

THE CRISIS OF “ELITE” PERCEPTION IN CONTEMPORARY
ARMENIAN SOCIETY

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The problems of political, cultural and economic elite have always been in the center of attention of different public sciences. The discussions about the elite are up-to-date in Armenia, because over the last two decades the “elite” has begun to be defined as and compared with success. The social layer that is found in the highest level of political and economic success is perceived as a “real elite” in the consciousness of broad masses. The latter will further be called “false elite” by us. In our opinion, the real elite is, first of all, the “elite” of science and culture that has yielded its role to the political and economic elite in the society in the functional sense.

Our aim in the present article is to show that in Armenia in the last two decades cultural and scientific elites have comparatively given up to political and economic elites, bringing serious changes that have prevented the natural development of it, and, therefore resulting in qualitative changes in “Elite” perception.

The word “elite” originates from Latin *electus* (selected, of the highest quality). In the scientific literature “elite” is understood as the most significant part of any community, the first interpretation of the word has a normative value that comes from its initial content. The main function of the elite is the management and the development of the scientific, cultural and other aspects, from the point of view of the cultural news, changes of the new models of behavior and of acceptance; it supports the resistance of the challenges thrown from the rapidly changing external world and the formation of the society. Different demonstrations of the concept of “elite” are manifested in sociology: political, economic, administrative, military, religious, scientific, cultural, that are counterbalanced to each other.¹

In the Soviet Union a political elite was formed against the existing Bolshevik-Stalinist dictatorship of over seven decades. The latter had characteristic virtues of the national-political elite. In particular, Alexander Myasnikyan laid the foundation for the “scientific and cultural Armenia”, Aghasi Khanjyan for the “industrial Armenia”, and in Khrushchov “melting” years with the efforts of Yakob Zarobyan national aspirations were evoked, directed to the recognition of the Genocide and the recognition of Western Armenians’ cause, the reunion of Artsakh, Nakhijevan

¹ *Political Science: Dictionary-handbook consists of Sp. Pol. Science Sanjarevski I.I., 2010, Political Science. Dictionary-M.RSU, V.N. Konovalov, 2010.*

and Javahk in ASSR. Besides, there were also cultural, scientific and technological elites in the Soviet Union, competitive schools, which were headed mainly by the brainpower. This brainpower had a high social status and a high reputation in all the social frameworks. The Soviet Union was not a state with classless society. The political elite was a separate social class, and there was a vital, objective necessity to reach a peaceful existence with other classes and to gain stability of social coexistence.

The Armenian Soviet political elite and brainpower formed a society, the "resources" of which were enough to resist the collapse of the USSR and to win in Artsakh war. It was non - accidental that the "Armenian Committee of Karabakh movement" or the so-called "Karabakh" Committee which was the basis of Artsakh movement had 11 members all of which were literati (Alexan Hakobyan, Babken Ararktsyan, Davit Vardanyan, Hambardzum Galstyan, Samvel Gevorgyan, Rafael Ghazaryan, Samson Ghazaryan, Vazgen Manukyan, Ashot Manucharyan, Vano Siradeghyan, Levon Ter-Petrosyan). Igor Muradyan, who was also an intellectual, stood at the base of Karabakh movement and "Karabakh" Committee. During the whole period of Artsakh movement, a number of famous artists and intellectuals (Viktor Hambardzumyan, Silva Kaputikyan, Hrant Matevosyan, Zori Balayan, Sos Sargsyan, Bagrat Ulubabyan and others) demonstrated social activities. Besides "Karabakh" Committee, a number of "independent figures" (Paruyr Hayrikyan, Ashot Navasardyan, Rafael Ishkhanyan, Movses Gorgisyan, Haykaz Khachatryan, Azat Arshakyan, Rafael Papayan, Henrik Hovhannisyan, Rafael Ishkhanyan and others) also fought for the final independence of Armenia. During the whole period of the movement, the committee "Krun" was established, the members of which were Arkadi Manucharov, Arthur Mkrtchyan, Manvel Sargsyan and others.

