

Gender equality in the frontline of challenges for sovereignty of the people of Armenia



International
Center for
Human
Development

a Think Tank

*A death fight against you is what
it takes to mould a live of
nobility,*

We were told...

A spectre is haunting Armenia – the spectre of the 11th Red Army

In the spring and summer of 2013, prior to pre-signing an Association Agreement between the European Union and Armenia, Russia intensified its pressure on the Armenian society and the government. The pressure to make Armenia reject the direction of European integration, crowned in the meeting of the two presidents on September 3rd when the northern superpower made such an insistent offer to its Armenian counterpart that the latter was unable to refuse. In parallel with the political, military and economic pressures, the Armenian society appeared also within the impact range of the new instruments the Russian foreign policy has started to employ in full force; instruments that exploit issues such as family, gender, sexual, ethnic and religious minorities. This new inventory has been piloted and applied mainly to the internal political and social life of Russia, and its main goal is to divide and split; distract a civil society in its naissance from the most significant social, political and economic issues; impede coalescence of the social-political thought; fraction the society into adversarial “us” and “them”; and debase western liberal values in juxtaposition with the ones flavoured in the familiar sauce of “traditionalism”.

The old sickle in the hands of the new “fathers of the nation”

The inventory that was used in Armenia was developed on the best traditions of the strategy “Divide and rule”, and expertly manipulates the images of “the enemies of the people” and the “external enemy”. It was used by the “agents of influence”, including either the support or silence of the political powers and parties with large economic interests, contradicting Armenia’s interest in European integration; think tanks and research institutes under their auspices; individual politicians and NGOs, which often did not even shun engaging teenagers in the process. It was used through traditional media, active specifically in social networks and present in the range of public influence, which vehemently exploited insufficient awareness of many in the Armenian society. It was personalized, and without much thought, it targeted and labelled those much respected in the society. It inseminated xenophobia and misanthropy, intolerance and hostility. It was implemented without a slightest attempt to localize it, often without even translating materials from a foreign language, usually Russian.

This inventory was used with a conviction that they deal with a society that is often insufficiently aware of family and social issues, including gender issues; a society and individuals that have embraced traditional paternalism and patriarchal conservatism. However, they have forgotten that they deal with a nation that has been a victim of xenophobia and genocide; that has developed genetic immunity to the very xenophobia and misanthropy; and has since eradicated these abhorring phenomena. They have forgotten that they do not deal with people diseased with imperial chauvinism and nourishing imperial illusions, but the one that has suffered from chauvinism for centuries and now tries to shape the future for its offspring on the small land it has been left with.



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Perhaps they did not even know that Armenians had adopted and legally ratified the principle of equality of women and men decades before either Russian, or Western social-political thought had embraced it. They were indeed ignorant of the fact that the Catholicos of All Armenians welcomed and blessed this principle in the days when the number of state officials and renowned social leaders who were aware of gender issues was quite few, when a letter from a guard to a minister was spellchecked, and 'gender' was corrected into 'tender' with a certainty that it was a typo.

The Armenian crayfish

Still, the first hit of the blow meant to draw dividing lines within the Armenian society surprised many. They swallowed the pills poisoned with the fake coat of fundamental values that Armenians cherish dearly: family, children, and faith. An educated engineer and a financier, a student and a doctor, a janitor and a policeman, a pensioner and a minister, many indeed, regardless of their educational and professional background, caught the bait in the beginning, without suspecting that there is anything wrong about this.

In the absence of a tough and uncompromising response from the responsible state agencies to the propaganda of xenophobia and racism, debasement of the dignity of respected individuals and even explicit threats towards them; and in an environment where political powers involved in the exercise of external influence were promptly and willingly providing their feedback, the issue of revising the newly adopted "Law on ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women and men" appeared on the agenda of the country's internal policy. This achievement, which only a month ago allowed Armenian state agencies and NGOs to feel proud on various international arenas, was shortly at risk. Indeed, a step forward in Armenian political, economic and social realities is often followed by two steps backwards. Much like in the process of European integration, we witness presently the same logic in the processes of ensuring real tangible equality of sexes.

"To clear the sky, and brighten the sun, winds of October, lead the run..."

The profoundly regressive process characterised by political manipulations aimed at diverting the Armenian society from the European direction continues, though it seems that after the forced political statement made by the Armenian authorities in early September, it has weakened, if only for a time being. It is high time to summarise the developments of the recent months. It is indeed the painful time to gather the stones. Implications seem clear. First, it is obvious that there is a need for further strengthening of globally human values in the Armenian society, values that have been shaped under the significant influence of the Armenian political, social and spiritual thought; values which we claimed as ours, before they became global; values, which unfortunately, are endangered: an alien is showing us a distorted reflection of our values in a crooked mirror, thus shadowing the genuine ones, and does so through our compatriot. They act against the family, children and faith in the very name of these values. Many are involved without properly realising their own share of responsibility in this devastating process, much like many talented Armenians who, enchanted by the principles of freedom, equality and fraternity at the second decade of the 20th century, failed to detect the hand behind these sublime ideas, the only goal of which was to enslave Armenia and enchain the Armenian, the main weapon of which was the sickle that made everyone equal before death and dictatorship, which turned the treasury of Armenian thought, soul and faith into a fraternal cemetery.

