

# GENDER EQUALITY IN ARMENIA: A PERCEIVED NEED OR IMPOSED CONDITIONALITY?

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*“Gender inequality is unjust, unintelligent and expensive.”*  
Terry Davis, former Secretary-General of the Council of Europe

While the Soviet Union spearheaded, at least ideologically, what can be seen as a campaign-turned-policy of ‘State feminism’, proclaimed equality between the sexes and time and again took the lead in expanding social, economic and cultural rights of and opportunities for women, the overall undemocratic nature of the polity, economic system and the regime, that sought to impose a set of rigid ideological norms, required unswerving allegiance and tolerated no dissent or critical thinking. It, thus, effectively ruled out any true liberalization of social relations, respect for social freedoms and, not infrequently, any opportunity for an informed and judicious choice for men and, especially, for women. Egalitarian phraseology as well as the much touted socialist ideals of gender equality and gender equity notwithstanding, the paternalistic State left core patriarchal structures and patterns of the past intact. Ultimately it was men in that social organization who were in positions of power, decision-making, and control over access to resources<sup>1</sup> and “wealth”.

The State promoted only heavily controlled political, economic and, to some extent, social activism of women (which resulted in a dual or at times even triple burden of work, family and civic responsibilities), while at the same time being in no haste to make them truly equal and free, especially in families and households. It was in the private sphere in the USSR that men’s social, economic and even physical power over women was most institutionalized.

A World Bank study rightly concludes that “the veneer of gender equality was thin”<sup>2</sup> and emphasizes that “... society remained predominantly patriarchal and gender relations within the household continued to reflect a strong ‘male breadwinner’ model,” while “women continued to be seen predominantly as mothers and wives primarily responsible for nurturing within the family.”<sup>3</sup>

Unequal power relations became more visible and came to the fore with the demise of the Soviet Union. When the Soviet Union collapsed, the absence of a viable civil society significantly undermined the transition and democratization processes and was a source of huge distortions, including the resurgence of patriarchal stereotypes, mentality and practices. Nevertheless, it took almost a decade for a gender discourse in Armenia to focus on power asymmetry between the sexes and to conclude that gender inequality boils down to unequal access to and distribution of power for women and men. Those developments were further exacerbated in Armenia (as well as in other South Caucasus and Central Asian countries in contrast to Western CIS countries) by unfolding *de-modernization*

processes in social and public life and by not infrequent regression to *pre-capitalist* (not to say feudal) arrangements, practices and mentality.

These processes in the post-socialist countries in the transition period led to further entrenchment of patriarchal patterns and to growing gender asymmetry in economy as well as in politics and in public life.<sup>4</sup> American political scientist Mary Hawkesworth contends that the change in political system from authoritarian to democratic, by itself does not guarantee gender equality and that in many cases a transitional period brings many more inequalities.<sup>5</sup> What is more, as some sociologists indicate, in the post-Soviet region “liberation from ‘the Red’” was quite paradoxically also liberation from the ideals of emancipation.”<sup>6</sup>

Summing up their findings on the gender equality situation in the post-socialist transition Polish authors Agnieszka Rochon and Agnieszka Grzybek conclude: “In spite of the twenty years of democratic transformation, women did not manage to reduce their distance from men enough for their voice to be clearly heard in public debate.”<sup>7</sup>

Armenian society was no exception, with the said distance having grown even more. Neither was it immune to resurgent *patriarchal stereotypes* about male and female roles and *conservative societal expectations* vis-à-vis women and men. Maria Titizian, a Vice-President of Socialist International, points out that “with independence, women were relegated back to their traditional, culturally defined roles, which have marginalized their involvement in all aspects of governance and conflict resolution.”<sup>8</sup>

The recent study conducted by American gender expert Elizabeth Duban concludes: “Significant differences persist in the roles and status of women and men in Armenia, influenced by patriarchal culture and traditions. Cultural norms and stereotypes are quite rigid and account for a number of the obstacles facing women, such as societal notions that women are generally not decision-makers in the public sphere and women’s own lack of confidence and perceptions of their dependence on men.”<sup>9</sup>

That “organic” process of growing gender inequality was unfolding almost unchecked until the mid-1990s. It was in the aftermath of the *World Conference on Human Rights* held in Vienna in 1993, the *International Conference on Population and Development* (ICPD) held in Cairo in 1994 and, especially, the *Fourth World Conference on Women* held in Beijing in 1995 that gender issues were brought to the attention of the public at large and that their existence in Armenia posited, if not universally acknowledged. Armenia was opening up to the world at that time and was presumably making conscious efforts to “catch up” in its civilizational development, i.e. to shed the “oppressive” Soviet legacy and get on a fast track to a modern liberal democracy based on a free-market economy and European values.

Why would the gender theme become prominent for the first time in a public discourse in Armenia at that particular historical juncture? While the above-mentioned conferences provided important background, ideas, strategies, action plans and other tools and resources and while, thus, they were indispensable for structuring the debate and framing the issues and policies and for chartering the course of action, the single most potent incentive and an impact factor that

predetermined to a large extent a vector of future developments was what may be called a “European integration pull factor.”

