

The Armenian civilization as a breakthrough project

The 21st century poses new threats to Armenians worldwide. To defy them we have to respond to a number of fundamental issues as landmarks for our strategy. Especially important are the civilization-related visionary questions, namely: Are Armenians and Armenia the bearers of a unique in its kind (local) civilization? Which countries or cultures have mostly influenced Armenians (in both positive and negative senses)? Which Western values concur with our ethnic image most of all, and which of them are in odds with it posing a threat to our national security? Is it possible for Armenia to preserve its ethnic identity and refrain from integrating with larger civilizations by doing no more than enter in a dialog with other civilizations? This is the non-exhaustive list of those civilization-related issues to be addressed in this article.

The complexity of the question consists in that we determine the concept of civilization and with what purpose we use this concept. Morgan and Engels defined civilization as the stage of social development after barbarism. Marxism – Leninism used this definition of civilization to phase history from the perspective of dialectic materialism, i.e. this term was applied in certain ontological framework. In the given context, civilization was defined as a set of attributes of public and political way and spiritual development distinguishing a high degree of development of human society from a primitive stage. If we deem civilization as a step on the way to the social development of material and spiritual culture as associated with labor division and manufacture rationalization, consumption and distribution, it would be possible assert that Armenia and Armenians are part of global civilization.

Another context for the use of the concept of civilization appeared in the 18th century in close relation with the concept of culture. The French philosophers of the Age of Enlightenment held that civilized are those societies based on reason and equity.

There is a concept of manmade civilization implying that societies typically transform nature to fit their own interests and accept the freedom of individual activity as the determinant of relative independence in relation to social groups. **Armenia can be said to have recovered civilization after independence and with the introduction of private ownership and basic democratic institutes.** The western civilization can be defined as a process of development for the Western Europe, the USA and Canada which have all the necessary preconditions for successful development.

Traditional civilization is usually understood as a society with high degree of dependence on environment for the living standards, as well as rigid ties between individuals and their social groups. Islam-based societies are usually deemed as a civilization like this. Civilization otherwise is defined as a numerous group of people recognizing the unity of destiny. The idea of civilization is the idea of uniform destiny. In this context, too, Armenians can be defined a civilization.

According to a traditional viewpoint, those States (nations) having lost wars and conflicts used to be deemed outside of history and civilization-related processes. Their eventual comeback was associated with the recovery of political independence.

Therefore, the context should be taken into account when discussing whether Armenia / the Armenian world may be deemed as a unique of its kind local civilization.

When look upon as a competition and dialogue of civilizations, history may loose those nations which can no longer be identified and self-determined as cultural and historical entities. With the loss of said ability of self-identification we appear to be on the margin of history, turn into waste of civilizations which can still serve some purpose but is partly unfit for use.

In today's geopolitical space by saying civilization we understand systemic and adequate historical-cultural self-determination of a society, in other words, the cultural-ontological essence of the society. To qualify for these criteria, the Armenians should meet the following parameters inherent in civilizations:

- be recognized by other civilizations as an independent unit standing above the national, State and territorial criteria,
- enjoy a unique and original nationwide potential as focused on the future;
- have the ability to safeguard historical heritage, the understanding of own history and a feeling of uniform destiny;
- availability of a specific weight of system value bearers;
- availability of an elite able to reproduce benchmarks of behavior and value standards
- aptitude of "digesting" alien customs and traditions

With its reinstatement, Armenia came back to history in the context of the old understanding about civilizations. We may prove non-existent as seen in the light of our interpretation of history as a chain of rivalries and dialogues between civilizations. We are the representatives of a unique civilization, but are not a civilized nation today.

At the same time, as a self-identified essence, civilization is a dynamically changing system, which means that any civilization is in process of development or degradation. As noted above, essential for a civilization is its ability to self-identify: thus, strong nations are capable to curb foreign influences and norms by transforming and adapting them to their own essence (nucleus) either by amplifying or pushing away alien impacts, capable to destroy them.

Weak nations change their nucleus under foreign influence losing thus their identity and being assimilated in other civilizations.

To understand how a civilization can influence others, we should clearly see the means, tools, skills and ways of conveying knowledge within and between civilizations.

In my opinion, the basic compilers are as follows:

- The State as a public institution, which institutionalizes the standards of behavior at the normative-legislative level;
- Research and scientific progress as a powerful tool for modification of living standards;
- Art as a form of preservation and transfer of historical memory of societies;
- The elite as an entity specifying and evaluating different norms and modus vivendi;
- The church as the social institute providing the continuity of vital reference points, complete spiritual picture of the world and moral - ethical standards of behavior.

Through these transmitting channels a certain code of thinking and behavior is conveyed, and if a nation lacks or has weak transmitting channels, it risks to be strongly influenced by other, more powerful civilizations.

Not having the ability to form our own standards through the state system, we accept the European standards in Armenia. Therefore, Armenia's bid for EU membership should be seen as a tactical task, understanding the risk of losing the ability to self-identification in the long run. Ignoring this danger can lead to greater exposure to new illnesses following the communistic nihilism, namely the consumer-like to life. And the only sense in this drive is the desire of being enrolled in the "Golden Billion."

Through science and scientific-technical progress we become the participants of a powerful globalization process which erases the borders between civilizations, or becomes a tool for command of other civilizations in the hands of one civilization. Today we can witness the process of “Americanization” mainly due to science, the achievements of scientific-technical progress.

