

## On the axiological foundations of the National ideology

An Expert Opinion, 11.11.2024<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction (Part I)

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*“Lord, protect the Armenians / And make them glorious...”<sup>2</sup>*

**Lord, protect,** National prayer,  
Song author: Komitas Vardapet, M. Taghiadyan

Since the restoration of independence in the early 1990s, the challenges that befell the Armenian people, including the loss of Artsakh, the preceding and subsequent events, became the gravest challenge that shook the foundations of the Armenian national-state life and ideology. Even the 1988 Spitak earthquake, with its countless human tragedies and destructive outcomes, did not have such an impact on the public sentiment.

The events of 2020–2023 made visible several profound issues in Armenian socio-political life. The historic defeat of the Armenians not only highlighted the strategic incapacity of the national state to prepare for and confront the imminent military-political threats but also revealed the inability of the socio-political circles to unite and face these dangers.

While acknowledging the significant external factors that contributed to the defeat, the current political discourse also attributes it to subjective reasons. That is: the Armenian sides would have been able to resist the challenges and threats more effectively if all the available potential during the independence period had truly been devoted to the establishment and strengthening of the statehood, the development of the economy and science, and the actual fight against corruption, abuses, and other negative phenomena.

The loss of Artsakh marked a borderline of the path of the newly independent Armenian statehood, which began with the rise of the Artsakh Case, during which the four leaders, each symbolizing different stereotypical perceptions and initially associated with different governance styles, served in office: a) *“the wise leader”* (Levon Ter-Petrosyan), b) *“the strict leader”* (R. Kocharyan), c) *“the flexible leader”* (S. Sargsyan), and d) *“the democratic leader”* (N. Pashinyan)<sup>3</sup>.

The reality of the defeat during the tenure of the 4<sup>th</sup> – *“the democratic leader”* gave rise to 3 discourse hypotheses:

1. The *“new ones”* [the incumbent team] are to blame.
2. The *“former ones”* [the previous 2 teams] are to blame.
3. Armenia has been going in the wrong direction from the very beginning.

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<sup>1</sup> The expert's viewpoint on the value-based foundations of national ideology is presented to the reader. The study consists of 5 parts, provided consecutively, with the included pictures taken from the internet.

<sup>2</sup> Translation by the author.

<sup>3</sup> The classification of the leaders is suggested by the author, is slightly different from the classical typology formulated by Herbert Simon and is based on the main discourses prevalent in the Armenian society over the past 30 years.

The 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> discourses largely carry the logic of the internal political struggle, while the 3<sup>rd</sup> approach mainly targets not the individuals and teams, which are secondary in this case, but the deep meanings embedded in the foundation of the newly independent Armenia.

History will still evaluate this phase after some time, free from orders and censorship, in more stable and unbiased conditions, separating the “*dry from the wet*”, outlining the roles and significance of individuals, social and political forces, historical realities, and processes in the calamity that befell the Armenians. Nevertheless, what happened seriously struck the discourses and ideas circulated by the Armenian socio-political thought and culture in the modern period, rejecting them and seemingly reinterpreting and even questioning the traditional perceptions of “*Homeland*”, “*Armenia*”, “*Armenians*”, “*nation*”, “*faith*”, “*national value*”, “*struggle*”, and other terms. And this was done by expressing mostly negative tones about everything national, sometimes even attributing the existing problems to our very existence, denying ourselves the right to a future.

Thus, we repeat what the antagonists of Armenians say and do.

As a result of the blows dealt to the Republic of Armenia and Artsakh, the Armenian socio-political thought has been faced a serious cognitive and ideological problem: “*Why did the country lose in front of the ‘advanced countries’, precisely during the tenure of a ‘democratically’ elected government? Why does the civilized world turn a blind eye to obvious criminal and genocidal acts? Wasn’t it assumed that the ‘new democratic team’, by putting an end to the illegalities of the ‘former authoritarian team’, would make the country even stronger in the face of all challenges?*” And so on, and so forth.

Moreover, what happened also struck at the very heart of the national identity.

The military-political failure of the “*revolutionary*” elite, against the backdrop of the long-term discrediting of the “*former*” elite, completed the process of devaluation of the entire existing socio-political elite in the eyes of the Armenian public. The observed deep crisis in the socio-political life is conditioned by the existing disappointment with the state governance apparatus and the traditions formed by Armenians since independence, the grown human resource, and, as a result, the national socio-political circles, their elites, and discourses.

