

THE ARMENIAN DIASPORA OR THE CUCKOLDS OF ARMENIA

Posted on October 11, 2009 by Keghart



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By Denis Donikian, France, 4 October 2009

Translated by [Viken L. Attarian](#) Montréal, Canada

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✘ The Diaspora is awakening. The imminent signature of the agreement protocols between the Turkish and Armenian States on the opening of the border, which they could freeze as inviolable, seems to have touched the Diaspora in the raw, in its pride and has reached into the depths of its struggle. The Diaspora that has seen itself as part of a single people, today finds itself as the forgotten part of its history and its destiny. And now, it has reached the rock bottom of its own schizophrenia.

In fact, the differences between the Armenian Diaspora and the government of Armenia are as great as the reality that the former feels the border problem as a symbolic matter, whereas the latter lives it as a deep issue of actual survival. The Diaspora can hold on to the issue for as long a time, as time it would be given; whereas the other has no more time. The main concern of Armenia is to find exits to offer an economic breathing room to a people that have been geographically exposed to a stranglehold. Knowing, that of the four windows that were granted to us by history, the window on Azerbaijan will stay closed for a long while, and that the Iranian and Georgian windows can arbitrarily close from one day to the next; the first, not only because Iran is rapidly becoming a nuclear power, but because of the suspicion that it is attributed by Western powers and certain Middle Eastern countries; the second, because it is subject to the Russian Damoclian sword. Is then President Sarkissian wrong to seek a large overture towards Armenia's West at all costs?

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But every time the Turkish counterpart signs anything, everything justly becomes suspect. The Armenians know, out of experience, that the Turkish state works on all fronts and pulls on every string to achieve its goals. The Diaspora experiences this anxiety on its own flesh. On their part, the Armenians of Armenia proper are not foreign to this either. They know too well the level of concealment achieved by Turkish diplomatic cynicism. It suffices to see the way Erdogan "parades" one after the other, Americans, Armenians and even Azeris, exuding warmth and coldness, truth and falsehood, with the sole aim to jumble their thoughts and to advance his own pawns. As it was confirmed in earlier times by Fr. Charmetant (1844-1921) when he wrote: "... The Turk, in fact, never cedes except to force. He fears no one on the diplomatic front; he possesses the highest degree of the art of evasive answers and delaying formulae; during discussions, he is the master of the art of pretending and no one knows better to sterilize the negotiations and to gain the time needed to postpone the solution, and to eventually cause the failure of any combination that might annoy him". One can « knock » Serge Sarkissian to one's heart's content, but I fear that we would be ill-advised to attribute to him any political angelic naïveté as do the numerous protesters and petitioners of all kinds. We should remember that Sarkissian fought at the highest levels for the defense of Artsakh, to a point of being decorated for his merit by none other than his enemy of today, Levon Ter Petrossian. Moreover, I doubt that that smallest protester of the Diaspora who shudders at the thought of any sell-out of the Genocide or of Karabagh, is more conscious than him that nothing can be given away on these fronts. Finally, to continue along the same line, it would be appropriate to recognize that the Turks are facing a counter-negotiator who knows how to skillfully play the rules of international law. Here is a man, who had shamelessly "seen" himself as president, several months before the actual elections; and who became one, even at the cost that he had to pay, meaning, by disregarding any transparency whatsoever; a man who practices democracy by lying, by low blows and by an iron fist. A man, who without second thought, leaves the opposition drooling over him in public. This man is surely tough, cunning, a warrior, a Machiavellian, but no one should tell me that he is soft or naïve.

In this game with the Turkish State, he knows that he has to take risks. But he also knows that the biggest risk for Armenia, which the Diaspora is not even able to measure, is the risk of isolation. We have said it: the countries that surround Armenia are unstable. They are not immune to conflicts that could explode overnight, resulting in the closing of their doors at the slightest heating up of issues. If Serge Sarkissian would not look today to push open the Turkish door, tomorrow, in the case of problems on its Northern or Southern borders, we would reproach him of not foreseeing what

happened. Because, as the adage goes, to govern is to foresee.

In this case, does the Diaspora have its say? But also, should it determine how it projects itself as a national consciousness?

