



**CONVENTION OF
THE FUTURE ARMENIAN**

10-12 MARCH 2023

Yerevan

ARMENIA-DIASPORA UNITY

Framing question:

How can we build a strong and effective system of Armenia-Diaspora relations based on shared principles and practical foundations?

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VIEWPOINT

**Armenians and the Armenian
Diaspora today**

Preface

Who are we?

The experts,¹ invited to discuss the issue of Armenia-Diaspora unity, considered it important primarily to discuss some fundamental issues related to common perception of the Armenia-Diaspora. The intention being that people could listen to each other, contemplate and in subsequent discussions be certain that there is harmony around the discussion table on basic perceptions.

- **How do we describe ourselves? Who is an Armenian in the 21st century?** Suggestions were made to start the discussion with this question.
- **How do we formulate patriotism? What about national solidarity?**
- **Who is a competitive Armenian?**
- **What is our idea of an attractive and powerful Armenia?**
- **What is a birthplace and what is a homeland? What is the difference?**

According to the experts, the answers to these questions will help the participants of the Convention make the search for solutions for Armenia-Diaspora unity easier.

What do we know about the Diaspora?

Experts from Armenia and the Diaspora agree that we have a serious lack of data on the Diaspora, and that it is necessary to carry out much work toward **creating databases on the Diaspora**. There even was a suggestion that work should be done with Google and other major companies that own and manage data.

According to experts on the Diaspora, the Diaspora is not some kind of representative institution. It cannot be monolithic by itself, and it has various issues. *“The unity of the Diaspora is an utopia,”* was voiced during the discussions. **The Diaspora is not one Diaspora**, and problems should be considered on the community level. *“I know of three different Diasporas.”*

1. **The Diaspora formed in the aftermath of the Armenian Genocide**, which, especially in the Middle East, has a marked tendency toward sovereign statehood and is very Armenian-centric. Of course, there are also Diaspora-centric circles here.
2. **Those who have emigrated from Armenia in the past 30 years**. For example, Armenians who came to Glendale, who have relatives, close friends, and other such strong ties to Armenia, but exceptionally weak ties in terms of statehood.

¹ The experts decided to use the option **“Armenia-Diaspora”** instead of **“Homeland-Diaspora”**, stressing that the term “Armenia” should be understood as **Armenia and Artsakh** together, while the term “Homeland” is much more abstract and contains other dimensions.

3. The “Third Diaspora” is the oldest. For example, for Boston’s Armenian community, where people have been **living for four or five generations**, being Armenian has nothing to do with Armenia. Instead, it is more connected to culture and cuisine.

In reality, the Diaspora consists of ordinary people driven by simple motivations. We have two groups: one, people who are motivated by personal interests and their livelihood; and two, people who value the state and feel an obligation towards it. Everyone is somewhat ready to be involved in the Pan-Armenian agenda.

During the Republic of Armenia’s more than 30 years of existence, the role and importance of the Diaspora have been great in almost all spheres. The most important **contribution of the Diaspora** to the economy and public life **has been and continues to be not just money, but also culture**. Even in the Soviet era the influx of Diaspora Armenians brought, for example, music that didn’t even exist in the USSR. Today the Diaspora continues its influence and investment with ideas, such as “TUMO”. And this is what we need to consider in the relationship paradigm.

What goals do we have?

According to experts, the ranking of the relative importance of goals for Armenians around the world looks like this:



Or simply put, we must be able to solve the issue of Strengthening Armenian identity everywhere. We must ensure our existence in a sovereign Armenia, and to do this we must be able to tackle the security issue, and to ensure security, we need economic empowerment. And to do all of it, we need unity.

What problems do we have?

Until today, as a rule, individuals, the Diaspora Armenian elite, participated in the formation of the Pan-Armenian agenda: we now lack **the platforms where the people will speak**. What's more, the Diaspora itself has a low level of institutionalization. Only 15% of the Diaspora is related to Armenian organizations, the main one being the Armenian Apostolic Church. The rest has nothing to do with Armenian structures.

