

PARADIGM SHIFT

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 **Berge Minassian**, Toronto, 30 December 2015

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Obviously, the crucial switch from extractive to inclusive governance will be realized only by local Armenians. This essay is written by a Diasporan addressing Diasporans. The question therefore is: What can the Diaspora do to help in the switch?

Unsurprisingly, in the recent referendum the people of Armenia screamed loud and clear: NO to the extractive regime. Who, after all, prefers extractive over inclusive rule? However, just as clearly, the people of Armenia did not come out to march with the "Clean Opposition". The dual message is evident: The people reject extractive governance but do not yet trust the members of the organized "Clean Opposition", at least not enough to risk their livelihoods or the country's stability by coming showing where they stand..

Rightly, the official Diaspora formed close ties with the initially democratically-elected government of Armenia. However, as democracy faded, and was plainly eliminated in the recent referendum, these close ties remain. A particularly representative example is the All-Armenian Fund. This organization encompasses the major Diasporan parties, churches and charities and is chaired by

Armenia's president. These groups are obviously aware of the extractive regime of governance in Armenia. But can they speak up against it to help the regime change its ways? No, because it is impossible to speak up against institutionalized corruption while collaborating with the same said institution. As for trying to influence change in the regime by private whispering in the ears of its leaders, it does not seem to have worked over 25 years of trying.

As mentioned above, the only other way to help achieve a switch to inclusive governance is for the Diaspora to support the development of a viable, ultimately trustworthy "Clean Opposition" which would democratically replace the extractive regime and run the country in inclusive mode. If the Diaspora is sufficiently awake and can see the clear and present danger of allowing the country to languish in extractive phase, then it has no choice but to identify the "Clean Opposition", relinquish its regime related perks and ties, and support, nurture, and help build this opposition.

Following the 1988 earthquake, the entire Diaspora came together to help rebuild physical structures. It is now time for a Diaspora-wide conference to help build a nation... starting with building a clean-governance alternative to the present extractive rule. Once adequately constructed, and once it gains the trust of Armenia's population, the inclusive "Clean Opposition" can come to power despite all attempts at election fraud. At that point, the critical paradigm shift would have occurred, the country would be on the right track, the economy would jump-start, Diasporan aid and investment would flow, immigration would occur, emigration will slow, and the country will have a chance to survive.

Opposition: it is a word that disturbs many Diasporans and their leaders. Its most immediate effects are unpleasant. However, when one is awake to the reality that a grave danger is threatening our nation, one cannot but be opposed.

Do Diasporans and their leaders care enough; are they strong enough, to oppose what in Armenia's case is fatal (extractive governance)? Or has the Genocide succeeded in making us blind and too weak to fight this battle for survival?

