POINT COUNTER-POINT. AN EXCHANGE ABOUT ARMENIA'S FUTURE

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Category: Opinions

Artur Mazmanian & **Berge Minassian**

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Artur's comment

No Trust
Submitted on Fri, 2016-01-01 18:53

This kind-hearted article is a prime example why there is close to no trust in the so-called clean opposition: Let me start, point by point.

1) Daron Acemoglu has no doubt written an excellent book. But the big problem is that theoreticians don't build nations. And most importantly, in today's world, it is so naive and destructive to promote one-size-fits-all theories, as wonderful as they may be. We all remember the heartfelt odes the world paid five years ago to the Arab Spring. Everyone believed in the dawn of democracy in the Middle East, and how it will change the Arab countries for the better. It turned out to be the biggest lie. What on paper looked like an ideal scenario, became the worst tool of destruction. The idealism of the wonders of democracy gave birth to one of the most vicious cycles of violence, brutality and genocide the world has seen. Arab Spring gave birth to ISIS. Because humans have a tendency to fall into the same trap more than once, the same thing happened in Ukraine, shortly after. Everyone praising the heroic Ukrainian nation that same way Berge Minassian and the Sefilian-Hovannisian duo advocate... that new leaders come to power to "save" the country. We all know where Ukraine

ended up. A country destroyed, divided with little hope of ever recovering. A "revolution" to "save" the country? No, thank you, you can keep it to yourself.

2) We've been hearing this or similar expressions of "catastrophe of untold proportion", "the end of Armenia", "population of barely 1 million is left in the country"and "Pity the nation" for the last 25 years! Enough of these naive, senseless warnings of apocalypse and fear-mongering. Instead, go and make an investment so that people have jobs. Without making up excuses. Because whether oligarchy, dictatorship, or democracy, what matters most are jobs.

3) There is no Clean Opposition; that's a lie. Searching and promoting Clean in politics, in a country like Armenia, and where it lies geopolitically, is naive and dangerous. I want a president who's more Turkish than a Turk, more Russian than a Russian, and more Azeri than an Azerbaijani. Someone who's a wolf and a fox rather than a clean innocent sheep. Someone who puts all his abilities of maneuvering, changing loyalties, ruthless calculations, dividing and conquering, strategizing and treating politics as a real chess game, for the good of Armenia. That's exactly what we need and what we have in Serge Sargsyan and his school of thought. There is no doubt that he has faults, but I also have no doubt about his patriotism. Now close your eyes and imagine Raffi or Jiro sitting down and negotiating with Vladimir Putin. I don't know if I would laugh or cry.

4) Minassian makes two statements, one true, another false. The statement that the people of Armenia did not come out to march with the "Clean Opposition" is true. More people show up at the average Armenian wedding. The statement that "the people of Armenia screamed loud and clear: NO to the extractive regime" is false: The result 66% YES , 33% NO speaks for itself. There were minor violations during the referendum, violations which could not have affected the outcome even by one percent. This new constitution is excellent for Armenia in the long-run.

5) Let's just say hypothetically that one unlucky day, by some devil-sent miracle the Hovhannisyan-Sefilian group takes over the government by street protests. Elections are held; they take control. But as a result another group of people (only because they lost) claim the elections were fraudulent, and they start street protests to take over the government. And they take over. And after this, yet another group shows up and says, only through them can true democracy be established. And this goes on and on. Is this what we want? Nation-building or a joke in the name of democracy?

6) A little comparison between Hovhannisyan and Sargsyan. Hovhannisyan has had four great chances in the last 25 years to become an important figure in Armenian politics. He has failed miserably in all four instances. As foreign minister he was fired (mostly because emotions have no place in politics and he was inadequate). As head of the AAF, he was unofficially fired because he was not capable of managing the fund, and the complaints from Diaspora about his incompetence were staggering. He then founded Heritage. Everyone had high hopes, they even had seven seats in parliament. The party fraction has gone down to one mostly because of his careless leadership. As presidential candidate, he simply wasted more than 500,000 votes cast for him, simply because he

just didn't know what to do. Other than putting on a comedy show with the police chief at Tsitsernakaberd. He simply should have no place in politics. Sargsyan is the exact opposite. He has been involved in literally every aspect of political life since independence. When he took on the Republican Party, it was a relatively minor political party. He has transformed it into a formidable power, where he controls almost everything. This is what I call strong leadership.

