

Artsakh Forum of the Future Armenian Growing Population in Artsakh Program directions

On May 22, 2022 **Artsakh Forum of the Future Armenian was held in Stepanakert, the capital of the Republic of Artsakh, on the topic of “Growing population in Artsakh”.**

To prepare for the forum, an inclusive group of leading Armenian experts in the field of demography held a number of meetings and discussions during the month ahead to develop and formulate recommendations based on various scenarios. These recommendations were submitted for discussion of the participants of the Artsakh Forum and for the final decision.

During the almost 5- 6-hour long discussions of the Artsakh Forum, about 620 policy observations of participants were recorded by professional note-takers. The summary of the discussion material and observations in the form of a specific program outline has the following picture. It can serve as a comprehensive package of actions for the relevant state bodies, Armenian organizations and departments, business circles of Armenia and the Diaspora in order to implement these instructions through joint and coordinated efforts.

The recommendations are presented in descending order of weighted average voting points.

“We Stay in Artsakh”

4.6 points (out of 5)

- *I told my only son, if we are here today, it means that our grandfathers and great-grandfathers stayed here, thus we must continue the same. The priority is to keep the people living in Artsakh in the country.*
- *After the war, the structure of the economy changed. It is necessary to study in which direction would be right to develop.*
- *The children must be brought up properly, it must be thought that every family leaving its village or house, by that action, hands over the piece of Artsakh entrusted to them. I am Artsakh, I am the state, I am the homeland.*

The idea of “We Stay in Artsakh” movement received the most support from the participants. The main directions of the idea are:

1. decent living of the existing population,
2. housing and work for everyone,
3. definite social guarantees for large families,
4. strong system of education and advocacy (propaganda).

The people of Artsakh emphasize that the program should give importance to the spiritual and ideological component, of course, without ignoring the directions of improving living conditions and launching various incentives. Certainly, the role of state policy is essential in the implementation of such complex program. Nevertheless, the combined small programs from Armenians of the world can also be crucial especially in directions (2) “housing and work for everyone” and (4) “strong system of education and advocacy”.

“Not leaving the people of Artsakh alone”

4.3 points (out of 5)

- *A significant part of the large events held in Armenia can be moved to Artsakh. See how much this discussion today has changed our lives.*
- *It would be very good if the tourism companies operating in Armenia trained specialists in Artsakh and worked actively with them to turn Artsakh into a possible tourist destination.*
- *If people are going to come here to take pictures and say they are not leaving the people of Artsakh alone, this will only be PR.*
- *Tumo's example is very good, when specialists not only from Yerevan, but also from abroad come to Artsakh for master classes and stay here for a month. This is one of the brilliant examples of not leaving the people of Artsakh alone.*

This initiative is based on the belief that the constant presence of Armenians from the motherland and the Diaspora on the streets of villages and towns in Artsakh is important not only economically, but also in combating feelings of loneliness or abandonment. *“It is important for the people of Artsakh to feel that they are not alone. This means that people come and be present here physically,”* said one of the participants in the discussion. Working with travel companies, creating noteworthy visitor packages, planning regular educational and cultural trips for Armenian universities and colleges, and complex campaigning can change a great deal in the field of Artsakh tourism. The targeted work with the leading travel companies of Armenia can give a noticeable result in the activity of the villages and towns and, in general, in the promotion of economic development, in the creation of jobs in Artsakh.

Creating a system affecting the moods of people

4.2 points (out of 5)

- *We need to develop self-organization mechanisms for all situations. Even organizations have strategies to respond to different situations, a similar document should be developed for the country.*
- *The accurate psychological work must be done to form an adequate mentality in the society,. The society must be treated first, and the atmosphere must be healed.*

- *A person cannot be forced to have many children. It requires hard work and creation of an atmosphere where people themselves would want to have many children. Propaganda is very important in the public and media. The foundations of everything start from here.*

In order not to seriously endanger the demographic picture in various security environments, one should always be prepared and create appropriate structures. It's a job we have to do non-stop. Preparing for more complex scenarios will obviously require the development of tools on people's emotionality, on inclination to emigrate, on influencing citizen's behavior, **on establishment of an institutionalized risk management system that influences the moods of people with family or emigration problems**, that must be done first of all at the state level. But, obviously, pan-Armenian collective and targeted programs with Artsakh NGOs, media and cultural figures can have a significant impact. *Moreover, one of the participants of the Artsakh forum even suggested setting up a special demographic risk management center with the ability to implement analytical, advocacy and micro- projects.*