Before Artsakh movement, a number of environmental actions and demonstrations were held in Yerevan. The existing environmental serious problems are connected with "Nairit" rubber factory and Medzamor nuclear plant. In 1970's, academician Araksi Babayan published an article in "Communist" paper about the disastrous consequences of "Nairit" rubber factory and about its incompatibility with the urban life. Years later, in 1987, Zori Balayan published an article entitled "Yerevan is in disaster" in the "Literature paper", which drew the attention of the Soviet authorities to the raised problems. The first environmental demonstration was held on September 1 in 1987 in front of "Nairit" rubber factory, in which about 300 people took part. At the base of this environmental movement were Hakob Sanasaryan, the chairman of the "Greens' Union of Armenia" and Karine Danielyan, the chairman of the association "For sustainable human development". Gradually, the movements directed to the maintenance of the Armenian language, education in native language and the preservation of the historical capital Yerevan were added to these environmental demonstrations. It must be noted that people came out against

the Soviet system for the first time, taking part in those environmental demonstrations.

A tendency of growing environmental demonstrations into political ones was seen also 20 years later, after the Independence was regained in Armenia. Particularly in 2012, as a result of a 90-day struggle, the park named after Mashtots in Yerevan was saved from construction processes due to about a hundred environmentalists. These activists formerly had been struggling to save Trchkan, Qajaran and the forest of Teghut. Later on, on February 18, 2013, after the official results of the presidential elections were announced, a large wave of social discontent arose in Yerevan and in all the regions of the republic. About thirty intellectuals and numerous citizens, political activists, a great number of which had also taken part in the above-mentioned environmental demonstrations, founded the non-political establishment called “Nakhakhorhrdaran” (“Preparliament”).

But, as a result of the “liberal” revolution, Armenia suffered heavy losses, and that referred, first of all, to those intellectual and spiritual resources, which were the basis of the political elite and which nurtured it. That elite consisted of people, who wished to make democratic changes, that is, to establish a constitutional state, fight for changes and take the responsibility to implement those changes. They were people of different specialization, with different financial means, and it was not mandatory for them to be political figures or any members or supporters of any oppositional political parties.

However, it is a truth acknowledged that, as a consequence of revolution, the change of the elite proceeds rather morbidly (formerly a great thinker of the 20th century, Pitirim Sorokin analyzed the mechanisms of this phenomenon)². It should be noted that the formation of national political elite is a long evolutionary process, the interruption and the disruption of which can have a negative impact on the qualities of elite. Such interruptions occur, particularly, as a result of wars, revolutions and geopolitical big shocks.

In fact, in the beginning of Artsakh movement the above mentioned intellectual groups became the heart of the elite in public and political unions.

Besides the appointed heart of the new national-political elite, almost all the national resources were centralized during the years of war, and an important role in the fate of the state belongs to those, who had no bright biography and high educational level. But these people, regardless of their biography and the low educational level, became a “military elite”, as they were able to show their strong will and to organize military resistance with the help of the Armenian officers and generals, and this, in its turn, helped them to beat the powerful opponent. Later the mentioned people, replacing the Soviet party-economic elite, formed the two governments of the Armenian state.

² *Sociology of Revolution/ Pitirim Sorokin-M., 2005*

After the collapse of the Soviet system, rapid changes of economic and social character occurred in Armenia, resulting in the formation of new social layers and groups. This resulted in the quick lamination and hierarchy of the society, which, in its turn, brought forward a formation of perception of new values by the process of the current lamination and hierarchy. But the production or the reproduction of such values that could assist the citizens of all layers of the transition period, living in the borders of one state, to live through social, economic and cultural problems, were neither formed, nor put in the list of priorities. The result of it during the last ten years was that the values of separating the group got a much greater role in the Armenian society, than the consolidating common values of the national, state and political content, which fostered the splitting of the unity of the social values.³

As it has been shown above, over the past years the social and economic processes that occurred in Armenia played a significant role in the culture and the processes of its reproduction, as a result of which the elements of the group, having authoritarian character, had a prevailing role in the modern culture, which limits the full participation of the majority in the reproduction of culture. On the other hand, the people who implement the control of reproductive processes have also become false elite frameworks, characterized by the disposition of group ruling, whose framework of cultural requirements is too narrow because of their educational-aesthetic and low intellectual abilities. Thus, a situation has been created in which the elite class does not show intellectual and spiritual requirements of creative capability, aesthetic taste and, moreover, having power and not having a sufficient level of development, the "new" false elite puts forward alternative cultural requirements which are mainly meant for consumption, or at least for entertainment⁴.

