

A new opportunity for the Armenian diplomacy? Jewish curiosity with Armenia

The time of small fish

In nature both the big and the small have their unique significance and roles. Time and circumstances may value these roles differently. Since politics (no matter how distinct a discipline) still obeys the laws of nature, the time and the circumstances change the roles here as well and this time they have put one of the big – the USA – in a challenging situation in a small corner of this world, where the small are many, ancient and try to play in accordance with the new rules of the game, and the big are few - one or two - ancient and as big ones feel like they have the right to play with their own rules of the game. It is not the best time for the American diplomacy in this region: on one hand there is gradually accruing tension with Iran, on the other hand, worsening relations with a former ally, Turkey. Moreover, the situation is charged with a number of “petty” issues, for instance, with the conflicts in the Caucasus, the integrity of which considerably complicates the regulation of more serious challenges. Now the US tries to disentangle this knot, which is tangled to the extent that one is remained with the only option of trying and trying, in order to see where the right end of the thread is that will allow untying the knot. Here is one of the attempts: to understand what the small ones – Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia – want from the big one holding crucial importance for the US, namely Turkey. Now it is time for us in Armenia to speak up and for them to listen to what we have to say. We are to say what we need from the powerful and what we can offer instead. And! We are going to be heard by one of the most significant players in this region and the US, the Jewish community.

What we want and what we can offer

It seems we are aware of both our issues and assets.

Issues:

- Nagorno Karabakh conflict, breached relations with Azerbaijan,
- 1915 Genocide, breached relations with Turkey.

Assets:

- Knowledge of Iran and mutually positive relations,
- Knowledge of Russia and mutually positive relations,
- Georgia: knowledge of each other, ancient relations, which at times become extremely strained and other times, are visibly warm.

It appears that our wishes are not clear yet, specifically in terms of what we want from the US. What we want from them? Essentially, support with resolving our problems, in exchange of using our assets for their welfare. It should be mentioned that our issues are interconnected. For instance, in order to improve relations with Turkey, there are several obstacles that need

to be overcome. Some consider this obstacle to be the issue of Genocide recognition and the others believe it is the NKR conflict. We say, “Let’s open the borders, then we’ll talk of the problems”. They respond, “No, opening the border is the end game. It can’t be the beginning of the process.”

Next, we are almost certain that the perception of the NKR conflict abroad is faulty. Outside the region they see it as either a territorial or ethnic conflict. Some others regard it as a conflict about self-determination. Whereas here, except all the above-mentioned, the NKR conflict is viewed also as a significant axis around each the modern political identities of the two countries - Armenia and Azerbaijan – have been built. Perhaps it is this very factor which makes any possible resolution extremely complicated, since any resolution may be regarded as a blow to these identities. It is exactly at this point where our wishes diverge. We want status quo, simultaneously expecting the assistance of the international community in ensuring security of the region, which implies a solution.

The same picture holds true for relations with Turkey. Our wishes again lack clarity. A part of us is ready to start from square one – restarting relations without any preconditions. Another part believes that we can ask the US or Israel to mediate a process of developing relations with the emerging political elite in Turkey which seems to be qualitatively different, without necessarily giving up our claims.

Regardless of the probability of support, we are willing to offer our assets to the US to improve its relations in the region. Since at the moment it is the US-Iran relations that may be described as critical, we are ready to neutralize the possibility of military actions in the region, offering a bridge for knowledge of each other. Today the diplomatic and political relations may impede the process of mutual learning. However, Armenia is ready to mediate any Track Two diplomacy actions through providing neutral and knowledgeable forum.

Do we make a correct assessment of our role in the given period and circumstances?
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The question is incomplete, because the “now” and the “given circumstances” are variables which should serve the goal of establishing a strong and respectable state, whereas we are yet to clarify our wishes and do so based on constants, not variables. Certainly, this should not prevent us from action. However, we should not put off a brain exercise: where do we see Armenia in the future and does each step we make bring us closer of moves us away from our vision? It is urgent to engage in discussion of the vision for the Armenian diplomacy in various Armenian forums, and the next time move forward with unanimous wishes and suggestions.

The paper is elaborated based on the opinions passed by the participants of the round table “Current Face of Armenia’s Foreign Policy: A look from the US”, which took place on May 28, 2008. The roundtable discussion was attended by independent analysts, government officials, and representatives of the international organizations.