

# WAN-C GETS MY VOTE

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 By Viken L. Attarian, Montréal, 25 February 2010

*Editor's note: The text originally appeared in 24April Forum (Toronto).*

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History is our teacher. We have tried Sasoonian's idea several times. Almost every time we have failed to achieve our final objectives because of our narrow worldviews. Obviously, 24April forum is not representative of pan-Armenian views. I am sure that the manager Artin Boghosian can refresh our memories, but the ratio of contributors to members is probably one to 10. The people on this forum do not represent the Armenian "street", wherever that may be. So let's not assume good intentions across the board.

In my view, there is no single Armenian Diaspora. There are many Diasporas, each with its own dynamics, history, stage of evolution and demographics. We would be ignoring these differences at the risk of our potential. For example, I might have more in common with a contributor to 24April from Sweden than with the Armenian diamond-cutter in Yellowknife who is married to a native Gwitchin first nation woman and is my fellow Canadian. My point is that there are a multiplicity of identities that fracture us and enrich us simultaneously.

Any proposal to unite the Diaspora under any umbrella organization must take into consideration the following two factors. The traditional organizations (whether political, religious or any other) will fight it tooth and nail because they want to maintain their hegemony and preserve a status quo which they feel is to their advantage. This is a given. To ignore it would be at best naïve and at worst, complicit in the undermining of such an effort. As well, a Diasporan umbrella organization must be fashioned around a VERY SPECIFIC project around which the multiplicity of Armenian identities CAN unite.

A lofty overreaching purpose such as preserving our identity and helping Armenia is, in my view, an unlikely uniting factor, because we already know that every single Armenian organization would claim that policy "space". It would be a moot point to create global governance around, so to speak,

"motherhood and apple pie" vague generalities. That is why the Western Armenian National Congress (WAN-C) has it right in my view, because their stated purpose is the pursuit of legal retribution for the suffering of our people as a result of the crimes committed by an antecedent state whose legal successor exists today. In other words, there is a defendant in this potential legal case. The purpose of the WAN-C is to create and organize the plaintiff.

It is, of course, hoped that once this experiment and others like it (i.e. mobilizing globally around specific projects and ideas) become successful, Armenians can be inspired by this success and voluntarily choose to use such governance models to enhance their organizational potential. Whether that platform would be the WAN-C or any other one would be premature to determine at this stage.

The Diaporas have a long way to go. For all intents and purposes there is no successful experiment in democracy in any Armenian Diaspora, as we understand and accept the concept of democracy in secular liberal democracies of the West. The reason is, because healthy democracies understand value and even cherish the existence of democratic opposition. As Armenians, we need to cultivate these concepts within global democratic experiments in the Diaspora, again by mobilizing around specific goals. It is for this reason that the Diaspora could not advocate for democracy in Armenia at an institutional level because it lacks those structures and practices itself. It could not give what it did not possess.

The above reasons explain why I would bet on the WAN-C proposal rather than others, but always keeping in mind the aforementioned two caveats.