It should be borne in mind that at that time for post-Soviet countries like Armenia that ostensibly embarked on the road to liberalization and democratization it was crucially important to demonstrate to the world that as newly independent nations they took those processes seriously and they wished to abide by democratic principles and “European” values, including, *inter alia*, *respect* for human rights, *elimination* of discrimination and *provision* of equal opportunity. The main reason behind those intentions and plans was to become accepted into the community of European nations through gradually obtaining membership in regional organizations such as OSCE, Council of Europe and, eventually, the European Union.

Besides, the international aid, which was provided to most of these countries (and Armenia was no exception) with a view to helping them to get on a sustainable development track, presupposed compliance with certain norms and principles. While no strings were attached expressly, this aid gradually came to entail certain conditionalities, albeit initially for the most part implicit. Serious reforms were underway and domestic legislation had to be harmonized with international legislation. While not perceived locally as necessarily a top priority at that time, gender issues were identified among the problems that needed to be addressed in a comprehensive and meaningful way.

The outcome documents of the above-mentioned conferences provided a conceptual framework and policy guidelines for the powers-that-be as well as for fledgling civil society organizations and for the research community in Armenia. In addition, they introduced novel ideas, concepts, terminology and theories concerning gender equality and offered a totally new perspective on gender issues.

Thus, the *Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action* not only spoke about the “human rights of women” that are “an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights” but also stated unequivocally that the “full and equal participation of women in political, civil, economic, social and cultural life, at the national, regional and international levels, and the eradication of all forms of discrimination on grounds of sex are priority objectives of the international community.”<sup>10</sup>

The ICPD *Programme of Action* was the next milestone. Not only did it bring a “revolutionary” idea of recognition of and respect for women’s reproductive rights to the forefront but it also focused on the crucial importance and role of the empowerment of women. As one of the 179 countries that adopted the ICPD *Programme of Action*, Armenia subscribed to the idea that the “empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of their political, social, economic and health status is a highly important end in itself [and] ... is essential for the achievement of sustainable development.”<sup>11</sup>

The Beijing Platform for Action laid out the idea of gender equality in the human rights framework and stressed the significance of and provided an agenda for women’s empowerment.<sup>12</sup> More importantly, it identified 12 areas of concern and detailed the strategic objectives to be achieved and the actions to be taken.

Gender equality was clearly established by those documents as a democratic principle; it was also politically, economically and socially useful. The idea, however, met with much resistance and opposition by some segments of Armenian society almost from the start.

The reasons for opposition included but were not limited to:

- Injection of too many ideas, including seemingly “radical” ones, within a short period of time; naturally enough, quite some time was needed for society at large to come to grips with, to digest and subsequently to accept and internalize some of those ideas.

- The limited absorption capacity of society vis-à-vis progressive ideas (which can be accounted for by uncritical acceptance and toleration of patriarchal stereotypes and practices) slowed down the acceptance process for ideas of gender equality.

- Little initial enthusiasm and surprisingly little opposition, which can be accounted for by indifference as well as by the lack of adequate understanding, knowledge and realization of consequences, were soon replaced by divergent positions, which came to be articulated and held quite forcefully. To too many people the gender discourse initially looked like a traditional Soviet approach merely couched in different phraseology. Even those who were not particularly enchanted with these ideas did not take them seriously, probably relying on bureaucratic ability to merely pay lip service without actually making real changes. When the realization came that gender equality is not merely a convenient slogan which can be expediently neglected in real life, that effective measures have to be taken and that major social changes have to be effected, the opposition to women’s empowerment grew.

- Difference in perceptions and interpretations of “equality,” with the majority not being against “equality” per se. To complicate things further, not infrequently, the existence of gender inequality is recognized but is not seen as a problem.

- Social resistance, which was pointed out by gender experts Marina Blagojevic and Jina Sargizova: “... [T]here is still widely shared “social resistance” to gender equality which originates, not so much from traditional values (since communist memory of gender equality still seems to be strong, at least in the stratum of women professionals), as much as from the new unfavorable labor market conditions which “push back” women into the family roles.”<sup>13</sup>

Despite the opposition, the idea of gender equality was officially embraced, however reluctantly, and it gradually gained prominence. Some steps were taken, albeit for the most part superficial, and policies were formulated, although those were far from consistent in implementation:

The Department of Family, Women’s and Children’s Issues was created within the Ministry of Labor and Social Issues in 1997. The Department was tasked, *inter alia*, with drawing up the first *National Action Plan for the Improvement of Women’s Status and Enhancement of their Role in Society for 1998-2000*<sup>14</sup>. However, the Plan remained on paper. It was not implemented and no official review was ever conducted. Almost all the work in the gender issues field was done at the time by the few existing women’s NGOs. The latter focused

on awareness-raising, advocacy, research and lobbying. First conferences were held and surveys conducted.<sup>15</sup>

Over 20 women's NGOs were established or gained prominence during that period. Most of them discovered or clarified their principal mandate and mission.

