

**THE CRISIS OF THE ARMENIAN COMMUNITY OF SYRIA AS A GROUND FOR
THE REEVALUATION OF THE PAN-DIASPORAN PRIORITIES
(In the Context of World Processes)**

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Beginning from the 20th century, world terrorism with its various forms of manifestation (the Young Turk coup in the Ottoman Empire in 1908, World War I in 1914-1918, the Armenian Genocide in 1915-1923, the February revolution and the October coup in the Russian Empire in 1917, World War II in 1939-1945 and the subsequent events in the Middle East) has had and continues to have devastating consequences on the world civilization, as well as to become the cause of the change and reformation of the demographic state of the native people and the native cradle-territories.

In other words, the Armenian Genocide, the fall of the Ottoman and Russian Empires in World War I laid the foundation for the extensive plan of the occupation of the Near and Middle East countries, which has further developed in the subsequent decades (in the years of World War II and later), as a result of periodic and continual wars and which is trying today to reach its culmination during the undeclared World War III.

The peculiar feature of the three World Wars was and continues to be committed and still periodically continuing genocides and the forced deportation of the indigenous people, the natives (Armenians, Slavic peoples, Eastern and Western European peoples, as well as Arabs, Yezidis, Assyrians and other hetero-ethnic or religious groups), which, as a rule, are accompanied by the total destruction of the heritage of universal civilization (the ancient and newest material and spiritual values¹), as well as by the Christian-expatriation, namely, Armenian-expatriation (twice in the course of one century, at first in the native cradle – in Western Armenian, Cilicia, also in the Armenian-inhabited provinces of the Ottoman Empire, and then in the “Mother Armenian Diasporan communities” of the captured territories).

That disastrous process had, in its time primarily affected the Armenians living at the crossroads of East and West, specifically the Western Armenian segment, causing them to suffer the Genocide and the loss of their Homeland, dispersing the living remainder all over the world. A situation, which, in the following decades, led to the process of gradual assimilation (immediately in the Western countries and at a slower rate, in the Eastern countries); moreover, it has caused also an inevitable alienation and estrangement of a significant section of the population living on the preserved $\frac{1}{10}$ of their Motherland (Republic of Armenia - RA, Republic of Mountainous Karabagh - RMG, from 2017 - the Republic of Artsakh - AR).

¹ Irina Bokova - the general director of UNESCO has qualified the actions of the “Islamic State” as a form of “cultural cleansing”) UNESCO seeks to save Jewish sites from Islamic State’s claws. 2014, December 1, <https://goo.gl/8USF9H>).

In fact, a 100 years after the Armenian Genocide and the Homeland-deprivation of the Western Armenians and particularly following the World War II, the radical processes occurring in the Near and Middle East countries have, as a result of periodic and continual wars, already led and are intended to lead, to the annihilation and the expatriation of the native and hetero-ethnic peoples of the region, as it happened with regard to the Armenians a century ago.

Started with the terrorist attacks launched in the USA on September 11, 2001, the successive destructive terrorist wars, the civil clashes, the coups realized with identical scenarios have had and continue to have their irreversible consequences on the Armenian communities (Iraq [2003, March 20 - 2007, May; 2008 to date], Egypt [2011, January 25 - 2013, July 3], Syria [2011, March 15 to date]), which had greatly increased in number following World War I, as a result of the Genocide perpetrated against the Armenians, the survivors of the pogrom having found refuge in those countries.

It is no mere chance that the descendants of the rescued survivors of the Armenians subjected to the first Genocide and Homeland-deprivation in their historical cradle, in Western Armenia, Cilicia, as well as in the Armenian-inhabited provinces of the Ottoman Empire by the same patrons of the world criminal powers continue to undergo the attacks, the ravages and the deportations of the genocidal terrorists now on the one-time host Arab land, the Near and Middle East countries, where their ancestors had formerly taken refuge.



Political map of Syria

As a consequence of the protracted and devastating war launched by the terrorist forces in 2011, thousands of Armenian-Syrians have taken shelter in other countries (Lebanon, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, the USA, Canada, Sweden, etc.) also in the Motherland, in the Republics of Armenia and Artsakh.

