

# THE WASTED DECADE

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By Harut Der-Tavitian, Los Angeles, 7 January 2010

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Bearing the above in mind, we published an article ten years ago entitled "The best way to predict the future is to create it." We concluded the piece with the following: "We have to replace our partisan and communal mindset with that of state-building, because after all, we have established our own independent state which entails a modification in our reasoning. The development of the Armenian political mindset through the holding of public debates and discussions will become our assurance in overcoming the challenges facing us and in creating the future that we deserve."

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Ten years on, as we close the first decade of the 21st century, a quick retrospective indicates that there has been no national progress. The past ten years have been a wasted decade, contrary to two major achievements in the preceding decade: the establishment of the independent Republic of Armenia and the liberation of the Armenian territories of Artsakh. Regretfully, it was also characterized by the tragedy of October 27, 1999, which undermined those achievements. On that day, a group of armed men stormed the parliament, and assassinated the Prime Minister Vazgen Sargsyan, Parliamentary Speaker Karen Demirchyan and six other high ranking officials.

## **WHAT CHARACTERIZED THE PAST DECADE?**

Instead of delving into our archives, let's mention only those developments that immediately stand out in our memory. Since eight of those ten years Armenia was ruled by Robert Kocharian, let's start with his tenure.

### **The "achievements" of Robert Kocharian**

Having grabbed the president's post (1998-2008) through constitutional violations and irregularities,

Kocharian proved that he was a man of limited intellect, devoid of the characteristics of a visionary leader. Let's numerate some of his "achievements".

1- He single-handedly excluded Artsakh (the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh) from the Minsk negotiations. He even bragged about this damaging decision during the presidential debate with Stepan Demirchian. The consequences of this misguided decision are evident today: a lot of effort is being made to overcome its detrimental impact, but to no avail.

2- Kocharian made the pursuit of the recognition of the Armenian Genocide a major aspect of Armenia's foreign policy, with the unrealistic expectation of pressuring Turkey. As a result of this failed diplomacy, the veracity of the Armenian Genocide is now under question. And Let's not forget his infamous declaration in "Le Figaro" that Armenia does not have the legal basis to pursue territorial claims from Turkey.

3- During Kocharian's term, major objects of strategic importance were transferred to Russia, under the "property for debt" deal. Other ex-soviet republics did not opt for similar extreme measures despite owing Russia more than tenfold of the amount owed by Armenia.

4- The closure of the A1+ TV station and the curtailment of free speech and freedom of expression, which derailed the nation's progress and democratic ambitions.

While the above Kocharian blunders are sufficient proof for his failed policies, we can't ignore the abject irregularities committed during the presidential and parliamentary elections, the trampling of the judicial system, the ongoing emigration, the abuses of the corrupt and oligopolic climate. We should not also forget the terrible crime of Oct. 27 mentioned above, that immediately preceded the decade, and provided Kocharian the means to usurp power.

### **The "achievements" of Serzh Sarkisian**

1- Kocharian ended his regime with the slaughter of March 1, when Serzh Sarkisian was the "elected" president. The latter could have distanced himself from his predecessor's most recent crime, but he did not, thus assuming equal responsibility for the crime. If October 27 was a blow to the head (leadership) of the Armenian state, March 1 was the blow to the body (people). The apathy that is evident among Armenians of Armenia and of Diaspora, is mainly as a result of those crimes.

2- No matter how hard some circles try to justify the signing of the Armenia-Turkey Protocols, its negative effects have already become evident, thus weakening our positions and opening a divide between Armenia and the Diaspora. Turkey has already come out victorious from the process while Armenia is trying to contain the damage.

3- In 2009 alone, Armenia's foreign debt almost doubled with close to \$1.8 billion in new loans. A monopolistic minority continues to thrive at the expense of an economically deteriorating Armenia.

4- Protestors against the curtailment of free speech and the freedom of expression are imprisoned

~~after show-trials. As a result the judiciary is wretched and governed by lackeys rather than patriots.~~

5- Rather than imitating Kocharian's contemptuous and conceited behaviour (which became relevant through his violent and vengeful actions) Sarkisian tries to cover up that same attitude with eloquent verbiage, while failing to hide his cynicism.

To illustrate the above points (4 and 5), we present the following verbatim quote from his speech to the recent convention of the ruling Republican party: "Political stability does not mean fossilized intellect, stagnant ideology or indisputable authority. Our depiction of political stability supposes freedom of intellect. The factor of stability limits the shape but not the content, it stimulates to invent and create but not to silence... Pointed debate should not be underestimated, but we will secure our country's political stability by selecting the path of political dialogue. It is possible to be tough with ideas, but not with the ones who express them." Since these idealistic expressions have nothing in common with the practice of this regime, they blandly insult the intelligence of Armenians.

To back our use of the "wasted decade" terminology, we invite you to answer the following questions.

- Why did the depopulation of Armenia continue when the country was registering "double-digit" economic growth?
- Where did "Armenia, the island of democracy" disappear?
- What made those who came to power with the "no-compromise" slogan change their minds and become proponents of "counter-compromise"?
- Why people who have bragged of pressuring Turkey accept demeaning terms imposed on Armenia when the same individuals came under pressure?
- Why was it possible to link Armenia to Artsakh through the construction of the Goris-Stepanakert "Life Highway" at the cost of \$15 million, but it was not possible to construct the North-South "Vertebra" highway, nor populate Latchin (forget about Martakert and Shoushi) and thus reinforce our position on our lands, despite having raised more than \$100 million?
- What tangible outcome did we get from the much-publicized Armenia-Diaspora gatherings and other big-name conventions?
- Why did we spend hundreds of million dollars to construct "elite" buildings at the center of Yerevan, instead of addressing fast deteriorating infrastructural conditions in the Earthquake zone, as well as those of border villages, thus stemming the flow of depopulation?
- Why those who lose legal cases in Armenia find justice at European courts?
- Why do ex-officials speak about the shortcomings of Armenia only after leaving power?
- Even when the sums looted by the oligarchs of Armenia, are disregarded, wouldn't those looted by

~~Kocharian and Sarkissian alone have been enough to populate their native Artsakh, thus de-facto contributing to the solution of Nagorno Karabakh problem in our favor?~~

After casting a glance at the "achievements" of the past decade, the obvious question we ask ourselves is this: "Where would we be at the end of the coming decade, if we continue our precipitous decline at this rate?"