Meanwhile, today in the Diaspora, **there is a serious crisis of confidence**, not only in the Armenian state, but also in the population. For example, the Western Diaspora noticeably does not trust residents of Armenia, and people in Armenia continue to treat the Diaspora in an “akhbar” manner, giving a negative connotation. *“I think it is important that we all call each other Armenians and try to build trust on that basis,”* suggested one of the experts. *“I’ve lived for a long time in the United States and Europe, and there is a serious trust issue there, also regarding whether the collected funds will reach Armenia.”*

In this context, the most important question remains: **What can be done? What concrete steps can be undertaken to close the trust gap between the Diaspora and Armenia, between Diaspora Armenians and residents of Armenia?**



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Armenia at the Center

Actuality

“Before, the Diaspora used to have a purpose: Hay Dat. That was what brought us together. Now we have lost that purpose. All our work and plans are means, but what is the end? We must shift the focus from the Strengthening Armenian identity to the protection of Armenia”, - following these words of one of the experts, the goal of Armenia-centrism became a separate branch of discussions in the Armenia-Diaspora Unity Expert Committee. **The formula “State + Armenia”** was quite widely included in these discussions and received a particularly remarkable formulation by one of the respected experts, later becoming a regularly quoted saying:

*“I see the Diaspora in the form of iron dust scattered on the table that we are trying to collect. **The Republic of Armenia should be the magnet** that brings everyone together. However, for this, there must be an infinitely reliable state. The Diaspora should not work on its own to carry out piecemeal projects in various sectors. How can we make the state zealous about attracting the Diaspora like a magnet? Also, how do we charge those iron particles?”*

According to some experts, we should admit that **today's Diaspora is not Armenia-centric**, and we should stop pretending that it is. According to the survey results, Armenia places only fourth in the interests of the Diaspora, and this fact should be considered. Although, it should be noted that, despite being in fourth place overall, Armenia is still present in everyone's answers.

Policy

“In my opinion, the most important issue we have today is the protection of Armenia's statehood. Excuse me, what Armenia-Diaspora can we talk about if there is no Armenia?” - with this observation, the idea that Armenia needs fresh blood, that is, **organizing a Great Immigration**, was put forward. It is clear that this is difficult to implement, but if we make this a priority, many other issues “automatically fall into place”: defense, economy, mentality, education, the state system. Armenia will change, and so will Artsakh, because without security for Artsakh, we will not be able to ensure Armenia's security. Let's remember that Soviet Armenia organized immigration at the state level three times, and that in Israel, the Ministry of Diaspora is today called the Ministry of Aliyah (Jewish immigration to Israel) and Integration.

The formula “State + Armenia” implies that the **logic of the state administration system** must be **changed**, which should thoroughly and rigorously take into consideration and think about the 10 million Armenians around the world instead of the 3 million Armenians in Armenia. In other words, any decision in any sphere should be considered through the prism of all Armenians. Everyone's way of working needs to be restructured based on that. According to the experts, the government of Artsakh is working on this idea to some extent.

A topic that gave birth to an intense discussion in this context is the political participation or non-participation of the Diaspora in the development of Armenia in various formats. **The need for constitutional changes**, which would lift restrictions on the Diaspora, was especially emphasized. *“We have six articles in our Constitution, which, for example, do not allow an Armenian who studied abroad and has dual citizenship to become a minister.”* We have no right to refuse the resource of the Diaspora. There are many countries where dual citizenship is not an obstacle. Not even in the United States. *“In fact, 75-80% of the potential of the Armenian people is in the Diaspora, where there are also Armenian citizens. How can we strengthen our state by giving up so many resources?”*

The topic of the integration and participation of the Diaspora in the political life of Armenia was then, discussed within the sphere of legislative power. Proponents of moving forward step by step suggested that we can first legally require the parties participating in the elections **to include representatives of the Diaspora in the candidates’ lists** at a certain proportion. And as the final stage of solving the issue, the **Bicameral Parliament model** was considered, where the Upper Chamber or the Senate is made up of representatives of the Diaspora. This idea has been circulating for a long time, and everyone understands the difficulties in implementing an election mechanism.

Another proposal touched on the issue of paying **a tax (on average \$100-150) to Armenia** by people who consider themselves Armenians. There were also those who opposed the idea. *“Why should, for example, an Armenian living in Argentina who receives \$1,000 dollars a month transfer some amount to Armenia’s budget every month? What will be their motivation?”* Proponents of more compromise solutions smoothed the sharp angles of the discussion. *“After 2020, Armenian-centric trends increased in the Diaspora, and our compatriots understand, realize and picture everything more systematically and seriously. We need to understand how to use these features. I think we should think of a **system that would allow people to make such payments according to their ability.**”*

The experts also discussed the issue of Diaspora Armenians **servicing in the Armenian Army** on a voluntary basis or by any other acceptable mechanism.

Initiatives

- In the case of adoption of the Great Immigration Strategy at the state level, initiation of the **“Back to Armenia” pan-Armenian movement**.
- Creation of a "Hayastan" investment company with reliable management, giving every Armenian the opportunity to participate in the development of the **RA economy in the form of buying shares**.
- Initiating the process of unification of the **“yan” ending** of surnames used in Armenia and the **“ian” ending** used in the Diaspora.