Another important feature of this "breakthrough" in the recognition of gender issues was recognition of the **political** and **economic dimensions** of women's issues, whereas earlier the focus had been almost exclusively on families' socioeconomic situation, women's reproductive health, maternal and children's health, provision of social services to women, etc.

Nevertheless, it was at the turn of the century/millennium that push came to shove, marking the beginning of a new period in Armenia in public perceptions and attitudes, in policymaking and in research and activities concerning gender issues. The marked change can be accounted for primarily by four major external factors, *viz.* the **Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)**, the **Beijing review process, reporting** under international human rights instruments and the **Council of Europe (CoE) membership**.

(i) **MDGs, including their review process**: The Millennium Declaration (that the MDGs are derived from) qualifies "gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulate development that is truly sustainable."<sup>16</sup> The UN subsequently encouraged all countries to take ownership of the MDGs, to make national development plans gender-sensitive and to "nationalize" MDGs, i.e. to make them relevant to their local context. Armenia produced its first MDG National Progress Report in 2005, developing a national MDG framework, i.e. setting country-specific localized targets and monitoring indicators that reflected the priorities and needs identified by the Armenian government and suggested ways to achieve the MDGs in line with Armenia's own development needs. The Report states that "in Armenia's context, MDG nationalization entails setting goals that are more ambitious than those pledged by the Millennium Declaration. This is particularly true about ... gender equality (MDG 3), which emphasizes gender equality in terms of women's participation in politics and decision-making."<sup>17</sup>

(ii) The **Beijing review process** (especially Beijing+5 and Beijing+10) made a strong impact on domestic policymaking and advocacy, especially through the outcome document adopted by the twenty-third UN General Assembly special session "Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-first Century" and resolutions and agreed conclusions adopted by the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). The process was particularly important because Armenia chaired the CSW in 2009-2011.

(iii) **Reporting** under international human rights instruments is also very important for national policymaking and policy implementation. In this context, the most relevant international legal instrument is the *Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)*.<sup>18</sup> Armenia has been making strenuous efforts to demonstrate its adherence to international human rights treaties, including the CEDAW. The periodic reporting process, which entails not only preparation and submission of a report to the CEDAW Committee but also an obligation to act on the Concluding Observations provided by the Committee, has

proved to be a significant factor in making the government pay more attention to gender issues, take appropriate measures, including policy formulation and implementation, action plans, drafting legislation, etc. This process has thus proved to be a catalyst for change. The Concluding Observations provided by the CEDAW Committee were a powerful incentive for the Armenian Government to pay closer attention to outstanding problems and to look for effective ways to address them.<sup>19</sup>

(iv) **CoE membership** is an important factor primarily because of commitments and obligations that it entails, including those related to gender equality.

In the *Declaration on Equality of Women and Men* adopted by the CoE Committee of Ministers in 1988 the CoE member States reaffirmed “commitment to the principle of equality of women and men, as a sine qua non of democracy and an imperative of social justice.”<sup>20</sup>

As a member of the Council of Europe since 2001, Armenia was expected to recognize and accept that guiding principle. Ten years later, however, the idea that there is no democracy without women has yet to become an official policy line of the Armenian political elite. At the same time, there is a growing realization in the society at large that gender equality is a core principle of representative democracy and especially of participatory democracy. Thus, consolidation of democracy has to go hand in hand with more resolute and determined steps to achieve gender equality.

Due to the efforts of the CoE bodies the idea of parity democracy<sup>21</sup> gained a firm foothold in the gender discourse, if not in the political field, in Armenia.

Another important idea, which is promoted by the Council of Europe and which was gradually introduced into Armenia, is that the quality of democracy is predicated on the scope and scale of women’s civic and political participation and on their involvement in decision-making. However, in Armenia women still “have very little influence over policy decisions due to their lack of representation in decision-making positions”<sup>22</sup> despite the Recommendation Rec (2003) 3 of the CoE Committee of Ministers<sup>23</sup> that urges the governments of member States to commit themselves to promote balanced participation of women and men. According to the Recommendation, “balanced participation” means that representation of either sex “in any decision-making body in political or public life should not fall below 40%.”<sup>24</sup>

It is also noteworthy that gender-balanced participation and representation is not limited to getting more of the under-represented sex into all areas of decision-making. “At issue are not only the formal positions of elected seats within democracy, but the entire framework of social and economic decision-making.”<sup>25</sup>

This idea proved to be too “revolutionary” and radical for the Armenian political establishment, which has been doing its best to put it on the back burner or, preferably, to get the general public to forget about it (while at the same time government officials at international meetings vote for resolutions, statements and conclusions that reaffirm the commitment to the balanced participation of women and men).

