

UNITED WE STAND...

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✘ Keghart.com Team Editorial, 22 August 2010

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The latest Turkish action was the announcement of the "celebration" of Holy Mass at Aghtamar in September. There is no doubt that the Turkish state will manipulate it for its own interests. Our knee-jerk reaction has been denunciation, instead of looking for ways to turn the event into our advantage, such as by mobilizing people to be present not in the hundreds but in the thousands, and asking friendly Turks, Kurds, Zazas and Alawis to participate in solidarity with Armenians. All it takes is will, determination and cooperation among various factions of the Armenian Diaspora.

A memorable event that comes to mind is the publication of [I apologize](#) by thousands of Turkish nationals. How did we respond? Some Armenian media outlets did not even think the historic document deserved a few lines. Subsequent invitations to and interviews with key figures who had signed the document were mostly acts of lip service. Some of us argued that it was a ploy by the Turkish government. The authors were even accused of being agents of the state, although that dreaded word was not explicitly used. The "best" outcome was a diplomatic endorsement of the [Réponse des intellectuels Arméniens aux intellectuels Turcs](#) by a miniscule number of Armenian intellectuals compared to the number of Turkish signatories of the "apology". Was there an opportunity to adopt the campaign and expand its potentials? Probably yes, but it was missed. More recently--this past April-- the Genocide was publicly commemorated in Turkey, albeit by a few intellectuals and their friends. Concomitantly, Diaspora intellectuals were invited to Turkey by

TEPAV (Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey) to discuss the issue at a symposium. Some of the Armenian participants were rebuked upon their return from the gathering. Although solid arguments were provided against the event, the matter was treated in isolation, and not tackled within a larger context. Again no attempt was made to explore the potential of such encounters which could benefit the Armenian side.

Considering the above three (out of many) examples leads us to state unequivocally that the Turkish state and Turkish nationals continue to set the agenda--some would say they are even dictating it. Turkey will continue to use every means to place a halo around its denialist thesis. The Armenian Diaspora cannot afford to allow the Turkish side to determine this vital agenda. Rather than merely react, and in most cases denounce the Turkish initiatives, the Armenian Diaspora should be proactive: it should respond in a constructive way to the Turkish undertakings or better--it should put forth its own proposals prior to the Turkish projects. Negative reaction on the part of Armenian Diaspora will neither generate sympathy nor break new ground in advancing our Cause.

Of course, the lack of coordinated effort between the Republic of Armenia and the Diaspora make matters more challenging. As a result, all we hear is cacophony rather than reasoned, constructive, and practical arguments. In the absence of a common strategy by Armenian stakeholders, the field is left wide open for the Turkish side. We have nobody to blame but ourselves. Let's be honest with ourselves, and let's ameliorate the situation in earnest.

For starters, Tashnagtsoutune has to realize that it cannot have it both ways, i.e. present itself as the savior of the Armenians, yet at every opportunity try to expand its partisan interests. *Vis a vis* Armenia, it raises red flags only and only when the party's prerogatives or positions are in peril. It cooperates with others when there is a chance of increasing its dividends. This approach imperils our Cause, alienates people not only from the party but from Armenian endeavours in general within the party, its sympathizers, and adherents of other parties, too.

Tashnagtsoutune, being the best organized and most vocal Diaspora entity has the responsibility to set an example of cooperation in issues that matter to Diaspora Armenians. Pursuing the Armenian Cause in the legal field, for example, has been discussed for decades, within the party and with others. Yet there has been no real attempt to get the interested individuals or the organizations together. Will Tashnagtsoutune extend its hand to the proposed Western Armenian National Congress (WAN Congress) when the latter's legal team becomes operational?

We extend our apologies to the Ramgavar and Hunchak parties for excluding them in the above recommendations. They have their internal fights still to sort out. However, they, too, should pursue their efforts by clearly defining what they see as the priorities for the future of Diaspora, our dreams of recovering some parts of our occupied motherland, and act accordingly.

Long before the collapse of the Soviet Union, and more so after the collapse, many leftist individuals "deserted" their party but a few continued to operate under a variety of organizational names or

joined other parties. Some preferred to be "independent". This committed and capable contingent has been ignored by the Diaspora. Doubting their patriotism, ignoring their understanding of world affairs, and their contribution to Diasporan life is akin to amputating an active limb from the body. Their participation within the framework of an overall Armenian body politic is not only necessary but crucial in cultivating relations with progressive forces primarily in Turkey and elsewhere. Let's invite our free-floating "leftists" into our communities, organizations and projects.

The ideological followers of the generation that employed "unorthodox" means in the '80s are still around with their own organizations and publications. They too deserve our attention.

Although statistics are not available, it's safe to state that the majority of Diaspora Armenians do not belong to or follow any of the parties. Conventionally they are referred to as the "silent majority". Probably a good number of them do not and will not take part in any Armenian endeavour irrespective of its origin. However, some "independents" are active and do participate in community affairs in a significant manner through individual projects or organized forums.

Armenians, at least in the Diaspora, have settled into a lazy and denialist mindset. In a misguided belief of our nation's immortality, they maintain in the backroads of their minds the following nonsensical notion: "In our long history, we have survived war, famine, persecution, exile, genocide... we will somehow continue to survive whatever fate throws our way." This absurd myth, this belief in miracles blinds us to the existential challenges Diaspora faces, and may well result in our disappearance, within a few generations, as viable communities outside the borders of Armenia.

As mentioned earlier, we sorely lack common strategy to confront initiatives emanating from Turkey or to reverse the trend of setting the agenda. To that end awareness of what awaits Diaspora without cooperation among its various factions enumerated above is essential. The future appears bleak as the years go by. Numbing fatigue would eventually drown us. We cannot afford to waste more time.

Will any of the existing organizations take the lead in opening the channels of communication and cooperation? Or shall we wait for a messiah who will never show up? Will the proposed WAN Congress have sufficient gravitas, the intellectual mass and muscle, and the broad sightedness to draw all factions together? Or will it degenerate into yet another self-serving organization with special interests or ulterior motives?

What we need is inspired leadership which will win Diaspora's confidence.

What we need is strength of will in Diaspora leaders, parties, and individuals.

What we need is moratorium on pomposity and cant.

It's almost midnight for the Armenian Diaspora.