For decades, public perception has prioritized the political process over its purpose, making the struggle for power a dominant issue discussed at all societal levels, from backyard conversations to political platforms. Achieving the power became an end in itself, and the “*opportunities*” it offered were seen as trophies, or in an a less euphonious Armenian term “*ուլլաք*” (“*avar*”) – equivalent to “*loot*”. Meanwhile, the public remained largely indifferent and tolerant of the actual duties of those in power, viewing them more as the “*chosen ones*” with the right to use the levers of the power. If we add our national “*Well, how else?*” to the famous song “*The winner takes it all*” by a well-known group<sup>4</sup>, we get the formula under which our society has perceived the meaning and essence of political struggle for decades, with an appropriate criticism.

The liberalism that followed the collapse of the ideological stereotypes and artificial agendas imposed by the Soviet Union and the destruction of the “*Iron Curtain*” could not but

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<sup>4</sup> The author refers to a Swedish pop group ABBA, popular in 1970-80s.

affect our national “ecosystem”. Under the impact of the collapse of the “*free West – unfree East*” ideological dualism during the “Evil Empire” and the winds of globalization, our society gradually replaced the truths with opinions, while the values stepped on the “competitive field” and transformed into the objects of comparison. Given the environment of Social Darwinism and the market economy, the more “viable” and “efficient” began to win, so that everything (phenomenon, person, talent) that did not have a monetary (dollar) equivalent found itself on the margins of the social life. And those who had it, in turn, were pushed to the center of public interest.

Then, in the situation of scientific and technological breakthroughs and the rapid development of information technologies, the number of “*Likes*” became a measurement unit of influence, and therefore – of the “credibility”, thus giving obvious advantages to beautiful maidens over the elderly scientists and/or the moral preachers in the era of “post-truth”. The Internet and the virtual world began to absorb the younger generation, taking them to unimaginable and/or virtual reality (VR) worlds, giving secondary importance to the real land and environment, the homeland, and its borders. The difference in preferences and tastes (political, cultural, etc.) is distorting and is continuing to distort values, fragment the foundations that once united the nation and leaving individuals, who have grown into “persons”, at the mercy of the drafts blowing through the many open “Overton windows.”

As a result of the internal liberalization of value-systems and the external fashionable influences, be it Armenians, Germans, Estonians, and others become targets of various informational flows and ideological influences of the modern world. In the context of rapid changes in manners, value systems, and public discourses, individuals lose their bonds with their past and environment and are gradually condemned to isolation; they face unfamiliar phenomena and find themselves in new realities, forced to formulate a new life course. How does a person react when a yesterday's phenomenon becomes today's “new normal”? When the aggressive environment forming around individuals rapidly changes their living environment, distorting traditional values and institutions – family, national identity, homeland, and faith. When “surrogates” increasingly occupy a larger place in an individual's life – cohabitation instead of family, citizenship instead of national identity, living environment instead of homeland, and syncretic beliefs and superstitions instead of faith.

The motto of the era – “*You only live ones*” (or *YOLO*) – corresponds to the “Child-free” philosophy, a newly emerging phenomenon of families opposing to have children. From the perspective of citizenship priorities, the Armenian diaspora is nothing more than a group of foreign citizens of Armenian origin, while “*patriotism*” is merely an obligation to pay taxes. For a society that has rejected the concept of the “*Armenian history*” in favor of the “*History of Armenia*”, the Legend of Hayk, the ancient tales about the Kings Artashes and Artavazd, and the national epic of the “Daredevils of Sassoun”<sup>5</sup> are excluded from the current territory of the Republic of Armenia, and therefore – from the “official” history as well. Outside the borders of the Republic of Armenia remain Bagavan, Narekavank, Ani-Kamakh, Bagratuni's Ani, and other capitals of the historical Armenia; Mesrop Mashtots, Movses Khorenatsi, and Komitas were born outside the borders of Armenia, not to mention numerous figures of the

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<sup>5</sup> See: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daredevils\\_of\\_Sassoun](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daredevils_of_Sassoun)

National Liberation struggle, a significant part of Anania Shirakatsi's, Amirdovlat Amasiatsi's, and others' manuscripts are no longer relevant, and so on. The term “Spiritual Armenia”, encompassing an entire spiritual-cultural “ecosystem” beyond the time and space, remains in question.