In any case, even though, unlike the European Union, the Council of Europe does not yet have the ‘gender *acquis*’ (i.e. legally binding gender-equality

obligations), many of its documents lay the groundwork for relevant national legislation, policy frameworks and action plans. In addition, the Council of Europe makes effective use of and promotes Article 14 (“prohibition of discrimination”) of the European Convention on Human Rights and the Protocol No. 12 thereto, which further strengthened, broadened and operationalized the provisions of the Article for legal protection of women through introduction of a general non-discrimination clause.

In general, European regional organizations were also among the first to stress an economic dimension of gender equality, at the same time helping UN agencies to promote this stance the world over. In his address at the 6th European Ministerial Conference on Equality between Women and Men, the then CoE Secretary-General Terry Davis thus summed up the CoE position on that issue: “... gender equality is both a human right and an economic asset. The implementation of policies designed to promote gender equality may, almost certainly does, incur some costs, but these costs are insignificant compared with the social and economic benefits generated by gender equality.”<sup>26</sup> A recent EU publication goes even further as it states that “gender equality is a key factor in achieving long-term sustainable economic growth.”<sup>27</sup>

Armenia followed the lead, albeit very slowly. In 2002, a Deputy Minister post was created in the Ministry by a Prime Minister’s Decree. The Deputy Minister’s responsibilities include supervision over the *Department of Family, Women’s and Children’s Issues* and coordination of all women-related activities of other ministries, while ensuring collaboration with women’s NGOs and enforcing compliance with the CEDAW Convention.<sup>28</sup>

The second *National Action Plan for the Improvement of Women’s Status and Enhancement of their Role in Society in the Republic of Armenia in 2004-2010* was formulated and approved. It sought to set the principles, priorities and main directions of State policies aimed at solving women’s problems in eight main areas (decision-making and public and political spheres, socioeconomic situation, education, health, violence against women, trafficking in women and girls, media coverage and institutional reforms).<sup>29</sup>

The implementation of the Plan met with more success than its predecessor. Nevertheless, when steps were taken, they were for the most part half-measures. Still the government appointed gender focal points in Ministries and Regional Governors’ Offices, set up inter-agency commissions to deal with gender-related issues<sup>30</sup> and energized the operation of the Council on Women’s Affairs that had been established by the Prime Minister back in 2000.

The situation slightly improved at the end of the decade (and of the second National Action Plan). The Government finalized the draft Law “*On Provision of Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men*” and in 2011 submitted it to the National Assembly. On February 6, 2012, the Law was passed in the first reading.

At its 11 February 2010 session the Government endorsed the *Gender Policy Concept Paper*,<sup>31</sup> which is the first national comprehensive document outlining the main principles, goals and objectives of gender policy as well as its implementation tools and strategies. The Government then used the Concept Paper

to draft the *Republic of Armenia Gender Policy Strategic Programme 2011 and Action Plan for 2011* and the *Republic of Armenia Gender Policy Strategic Programme 2011-2015*,<sup>32</sup> which were approved at the 20 May 2011 session of the Armenian Government

In line with the recommendations made by international organizations (primarily by the CEDAW Committee<sup>33</sup>) and by local NGOs the Armenian National Assembly increased the gender quota to 20% on political party lists in majoritarian parliamentary elections.<sup>34</sup> While definitely an improvement from the earlier quota of 15%, it falls short of the critical mass of 30% advocated by the UN and of the 40% regarded as “balanced participation” by the Council of Europe.<sup>35</sup>

While these policy initiatives are very important, the Armenian government and parliament have yet to put their full weight behind them. It would still be premature to contend that gender equality has become a priority for the government and/or the parliament.

It should be pointed out that civil society organizations, primarily women’s NGOs, played an important, at times a leading role in most of those undertakings not only through lobbying and advocacy campaigns but also by contributing expertise and devoting time and effort. Cooperation with international organizations, which in many cases provided technical expertise, resources and coordination, was another factor that contributed to bringing those projects to successful completion.

It is also noteworthy that the persistence of women’s NGOs and international organizations has led to the (en)gendering of the government policies and has to a large extent averted the process of “degendering,”<sup>36</sup> which, as studies show, is not a rare occurrence in quite a few European countries.

A good example of productive cooperation between the government, civil society and international organizations in the past is provided by their joint efforts to combat gender-based violence (GBV), with the UNFPA Project “Combating gender-based violence in the South Caucasus” playing a key role.

On March 30, 2010, the *National Inter-Agency Committee to Combat Gender-Based Violence in Armenia* was established by the Armenian Prime Minister’s Decree N 213-A, as a special coordination and monitoring body which consists of representatives of Ministries, international organizations and local women’s NGOs. The Committee set up a working group that drafted the *2011-2015 Strategic Action Plan to Combat Gender-Based Violence* and the *2011 Action Plan to Combat Gender-Based Violence*.