The Armenians and Diasporans engaged in the neo-Bolshevik process either do not know, or do not realise the value of the lessons learnt from their own history. It is necessary to voice out these issues, as their importance should not be underestimated, or rather should equal to the significance of contemporary arms. We need the power of the Armenian thought, spirit and faith. We have overlooked the moment when the enemy of our values has penetrated our spiritual and intellectual space. It is already several months that the battles are fought on our own land, in the hearts and minds of our children, sisters and brothers. At the war of values even the missile guidance systems are useless. We need the forceful word and thought of the Armenian intellectuals, politicians caring about the strength of the state and the Armenian clergy. We need to push back the darkness of ignorance into the cave, and throw the bile of xenophobia and misanthropy behind the bars. We need to do this fast, before the adversaries and enemies who are happy that the Armenian statehood and the Armenian nation are facing numerous challenges and who are ready to exploit those any moment, have managed to attach the stigma of racism to a whole country and society. The more a

clear and harsh feedback is slows down, the greater the possibility of presenting Armenia in an unfavourable light in various monitoring reports, which will divert the country from the direction of civilization even more and will push it towards the mire of slaving for another.

“When you get tired of and cross with the world...”

It was not only the Armenian state agencies, non-governmental organizations and various political powers that failed to address the threats towards global values, human rights and European integration of Armenia in a proper and timely manner, but also the institutions that represent European values and institutions in Armenia. Even if there was any feedback, it was mainly fragmented. For instance, though late, the issue was addressed by the Gender Thematic Group, which is co-chaired by UNICEF and OSCE. Unfortunately, the Delegation of the European Union to Armenia did not respond to this crucial issue in robust way, whereas its role could have been essential for promoting the successive steps undertaken by the Armenian authorities. Alas, the much acclaimed political dialogue between the Armenian government and the EU institutions does not always withstand serious challenges, especially in the times crucial for Armenia and the Armenian society.

For the sovereignty of the spirit, freedom of thought and future of generations

- There is a need to use the existing strong public resonance to educate the society on the equal rights and opportunities of women and men, to unite the public over this principle, to erase the dividing lines and to bridge the current gaps. The power of Armenian identity is in our multifarious and multiform existential nature. Any initiative towards depriving the Armenian identity of its diversity, of imposing any reductionist image of a ‘right’ Armenian and ‘correct’ Armenianness, and thereby limiting or repudiating any other expressions of Armenianness, should be eliminated at the root, as a most serious challenge to the security of the Armenian nation;
- We need to refuse any ‘dialog’ with people promulgating racism and xenophobia. There can be no dialog with the ‘front lines’ of the 5th column who feed to the political interests of the others through attacking Armenian values, and thus restricting the sovereignty of the Armenian people, as there can be no dialog with anyone denying the fact of Genocide and its consequences. Instead, we should unveil the goals of destroying a nation, hidden under the distorted shroud of family, children and spiritual values. We need to do so by engaging into the process the social, political, cultural, state and most importantly, religious leaders who have significant impact on the public opinion, as this will help to identify the immediate and explicit connection of the mentioned issues with the risks the sovereignty of Armenia is facing;
- It is necessary to consistently demand from the law enforcement agencies to respond to xenophobic and racist behaviour, including any violation and threat towards libelled individuals and organizations, immediately, applying full force of the law. Obvious fascist actions should be responded by the most solid legal arsenal available. In case relevant state agencies linger with adequate response, it is necessary to include these serious concerns in national reports on current developments regarding the protection of fundamental human rights in Armenia, and in order to compile these reports, it is necessary to organize and implement consistent monitoring activities, paying attention specifically to the more aggressive actions against human rights; their perpetrators, and those officials and state institutions which will have procrastinated an adequate response by their silence. It is necessary to root out the approach that ‘the survival of the drowning is their own business’, and that the individuals and organizations that have been victims of most aggressive attacks, or targets for threats and libelling should take the responsibility for securing their dignity, honour, and even physical safety. The Armenian people have established and defended their statehood with a profound understanding of their core values and of collective responsibility for ensuring the security of the civilized future of their children. Whereas the above-mentioned approach compromises the foundation of the statehood. Any and each humiliation of public values and violation of the constitutional rights of the citizens should entail an adequate official reaction;

- In parallel, government agencies and officials that are most unswerving in contributing to the consistent implementation of state policies ratified in several important strategic documents should be rewarded; policies which determine the priorities of ensuring the security and development of the country and the society, protecting human rights, and the equal rights and opportunities for women and men. We need to support these officials and agencies, stand by their side. It is necessary to demand for the clear position of the senior political leadership regarding these issues;
- It is necessary to call upon the UN and EU institutions and officials for immediately responding to these issues, clearly stating their positions for both the RA government and the society. We should demand from the embassies of EU member states to discuss the necessity of restricting entry to EU countries of those who have been involved in racist actions, have publicly spoken against human rights. This refers to both common individuals and more public figures, including state officials, NGO representatives and politicians. These restrictions need to apply both to official and personal visits. Such an action may become a signal for the Armenian society about the determination of the European partners when it comes to the protection of human rights and the global and European civilization values.

The paper is elaborated based on the opinions passed by the participants of the discussion “Gender equality issues”, which took place on 7 October, 2013. The roundtable discussion was attended by independent analysts, government officials, and representatives of the international organizations.

The round table was organized within the framework of a BSPN project.