For the moment, I shall focus on two of its principle aspects. The first, of its being a force for mobilization, the other as a power for economic solidarity. The mobilization for the recognition of the genocide has been taken on mainly by the troops of a party, that was traditionally, albeit blindly, active in the defense of national interests. Those who are raising the red flag today and throw suspicion on Serge Sarkissian by accusing him of a total sell-out of even that which he has defended with arms, are close to a caricature that is playing on fears and frustrations, reviving old myths and utopias. For that, the more moderates who rub shoulders with the extremists, become extremists themselves, and the more naives fall into the trap of overbidding on emotions. They tell me that, on this issue, it is better to preach the worst possible outcome to avoid any potential future inconveniences, even when they are hoping that those would never come to be. But the Diaspora is also a force of economic solidarity, without who Armenia would have been in a much worse state. The Diaspora is not only the outcome of the Genocide but also a political construct willed by the Armenian state since its independence. By effectively forcing men to work in foreign lands, the State relieves itself from its own responsibilities and receives support from this source of wealth which is more or less a co-opted for the patriotic cause. The financial aid that every exiled person brings to their parents and children is like a manna that directly or indirectly contributes to the functioning of the country. As for the Diaspora resulting from the Genocide, it also contributes to fill in the gaps left by the Armenian state by its targeted aid (telethons, twinning of cities etc.) or distributed assistance through various associations. Not counting all those cousins in foreign lands helping their families or even those generous donors who profit from their trips to Armenia to save strangers by issuing them micro credits. We must also mention all those of the Diaspora who bring assistance to Armenia on a purely cultural front in its broadest sense (courses, training, events etc.). Resulting, and I do not hesitate to say this, as I have always claimed, that those members of the Diaspora who feel that sense of responsibility towards Armenia can be considered as cultural or economic citizens of the country. Even when they do not have the full status of the de facto citizen. It is also true that the Diaspora does not receive in return the political consideration that its contribution to the country can make it hope for. More precisely, today, in this affair of the Protocols that touches the essence of its battle against the Turkish State, the Diaspora would have counted for nothing. And for a reason.

Today, this Diaspora has just received a cold shower. That is, since independence, this power for solidarity that it has represented seems to have turned to be a lost cause. By not asking for any political counterweight in exchange, the financial contributors of the Diaspora have become the cuckolds of Armenia. Not only is their assistance partially or even completely diverted (like in the case of the rescue aid provided during the earthquake), but it is always unilateral (allowing thus the oligarchs and politicians of "business" to enrich themselves and to shamelessly build sumptuous

homes). Since independence, and in spite of the efforts of the Diaspora, which concentrated mostly on Karabagh, the Armenian countryside has languished in a destitute poverty. One is forced to admit that the Armenian Diaspora, not having a voice on the internal political stage of the country, could not monetize its financial assistance into forcing the Armenian State to develop a real social policy. This demonstrates the level of political contempt assigned to the Diaspora Armenians which is profoundly humiliating in view of the financial interest it represents. The creation of a ministry of the Diaspora is simply designed to channel the external wealth towards the country (for example by the multitude of village sponsorships by wealthy Armenians or aid to individuals via micro credits).

It is therefore not surprising that today the Diaspora feels cheated. In fact, from the point of view of Armenia, it never amounted to much. (The Aghperoutyoun is just an illusion: between the "brother" of Armenia and his "brother" of the Diaspora, the relationship is one of a con-artist thief and his naive victim). Today, the Diaspora pays the price of having managed the suspect liabilities of the Armenian State too complacently. When Serge Sarkissian instituted himself at the head of the country under fraudulent conditions which we knew about, when he threw his opponents in jail, when he continues to incarcerate Diasporans who have fought for Karabagh, and even denies them Armenian citizenship, the representatives of this same Diaspora were never so furious and menacing as they are today, when it is "their" Genocide that is at stake. As if the dead were more alive for them than the actual living. By not supporting the democratic opposition which has been screaming all year-long against the absurdities and deafness of the Sarkissian regime, by leaving to their fate a countryside that has been willingly abandoned, by not denouncing firmly the white genocide of economic emigration, the Diaspora should have expected to one day receive back the "fair" change for its coin. What government-opposing citizen of Armenia, by now a veteran of protest meetings, would not smile bitterly after reading or hearing the media reports about the incidents related to the visit of his president in Paris; what he has been screaming for months: "Sarkissian, resign!".