Another result of joint efforts was a first nationwide, nationally representative sample survey on violence against women in Armenia, which was conducted in 2008-2010 and which is one of a kind because of its scope, scale, methodology and the status of the obtained results. Published in 2011, the final report summarizes the major findings of the survey, with a focus on relevant indicators and specific topics covered. The survey findings provide valuable information on *prevalence and incidence of major forms of violence against women*, including intimate partner and non-partner violence, on *effects of GBV* on women’s physical, mental and reproductive health, on *women’s coping strategies and mechanisms*, on *attitudes* towards violence against women, on *childhood sexual abuse* as well as on

the relationship between women's *socioeconomic status, financial autonomy* and *GBV*.<sup>37</sup> The study concluded that the phenomenon of violence against women is a serious problem and a common occurrence in Armenia and that intimate partner violence accounts for the greatest share of physical and psychological violence and controlling behavior and, probably, of sexual violence.<sup>38</sup>

A women's NGO took the lead in drafting a domestic violence law, while relying on the support of international organizations and government entities.

The GBV issue is particularly important for the context of gender issues in Armenia because GBV is a constitutive element of patriarchy, it is a tool used to keep women in subordination, under male control both in a private and public life. We are reminded that "... violence towards women is the result of an imbalance of power between men and women and is leading to serious discrimination against the female sex, both within society and within the family..."<sup>39</sup> As development expert Naila Kabeer put it, power is not only a widespread feature of gender relations but it also often takes a very coercive form.<sup>40</sup>

A gradual process of norm crystallization has been going on for several years already, which will hopefully result in adoption of a domestic law and in ratification of the legally binding *European Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence*, which will make it incumbent on the Armenian authorities to prevent GBV, to protect its victims and to prosecute perpetrators. So far Armenia is not among 18 signatories to the Convention. Nevertheless, it is important that the denial stage is over, that the existence and prevalence of GBV has been recognized and the efforts have been made to mobilize society at large to combat GBV as one of the ugliest forms of sex-based discrimination and one of the obstacles to gender equality.

The representatives of relevant government bodies, UN agencies, several other international organizations and local NGOs have recently started discussions concerning the establishment of a national referral mechanism for victims of gender-based violence and reviewed the model proposed by an expert.<sup>41</sup>

The area of Armenian public life where power asymmetry between women and men and gender inequality are most vivid is politics, even though it is no longer viewed as a male preserve. It is not that politicians, men in power and other male opinion makers *en masse* really believe that women should be confined to the private, family sphere and engage only in homemaking and care. The legitimation of male authority and women's subordination is mostly cultural, not ideological or political. These men do not want women (as well as other men) to undermine their domination over crucial decision-making and over access to and control over resource allocation. For the most part, society at large and particularly women are aware of the continuing marginalization of women in political life as well as in some other areas of public life. Time and again women activists from political parties and NGOs raise this issue and advocate strongly that more women should be in leadership positions in political and other fields, including the legislature, public administration, local governments, businesses, health, education, science, etc. It is a fact that with regard to representation in power and decision-making there is (to borrow a phrase from economics) a *suppressed demand* on the part of

the sizeable groups of women in Armenian society. Those unmet needs gradually cross the boundaries of social class, economic status and political affiliation.

At the same time political representation of women is very important because women (and it is true for any social, demographic or other group) better realize and represent their interests, problems and concerns. It will also secure more gender-sensitive and gender-fair legislation as well as women's more balanced and equal participation in decision-making.<sup>42</sup> In addition, this will set the stage for more gender-equal and gender-fair representation in the executive branch of government, will promote a philosophy of equal opportunities and equal outcomes and will help implement policies grounded in that philosophy.

An important caveat is in order here: while it is important to get many more women into the parliament and the government, efforts should be made that the best women get there. It is not only that women are too few in the parliament (or government for that matter) to make a difference, it is still problematic (based on the past performance of some female MPs) whether some of them are even willing to make the difference (assuming they have enough knowledge, expertise and vision, etc.).

As in many countries the world over, women in Armenia face numerous obstacles and problems in the political field. The most common of these are *resurgence* of patriarchal mentality (stereotypes), overall prevalent *indifference* not infrequently bordering on apathy, especially among younger women, *electoral legislation* and system (which tolerate inequality and do not ensure parity and require a lot of money that women, NGOs, etc. do not have), inability (incompetence, lack of experience, traditions and will, organizational constraints, etc.) to form alliances across party lines, ideological and other preferences and to network, and the *nature* of the political field (corruption, violence, manipulation, machinations, etc.).

Asymmetrical power relations between women and men are reflected in women's very limited access (if at all) to political and, especially, economic power. While the proportion of women in executive political positions gradually increased, it is still a far cry from the critical mass of 30% and even further from the stated CoE goal of balanced participation of 40/60. The situation is even worse in the private sector, where very few women are in decision-making positions. Not surprisingly, then, the problem is that the male bias is institutionalized, i.e. it is inherent in most political, economic and social institutions in Armenia.

It is also a fact that on the whole Armenian women are not politically assertive enough. A big part of this problem is the re-emergence of gender roles, which are typical of a traditional society and which are reinforced and impacted, if not determined, by the above-mentioned resurgence of patriarchal culture stereotypes, which go hand-in-hand and compete with modernistic, egalitarian, "progressive" and libertarian views and norms.