Simultaneously, as a result of the immigration Quota privileges² (to the USA, Canada, European countries, Australia and others), assigned mainly to the Christian refugees by the Immigration Services of the Western countries, more and more Armenian generations chiefly from “Armenian-preserved” Eastern countries are sacrificed to the “Melting Pot” of the West.

Due to **historical-political** *objective* and *subjective* circumstances the Armenian people both **in the Diaspora** (communal organizations) and **in Armenia** (authorities) were, on the whole, unprepared for the radical crisis of the Diasporan communities, especially, of the largest Armenian community of the Near East, Syria, and to show hospitality to the tens of thousands Armenian refugees.

Thus, the ***national organizations of the Armenian community of Syria*** (both dioceses: the second by its size - the Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia, the Diocese of Perio, and that subject to the Mother See of Edjmiadsin in Damascus), as

² Thus, during the Syrian war, when the Armenians and the Armenian community organizations started to become targets of attack, some Armenian-American public figures have appealed to the US appropriate structures with a proposal to reconsidering the quota assigned to the Armenians in the country's immigration programs. On November 11, 2012, the US government, responding to the appeal of four prominent Armenian-American lawyers, has reconsidered the former resolution of the Homeland Security Department of the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to grant the Armenian-Syrians merely a “Temporary Protected Status” (TPS) and has permitted to issue for them “Visa Waivers”. The said resolution stated: “Due to the violent upheaval and deteriorating situation in (Syria) USCIS announced that eligible Syrian nationals ... in the United States may apply for Temporary Protected Status (TPS).” Alluding to the bombing of the St. George Armenian Church in Aleppo, as well as to the kidnappings (seven in number) of Armenians in the Beirut-Aleppo route bus, the Former Assistant Director of ACTION/Peace Corps, the well-known lawyer Vardges Yeghiayan Esq., and the Former Mayor of Pasadena, William Paparian Esq., had applied, on October 12, 2012, to the US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, and to the Homeland Security Secretary, Janet Napolitano, expressing their concern about the fate of the beleaguered Christian citizens in Syria: “The fighting there [in Syria] has engulfed large portions of the country and has made the already precarious position of Christians even more untenable. It is precisely because we feel the current legislation, including the extension of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) to Syrian nationals, is insufficient in addressing the deteriorating humanitarian situation that we turned to the United States government.” Before long, their innumerable friends and relatives from the USA and elsewhere expressed their readiness to assist the US government to ensure facilities to the Syrian-Armenians for their entry to the USA. According to William Paparian's assertion, they will continue “to press the US Government to take immediate action to alleviate the suffering of Christians in Syria and will immediately advise the Syrian Armenian community and their family and friends of further developments” [US Government Responds to Prominent Armenian-American Lawyers Call upon US Government to Issue Visa Waivers for Syrian-Armenians. Center for Armenian Remembrance. Press Release. 2012, November 12, <<http://www.centerarnews.com/>>]. Whereas, the Diasporan Armenians should have displayed unanimity in order that the transfer and the accommodation of our compatriots from war-ruined Syria would have been realized in the Republics of Armenia and Artsakh (Mountainous Karabagh), concurrently with the activities of the local authorities, and not in the USA, as well as a substantial material aid should have been offered to our Diasporan compatriots to ensure their transportation to the Motherland, their lodging and their employment, and not to the US government, and for settling them in the US.

well as the authorities of the political-party and national-communal organizations were not prepared to the war situation, although, being the witness and well-informed about the proceeding military-political developments in the Near and Middle East countries, particularly following the World War II (Palestine, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Iran, etc.), they had to do their utmost to objectively foresee the inevitability of the ripening military outcome and its devastating consequences on the Armenian community. Therefore, as the communal organizations of the “Mother community,” it was necessary that they could, thus far, reconsider the pan-Diasporan and, particularly, the communal priorities (passive Armenian-preservation, to maintain, at any cost, the community even at the price of human lives, to establish “homelands” in foreign countries, even under machine-gun fire).