“Return to Artsakh”

4.0 points (out of 5)

- *The displaced people of Hadrut are experiencing psychological stress simply from the fact that they do not have a plot of land to cultivate near their homes. Even providing a small plot of land near the house can be a good incentive to return them to Artsakh.*
- *There are perspective directions in agriculture: greenhouses, alternative meat, (i.e. rabbit) production. We must develop these directions, as grain is already difficult to cultivate.*
- *The main incentive to return to Artsakh is to solve the security issue.*

After the 44-day war, 141 out of 242 communities of Artsakh remained, and many citizens who lost their houses left Artsakh. There is an opinion that promoting their return should be the priority of demographic policy. From this point of view, first of all, the development and implementation of the **“Return to Artsakh”** or **“We are Going Home”** complex program aimed at the return of the population of Shushi, Hadrut and other settlements lost during the war can yield effective results. The idea is that such an initiative should be implemented through the joint efforts of Artsakh, Armenia and all Armenians, assuming not only advocacy (propaganda), spiritual tools, but also the creation of new, real living conditions in Artsakh. The registration of those who left Artsakh, the assessment of their needs, the elaboration of conditions for their return to Artsakh, the family-to-family negotiations and the creation of a corresponding public atmosphere are feasible programs that can provide quick results.

Promotion of Artsakh branding

3.9 points (out of 5)

- *Artsakh has many brands to present, but all that must be organized and presented in the world both at the state level and through the efforts of the Diaspora.*
- *First we have to understand what we want to present, then we have to think about branding, presentation.*
- *For example, Korea and Turkey spread their story through popular soap operas, presenting it in a way that suits them. We must also be able to show Artsakh, the struggling type of mind, the type of free man.*

We need to think about raising the visibility of Artsakh, Artsakh identity in Armenia and in the world. The promotion of Artsakh brand, the continuous spread of the name “Artsakh” can keep Artsakh and its people in the center of the world’s attention. First of all, it increases the level of security, raises popular pride, tightens ties to one’s own home and homeland. In general, we must develop the “concept of civic nationalism” when the pride of being an Artsakh citizen and living in Artsakh is in a good way above any alternative. This is a tried and tested way of avoiding all possible difficulties. In the case of a combination of efforts, this can be a rewarding endeavor.

Formation of “communes”

3.3 points (out of 5)

- *There should be an increase in the number of community development programs. If the communities stay and get stronger, the rest will stay and get stronger.*
- *Many problems can be solved at the community level, the Armenians of Artsakh may be ready for bigger challenges with a higher level of self-organization.*
- *With community-communes we further isolate communities from each other.*

The formation of so-called “**community-communes**” in complex security environments can give flexibility to Artsakh, when individual communities, under appropriate conditions, become self-preserving and self-developing, independently solving the problems of preservation of the Armenian identity, population growth and social justice. We speak about becoming more self-sufficient communities, where people create together, share goods, are ready to defend themselves, their language, their values, their religion, to develop themselves, regardless of whether there is state or other support or not. The implementation of the Pan-Armenian Community Strengthening Program in Artsakh can create new opportunities to increase Artsakh’s potential to meet different types of challenges.

“Godfathering” of communities

3.2 points (out of 5)

- *I liked the idea of godfathering, both from an emotional point of view and in terms of competition. It will benefit the communities, they will develop dramatically.*
- *Today Vank village is one of the brightest villages thanks to Levon Hayrapetyan. He has built it up, but we need those who continue that work, that is, the application of an institutional approach.*
- *The patronage idea is still short-term. Once investments are made, we should also teach how to maintain those.*

The experts suggested that each community in Artsakh be “strengthened” with one of the Diaspora centers or one of the communities in Armenia, or brought under the auspices of wealthy Armenian bars. This will allow communities to always get “fresh air” through a separate pipe, gaining some resilience to address demographic and development issues. **“Every community must have a “godfather”** in order to connect with the world and increase the number of its people,” the experts described their proposal, predicting a “godfather competition” and competitive community development. Moreover, if the sponsor of a community is, say, the Armenians of Rostov-on-Don or Thessaloniki, or a well-known benefactor, then some families must move to live in that community in Artsakh, becoming a bridge for that cooperation. Let us remind that for example Tatul Krpeyan in 1990 in September, went to work as a history teacher at Getashen school. This initiative was the most discussed in the Artsakh forum, but the people of Artsakh could not completely see the achievability of this program.