This situation is not unique to Armenia but, rather, is reflective of a more universal, if not global, trend. Nobel Prize winner in economics Amartya Sen emphasized that women themselves may not be immune from the hold of traditional masculinist values. He aptly pointed out that "what is needed is not just

freedom of action but also freedom of thought - in women's ability and willingness to question received values.”<sup>43</sup>

A spin-off of gender becoming a politically significant and at times politically charged issue is what Agnieszka Graff aptly called “loss of collective gender innocence,” i.e. gender issues have become less colloquial, less transparent, and more political and a subject of political reflection and political debate.<sup>44</sup> That is not necessarily a bad development. Greater public attention and more active and informed debates are a positive development.

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Thus, answering the question posed in the title, I would say that there are reasonable grounds to conclude that focus on gender issues was in a sense “imposed” initially rather than being “indigenous.” However, as Amy S. Wharton reminds us, gender is “a central organizing principle of social life in virtually all cultures of the world.”<sup>45</sup> Accelerated societal progress and the European integration process would in any event have sooner or later **underscored the discrepancy** between the ideal or, rather, normative vision of the society and the emerging social relations and practices and **exacerbated the conflict** between the social roles, expectations and norms of behavior prescribed by adherence to European liberal ideology and values and the largely patriarchal social realities “on the ground” marked by gender asymmetry.

The extraneous influence enhanced realization of the discrepancy and conflict and helped to frame the discourse and chart a further course through policy formulation and implementation. It is important to note that ownership of the gender problems area gradually became local, as evidenced by the results of studies, monitoring and surveys as well as the analyses of a public discourse. Supported by international organizations, Armenian women’s NGOs, by themselves or in cooperation or even partnership with governmental entities, have achieved public acknowledgement of the importance of the gender equality discourse and policies and have helped a growing segment of the Armenian general public internalize the ideas of gender equality and their underlying democratic values. Still, success in achieving gender equality and empowerment of women is predicated on strong political commitment,<sup>46</sup> which is yet to be made by main actors and stakeholders.

While quite a lot has been done, at least in terms of policy formulation, production and adoption of action plans, etc., the prospects are not, in my view, necessarily bright.

Armenia is in the grips of a systemic crisis. The problems are so grave that some experts even speculate whether Armenia will be able to survive as an independent state<sup>47</sup> without drastic and bold steps being taken. So far, however, there are no indications that there is political will to take those steps.

The systemic crisis means, *inter alia*, that it is not actually possible to solve problems in one sector (e.g. education, health care, agriculture, the army or gender for that matter) taken in isolation.

In a word, unless genuine democratization that will secure liberalization of political, economic, social and cultural relations takes place, gender equality will remain an ideal at best or a smoke screen at worst.

Besides, as the Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe states, “While formal gender equality can be achieved quite rapidly by enshrining this principle into constitutions, laws or specific norms, the same does not happen with regard to substantive gender equality.”<sup>48</sup> That is exactly the case in Armenia.<sup>49</sup> While formal recognition of gender equality has been made, there is still a great deal to be done to achieve substantive gender equality, which effectively means equality of opportunity and consistent efforts to move closer to securing equality of results. That, again, is predicated on genuine overall democratization and liberalization.

Only lip service is paid to democratic principles; they are not gaining ground. Any attentive observer of public life in Armenia can hardly fail noticing crystallization of authoritarian practices and norms and lack of institutional democracy and transparency in major governmental, political and economic institutions. There is less pluralism and less tolerance of pluralism. Even the putative marketplace of ideas is very limited and in jeopardy. There is little consolation in realizing that Armenia is not unique and that by many accounts we witness a global trend of backtracking from democracy.

In Armenia, instead of getting closer to electoral democracy to be able then to move further to consolidation of democracy, we seem to be drifting away from even a minimalist democracy. Erosion of public trust and confidence in major political and social institutions and now even in religious institutions is ubiquitous. The concepts “fledgling democracy,” “new democracy,” “transitional democracy,” etc., which were widely used in the 1990s and early 2000s to describe Armenia, are no longer seen as relevant and/or credible, at least, as applied to Armenia. What we have today is neither modern capitalism (since the latter is based on a genuine market economy, which has, at least historically, so far been a *sine qua non* of democracy) nor modern democracy. One of the clear manifestations of the absence of a free-market economy is the virtual absence of viable protection of private property, absence of enforceability of contracts, pervasive arbitrariness and invasive policies on the part of the ruling bureaucracy, growing monopolization of the economy, low effectiveness of the economy, low export capacity, etc. The emerging political and economic system looks more like what prominent Russian political scientist Sergey Kurginian calls “Mafioso-style pseudocapitalism.”<sup>50</sup> It is a pity because the social and human cost of transition has been staggering.

It is in this context and against this background that the prospects for achieving gender equality should be viewed. The above-mentioned trends do not bode particularly well for gender equality in Armenia.