The communal and, generally, the pan-communal organizations responsible for the vital activity of the Armenians of Syria (on the eve of the war there was a fairly-well organized Armenian community in Syria numbering about 80 thousand people, the greatest part of which, around 60 thousand people, lived in Aleppo³), who had the one-time historical experience of the classical Armenian communities (India, Poland, the Netherlands, etc.), created by the statehood-deprived Armenians, should consider Syria as a provisional and unpromising haven. Moreover, following the crumbling of USSR and the factual termination of the “Cold War,” these organizations (and the Diaspora, in general), although cultivating multilateral state-political and social-economic relations with the Republic of Armenia (which is free and independent since 1991 and, with the proclamation of the Republic of Mountainous Karabagh - Republic of Artsakh, is in the process of becoming also united), nevertheless they were, based on *subjective* motives, and still are interested in preserving the “Mother community” of the Near East (enlarged in number as a result of the Armenian Genocide) even in the ruins⁴.

Whereas, ***Eastern Armenia***, especially after its unification with Russia (Armenian Province - 1828-1840, Yerevan District - 1840-1849, Yerevan State (Erivan Governorate) - 1849-1918), and the more so during the whole 20th century (First Republic of Armenia - 1918-1920, Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic - 1920-1991 and the Republic of Armenia - 1991 to date) has been and continues to be an *objective* refuge of immigration and repatriation (individual, organized and massive) even if these migratory processes are realized under difficult historical-political and social-economic conditions.

As a consequence of subjective motives, it is natural that Armenia, confronting social-economic and military-political hardships, would be unprepared to receive such a huge number of its compatriots displaced by reason of a similar dreadful calamity. Nonetheless, in contrast to the experience gained in Armenia with our compatriots displaced as a result of the Iraqi war, the assistance shown to the Armenian-Syrians

³ Pashayan Araks, Instability in Syria, «Globus. Energetic and regional security”, n.3, 2011, May 31 <https://goo.gl/rzfsxT> (in Arm.); Galstyan Hrant, Syrian Armenians. return which was not considered, June 3, 2015 <https://goo.gl/bozXio> (in Arm.).

⁴ To recovery. Appeal of Aram I to Armenian people from alarmed Aleppo, January 9, 2017, <https://goo.gl/sqnoNV>.

had a more organized and coordinated course thanks to the Ministry of the Diaspora of the Republic of Armenia, created in 2008 (Minister: Hranoush Hakobyan). Making use of the corresponding governmental levers, the Ministry together with the national and Diasporan (including Syrian-Armenian) public and benevolent organizations exerted and continue to exert great efforts (coordinated also with a few international bodies) to facilitate, with all possible means the process of putting up and settling of the Syrian-Armenians in the Motherland.

So that, the crisis of the Armenian community of Syria has been, since the foundation of the Ministry of the Diaspora of the Republic of Armenia, the first serious and trying experience in the evaluation of the efficiency of the cooperation between Armenia and the Diaspora and the involvement of the Motherland in the Armenian-Syrian problem.

The crisis of the Armenian community of Syria was an experience also from the point of view of examining the ideological-psychological readiness of the mutual understanding, cooperation and coexistence between the two segments of the Armenian people since the periodical repatriation programs realized in Armenia in the Soviet period.



St. Martyrs' Armenian Church of Deir-ez-Zor exploded by the Islamic terrorists on September 21, 2014 (the date was chosen not by accident: the day of the proclamation of the Independence of the Third Republic of Armenia)

Based on **ideological - political** objective and subjective motives, the Armenian people both **in the Diaspora** and **in Armenia** are, from the viewpoint of being repatriated and receiving repatriates, on different planes of national readiness.

Thus, for the Armenian's from **Syria**, who had, at one time, visited or been educated or engaged in various occupations (personal, scientific, business, etc.) in Armenia and thereby being familiar with the linguistic peculiarities

(also with Russian language), mode of life, customs and habits and other behavioral features of Armenia, it was objectively easy to make a decision to be repatriated to Armenia long before the beginning of the hostilities in their country or at their outbreak.