Another manifestation of the new Armenian reality is the attitude towards both the Armenian Apostolic Church (AAC) and Christianity in general. Attempts are being made to view the nation's past through the lens of “pre-Christian” and “Christian” periods, attributing the first to “*glorious martial victories*” and the latter mainly to “*moral victories*”. Alongside the targeted spread of discrediting news about certain AAC clergymen, a network of sectarian organizations, mainly Protestant and Charismatic, rapidly emerged in Armenia and Artsakh. The media, which accuse Armenian clergy of unacceptable behavior and excesses (perhaps sometimes rightly), at the same time demonstrates and continues to demonstrate evident tolerance towards discrepancies within the sectarian circles. Meanwhile, there are no facts confirming the abilities of the latter to walk on the surface of Lake Sevan and to turn water into wine.

Active attempts are also being made to drive a wedge between the Armenian Apostolic Church and the Armenians under the guise of reviving of certain pagan beliefs. Its priest-leaders, who brand Christianity as a “*foreign*” faith, do not seem to care about the non-Armenian, Marrian, Greek, Persian, and Semitic names of the “native” “Armenian” deities of the pagan pantheon, nor about the fact that their discourses fighting against the Christian spiritual-cultural heritage repeat the ideas of Bolsheviks and other anti-Armenian forces and countries. Against the backdrop of the spread of *yoga* and other spiritual-physical practices, and the lifestyle associated with them, the values of the “Sermon on the Mount” become outmoded and less in demand.

As a result, the loss of Artsakh demonstrated the inability and powerlessness of a society led by the “old” ideas and the new values under “*The world has changed*” heading to withstand the external threats. That is why the discourse about the need for a “*new national ideology*” has started to circulate within the Armenian society, which is still trying to fight against all this, while those interested in the nation and the national are trying to find a formula that will suggest a way to the unity of Armenians and the solutions to the existing problems.

In short, if we leave aside the *clichés* and formulas of political science, what is really at stake is the recognition of the need for a qualitative transition from the “*ersatz-Armenian*” behavior to the “*truly Armenian*” thinking and the search for ways to replacing the eloquent national-patriotic, but “*lacking the one ready to hang the bell*”, with a vision that is consistent in its external form and internal content.

The purpose of the forthcoming series of articles is not to outline such a national ideology; the intention is no less ambitious and aims to reveal the keys already existing in our national-spiritual-cultural realm to answer the main questions regarding the national identity and the mission. We will try see our national history as a single, unified whole, without following the fashionable attempts to divide it into the “*pre-Christian*” and “*Christian*” periods, we will affirm the spiritual-ideological starting point, we will try to understand the “core” of the national identity and its significance throughout the national

history, we will outline the dimensions of the Homeland, and we will substantiate the principles of the person's connection to it, and so on.

And just as the strength of any building is measured by the hardness of its individual bricks, so, in our view, the viability and continuity of a nation starts with the individual; therefore, a *renaissance* of the nation should not start by designing the “building” of the future Armenia — a common approach among those interested in the field — but by baking the bricks for that “building.” We are confident that every individual, who holds on to the values is the “brick” that holds the nation's right to live and the grace to create. A baked brick is valuable in itself and is even more valuable in the structure where it assumes its unique function. Similarly, the conscious individual, who is valuable everywhere, becomes important in the ranks of his nation. We are convinced that the roots of the great and small problems of the humanity are hidden in the essence of man and the struggle with it, and therefore – the keys to the continuity of the individual and the nation are also can be found there.

Therefore, let those who truly value their identity and nationality begin the struggle within themselves: not to surrender to weaknesses, not to become servants of evil, and not to convict themselves to spiritual destruction, loss of personal identity, and inability to lend a helping hand to others.

Summarizing and linking our perceptions to each other, we will try to create a unique “value chain”— simple, understandable and effective at the same time. Emphasizing the foundations of a holistic identity, we will talk about an individual, trying to make the postulates of the national “new ideology” understandable and applicable in his/her life and daily routine, above and far from political platforms and podiums. And we will start all this with the first individual and personality of our nation – Forefather Hayk.

*(Continued)*