In fact, more than just gender equality hangs in the balance. Armenia is at a critical juncture. There is a growing realization that those tendencies have to be reversed so that the country gets on a sustainable political, economic and social development track.

In any case, gender equality is not an altogether lost cause in Armenia, at least for now. While the role of the above-mentioned macrosocial and macroeconomic determinants is crucial, there are also other factors at play in society, which are powerful enough *per se* to make a strong positive or negative impact on progress towards gender equality. While an enabling sociopolitical and economic

environment is indispensable, yet the effect of other factors, whether stand-alone or in combination, is far from marginal and, thus, cannot be discounted.

Some key “push” (positive) and “pullback” (negative) factors are well worth mentioning.

The three *major pullback factors* are (1) lack of efficient coordination and of consistent implementation of gender policies, (2) emigration and (3) declining levels of educational attainment.

While some policies are in place, there are serious implementation problems, most of which are grounded in the **lack of proper coordination**. This problem can be addressed effectively with the establishment of national machinery for gender equality.

**Emigration** not only depletes the country’s human resources, it also includes a *brain* and *talent* and *skill drain*. The proportion of better-educated, more enterprising, creative, future-oriented, and socially and professionally dynamic individuals with a modern mentality (in other words, de facto or potential members of a middle class who, as such, have internalized, at least to some extent, the ideas and ideals of gender equality) is markedly big in the emigrant flows.

The **education policies** and **reforms** (as well as changing social perceptions that devalue education and science) are responsible both for a growing number of school drop-outs and absentees<sup>51</sup> and for the grim prospect of a less educated citizenry (including the segments of uneducated and functionally or even absolutely illiterate population). The better educated a person is, the more likely he or she will be open and sympathetic to new ideas and values, including equality, social justice and human rights, hence, gender equality. And vice versa.

The three *major push factors* are (1) political will, (2) a still nascent but already assertive democratic gender culture, and last but not least, (3) a vibrant civil society.

Clear manifestations of **political will** were mentioned above. While far from consistent and determined, this political will, nevertheless, exists and needs nurturing, encouragement and support.

Much has been done, primarily by women’s NGOs and other actors, to promote and to build on those elements in the traditional Armenian culture and in the Soviet legacy that were supportive of gender equality. This **democratic gender culture** confronts and fights back against the resurging patriarchal stereotypes. It is due to this culture that gender roles, which are very rigid in quite a few cultures and nations, are not tightly prescribed in Armenia. Of course, with regard to gender roles, stereotypes and perceptions there are still numerous unexplored nuanced complexities that need serious research, which would then inform policy action and educational efforts.

**A vibrant civil society** is a key to success. It is clear at this point that a women’s movement has not emerged in Armenia. However, there are quite a few determined, effective, vocal and visible women’s NGOs that have introduced, promoted and supported the gender agenda. Due to them, gender issues have gained prominence and recognition, become a part of public discourse and made their way into government policies and into educational as well as research institutions. Advocacy and lobbying have been crucial. Women’s NGOs and other

civil society organizations that support them can be credited with fighting discrimination on the grounds of sex (including gender-based violence), with ratifications of relevant international legal instruments, with introduction of gender quotas as well as gender-sensitive amendments to Civil, Labor, Family and other Codes, with introduction and subsequent institutionalization of gender education and research, with making media reporting more gender-balanced and gender-sensitive, etc. Taking a pro-active and non-confrontational but collaborative stance, women's NGOs have succeeded in getting many key politicians, decision-makers and other prominent individuals on board. NGOs are behind all measures, however moderate and irresolute, taken to increase women's political and economic empowerment. And they push for more, placing much emphasis on women's civic and political participation and making consistent efforts to educate the general public and to make ideas of gender equality more acceptable to it.<sup>52</sup>

The convergence of the effects of all the push factors and alignment of the policies and efforts of all stakeholders will be conducive to true commitment to the goal of attaining gender equality professed by the country's government, legislature, main political actors and civil society. This commitment entails first of all **elimination** of discrimination on the grounds of sex, **provision** of equal rights and equal opportunities to women and men and gradual **securing** of equality of results, i.e. complementing formal-legal (de jure) equality with de facto equality and – in the future – with substantive equality. That, in its turn, requires changes in current legislation (including the adoption of temporary special measures) as well as formulation and implementation of an overall policy and of concrete strategies for various spheres of public life, including identification of important tasks, establishment of priorities and formulation of short- and medium-term action plans and programs for the long haul.

All this, however, is predicated ultimately on democratization and liberalization processes. Let me stress again that gender equality cannot be expected to be achieved under the constraints of the present-day political and economic realities in Armenia.

#### ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Sociologists have long argued that gender is one critical dimension upon which social resources are distributed (A.S. Wharton, "Gender inequality," in George Ritzer (ed.), *Handbook of Social problems. A Comparative International perspective*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2004, p.156.

