

ADDRESSING ARMENIA'S 2021 SNAP ELECTIONS

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Keghart.org contributors, writers, and readers from around the world express their views, ideas, and concerns regarding the momentous June 20 elections.

Short List of Wishes

Pundits of all sorts claim the parliamentary elections will determine the future of RoA and secondarily Artsakh. Stark expressions such as "to be or not to be" are invoked.

I don't think there will be major changes no matter who comes into power, which bloc gets majority or minority. We are in a box and whoever comes out on top will act within the parameters of that confined space.

I hope I am mistaken and miraculously people in RoA come to their senses and vote according to their conscience and set a new course. They thought they did it in 2018, and rightly so, but forces of the old regime were more powerful within the bureaucracy and judiciary than the reform-minded new wave. Contributory factors were the inaptitude and inexperience (especially in foreign affairs) of the newbies. Since the war defeat all sides try to expose "traitors". I believe it is a side-show because the whole system is rotten to begin with.

What's to be done? It's the citizen of RoA who will determine the outcome. The republic has not listened to the Diaspora since its beginning in 1918. Expecting that it will listen now is just a pipe dream.

Having said so and being the son of a man born during the Genocide, I can't be indifferent when my brain carries the memories passed on to me by my parents and the etched, self-created images based on history and education.

All what I can do is make a short list of wishes which are not any different from what our freethinkers have expressed since Nalbandian, Raffi, Khrimian Hayrig and others. Unfortunately, those wishes do not go beyond generalities.

Armenian citizens saying "yes" or "no" to the kleptocracy

Armenia has embroiled itself deeply into post-war political turmoil and confusion. The misinformation and propaganda spread by public and private news channels and paid foreign agents are delusional and thus deprive the citizenry the right to an informed choice.

The political camps are divided along the East -West civilizational lines. The proponents of the latter say Armenia should establish new alliances with the West. The proponents of the former claim Armenia will not survive without Russia.

All three former Armenian presidents have been unambiguous that Russia is still the key stakeholder in the post-war crisis and the new geopolitical realities.

Nevertheless, these elections are not going to be about the East-West civilizational choices. They are about Armenian citizens saying "yes" or "no" to the kleptocracy of thirty years, to the public corruption that brought the country to its knees and enriched a handful of macho men whose only merits are not much different from those of the Cave Man. The elections are about saying "yes" or "no" to the degrading systemic poverty, when selling a vote for a spoonful of sugar is not considered a shameful and humiliating act.

The elections will not set the long-term political development course of our Motherland. Their results will be transient as the fight among former kleptocrats and oligarchs versus the laborists of Nikol Pashinyan (and laborist turned former oligarchs) will be fierce and uncompromising. Although some analysts predict there will be clashes between these hostile forces, they also claim there is no ground for mass unrest.

Notwithstanding election results, what Diaspora can and should do today is to keep calm and focus on doing real groundwork. If we want a bright future for Armenia and the perpetuation of the Armenian culture, we need to invest in educating the Armenian youth. We need to educate them not only to excel in math and English but also to know what their rights are and why someone at the top is not the king but is the servant. If you want change in our lifetime, work on changing attitudes and mentality.

Regarding geopolitics, it remains largely volatile and situational. And it may well be that we are witnessing USSR Breakup II. After all, Russia is an autocracy and its policies may drastically change once the autocrat is removed. Will that be in our favour? I am not sure that is what I want today. But we need to be ready for it tomorrow. Just in case.

