PRESUMPTION WILL GET WAN-CONGRESS NOWHERE

Posted on January 14, 2011 by Keghart

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Category: Opinions

Keghart.com Editorial Board, 16 January 2011

On a number of occasions, since its inception three years ago, Keghart.com has reiterated that recognition of the genocide of Armenians alone will not resolve our just demands of reparation, restitution and return of lands. To that end, along with others, we have underlined the importance of the creation of an entity that would pursue the various aspects of this cause in the international arena with the participation of all concerned individuals and organizations. As we are all aware, for more than five decades many intellectuals, activists and lawyers have made various proposals of how to establish such a structure.

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It appeared the projected Congress of Western Armenians could fulfill that quest. The steering International Organizing Committee's (IOC) quarterly meetings, registration of NGOs in France and Switzerland, the symposia dedicated to exploring the legal venues on how to present our demands in international courts, and establishing the nucleus of a team of legal professionals were all inspiring and hopeful activities. Accordingly Keghart.com lent its support to the proposed Congress and the IOC.
As we get closer to convening a conference for the establishment of the said congress, various draft proposals have been made regarding definition of its goals and constitution. Like other similar initiatives, the devil is in the details. Respecting the principles of transparency and cognizant of our obligations towards our readers, we devote this editorial to expressing our reservations regarding certain propositions that have been circulated to members of IOC and close friends. We may be accused of divulging "internal" information. We don't perceive them to be confidential since the ideas giving rise to the said draft proposals are already public knowledge and have appeared in various articles penned by members of the IOC, its website and in interviews.

In section B of Article 4 it is proposed that the Congress "Develop and implement pan-Armenian plans and programs in support of Armenian statehood, strengthening and rapid development of Republic of Armenia and Artsakh, improving people's standard of living…"

At face value and as cherished goals, we presume that nobody would argue against such programs.

However they raise serious questions. What does the Congress really want to achieve and why? More importantly, who gives the right to any organization to make such blatant statements which are tantamount to interference in the affairs of the sovereign state of Republic of Armenia? Do Armenia and Artsakh agree to such plans? Ultimately, citizens of Armenia answer to their government and not to a transnational entity. Historically, all three republics of Armenia have shown resistance to encroachments, to put it mildly. Furthermore, the prerogatives of the parent countries where the NGOs are registered are implicated. One really wonders what kind of legal advice the leadership of IOC got when it made such a draft proposal.

Further down, in section E the IOC proposes to "assist in the Diaspora the preservation and awareness of Western Armenians' identity..." Is the goal of IOC to replace other organizations that are already engaged in similar endeavours? Why duplicate?

Section H of the same article speaks about "cooperation with all other nations and people on the basis of universal principles of peace, independence, democracy and justice." Even before creating an entity and allowing it decide what direction it should take, the IOC is almost "dictating" a course, granted in a draft proposal. What's more bothersome is the assumption of international relations which is far beyond the accepted norms of what NGOs can and should reach for. It sounds like creating an organization with governmental attributes. Is that what the IOC intends to do, forming a trans-territorial government? Wouldn't this undermine the present statehood of Armenia and the prerogatives of its government?

Statements like the above make one's head spin and lose track of what really the IOC wants to achieve. Aspirations aside, there are realities that impose boundaries to what we want, what is achievable and practical.

Most readers of Keghart.com and its close friends are not interested nor are they willing to devote time and energy to projects that have no chance of success and raise questions regarding the motives of promoting such goals or plans.

Aside from the above, when we look at the ambition of creating an overreaching entity, which presumably will speak on behalf of Western Armenians, one has to ponder about its legitimacy. On what basis does this nascent organization assume to be similar in magnitude to the First and Second congresses and call itself Third Congress? Is it not pretentious to say that the proposed structure "cooperates with all governmental agencies, establishments..., public organizations, as well as national and international establishments and organizations"?

It's fine to get together with two-hundred to three-hundred people and establish whatever organization one's heart desires. But calling those like-minded people "delegates" defies logic. They will not be elected by others, and they represent only themselves. Hence, wouldn't it be preferable to adopt a resolution stating that the said organization represents only itself and speaks only and only on behalf of its members? By demonstrating to the public some tangible work, establishing a

track record of achievements, one may gain legitimacy. Even then without a public and transparent process of elected participants no acceptance by the public can be expected. Aren't the IOC members aware that in the Diaspora the legitimacy of organizations that have existed for more than a century is being questioned?

Some members of the IOC cannot resist the temptation of likening the proposed Congress to the one Boghos Noubar Pasha led. One would wish that they stopped there. Unfortunately, they go on almost forever, lecturing about it and treating the public as an ignorant mass. Do the Congress organizers want to emulate the Pasha? The great Armenian had history of achievements prior to and aside from the Congress. We would advise that pretension be restrained. Furthermore, in the name of yet undisclosed historical justifications some IOC members present personal interpretations of why we failed in the past. Arrbitrary declarations, statements which lack credibility do not attract people; on the contrary, they sow divisiveness and aversion.

If IOC and the proposed Congress have any chance of success a great deal will depend on drastically revising the draft proposals, resisting the temptation of becoming an overreaching organization, and limiting itself only to the pursuit of our cause through legal means.