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Migration in the Armenian Mass Media

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Introduction

Migration of the population is the most pressing issue in Armenia. It is a widely discussed, and it is an extremely sensitive topic for the Armenian society. Migration and especially emigration-related issues are always in the focus of Armenian mass media. On average, dozens of articles on migration issues are published each month, some of them are solely informative, others are both informative and analytical. This paper reviews the publications on migration issues that have appeared in electronic media during July 2011- May 2013. This period is distinguished by two most important political processes in Armenia: elections to the RA National Assembly in May 2012, and presidential elections in February 2013.

Below is the analysis of both pro-governmental and opposition media¹. The purpose of the study was to analyze the most important migration themes covered by the media during the period mentioned. The information obtaining methodology included the review of the publications dealing with emigration, repatriation and other migration issues. The underlying methodology for publications review was the analysis of headlines and contents, as well as the visual design of the publications, etc.

Frequently Published Topics and Their Media Coverage

The below-mentioned topics are frequently covered by articles or other publications during the period under review:

- “Emigration”;
- The Russian “Repatriation” program;
- Syrian Armenians.

There are also publications of solely informative nature, e.g. on EU-Armenia relations in migration area², individual cases of repatriation to Armenia, and in particular, stories of their integration into the Armenian society³, trafficking and illegal migration, legal and social status of refugees who fled from Azerbaijan in 1988-1992, etc.

- **“Emigration” as a regular theme of publications**

Migration is often identified by the media as well as in everyday discourses as emigration. This is because emigration numbers are incomparably larger than other migration ones, and this trend remains unchanged. Some mass media periodically publish statistical figures on “emigration”, using passenger

¹ Mass media position and attitude towards the national political processes was selected as a classification principle. The review covered 32 companies of the Armenian media industry, of which 3 companies represent opposition, and 3 represent pro-governmental media. The publications of the rest contain articles both supporting the authorities and criticizing them.

² “Упрощение визового режима выгодно как Армении, так ЕС – МИД” in newsarmenia.ru (Новости-Армения) on February 27, 2012. (Simplification of visa regime is beneficial both for Armenia and EU - MFO) Downloaded from: <http://newsarmenia.ru/politics/20120227/42619262.html>

³ Ընդդեմ սփյուռքի հակահայ քարոզչության և հանուն հայրենադարձության. մի հայրենադարձի պատմություն (Against Diaspora’s anti-Armenian campaign and in support of repatriation. A story of a repatriate) <http://ankakh.com/2012/09/238634/>
For many of us in the Diaspora, finding ourselves in a free and independent Armenia was a miracle long in the making <http://repatarmenia.org/eng/why-armenia-for-me/>
Цатурова А. «А я домой, в Армению, хочу!..» in Novoye Vremya, on 21 January, 2012 . (A.Tsaturova. “I want to go home, to Armenia) Downloaded from: http://www.nv.am/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=17257:2012-01-21-07-12-23&catid=10:2009-06-09-07-22-13

turnover and other data as a source of information and even referring to unreliable sources, as well as their personal, visual perception “of emptying villages, impressive number of people at the airports and bus stations, neighbors and relatives abandoning the country...”).

Statistical data on passenger turnover that is periodically published by the National Statistical Service and State Migration Service is provided by the Border electronic management information system (BEMIS). However, it is worth noting that passenger traffic is of strictly seasonal nature, e.g. in spring the negative balance of passenger traffic goes up due to the growth in the number of those leaving Armenia for seasonal employment. During these months mass media publications are headlined as follows: “Leaving Armenia never to return”, “Armenia continues to be abandoned”, “Emigration rates become threatening”⁴, “Leaving Armenia for good”, “...the number of irretrievably gone, i.e. emigrants...”⁵ and similar. While if guided by this logics, during the months when the balance of passenger traffic is positive (e.g. June, August, October 2011⁶ or in June, September, October, December 2012⁷) other headlines should be used such as “Returning to Armenia”, “Number of returnees” and similar. Hence, the assessment of migration flows by passenger turnover has certain drawbacks since “a migrant”, according to the international definition, is a passenger, but a passenger is not necessarily a migrant.

Besides, the data on individuals crossing the border do not contain information on the purpose, duration of stay or departure. Hence it is not possible to distinguish migrants from non-migrant, neither is it possible to identify their certain categories (long-term and short-term migrants, labor migrants, students, etc.). For this very reason, it is impossible to have a flawless picture of migration flows and structure of migrants. Initially, BEMIS system was not devised for providing statistical data on migration.

Nevertheless, the figures of annual passenger traffic give a general idea on prevalent opinion among population. If a negative balance is repeatedly recorded in the country, then the population will be mostly inclined to emigrate. Judging from the published data, since 2008⁸, the intention to emigrate from Armenia has been dominant amongst the population, demonstrating increasingly growing figures of migration flows.