In contrast, for a certain number of people, who had taken refuge ("involuntary repatriates") in the Motherland by reason of the intensification of the hostilities in Syria in the subsequent years, Armenia was considered and can still be considered as a provisional shelter and transit place to move to either other countries (Europe, USA,

Australia, Eastern countries) or to return back to Syria, something, which has subjective motives (lack of desire to accommodate themselves to Armenia's environment, to the social-economic hardships of Armenia, to the military-political complications, to the peculiarities of the Eastern-Armenian linguistic thinking, also the Russian language, being unfamiliar with the lifestyle, customs and habits, other cultural and behavioral features or feeling alienated to them).

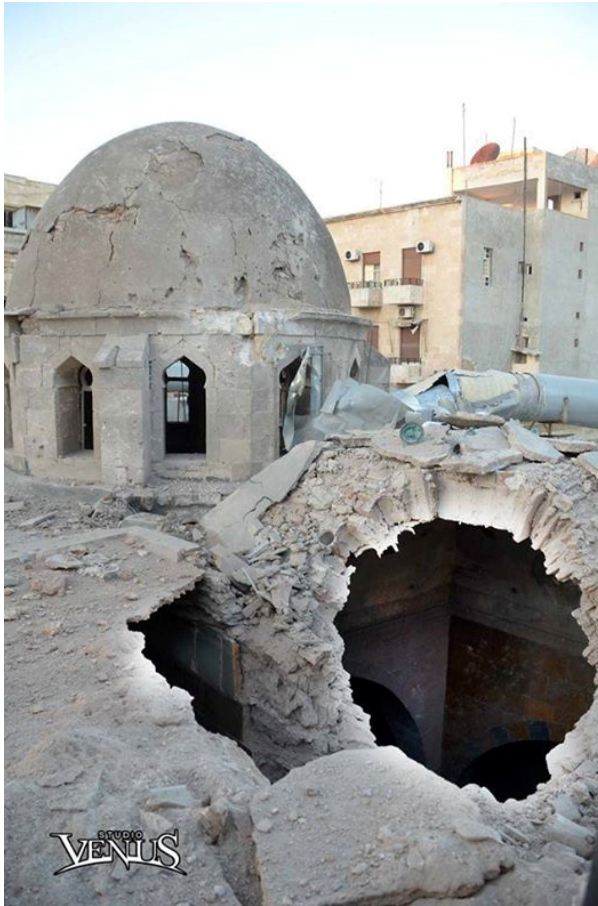
Whereas the citizens of ***independent Armenia*** in general (with a few negligible exceptions) have displayed and are displaying now a tolerant behavior toward our compatriots from Syria, which is the consequence of objective factors (being familiar with the Western Armenian linguistic reasoning, as a result of periodic and individual repatriation events in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods, the utilization by some of the repatriates of Turkish, Arabic and other languages, their mode of life, customs and habits, being acquainted or familiar - in some cases also accustomed to or mastered – with their cultural and behavioral peculiarities).

Consequently, in the *subjective* perceptions of the majority of the population of the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Artsakh it is incomprehensible, that a certain segment of Diasporan Armenians are bargaining about the priorities for the large-scale investments in the Motherland, as well as the lack of preference and zeal toward the repatriation among a certain part of the “mostly-preserved” Armenians of the “Mother community,” Syria. Inasmuch as, Armenia is the main assembly place (Repatriation, the call “Come Home,” Home-Coming, Armenian-Assemblage) and habitation for the hundreds of thousands Armenians, who were scattered all over the world as a result of the Armenian Genocide. Moreover, Armenia has become free and independent since 1991 and, by the proclamation of the Republic of Artsakh, is on its way also to become united.

Formerly, the main obstacle for a certain section of the Diasporan Armenians in the relations with Armenia was the latter's forming part of the USSR; after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and a quarter of a century past, the new obstacles for those relations, which are now considered (basically by the same group of people) are Armenia's social-economic hardships, the political situation in Artsakh, the peculiarities of the Eastern Armenian linguistic thinking, as well as the use of the Russian language, etc.

Moreover, appeals to restore and to reestablish the national structures of the ruined (following the war) adopted country (“Syrian motherland”) are heard⁵, which have laid and will lay obstacles in the path of the pan-Diasporan efforts of the rebuilding of the real Homeland, as well as of the ideological-practical program of the utmost importance and actuality, the Armenian-Gathering.