At a certain stage of history, art found itself under the influence of major global trends. Today the Armenian art develops under the influence of both the East and West. But art gains importance at the level of civilization when masterpieces are born under the influence global processes.

The elite today is separated and is not capable to develop complete system of valuable criteria and norms of behavior. In result, in the separated society find display mutually exclusive norms of behaviour.

By and large, the elite seem to be the basic compiler of norms and values which are projected in our civilization, and she should provide their adaptation and act as the certain terminator. Absence of this function at elites results to that various, frequently norms alien to us are spread during our life directly, passing what or terminators, transforming Armenia into a province (now it is possible to speak about the tendency of transformation into the European province). (In our definition "provintSIONALIZM" it is inherent in a society which be not capable to keep, create, staticize and develop own norms of behaviour, valuable criteria and is compelled to be guided on another's.)

The church is a unique institute which keeps and can provide translation of unique, complete spiritual picture of the Armenian world, kept the basic doctrines in a constant kind within centuries. Historically the role of elite in the Armenian society always was carried out by representatives of the Armenian church. The church provided continuity during many centuries, but for last 100 years, by virtue of historical circumstances, appeared torn off from the wide public.

The main feature of our society is that we are under the influence of not only the western values, but also of eastern ones which are often overlooked, therefore I want to cite V. Bryusov who wrote “Two forces, two opposite started, being crossed, being bound and merging in something new, uniform, directed life in Armenia and created the character of its people during several thousands of years: the beginning of the West and the beginning of the East, spirit of Europe and spirit of Asia. Situated on the boundary of the two worlds, constantly being the arena for collision of peoples, involved by a course of events in the greatest historical revolutions, Armenia, the destiny, was intended - serve as a mediator between two different cultures: on the basis of what all Christian West has grown, and what today is submitted by the Muslim East. “Armenian is the vanguard of Europe and Asia.” This long proposed formula correctly defines the position of the Armenian people in the world. The historical mission of the Armenian people prompted by the whole course of its development is to search and find the East-West synthesis.

And this aspiration was quite expressed in the artistic creativity of Armenia, in her literature, in her poetry.” As a special form of socio-historical development, each civilization is different from the others. What is true for one civilization can be erroneous for another, i.e. the criterion of true is a kind of socio-historical practice which distinguishes civilizations. The concepts of validity, freedom have different contents, and the moral - ethical standards of behavior absolutely different, moreover, mutually exclusive. But whether follows from this, that one civilization should prevail of another, force it to change the existing reference points as it frequently happens today. Our answer “is not present,” and the essence of dialogue of civilizations should become the understanding of these distinctions and the search of mutually acceptable forms of existence. Demonstrating to the world our own doctrine of coexistence of civilizations has become a basic mission for the Armenian people in the 21st century.

The key to the development of this doctrine of coexistence can be found in the well-known formula of August the Blessed: “Unity in the main thing, freedom in secondary ones and love in all.” One can clearly see this when studying the history of the Armenian Church. The essence of history of the Armenian Church is reduced to that it has kept the basic evangelical doctrines in a constant kind, being impregnated by purest Christian liberalism.

The Armenian apostolic church, unlike other Christian doctrines, acknowledges minimum of dogmas and maximum of opportunities for the development of doctrines. By virtue of this very fact, the Armenian Church has always been penetrated with a spirit of tolerance towards both the parishioners and the representatives of other beliefs. In spite of the fact that the Armenian Church has suffered a lot due to its openness facilitating the propagation of other churches among its followers, it “used to realize the fatal consequences of its tolerance, however, while facing this bitter experience, it has remained faithful to the sacred rules of theological and church liberalism. It has kept them and will keep inviolable in the future. And if the Armenian Church succeeds in bringing together different churches, which is something probable, it will be entitled to pride for deserved glory (Archbishop Maghakia Ormanyan).”

The uniqueness of our identity consists in that we have gone through many ordeals and each time emerged even more viable. As paradoxical as it is, we the Armenians are peculiar in that we have an ineradicable sense of freedom and validity.

There is a set of myths which do not allow the Armenian to understand the essence of our historical mission. We are trying to prove to ourselves that we have outstanding scientists who set a vector in science, our art used to shape new artistic trends and that Armenians were behind many innovations. Similar mythology is necessary for such nations as live in the mode of survival when it is necessary to get strength, energy, stimulus to fight for identity preservation. But when development is at stake, myths to that effect can drive us into a cogitative trap and deprive of the possibility of revealing the basic essence of the Armenian nation.

Only those nations realizing their own historical mission can be considered as a civilization. And, in this respect, revealing the historical essence of the Armenian nation will bring to light its mission and answer the following question “Why have we survived and what should we tell the world?”

Our history was full of tests. Overcoming them we became stronger and stronger. Each historical test pawned in our sub-conscious and genetic code at least two formulas which help us push ahead:

- Belief in the triumph of freedom and validity;
- Mission of conveying said belief to other nations.

Today’s Armenia faces a basic challenge of realizing this mission and suggesting a formula for civilizations’ coexistence. It is important for us to understand that we are the ones to shape a nation - civilization from ourselves. Which way we see ourselves, such we shall be. Especially today we need an ambitious project which would allow us to build up capacity for succeeding a breakthrough.