The review of media publications show that the publications provoking commotion without thorough analysis, cause extreme anxiety and even panic amongst the population.

Apart from it, “emigration” and “emigration figures” are often speculation themes before the presidential and parliamentary elections and, as a rule, are used by political opposition to criticize the authorities⁹. Emigration is referred to both by the government and the opposition parties basically in order to gain more support and win more votes¹⁰.

Արտագաղթի տեմպերն սնազնասնում են (Emigration rates become threatening)
http://www.1in.am/arm/armenia_economy_112381.html

⁴ “Armenia's six-month unfavorable migration balance 89,345 people” in Tert.am, 12 August, 2011. Downloaded from <http://www.tert.am/en/news/2011/08/12/migration/?sw>

“В отпуск или в эмиграцию?” (A vacation trip or emigration”) in 1in.am, 13 August, 2011. Downloaded from http://www.1in.am/rus/armenia_apolitics_8509.html

“More people emigrate from Armenia” in Haykakan Zhamanak, on June 16, 2012. Downloaded from <http://news.am/eng/reviews/3874.html>

⁶ State Migration Service of Armenia. Volumes of border crossings of the RA by types of transportation means 2011 <http://www.smsmta.am/?id=928>

⁷ State Migration Service of Armenia. Volumes of border crossings of the RA by types of transportation means 2012 <http://www.smsmta.am/?id=1036>

⁸ State Migration Service of Armenia. Volumes of border crossings of the RA by years http://www.smsmta.am/?menu_id=18

⁹ “Լևոն Տեր-Պետրոսյանի ելույթը մարտի 1-ի հանրահավաքում” [Levon Ter-Petrosyan's speech on 1st of March meeting] in Hetq.am on March 1, 2012. Downloaded from: <http://hetq.am/arm/news/11356/levon-ter-petrosyani-eluyty-marti-1-i-hanrahavaqum.html>

- **The Russian “Repatriation” program**

During the period under review, the publications with a broad media coverage dealt with the Russian “Repatriation” program having a wide-scale response of the Armenian society.

The program was approved by the President of the Russian Federation in 2006¹¹, while its implementation in Armenia started in 2007. The purpose of the program was to arrange the repatriation of compatriots to the Russian Federation in order to improve the worsening demographic situation in the country. In this regard, the CIS is a target region for the program by suggesting attractive conditions for the repatriates. The term “compatriot” is broadly defined, and almost every person in the CIS region may become a program beneficiary. Protest actions against the implementation of this program took place in Armenia. The mass media started actively publishing materials on the Program¹². The articles contained criticism of the authorities for both their inaction in preventing the implementation of the Program, and for enhancing emigration through the Program. The publications called it an “anti-Armenian” program that threatened the national security of Armenia.

However, the statistical data show that from 2007 to October 2011, nearly 2,500 people left Armenia under this program. As of September 2011, 31,656 persons have applied for consultation, 3,587 persons filled in application forms, and 1,104 have been granted a certificate of a participant¹³. So, it can be concluded that many more persons have been interested in the program but only a limited number participated in the program and, as a result, left Armenia.

Still, intensive responses of the media to the program implementation have caused direct and indirect awareness of wider circles of population about the Program, which, in its turn, promoted the interest in the program in the country which is generally inclined to emigrate. This fact is also confirmed by the study¹⁴. *“The Representative Office of FMS does not spread announcements and propaganda of the program through mass media or other tools of information dissemination in Armenia. However recently Armenian mass media indirectly inform broad audiences about the existence of such opportunity while criticizing the program. Most beneficiaries confirm that they have learnt about the program through their acquaintances/relatives/friends or through the Armenian mass media. They obtain more detailed information at the seminars organized in the Representative Office of FMS”.*

It is worth mentioning that during the mentioned period there were no publications on other immigration programs implemented in Armenia. For instance, there were no references to the USA *Green Card* program implemented in Armenia since 2006, or the Canadian immigration program for qualified immigrants, which has been implemented since 2003. Those who leave through these programs rarely come back.

(Contd.) _____

«Ժառանգության» հաղթանակի դեպքում արտագաղթի կանխման ուղղությամբ կարվի հնարավորը (in the event of victory of *Heritage* party, any possible action shall be taken to prevent emigration) <http://www.panarmenian.net/arm/news/104735/>

¹⁰ H. Chobanyan (2013) Explanatory Note: Migration Rhetoric in Armenian Political Parties' Programs

¹¹ *Государственная программа по оказанию содействия добровольному переселению в Российскую Федерацию соотечественников, проживающих за рубежом.* (State Program for assisting compatriots in their voluntary resettlement in the Russian Federation) Available at: <http://www.fms.gov.ru/programs/fmsuds/>