Today two opposing elites can be differentiated in Armenia. The first is the elite of the government and the businessmen, which are so intertwined with each other that can be considered as one group. The second group consists of the classes working in international organizations.⁵ This goes with scientific and cultural elite, or the so-called "high intelligentsia". Brainpower is a historical, cultural category, the definition of which may vary in different contexts. The "high intellectuality" is the part of the society which deals with the mental activity in different aspects of art, culture, science.⁶ In the years of the Soviet Union, the "high intellectuality" had some privileged status, but in connection with the conditions of the social

³ **Gabrielyan M.** *The focuses of the Maintenance of Spiritual Security and Moral Values in the Context of National Security*, Yerevan, 2002, p. 3.

⁴ **Tadevosyan A.** *The problems of the Maintenance and reproduction of the Identity of the Culture from the National Point of View*, Yerevan, 2002, p. 31.

⁵ **Bayadyan H.** *The Advertisement in the TV newspaper and cities*, <http://hetq.am/arm/articles/4705/>, December 15, 2008, <http://hetq.am/arm/articles/4714/>, December 22, 2008.

⁶ **Memetov V. S., Rastorguev V. N.** *The Intelligentsia, the Great Russian Encyclopaedia. T. 11*, Moscow, 2008.

movements, the large-scale emigration and heavy economy of the 90s, it was deprived of its privileged status. The intellectuality, which got a Soviet education, had a feeling of uselessness.

Along with the weakening impact of intellectual, scientific and educational elite emerged a new “elite” with its slang and lifestyle that became a source of imitation for different groups of people. “Eating”, “having fun”, going to sauna, organizing different events have become the main forms of entertainment for the representatives of this new “elite”. In our opinion, this situation is directly connected with the fact that in Yerevan there are many entertainment companies named “Elite”, the name of which determines the social status of its visitors or clients. It is interesting that many of these companies which have the same name, in reality have no connection with one another.

The “Elite” limited liability company, for instance, deals with organization of banquets, business dinners, caterings, and wedding ceremonies. The same company is also responsible for a bar, a restaurant and a café, all under the same name – “Elite”. However, there is also a taxi-service with the name “Elite”, that has nothing to do with the previous company, or the chemical cleaning laundry “Elite” that provides services of chemical cleaning of linen, carpets, clothes, leather things, curtains. There is also a secondary school after Ruben Sargsyan, named “Elite”.

In this atmosphere, such high requirements as high art, fine art, spiritual culture, the art of singing and dancing, literature and poetry, science and other requirements of creative character are alien and boring phenomena for the Armenian current “elite”.

The history of the appropriation of city center which was launched with the privatization of urban space can be considered as an example for the above-mentioned. The rehabilitation program of “Lincy” foundation was followed by rapid flourishing of entertainment industry. Rapid growth in real estate prices in city center was the next step and under such conditions the implementation of massive reconstruction programs (Byuzand str., North Avenue) seems to be understandable in itself. Since about 2000 up to these days, constructions of new residential buildings and complexes have been carried out in the central parts of Yerevan. Most of these buildings are called “Elite”, taking into consideration the new quality of the accommodations of the new buildings. Instead of the population, which was displaced from the rebuilt parts, these new buildings are already mostly occupied with the political and economic elite.⁷

In response to the “elite’s” bad taste, courtesy of demands and the lack of middle class in which brainpower has its key role, Armenia’s current cultural situation turned into a “closed” system which is adapted to the requirements of the ruling class, and there is no capacity for the implementation of creative abilities.

⁷ Bayadyan H. *Political territory and mass media*, <http://oldest.hetq.am/arm/technologies/8091/>

This does not mean that today there is a lack of social classes forming a high cultural demand in Armenia. The whole problem is that the authoritarianism of the political and economic elite directly prevents the organization of the social natural hierarchical processes, opposing to them its hierarchical principles which do not rely on man's individual and creative or professional abilities. Such a hierarchy cannot promote to the development and spread of high culture.⁸ But apart from all this, more important events are taking place in Armenia today. New elite is being formed, which is distinguished by the freshness of its ideas and the width and depth of the cultural views that provides the cultural communication with universal values.

Thus, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, during the Independence years, the political, economic and military elite, which was formed in Artsakh war, and came to power over the past ten years - though not corresponding to its professional values (political, economic, military) - gradually became an incomparable and powerful elite of wide recognizability as opposed to the real elite. The latter, or the so-called intelligentsia, on the other hand, was unable to counterweight the aforementioned elite, which in its turn resulted in the misunderstanding of the concept "elite". As a result, the formation, development and self-expression of the creative person came to live in a deep crisis.

«ԷԼԻՏԱՅԻ» ԸՆԿԱԼՄԱՆ ՃԳՆԱԺԱՍԸ ԱՐԴԻ ՀԱՅ ՀԱՍԱՐԱԿՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՈՒՄ

ԽԱՉԱՏՐՅԱՆ Ա. Ս.

Ամփոփում

Խորհրդային Հայաստանի քաղաքական և մտավոր էլիտան ձևավորեց մի հասարակություն, որը կարողացավ հաղթահարել ԽՍՀՄ-ի փլուզման բացասական հետևանքները: Մինչ Արցախյան շարժման ծավալվելը Երևանում տեղի ունեցան բնապահպանական մի շարք ցույցեր ու հանրահավաքներ, որոնցով, ըստ էության, հասարակությունն առաջին անգամ դուրս եկավ խորհրդային համակարգի դեմ: Սակայն ազատական հեղափոխության հետևանքով Հայաստանը ծանր կորուստներ կրեց, և դա առաջին հերթին վերաբերում է այն մտավոր-հոգևոր ռեսուրսներին, որոնք քաղաքական էլիտայի հենքն են: Արցախյան շարժման սկզբում վերոհիշյալ մտավորական խմբերը հասարակական և քաղաքական տարբեր միավորումներում դարձան ազգային քաղաքական նոր էլիտայի միջուկը:

⁸ Tadevosyan A., *opus. citus*, p. 33.

Հայաստանում անկախության տարիներին ձևավորված և վերջին տասնամյակում իշխանության եկած քաղաքական, տնտեսական և ռազմական էլիտան աստիճանաբար հզորացավ և հասարակական լայն ճանաչում ձեռք բերեց՝ չհամապատասխանելով իր անվանը բնորոշ մասնագիտական (քաղաքական, տնտեսական, ռազմական) որակներին: Իրական էլիտան կամ մտավորականությունը չկարողացավ հակակշիռ դեր ունենալ նրա նկատմամբ, ինչն էլ, իր հերթին, հանգեցրեց «էլիտա» հասկացության թուրրմբռնմանը: Դրա հետևանքով ստեղծագործող անհատի ձևավորումը, զարգացումը և ինքնադրսևորումը հասարակական միջավայրում խոր ճգնաժամ ապրեցին:

КРИЗИС ВОСПРИЯТИЯ “ЭЛИТЫ” В СОВРЕМЕННОМ АРМЯНСКОМ ОБЩЕСТВЕ

ХАЧАТРЯН А. С.

Резюме

За последние два десятилетия слово “элита” стало ассоциироваться со словом “успешный”. В нашей стране культурная и научная элита уступили место политической и экономической элите.

Советско-армянская политическая и интеллектуальная элита сформировала такое общество, которое сумело преодолеть негативные последствия распада Советского Союза. В начале Карабахского движения вышеупомянутые интеллектуальные группы сформировали новую национально-политическую элиту. Реальная элита, иначе говоря – интеллигенция, не смогла противостоять вышеупомянутой элите, что, в свою очередь, привело к недопониманию концепции “элиты”. В результате в армянском социуме формирование, развитие и самовыражение творческой личности пережило глубокий кризис.