Ideologically Armenians are Lost

These elections are extraordinary for several reasons:

1. They are happening after several major turning points and developments in our history (2016 April skirmishes, 2018 Revolution, 2018 elections and attempt to change the regime, war of 2020, collapse and confusion in the past seven months);
2. They are being held within a new internal political reality: the powerful return of ALL old guard members and parties in opposition to the current ruling majority that was formed due to the incomplete revolution;
3. They are happening in a new regional political reality that can't be compared with previous phases in our modern history: frail Russia that can barely defend its interests in its backyard but at high cost and recession. An ambitious Turkey that is "cautiously" trying to establish a foothold in the Southern Caucasus. Cautious because of its increasing internal challenges, because of its awkward relationship with Azerbaijan and the five Central Asian states. A vicious and capable Azerbaijan that has been done its homework since 1994 (polishing its image, investing in its military, etc...). Last, but

not least, an increasing European interest in the region due to the new oil/gas connection and other economic interests such as the East-West land connection via Iran.

I see the following challenges Armenia will face as of June 21 2021:

1. Will the new ruling power(s) be able to plan and implement policies that can turn the Armenian economy into a smart knowledge-based economy (smart that go beyond the principles of a knowledge-based economy of the 1990s)? Only such economy can place Armenia on the global economic map and can give it a competitive advantage that cross national borders;
2. Will the new government be able revamp the armed and security forces as well as the nation to form a new military system that can defend the country and constitute a serious threat to any hostile neighbour? There are more than half-a-dozen examples in the world: we need to learn from them;
3. In foreign policy can the new government come up with a magical formula of "balanced foreign policy" that gives Armenia the ability to preserve its margin of maneuvering without provoking any country. In other words, Armenia should become a regional and maybe even a global point of intersection of several countries (mediator) that can deal with Armenia as a point of reference. Of course, this accompanies economic competitiveness and internal political stability. I'm not talking about El Dorado. It may become reality under wise leadership;
4. Ideologically Armenians are lost. Our post-Soviet national ideology that was a mix of militant-liberationist ethno-nationalism has served its aim and is taking its last breath (if not already dead). We will be living (if not already living) in a vacuum of national ideology: Who are we? What are we? Where do we want to be in the next 100 years? Why do we exist? How do we interpret our close and distant history? We don't have minimum consensus on any of the answers--not to say of a bundle of answers which form a "national ideology" which in turn can constitute the backbone of a thriving political entity (country with a state). Governments have a major role in redefining these concepts along with society. Such a bundle of concepts constitute our new national ideology.

A Russian war against Armenia

The 2020 war was essentially a Russian war against Armenia, specifically against Pashinyan, because Putin let his unreasonable and violent temper and anger direct Russia's policies (assuming Russia has any policies).

Russia could have stopped the war before it even began. Yet Russia said and did essentially nothing prior to Sept. 27 but then came in and stopped it on Nov 9.

Lavrov, Russia's foreign minister has essentially admitted to Russia's power to have stopped the war earlier by saying something like: 'We offered you a peace deal, but you did not accept it and so the war continued.'

Russia let Turkey (a NATO member!) send American-built F16s, terrorists, and Bayraktar drones into

Azerbaijan with hardly a word.

And yet, Putin complained and promised to "kick a country's teeth out" when Turkey gives the same weapons to Ukraine.

Now Russia and the CSTO are breaking their agreements with Armenia by letting Azeri soldiers into Armenia. It's obvious that Russia is trying to embarrass Pashinyan before the elections. Russia wants slaves, not allies.

As for Russia's excuse that it had no defense agreement with Artsakh: No one foresaw that Russia would allow NATO member Turkey to explicitly get into the fight on Azerbaijan's side. That changed the equation.

Russia has again betrayed Armenians as in the 1920s.

I agree this does not tell us what Armenia should do now, but I had to express my views.

Yes, I know that Armenia is stuck with Russia.

Lastly, people often say Armenians should have signed a peace agreement on Artsakh's autonomy long ago. Yet we don't know what such an agreement would have entailed. What sort of autonomy? "Autonomy" is just a word. Clearly, the "autonomy" offered by Azerbaijan was never acceptable to Armenians. There have never been details about this "autonomy." Would Artsakh have had its military? Who would have controlled immigration? Were Azeris to be allowed back in to restart a civil war? Does anyone trust Azerbaijan?

There are no comments yet.