

---

# Does Armenia Have a Future?

By Hrach Bayadyan

18/6/2007

---

Many people speak today about how the South Caucasus is an artificially created region, where the member countries have differing (and sometimes opposing) interests and wishes. Will it unite in the wake of other countries' entry into the region, or the region's desire to be part of broader international bodies? Or will it break down as a result of centrifugal forces? It is hard to tell. What is obvious though, is that this region - where the main attraction seems to be the oil reserves of Azerbaijan - is unsuitable for Armenia, which has been isolated and left out of all programs of regional collaboration. At the same time, the unresolved conflict with Azerbaijan as well as policy positions favoring Russia and Iran in both global and regional issues, have created an unpleasant situation for Armenia, establishing an image which is neither presentable nor attractive in any way.

What are the possible solutions to this situation? One of the proposals is to use Armenia's intellectual resources efficiently and to achieve economic progress through the development of advanced technological solutions. But the sorry state of education and science in Armenia today does not even offer a shred of hope of that happening anytime soon. On the other hand, the government's inability to form realistic and achievable strategic plans or to plan the future based on today's global reality is obvious. One cannot even speak of any constructive activities on the part of the country's political parties.

It is a known fact, for example, that the Armenian government has worked with a number of different forces (ranging from American-Armenian entrepreneurs who have been successful in computer programming to the World Bank) to make Armenia a 'new India' in the computer programming global market. This was supposed to give the country a new global image and also facilitate the development of the economy, modernize society and improve living conditions. But it was clear from the beginning, that this objective was not achievable.

The issue of digitizing the manuscripts at the Matenadaran, which caused a lot of noise, showed yet again the sad and primitive standards in this sphere particularly, where Armenia is supposed to have 'great potential.' In reality, what is obvious is the absence of experts with basic knowledge and the ability to make themselves understood. The 'intellectual' chaos that erupted was aimed against the world and immediately fell in line with ideas such as endangered 'national values', 'untouchable cultural treasures' and other similar topics of rhetoric thinking.

Another issue is the whole idea of creating a more democratic society, which is being presented more than ever as a real option for the development of society, gaining positive reaction from the West and for becoming a member of the European family one day. According to that idea, one would hope that democracy would make Armenia competitive in the region, even despite the incompatibility of some western ideas with Armenian national traits and the 'Armenian mentality' regarding some topics that will not be mentioned here. Some analysts are even willing to go further, by linking the democratization of both conflicting sides with the possibility to resolve the Karabakh conflict.

What is Democracy?

In the last years of the Soviet Union, as well as in the first years after it, Armenia's future was being constructed using Soviet building blocks. After the Empire collapsed, the roads and means away from Soviet reality led to everything being looked at in a Soviet context. The homeland that Armenians dreamed about had unavoidably been based on ideas, self-evaluation and a perspective of the world that were all based on Soviet times. The vision of Armenia during the fall of the Soviet Empire was vaguely that of a

nation state with modern industries, a rich cultural tradition coexisting with modern culture, high levels of education and science, and so on. And one of the main reasons for the great disappointment in the post-Soviet years was that false vision. Today, another example of a similar false perspective on the future which has not been fully thought through is the idea of democracy. The idea of selling the democracy of the West, which is like a food item past its expiry date, is actually a very lucrative business for some non-government organizations in Armenia. There are parties and politicians for whom democracy has become an expression of opposition to the government, a sort of political niche. 'Democracy' is also the name of the game that Armenia, like many other former Soviet republics, is playing with the West, particularly with the European Union. But it seems that it is also self-deception of sorts, giving on the opportunity to look to the future optimistically, which then relieves one of the headache of having to think about that future.

Generally speaking, the central idea of democracy is liberal representative democracy. But the paradox is that the more democracy spreads in the world, the less it seems to be trusted by developed democratic societies in the world. Although the dominant form of democratic rule remains liberal representative democracy, there is now a democratic crisis in capitalist societies and pessimism regarding its future possibilities. Debates about the limitations and shortcomings of democracy continue, as do discussions about the different models of democracy - representative, developmental, participatory, radical, democratic democracy and so on, and today, in the age of the Internet, also about instantaneous democracy.

Let us say, for example, that one must speak about participatory democracy when discussing the issues of 'election bribes' and 'buying votes'. In the case of Armenia, is it not suitable to speak of distinguishing between democracy as a method and democracy in content. Democracy, first of all, is a method of political representation, and the dream of organizing free, fair and transparent elections in Armenia one day fits nicely into this approach. However, the idea of democracy in content suggests a system wherein one allows the participation of people in public affairs and allows the removal of obstacles to the social and political participation of people.

But is democracy intertwined with capitalism, or is it possible to imagine other models, particularly one of democracy and socialism? And what does democracy mean in this era of globalization - in the conditions of the decreasing importance of the nation state in general, and in Armenia's case, in the conditions of growing influence of Russia and other global powers... The answers to these questions should not be expected from politicians or parliamentarians, but rather from scientists and analysts or in other words, from sociologists. But where are those scientists? That brings us back to the question of education and science.

---