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**The goal: Preservation
of the Diaspora**

Actuality

The goal of the Diaspora is not only the strengthening of the Republic of Armenia or the creation or strengthening of statehood. It should be one of many goals, not the only one. **Self-preservation, development, preservation and passing of identity, language and culture to the next generations are also among the goals of the Diaspora.** From this point of view, “Diaspora is also an end goal in itself.” Historically, the Diaspora has always been like that, but it dreamed of the Motherland.

Therefore, **the preservation of the Diaspora** can also be defined as the main goal of Armenia-Diaspora unity. And there are many problems in Diaspora communities. The most recent example is Lebanon, where the situation is quite dire. The minimum wage is \$21, even lower than in Afghanistan. A significant portion of the people, including the Armenian community, is barely making ends meet. Nevertheless, even in those circumstances, people are still concerned about Armenia.

There is a decline in the level of education in the Diaspora. One of the experts recounted their conversation with the editor of the Greek daily “Azat Or” and quoted him as saying: *“Every year they publish the data of Armenians who graduated from universities, that year this number was 21. The community has increased from 21,000 to 50,000 people, while the number of students has decreased.”* The social and economic level of the New Diaspora is not sufficient and there is a great deal of work to be done.

These and other issues are numerous and all need to be addressed. The approaches must differ from community to community. It is necessary to work with the French-speaking community of France in one way, and with the Spanish-speaking Argentinian Diaspora in another way. **Yes, it is necessary to work with the Diaspora in a variety of ways,** as the Diaspora itself is like that. The cooperation should be multifaceted, but such ties are missing, and, according to experts, they are missing because of Armenia and because that framework should have been created by Armenia.

The Diaspora went through war in Syria, then crisis in Lebanon, and today it is going through the crisis in Ukraine. We constantly see that we have a lack of **support systems for our communities in the Diaspora.** Another crisis was the 44-day war, which showed that there was a lot of support, but there was no effective system, which even leads to problems related to Armenia-Diaspora relations. We must have a system and leadership that will act as a guide during crises.

Policy

And which of Armenia’s institutions or structures should manage Diaspora affairs? Only those who live in and work directly with the Diaspora know the specific problems. In this context, the importance of an official working with the Diaspora in all Armenian embassies of a person, who understands the given community and its characteristics well, was

emphasized. Experts discussed insights into the effectiveness of the **Commissioner's Office or the Ministry of Diaspora**. *“We need to unite so that the Republic of Armenia speaks with one voice to the Diaspora.”* Here, the experts looked at the experience of Greece, where, for example, there is a Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where two ministers manage the ministry – the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Diaspora. They manage both directions together and there is no separation.

There were also opposing positions on this issue. For example, instead of state intervention, it is necessary to define a new approach and policy, to form new subjects and centers. *“We conditionally name it **Phoenix-Armenia** and spread the centers around the world: Phoenix-France, Phoenix-Russia, etc.”* These will be public, social and educational-oriented organizations, through which the connection between the Republic of Armenia and the Diaspora will be ensured. Such institutions are much less problematic. *“**We are talking about having a special Diaspora representative at the embassies.** It is much more problematic when someone tries to speak and act on behalf of the state, so by developing it in the form of, in the name of and the ideas of such NGOs, we will get better output.”*

According to the third point of view, we already have the **Hayastan All-Armenian Fund**, which has its own institutions. Therefore, it is necessary simply to reconstruct what already exists so that it is clear, for example, during the annual fundraising campaign, that some money will be directed toward solving issues in one or another community. Videos will show the problems of Diaspora communities, and projects will be financed.

In general, there was no shortage of ideas in the discussions regarding the creation of the most diverse networks. **Professional networks of doctors, engineers, lawyers and others** have been created and already exist at the state's initiative. The experts highlighted the importance of public supervision of the work of relevant state institutions overseeing the constant activity of these networks.

Initiatives

The experts also came up with the idea of creating a **Cooperative Network of Businessmen**. Successful Armenian businessmen are everywhere. *“Let them form joint business ties, from Argentina to India, etc., and a part of the joint profit will serve the Motherland. And it doesn't necessarily entail that these connections must be mediated by Armenia. They can be direct, for example, between the Armenian community of Canada and the Armenian community of Cyprus.”*

*“My proposal concerns the establishment of a **Pan-Armenian IT company.** In order to emphasize its pan-Armenian nature, we can create it as a joint-stock company, where people will participate in various formats,”* another expert had this kind of interesting proposal.

However, the most important Pan-Armenian network, the establishment of which experts were talking about, was the **Pan-Armenian Lobbying Network**. The Armenian lobby honorably carries out its mission throughout the world, but it includes only a small part of Armenians worldwide. With the establishment of a single, extensive network, Armenians from Australia to Canada can join efforts and achieve joint victories in tackling national issues.