

For the Establishment of the Diaspora Ministry



International
Center for
Human
Development

a Think Tank

Already anchored on an institutional basis

The time is ripe when the citizen of the Armenian Republic should extend a hand of support to his compatriots and fellow nationals anywhere in the world. It is time when each Armenian in the Diaspora should feel the state and the state care behind his back, be it about preservation of Armenianness, development of Armenians as a nation or in general, any national issue. Nowadays a lot is being said and written about this. The highest echelons sound this off, various conferences focus on the issue and a move from the talk to the walk is observed. Armenia already has a separate institution called to support its citizens and diasporans residing abroad. It is ready to stand next to the one who needs help and to act for addressing pan-Armenian issues. In fact, there is nothing negative about the institutionalization of any process. However, it is vital for this process to go right, otherwise it will result in the notorious scenario of “We wanted to make it better, but it worked out as usual.”

At the moment only a number of questions available

Like any other institution, the Ministry of Diaspora will soon have its statute, goals and missions, i.e. a sizeable ‘must do’ list. A large number of questions is highly probable here.

What kind of an agency there should be to ensure the interactions of different Diaspora communities all over the world, especially since the expectations might be very high? What should be its goals and objectives? What should be the functions and responsibilities? Eventually, the target of such an agency is neither Diaspora nor Armenia, but the Armenia-Diaspora relations that will benefit the Armenian.

How should this agency treat the differences within both the short-term and long-term goals? Should the intersecting goals be considered at all, for instance, Armenia’s goal of European integration and the issues of the European Diaspora?

Should the agency deal with the phenomenon of lobbying on issues of pan-Armenian concern and of individual Diaspora communities? Should it employ Track Two Diplomacy instruments or define concrete issues and present those to the agencies dealing with foreign affairs?

What structure should it have: regional or specialized?

Isn’t the mere copying of the “mini government” model, implying functions typical to one or the other special sphere, destined to inter-agency clashes and personalized relations? Eventually, in the result of applying such a model the most significant role of Diaspora-Armenia relations may get lost. The new agency may become a customer asking for concrete ‘products’ from various state agencies. Regional subdivisions of the agency can work as information-communication means, whereas the functional subdivisions should engage in policy development. Actually, in order for this to happen there should be a clear dividing line between the internal and external functions.

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The agency can become attractive and it may incite healthy curiosity if transparency is ensured for the Diaspora and simultaneously the Diaspora is made transparent for Armenia. The agency should work out internal instruments and clear procedures not to lose or leave out anyone. The methodological and procedural specifics of the work with concrete institutions (traditional institutions, community organizations, etc.) should be studied very closely. The issue of quality cadre should be crucial as well.

The bunch of working directions of the agency should include also the legal issues: Armenian communities are geographically widespread, each set in a different legal environment characterized with international instruments, bi- and multi-lateral relations, national legislation in foreign countries conducive to the protection of rights of Armenians and international commitments of the given country. In addition, the framework of legal issues includes regulation of Armenian legislation, specifically constitutional clauses, regulation of dual citizenship, realization of entry and exit rights, and organization of reintegration and readmission issues.

How should the financial issues of the agency be addressed and which should be the projects financed through the state budget? Some projects may require development of infrastructure: for instance, the organization of pilgrimage programs to homeland for young people under thirty, which will require existence of camps, inexpensive hostels and infrastructure. Regular communication between Armenia and Diaspora through information technologies and online distance learning require adequate connectivity, equipment and professional staff to provide quality service. Organization of an “Armenian census” requires financial resources and a common methodology. Creation and promotion of an “Armenian brand” requires intensive research and analyses, including marketing studies. Development of Diaspora studies implies formation of relevant educational-scientific potential. Projects aimed at improving Armenia’s international image are more complex and demand joint efforts of the Armenian government.

Instead of answers

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There is no reason to envy the pioneers of the Ministry of Diaspora and the writers of the concept papers on its statute and framework of activities. The list of “ifs” and “shoulds” is so long and the expectations are so high that the development of these documents essential for the activities of the agency can turn into quite a painful process. Realizing this, perhaps the civil society organizations should be the ones to extend a hand of assistance to such an important beginning. Anyway, it seems that the doors to the other side are not closed.

The paper is elaborated based on the opinions passed by the participants of the discussion “Current relations between Armenia and the Diaspora: development of future institutions”, which took place on July 25, 2008. The roundtable discussion was attended by independent analysts, government officials, and representatives of the international organizations. The round table was organized with the support of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation.