A VALUABLE CONTRIBUTION TO DIASPORA STUDIES

KHARATYAN A.

The extensive and long-anticipated book *The Armenian Diaspora in the Changing World* by Hranush Hakobyan (Yerevan, Hranush Hakobyan, 2017, 652 pp.) with its gravity and modernity of the issues and their solutions can be considered a successful addition to other books devoted to the Armenian Diaspora studies.

While reading the book, the first impression one gets is the notion that the Armenian Diaspora is a complete and breathing organism, part of a nation scattered across the globe and a community that has not been fitting in the boundaries of its homeland since very old times, while it lives with a history, endurance, culture and morals, as well as incredible efforts and faith to preserve its type. These are the most universal words that can be used to describe the Armenian Diaspora, which one needs to know, to fathom its problems, become familiar with closely and tell the truth adamantly when drawing conclusions deriving from that. It is safe for one to believe that the author has remained loyal to that truth with an indisputably high level of knowledge of her topic and with her amazing abilities of identifying the Diaspora and its major issues. The book sets forth a tremendous amount of issues and presents age-old and multifaceted problems that characterize the universally and specifically concrete life in the Diaspora and the image of it in this world, which is truly undergoing changes.

After a modest and yet capacious preface devoted to the goals and objectives set forth in her book, the author recalls the above-mentioned cognitive sources, dedicating the first chapter to the characterization of the Diaspora in the past and the Diaspora in the present. Here, as well as in the next chapters, the Diaspora is presented not as a self-sufficient phenomenon

accumulated within the boundaries of any country or continent, but as a phenomenon that is strongly linked to the homeland, the genocide of the past, independent statehood, as well as Artsakh and its problems. Right from the start, the reader is introduced to the author's unique manner of narration (consideration of real and current issues of the Diaspora that are presented alongside with theoretical formulations and are connected to those formulations), the outline of the historical reasons and conditions for the emergence of the Diaspora and an evaluation of the provisions of international Diaspora studies in the areas of Armenian Diaspora studies and identification of the standards that characterize the latter. The standards are complemented by the author's substantiated observations of the Diaspora-Archipelago, the Diaspora-nation state and the transnational elements of the Diaspora. With respect to these issues, the author shows a very consistent regularity (the endless and mutually counterbalancing processes of assimilation of diasporas in general on the one hand and of self-awareness and self-organization on the other).

The book attaches primary importance to homeland-Diaspora ties and the deepening of the relations, which are based on the realities and transformations within the Diaspora and the specific descriptions of the features of the Armenian communities. In this sense, the pivot is around the characterization of the various legal statuses of the Armenian communities conditioned by the legislation of the particular country of residence (included in the legal status are national-religious community, national minority, non-governmental organization, et al.). On the common ground of these differences, the book presents various types of characterizations of the Diaspora Armenian organizations (833 communities, 30,000 organizations), their types and the specifics of their activities that are related to the strategic role, general and pan-Armenian organizations play in the preservation of the national identity and in the deepening of relations with the homeland. In this manner, the Armenian Apostolic Church and, amid the endless problems connected with national preservation, the large-scale activities of Armenian schools, Armenian study-centers, Armenian political parties, as well as Armenian cultural, advocacy and professional institutions are properly assessed in the book. Sometimes the unity of the author's style is interrupted with substantiated academic objections and observations, and the author even makes thoughtful and practical proposals.

Considering the key issues of the Diaspora, Hranush Hakobyan specifies certain terms that tend to become identifications of a specific community, concrete names according to the local structures of the communities, i.e. Armenian community of Russia, Armenian community of the United States of America, etc. She also offers to stop using the concept of "gaghut" (colony in Armenian), proceeding from the truthful objection that "the fourth and fifth generations of Armenians are mostly born in the communities and it would not be right to refer to them as migrants" (p. 65).

In relation to the above-mentioned, the sections of the book concerning individual communities of the Diaspora (according to continents and countries) are definite and generalized. The real picture of the activities of the structures and organizations circulating within communities and the contributions of Armenians to the cultural and intellectual life of the particular receiving country are reproduced in the book that contains many facts, as well as interpretations of those facts. The author identifies this and related issues in their further development and always cites facts, including not too well known facts and realities on which the theory of her skillful examination of the functions of pan-Armenian professional organizations, centers and the media is based. For a more convincing reproduction of public and national life in the Armenian Diaspora the author also draws parallels with the structures of the diasporas of other nations, particularly the Jewish, Greek, Turkish and Irish lobbying organizations, taking into account the cognitive value of comparison on the path of solving the issues of national concern.

The second chapter of the book examines the current challenges facing Armenia and the Diaspora. In the chapter the author presents her concerns with regards to the challenges closely linked and conditioned by one another. The author formulates the priorities for solving those issues. Those priorities are associated with enhancing the public administration system in Armenia, overcoming political and economic barriers, applying effective measures against emigration, revitalizing the civil society, using the potential of the Diaspora, etc. Among the confrontations that all Armenians face, the author also attaches importance to the exposure of the belligerent policy pursued by the Turks and the Azerbaijanis as a counterbalance to the failure of the process of negotiations and the destabilization of the region. The author draws attention to the new phenomena that are having an impact on the Armenian realities, to

the fact that the newly emerging challenges require new approaches and that the currently bipolar world is causing new problems for the already troublous life of Diaspora Armenians, maintaining the growing risks in the depths. As the author shows, such risks emerge in the form of internal movement and disintegration within the Diaspora, as well as other forms. To these another inevitable difficulty can be added, and that is the incompatibility of the economic and political interests of Armenia and those of the receiving countries, and this accounts for the problem Armenia and the Diaspora have in making the right decisions. The author's approaches become more definite when she focuses on the characteristics of the communities of individual countries. From this perspective the author comprehensively examines the realities of the Armenian community in Turkey and Turkey's denial of the Armenian Genocide, the unwavering struggle against which the author righteously formulates as a factor that consolidates all Armenians. The book reveals not only the historic and conventional challenges transformed into a new look, but also the challenges in terms of law, especially in the sphere of legal regulations for the historical and cultural heritage of all Armenians. Among the issues related to the heritage of the Armenians' belongings and properties, Hakobyan pinpoints the features of the legal regulation of wills (according to the legislation of the given country and international law) and comes to a conclusion that has currently become resonant: unlike the past attempts to return national wills, today, when Armenia has a statehood, and the State itself assumes the role of the rightful owner – as the only representative of the nation-legatee, it is necessary to continue to return those wills. The author examines this issue in a correct and convincing manner within the limits of the possibilities of international law, and the just consequences of this are anticipated in the material and spiritual spheres as factors inspiring restoration of historical memory and a line of conduct.

The end of the second chapter of the book is devoted to the issues of Armenian identity and serves as continuity of the issues stemming from the previously expressed thoughts and ideas. The author considers the starting points (national language and schools, Armenian family and morals, culture, church and historical memory), reflected in her conceptual approaches and consolidating those approaches as pillars supporting the identity. The issues related to the problem of identity in the Diaspora motivate the author to draw

generalized conclusions assessing the real dangers, starting from restrictions on the use of the Armenian language within communities and ending with elimination of the function of the language as a means of communication, the cession of the quantity and quality of Armenian schools to foreign schools, the already devastating, dramatic picture of the decline in the number of purely Armenian families and more. In the last case, the author cites convincing data: in Latin America 70-80 percent, and in North America nearly 60 percent of marriages are mixed (p. 363). The author also states the horrible phenomenon of assimilation that is growing more and more in Christian countries, and the roots of which were seen within Armenian communities back in the Middle Ages. Hakobyan opposes this and other kinds of stringencies to the countersignificance of Armenian culture and religious organizations, particularly the opportunities for the joint efforts of the Armenian Apostolic, Catholic and Evangelical Churches.

Empowerment of the Diaspora definitely means empowerment of Armenia itself, and the author reinforces this viewpoint in the "Contributions of the Diaspora" section of her book. The Diaspora shows its viability in all of its relations with the homeland, including Armenia's economic recovery efforts. The book examines the current situation and the perspectives of the economic ties between Armenia and the Diaspora through a serious analysis in accordance with the material presented and characterizes the types of contributions and areas of circulation, as well as the significance of the characterizations of law, psychology and morals.

The last chapter of the book is devoted to the state policy on the partnership between Armenia and the Diaspora and should be considered a synthesis of political analysis and a weighted plan. Here the author provides a summary of the objectives for the development of homeland-Diaspora relations based on history, as well as the new qualitative and modern image of those relations starting from the declaration of the Third Republic of Armenia. The author places emphasis on the constitutional level in the new stage, and the adequate actions that lie at the core of the concept paper on partnership that was developed in 2009. With convincing experience and awareness, the author, who has actually been spearheading the Ministry of Diaspora since its establishment, describes the features of the Ministry that are the features of a public administration body and derive from the principles of mutual understanding

and equal rights, which convey a new understanding to the partnership between the homeland and the Diaspora. The author states that the implementation of those principles has been effective due to the harmony of the programs and the working style (the Program "Ari Tun", the Pan-Armenian Festival "My Armenia", the Pan-Armenian Festival "We Sing Komitas", the Summer School Program "Diaspora", etc.). Indeed, the Diaspora – that large sector of the Armenian nation – based on the author's accurate definition of the Diaspora described as "multilayered, multifaceted, multilingual, pluralistic and with multiple needs" (p. 427), faces us Armenians on the individual, public, political, economic, cultural and other grounds required for the mentioned partnership and obliges us Armenians to work endlessly and on a daily basis. The author fully convinces the reader that those efforts are a serious test for both the homeland and the Diaspora, and that the success of the activities, ensuring the national identity of the Armenians, depends on how the nation passes that test.

The sincere attitude of the author to her investigation and the empirical value of the provisions presented in tables of statistical data picture the real situation in the Diaspora and its relations with the homeland.

The book is composed in polished and expressive Armenian that freely formulates the issues and provisions set forth by the author. The language of the narration is in conformity with the topic and the scientific and practical nature of its implementation. Taking into consideration the tremendous work that has been done, we could make some observations regarding the logical sequence or formulations in certain sub-chapters, but they simply seem minor things when we talk about the paramount significance of this book. The cognitive and pragmatic value of Hranush Hakobyan's book devoted to the Armenian Diaspora is irrefutable. It contends for receiving all the merits of an encyclopedic book devoted to the Diaspora. It is a serious contribution to Diaspora studies and particularly to Armenian Diaspora studies, and its significance for the multilingual Armenian Diaspora is beyond any objections. It needs to be translated into European and Oriental languages.