7) Solution: Change Armenia starting from the bottom up and NOT from the top to bottom. Start from the people, make a change in their lives and in their thinking, and in their commitment not to lie and cheat. Forget about street revolutions. There are elections coming up in 2017. Campaign and participate in them. Make sure that you have 6,000 individuals of opposition affiliation as election observers at the polls, and fraud will effectively be non-existent. Rather than claiming that the elections are fraudulent before they even start. Street revolution is the lazy and mindless way to do politics.

I can add 10 more points to this list. But I will end it here.

Minassian's reply:

Submitted on January 2, 2016

Dear Artur,

First things first: I have no dog in this fight and no bone to pick. I am a Diasporan who wants Armenia to succeed and Genocide to fail. I don't care whether Armenia is governed by Boghos or Bedros. I just don't want Armenia's leaders to rob Armenia's citizens. I believe the meekest among them deserve respect and dignity.

Daron Acemoglu's 'Why Nations Fail' is not a theoretical book. It is a history. Extractive regimes fail. Inclusive ones succeed. Extractive regimes are characterized by oligarchies that hold the levers of the economy, monopolies, non-independent judiciaries, and other abuses of power including rigging elections. In other words, few with power abusing everyone else. If you can get the current regime to behave in a fashion different than this, I will wholeheartedly support them with you. If not, I would think you would speak against these abuses, unless of course you have a dog in this fight or a bone to pick, in which case you would want to warp reality.

Reality... You give the 'Arab Spring' as an argument against democracy. The birthplace of the Arab Spring, Tunisia, is not doing badly. If in a few years it becomes a thriving country, I am sure you will be happy. As for the other Arab countries, the problems they are having has nothing to do with democracy versus dictatorship. In all cases the fights are religious-sectarian, a problem that does not exist in Armenia. As for Ukraine, it is also, in the main, an ethnic conflict, again non-relevant to the Armenian reality. On the surface, you appear to make a good point when you describe the serious economic challenges that persist in Western Ukraine. But that is because you have not looked deep enough. While the Ukrainian revolution was driven by the universal wish of people for liberty and an

inclusive political and economic system, it quickly found itself entangled in the ethnic war, which became the immediate focus. The original purpose of the revolution was put on the back burner to fight the ethnic fight, and a new oligarch was allowed power. The current difficulties in Western Ukraine are wholly linked to the persistence of institutionalized corruption and oligarchy. They are nothing more than another example of failure of extractive systems. In Armenia, the program of the Clean Opposition is nothing other than the dismantling of the oligarchic system, and they are utterly honest, believe it or not. Artur, you write: "The idealism of the wonders of democracy gave birth to one of the most vicious cycles of violence...." Are you opposed to democracy?

You also write: "Because whether oligarchy, dictatorship, or democracy, what matters most are jobs." The problem is that the only way to have jobs, including through investments, is through democracy. That is the whole point, the only point, the only issue here. It is not fear-mongering to face the reality of Armenia's depopulation and the risks this causes. It is not unreasonable to look for reversible causes of this depopulation. It is obvious that the cause is lack of jobs. It is clear what sorts of systems favour development of jobs.

You write: "Searching and promoting Clean in politics, in a country like Armenia, and where it lies geopolitically, is naive and dangerous. I want a president who's more Turkish than a Turk, more Russian than a Russian, and more Azeri than an Azerbaijani. Someone who's a wolf and a fox rather than a clean innocent sheep." Artur, must the wolf eat its own?

Artur, the referendum was stolen. If you believe (which I strongly doubt) that it was not, then there must be "Clean in politics" in Armenia. Your stance forces you into these strange contradictions, because you are afraid, and I don't blame you for being afraid. You feel such a need for a strongman at the helm of the country that you must quash anything that erodes the strength of the leader, including democracy and being clean with fellow Armenians.

You conclude: "Start from the people, make a change in their lives and in their thinking, and in their commitment not to lie and cheat." How can they, the poor and the weak, who are lied to and cheated by those who wield power be expected to behave differently? I thought you did not like sheep? Artur, it's a simple matter of law and order and accountability. You remove these from Canada, for example, and everyone will lie and cheat. The whole point of successful economies is the presence of adequate degrees of law, order, and accountability, applied in sufficient extent even upon the most powerful. It is in the safety of this minimum reassurance that economies roar and take flight. It is in the absence of this inclusive system that jobs, and with them people, take flight.

Unsurprisingly, you and I, again, agree on the key point here: Jobs. The paradigm shift I am talking about is that we, as a people, focus on that key point, with depth, and honesty.