courage and unlimited devotedness in protecting the country.

Many leaders of the opposition parties also declared their support of the Armenian authorities and called for unity. The most vivid such example was the invitation of Armenia's first President Levon Ter-Petrosyan to President Serge Sargsyan to [a meeting](#). It took place at Ter-Petrosyan's residence. Robert Kocharyan, the second president of Armenia, said he planned no such meeting with President Sargsyan. But hopefully, it will not be long before we see this influential figure join the two around the table. Since 2008 presidential elections these three leaders dominated the political landscape of the country. It is imperative to see the unity of all these three leaders in these difficult times.

While the four-day war is over, the conflict remains unresolved and people in Armenia and Artsakh realize that the Azeri leadership may start a new war any time. And as much as the Armenian leadership feels stronger at the negotiation table, Armenian oligarchs and corrupt authority representatives feel weaker in the public eye. The war made the people more demanding of their government. Because the war took so many lives the populace realized corruption is not an abstract issue: corruption resulted in leaner financial resources for defense and, as a result, greater loss of lives of our soldiers many of whom were not even 20-years-old. Since the end of the war at least two corrupt high-profile people have lost their jobs. The cleanup is expected to continue.

The war also illustrated that the unfair distribution of income is not the only form of social injustice between the rich and the poor. Not only is there unfair distribution of income but there's also a huge gap in fulfilling military duty. The overwhelming majority of soldiers who died or were wounded were from poor or low-income families. Discussions in the media and in social networks to help these economically disadvantaged families shed more light on existing inequality in serving the military and increased the pressure on the government to solve the disparity. The military leadership admitted that there is a gap between the rich and the poor who serve in the army. Soldiers from rich families doing mandatory military service somehow avoid the front lines and thus run less risk of being in harm's way. This was proven by the casualty stats of the war which demonstrated a disproportionately high percentage of the casualties were soldiers who came from poor families.

The volunteer movement in Armenia created a sense of citizenship: it turned ordinary people, who were unsure of their rights, into real citizens. Demanding justice and accountability from the authorities reached to a new level.

Just as the war galvanized Armenia, Diasporans were also electrified. Churches, organizations and many individuals raised funds to support their brothers and sisters who had suffered during the war. And as in Armenia, where the sense of citizenship is on the rise, in Diaspora there was a corresponding elevation of Armenian identity. Armenian identity in the Diaspora, rooted in the Armenian Church and demands from Turkey, is transforming into a deeper identity: it is strengthened with pride in the independent state in part of their historical homeland while citizens

However, unlike the help of Armenia residents who have direct access to those who suffered, help from the Diaspora requires trustworthy structures to reach to those in need. Many in the Diaspora concerned in corruption in Armenia have either reduced their material contribution or sought channels which bypass government structures so as to ensure their help reaches the addressees. Diaspora's lack of trust in the Armenian government resulted in fewer coordinated channels of help. It was also duplication of effort.

Since the current challenges faced by Armenia and Artsakh will not disappear in the foreseeable future, many people in our homeland will continue to depend on assistance--including from the Diaspora. So to have trusted Diaspora-to-Armenia assistance channels is of vital importance. That is why Diaspora organizations should be more demanding of Armenian authorities regarding fighting corruption. Meanwhile, Diaspora aid organizations should reach out to reliable volunteer structures working in the field in Armenia and strengthen transparent and coordinated channels of help from the Diaspora. Having stronger and more effective Armenian organizations is an absolute must to consolidate our nation and all our resources in these dangerous times in order to eliminate the existential threat hanging over the Armenian population of Artsakh. In light of the potential threats, we have no option other than to focus on more effective organization.

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