

Armenians in 2115

Strategic Directions for the Twenty-first Century



CALOUSTE GULBENKIAN
FOUNDATION
ARMENIAN COMMUNITIES

A Seminar Report

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Preface

The Armenian Communities Department of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation hosted a unique two-day seminar for Armenian leaders and prominent intellectuals to discuss future scenarios pertaining to the Armenian people globally. The gathering was a high-level forum where forward-looking strategic discussions took place in a private, invitation-only environment. It was held on 13-14 October 2014. Forty individuals took part in the seminar, representing the Armenian community worldwide: Europe, North and South Americas, Turkey, the Middle East, Russia, and of course Armenia. Moreover, all major intellectual and community dispositions within the diaspora were present. Certain non-Armenian experts were also invited as discussion facilitators.

Participants reflected on trends that are shaping the Armenian world, as expert facilitators outlined certain key issues affecting Armenians, including developments in Turkey, Russia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Europe, the Middle East, Armenia and the Armenian diasporas.

Questions discussed included the diaspora's relationship with the Armenian government and civil society; engagement with Turkey, Azerbaijan and Georgia; the sustainability of diasporan communities; and identity formations. These were cross referenced with scenarios entailing Russian influence on Armenia, Turkey's democratic development, the threat of war with Azerbaijan, the impact of the conflicts in the Middle East on Armenians, and dynamics within the EU.

What follows is an analytical summary of the discussion. It is not a transcript, but a systematic presentation of key points around vital emergent issues and scenarios. It is meant to capture the essence of the debates.

This report is divided in four major parts. Part I analyses where the world is going in relation to Armenia and Armenians, focusing on Armenia's neighbourhood. Part II presents five scenarios, over which

Armenians do not necessarily have any control. Part III outlines strategies for possible engagements for Armenians to consider – i.e. actions over which Armenians do have control. It concludes with Part IV on the steps ahead and recommendations.

We would like to thank all the participants of this important seminar. Their open and frank exchanges not only enriched our knowledge, but also inspired us to continue working for the betterment of the Armenian people.

Martin Essayan, Trustee of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation
Razmik Panossian, Director of the Armenian Communities Department

Introduction: Keeping the Future in Mind

The world is rapidly changing, and yet there is a sense of impasse among Armenians both in the republic and in the diaspora. A more sustainable national approach is needed, in which strategies for positive change are developed and implemented. Such strategies must foster creativity and forward-looking approaches or frameworks.

In Armenia, the challenge is to create conditions whereby people see their future in Armenia, and not in moving abroad. A better future has to appear proximate enough, and tangible enough, for people to work towards it. This entails nothing short of Armenia redefining itself in light of domestic, regional and global challenges.

Similarly, in the Armenian diasporas – the “s” is intentional to highlight that the diaspora is not one coherent entity – the question of identity maintenance needs to be redefined and recast so that it is not just limited to preserving the old, but creating new ways of being Armenian. Diasporan identities in the 21st Century are much more self-consciously “constructed” or maintained rather than being “given” – policies and actions must reflect this fundamental social and cultural change.

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