

How to “Defend” the Armenian Democracy?



International
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A debate between me and myself

At various international forums Armenian diplomats, state officials, journalists, representatives of the non-governmental and cultural sectors, etc., like it or not, often appear in the role of ambassadors of Armenia, or ones who have to represent her interests. It is not a secret that in majority of similar cases Azerbaijan is represented with a large delegation which as a rule well-prepared and often acts in unison with Turkey.

In such cases the one representing Armenia finds himself/herself in an ambivalent situation. On one hand, being concerned about the democratization and Europeanization of your country and being an advocate of freedom of speech, you tend to be open and critical, seeking for solutions. Thus, you abstain from presenting the reality through the rose-colored glasses. On the other hand, you notice that the more critical you are to the issues in your country, the more these issues are being manipulated by your neighbors (and mind it, manipulations against Armenia), transforming any discussion aimed at promotion of internal developments into an anti-Armenian propaganda. Let's agree: this is the reality and this reality often compels Armenian participants of international forums to face an internal choice.

It's going to be hot...

After April 2008 you live in a different Armenia; at least it is thus perceived both in the country and outside. If during the March events everybody was silently following the evolvement of these vary events, now it is time to discuss, analyze and evaluate the recent events and in general, the present of the Armenian democracy at all possible levels.

There is no need to constrain even the severest castigations inside the country. Just the opposite. However, while abroad, the government and the opposition, as well as anyone representing the civil society will suffer serious apprehension. The description of this situation by a civil society representative is quite lucid: "While engaging with international organizations you always have to tell the truth if you are a decent person. However, when you do, you feel bad about it."

Thus, in such situations the question addressed to yourself will be the same for everyone: is there a limit to the possible?

To understand the goal

To answer this question you first have to find out what your goal is. It can vary. Goals can range from defending the honor of your country among the foreigners to teaching a lesson in Europe to your internal adversaries. Still, once you step up to a level higher, the real goals wave up in front of you and you understand that eventually your goal, as well as the goal of the whole society is to record positive changes in our country and therefore, blotting out anything is simply inane; it's virtually a disservice.

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If we want changes in our country, we should be able to talk freely of our fault lines, be it in the country or abroad. In the result of dissembling or mitigating the shortcomings, with time you will persuade yourself and the society that there are no problems, or even if there are, they are not as severe. However, you cannot afford such an outcome.

Thus, it does not matter whether you are a high rank official, an oppositional representative or a civic activist, whether you express your perspectives in Armenia or Strasbourg, your actions should be directed towards the recovery of the society and regaining faith for the victory of democracy; consequently attenuating the dark sides of the reality or defacing whatever positive exists cannot be on your agenda.

Eventually it is the strongest and the ones who are adamant to correct mistakes that are able to offer an excruciatingly rigorous self-criticism. Everybody knows this. Besides, no one slaps anyone who has challenged his/her own mistakes. On the contrary, the reaction is reflected in a hand extended for support. It is not a secret that until now Armenian delegations almost always have been compelled to take the role of one addressing criticism regarding the country in various international forums. Certainly, this is not a pleasant role and it seems that change in behavior is exigent.

Then what to do with Azerbaijanis? Actually, nothing. We simply need to be proactive and active when discussions start, strive for securing the rules of the game, clearly distinguish between the public and national interests, state that the discussions are in the domain of public interest and attempt to maintain the whole discussion solely within these framework. This is largely a technical issue and depends on the flexibility of the ones representing Armenia.

The paper is elaborated based on the opinions passed by the participants of the discussion "State of Democratic Institutions in Armenia", which took place on April 7, 2008. The roundtable discussion was attended by independent analysts, government officials, and representatives of the international organizations.