⁵ Ibid.



St. Rita Tilel Armenian Catholic Church of Aleppo with the adjacent Eparchy bombed on April 28, 2015 (the date was chosen not by accident: the commemoration days of the 100th Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide)

The political-party segmental ideology, with some exceptions, unfortunately, nowadays again, tries to keep the diverse sections of the Diasporan society away from Armenia's efforts to join and to strengthen wholly our repatriate-compatriots from Syria, thereby hindering the Diaspora from the opportunity to unambiguously orient itself toward the Motherland, in some cases preferring to support the refugee Armenians to settle abroad, offering the new generation of Armenians of foreign countries the option to induce "(re)constructing" new "motherlands" in alien lands, which is a meaningless activity, devoid of prospects, whereas the Motherland - the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Artsakh need the unbargainable and entire assistance of their sons.

The situation is the same also in the other communities, where under the conditions of the development and expansion of similar (Syrian) or other events (which cannot be excluded in the course of time), the return to the Motherland and the assistance of repatriates to establish themselves there remains questionable, out of the pan-Diasporan priorities (we have the examples of Armenians departed and departing from Iraq, Egypt and Syria), meanwhile preference being given mainly to emigration to foreign lands, whereas the free and independent Motherland (which is on its way to become united as well, following the liberation of Artsakh),⁶ in some cases, is being regarded as a springboard or a transit place.

The present geo-political challenges should further promote the reevaluation of the pan-Diasporan priorities, in order to radically revise and reorganize, in a moral-psychological, ideological-practical sense, the communal life in the Diaspora. That epoch-making mission should resolutely and urgently be assumed both by the Diaspora with all its structures, the Armenian Church (Apostolic, Evangelical, Catholic), the national parties (Social Democrat Party - SDP Hunchakian, Armenian Revolutionary Federation – ARF Dashnaktsutyun, Armenian Democratic Liberal Party - ADLP

⁶ "Free, Independent and United Armenia" - the credo of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF - Dashnaktsutyun), proclaimed in 1919. See: Independent and United Armenia, <https://goo.gl/bTUEkT> (in Arm.).

Ramkavar), the pan-Armenian benevolent organizations, all the Diasporan unions and clubs, the Armenian mass media in Armenian and foreign languages (the press, radio, television, internet), the educational institutions and the Motherland Armenia (RA and AR) with its state, ecclesiastical, public and other levers, to guide and to coordinate all the joint efforts.

It is necessary that the organization of Armenia and the Diaspora reconsider, first of all, from the ideological viewpoint and with the help of their nationalist and patriot forces, the pan-national priorities in the world becoming insecure with every passing day, the perspectives of survival and set the subsequent tasks. It is important also to organize illuminative work in the Armenian communities with a pan-Armenian, pan-Diasporan everyday consistent activity, by means of publications, speeches, presentations, etc., representing the real geo-political situation, the universal developments and challenges, the dangers of degeneration and the transformation and mutilation of the Armenian identity as a consequence of assimilation and generation changes.

Otherwise, the Diaspora, as a collective body of national importance, with its aimless and inefficient "Armenian-preservation," is doomed to assimilation and disappearance under the constantly changing, rapidly globalizing geo-political conditions, ceaselessly facing new challenges.

Under the conditions of a precarious and unpromising future and the gradually threatening dangers in the Near and Middle East and the Western countries, in addition to the dreadful geo-political developments imperiling humanity and civilization, and a 100 years following the Armenian Genocide, it is advisable to ideologically and psychologically prepare those living in foreign lands and facing the danger of the maintenance of their physical existence and assimilation to make a transition from a century-old passive and inefficient, migratory and **dubious Armenian-preserving policy into a practical land-preserving policy**, into **Repatriation to the Native Country**. This idea implies that the Diaspora should be ideologically, physically and materially prepared and aimed exclusively at the Republic of Armenia and the Mountainous Karabakh - the Republic of Artsakh, liberated at the price of the blood of heroes, aimed at an unbargainable **massive and comprehensive Home-Coming**.

Translated from the Armenian by: **Tigran Tsoulikian**