¹² “Российские миграционные офисы действуют в Армении незаконно” (Russian migration offices’ illegal operation in Armenia) in *Iin.am*. 1 August, 2011. Downloaded from http://iin.am/rus/armenia_asociety_8150.html
 “600 Armenian families left for Russia with Compatriots project” in *News.am*. 11 August, 2011. Downloaded from <http://news.am/eng/news/70646.html>
 ՀԱՅԱՍՏԱՆԸ՝ ԱՇԽԱՏՈՒԺ ԱՐՏԱՀԱՆՈՂ ԵՐԿԻՐ (Armenia as workforce exporter) <http://www.armtown.com/news/am/168/20120719/33034/>

¹³ A. Poghosyan , A. Shakhshvanyan (2011) Between National Security and Freedom of Choice: The Russian ‘National Program’ and its Effects on Armenian Migration

¹⁴ Ibid

At the same time, the review of the publications disclose the fact that very few references were made to the drawbacks of the Russian program (limited jobs, accommodation problems, etc.) or the problems encountered by the migrants who resettled in the RF, as well as promises and unjustified expectations¹⁵.

- **Syrian Armenians**

The publications on Syrian Armenians livened up from early 2012 when the political situation in Syria became most critical. The main themes were the political situation in Syria and the alarming conditions of the Armenian community in Syria¹⁶. During this period, the media criticized the Armenian authorities for their inaction in assisting the Armenian community as well as the lack of clear position or policy for arrangement of their repatriation.

Subsequently, as a result of the political crisis and the armed conflict, part of Syrian Armenians moved to Armenia¹⁷. The problems of their arrival into Armenia, resettlement, governmental assistance, their transportation by “Armavia” local air carrier have become the main themes to cover Syrian Armenians problems.¹⁸

Conclusion

This study presents the results of the analysis of articles and materials published in the Armenian media. Summarizing the review, most part of publications offer perceptive and panic-stricken evaluation of the migration issues. The evaluations often lack in-depth knowledge of peculiarities of the material. The analysis is generally superficial. Yet, it appears to touch a nerve, thereby giving rise to anxiety and panic in the society. Such an evolution is an additional factor for a decision on emigration: “If everyone leaves then ...”

At the same time, the period under review (2011-2013) was a rather active one for the development of migration policy in Armenia and the implementation of relevant measures, which is inadequately covered by media, or its coverage was solely of informative nature.

¹⁵ Մ. Պետրոսյան, 2012թ. «Ռուսաստանյան «Հայրենակիցներ» ծրագրի գյումրեցի մասնակիցն օգնություն է խնդրում» (M.Petrosyan, 2012, “A Gyumri participant of the Russian “Repatriation” program seeks help” .: http://www.asparez.am/news-hy/hayrenakicner_cragir-hy/

¹⁶ Սիրիահայերը բռնել են արտագաղթի ճանապարհը (Syrian Armenians on the emigration path) <http://www.a1plus.am/am/social/2012/06/27/syria-armenians>

¹⁷ Մոտ երեք հազար սիրիահայ ցանկանում է Հայաստանի քաղաքացիություն ստանալ (nearly 3000 Syrian Armenians want to receive Armenian citizenship) <http://www.armenpress.am/arm/news/686040/mot-ereq-hazar-siriahay-cankanum-e-hayastani-qaxaqaciutyun.html>

Հայաստանում ապաստանած սիրիահայերի 10 տոկոսը մտադիր է հաստատվել այստեղ (10 percent of the Syrian Armenians sheltered in Armenia wish to settle here) <http://armenpress.am/arm/news/690637/hayastanum-apastanats-siriahayeri-10-tokosy-mtadir-e-hastatvel.html>

¹⁸ Ն. Բուլղադարյան 2012թ «Սիրիահայերը դժվարությամբ են հարմարվում հայաստանյան պայմաններին» (N.Bulghadaryan “Syrian Armenians have difficulties in adapting to Armenian conditions”)

Հ. Շողիկյան Նոր արտոնություններ սիրիահայերին: Կառավարությունը նպատակահարմար է գտնում նրանց ազատել բոլոր տույժերից եւ տուգանքներից: 24.10.2012 (H.Shoghikyan, “New privileges for Syrian Armenians. The government deems it appropriate to exempt them from fines and penalties” <http://www.azatutyun.am/content/article/24749273.html>

Ամբողջական տվյալներ. Քանի սիրիահայ կա Հայաստանում, նրանցից քանիսն ունեն բնակարան և աշխատանք (Complete data: how many Syrian Armenians are there in Armenia, and how many of them have homes and jobs) <http://www.panarmenian.net/arm/news/133582/>

Սիրիահայ 200 կարիքավոր ընտանիքների կհատկացվի հագուստ և առաջին անհրաժեշտության իրեր (200 needy families of Syrian Armenians will be provided with clothes and first priority goods) <http://www.panarmenian.net/arm/news/136706/>