In fact, the unacceptable and the dangerous in this story of the Protocols is that at the moment when Sarkissian faces the Turks, his regime still has not settled the internal and dark accounts plaguing the country. Democracy is not appeased; the murders of March 1st remain unsolved; justice is under the boot of power; the economy is in total disequilibrium at the expense of the rural countryside; Mafioso oligarchs are thriving and the Karabagh issue is still without a solution. For a country so young, so fragile and so small as Armenia, these negative and uncertain components constitute a weakness, if not a major fault line for our national destiny. There is no doubt that these unresolved problems constitute as many time bombs. If the Diaspora was a real political force, it would have not missed the chance to warn this government, one that plays with the truth and governs with cynicism. Furthermore, it would have been necessary for this Diaspora to be sensitive to the warning signs that were apparent here and there by giving voice to those who have never been afraid to tear up the flags beneath which lurks a culture of self-hatred. Where we see today that everything is connected. A complicit silence and blind sanctification of the nation have produced these censures in the Diaspora, with the effect of encouraging the abuses that have been

the endemic rot on the socio-political fabric of the country. By diverting attention to the intense struggle against denial, the Diaspora has nourished complacencies towards the Sarkissian regime that have come back today to haunt away what is most dear to it. Not only do they undermine the goal of Genocide recognition and reparations by the Turkish State, but they also endanger a country which probably is not in a position to confront the opening of borders with any confidence.

It would however be wrong to reproach the Diaspora for being a force prey to distraction. What force is it with respect to the Armenian State? Its representatives have absolutely no legitimacy, and at a minimum, whoever they may be, they never even asked me for permission to speak on my behalf. As such, the Armenian State, which we would have the right to condemn on many fronts, is facing a nebulous entity led by militant forces that monopolize the Diasporan voice in tune with an ideology which they want to believe as expressing the ideals of all. We also could not blame this Diaspora for being too late in organizing itself into an external political force, capable of influencing the destiny of the country and leading a unified battle for the recognition of the Genocide. The hazards of contemporary history did not allow it to happen. But it seems that today, because of the signing of the Protocols, this serious crisis wedging itself between Armenia and the global Armenian Diaspora, has to accelerate the process of creating a structure capable of playing in the political decisional arenas of the country. Also, the recent closing of the daily Haratch has violently shaken the spirits of many, who today see very clearly the dangers threatening the existence of the Diaspora itself. They hasten to establish an inventory list for our destiny, hoping that they will be persuasive enough to reorient the elements of our survival in a more pragmatic direction. It remains to be seen whether the key persons who have contributed unconsciously to the fossilization of our culture will follow these "lesson givers".

What remains is that Turkey will have succeeded in neutralizing the Diaspora, as it would be in such a case, by establishing State-to-State relations with Armenia. However, in this context, the Diaspora does not constitute a State. Not even a State in Exile.

Some believe that the recognition of the Genocide is a moral matter. One should admit that principles of morality are more and more present in the political consciousness of our times, even when it is due, on the one hand, to the European principles of pacification of peoples, and on the other, to the new American deal. But, if a criminal does not recognize his crime except when constrained and forced, there is no reason to think that the Turkish State would cede anything due to moral pressure at the price of its own interests. In fact, it is difficult to see any country cede away even an ounce if it has nothing to gain. However, it is inside Turkish civil society itself that this consciousness of the perpetrated evil could result in action and eventually push for a change in mentality. It is also true that those who advocate a confrontation with the Turkish state have neither the time nor the means to wait. This faith will only bear fruit if it was supported by a new structuring of the worldwide Diaspora in order to effectively and relentlessly denounce a denial that has lasted too long, where those who are ignorant thereof can easily become accomplices to it.

Ultimately, it seems that this identity crisis that our Diaspora is going through, making itself immediately felt due to the loss of the Haratch newspaper and the issue of the Protocols, has no other cause but the hypertrophied excess of "Genocidal" thought, within a persistent denialist context, which in turn has reduced to nothingness the only thing which could have given breathing room to the spirit, namely culture. Not a fossilized culture condemned to a cult of language, of Church, and I do not know what other myth, but a culture that is living, loving and humorous. Instead, we have managed to make our artists run away, to contort our thought, to practice censorship and ostracism, to transform the Genocide into a castrating ideology.

Der Voghormia ! Der Voghormia !

Denis Donikian