<sup>2</sup> Pierella Paci, *Gender in Transition*, Washington: World Bank, 2002, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. x, 10. The USAID gender study concludes: "For many years, gender issues in the E&E (Europe and Eurasia – V.O.) region went largely unexamined, based on the assumption that under the Soviet system, men and women were treated equally. Indeed, during Soviet times men and women achieved enviable levels of gender equality by the standards of many other nations with similar GDP levels. In most countries in the E&E region, men and women had relatively equal access to education, health care, and employment. Many now feel, however, that women's gains and status have begun to erode since the transition and some have come forward to question whether the equality that existed under the Soviet system was more apparent than real" (*Gender Issues in*

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*Europe and Eurasia: An Overview of the Literature*, Washington, D.C.: USAID, 2006, p. 1).

- <sup>4</sup> “[T]he post-communist transition has seen reductions in women’s wages and employment rates relative to men’s; access to assets, property, and political representation has declined. Women as primary care providers have been hard hit by the collapse of or decline in social services. When poverty data are disaggregated by gender, they generally show that women fare much worse than men. Gender roles most often found in traditional societies have re-asserted themselves and may be exacerbating labour market discrimination and domestic violence” (James Hughes and Ben Slay, “Gender in Transition,” *Development and Transition*, # 8, UNDP & LSE., December 2007, p. 1).
- <sup>5</sup> M. Hawkesworth, “Democratization: Reflections on Gendered Dislocations in the Public Spheres,” in Nancy Holmstrom (ed.) *The Socialist Feminist Project*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 2002, pp. 298-312.
- <sup>6</sup> Bożena Umińska-Keff, “Reclaiming the Tractors,” *Women in Times of Change, 1989-2009*, Warsaw: Heinrich Böll Foundation Regional Office, 2009, p. 19.
- <sup>7</sup> Agnieszka Rochon and Agnieszka Grzybek, “Introduction,” *Women in Times of Change, 1989-2009*, Warsaw: Heinrich Böll Foundation Regional Office, 2009, p. 7.
- <sup>8</sup> M. Titizian, “The Armenian Woman: From Progressive Emancipation to Conservatism.” *The Armenian Weekly*, Watertown, USA, 7 March 2010 (<http://www.armenianweekly.com/2010/03/07/titizian-the-armenian-woman-from-progressive-emancipation-to-conservatism/#comments>)
- <sup>9</sup> E. Duban, *Gender Assessment*, Yerevan: USAID/Armenia, 2010, p. 3.
- <sup>10</sup> “Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action adopted at the World Conference on Human Rights. 25 June 1993,” *The United Nations and Human Rights, 1945-1995*, New York: UN, 1995, p. 449.
- <sup>11</sup> The *ICPD Programme of Action*, New York: UNFPA, 2004, p. 22.
- <sup>12</sup> “The advancement of women and the achievement of equality between women and men are a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice and should not be seen in isolation as a women’s issue. They are the only way to build a sustainable, just and developed society. Empowerment of women and equality between women and men are prerequisites for achieving political, social, economic, cultural and environmental security among all peoples” “Platform for Action” (Adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women, 15 September 1995). *The Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action*. New York: UN DPI, 2006, p. 33 (para. 41) & p. 17 (para. 1).
- <sup>13</sup> M. Blagojevic and J. Sargizova, *Needs Assessment on Institutional Mechanisms*, UNDP Armenia, March 2008, pp. 5-6.
- <sup>14</sup> According to the Armenian government, the National Action Plan “focused on the issues of mother and child health protection, women’s rights and fundamental freedoms, and provision of guarantees for their increased involvement in public administration” (*Armenia. Questionnaire to Governments on Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) and the Outcome of the Twenty-Third Special Session of the General Assembly (2000)*). <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/Review/responses/ARMENIA-English.pdf>, p. 1). However, the Plan remained on paper. It was not implemented, and no official review was ever conducted.
- <sup>15</sup> The most active was the Armenian Association of Women with University Education (AAWUE), which from July 1997 to April 2000 held 5 conferences on gender issues attended by scores of researchers, lawmakers, NGOs and political party activists from Armenia and other countries: *Women’s Rights and Issues in the Transforming Society: Reality and Prospects* (July 1997), *Women and Development: Rights and Opportunities* (November 1997), *Women & Society: Gender Equality in the Perspective of Democratic*

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- Development* (October 1998), *Culture of Peace: Democracy & Dialogue of Cultures* (July 1999) and *Women in Armenia in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Gender Equality: Women's Civic and Political Participation* (April 2000). AAWUE also conducted the first nationwide survey on gender issues: *Women in Development. Gender Issues of the Present-day Society* (in 1999). An interesting survey (*Dynamic of the Gender Situation in Gyumri*) whose findings drew much public attention was conducted in 2000 by the Center for Gender Studies at Gyumri School of Education.
- <sup>16</sup> *United Nations Millennium Declaration* (Adopted by the UN General Assembly at the 8<sup>th</sup> plenary session on 8 September 2000), New York: UN DPI, 2000, p. 8. The 2010 Human Development Report asserts that “gender inequality remains a major barrier to human development” (*The Real Wealth of Nations: Pathways to Human Development* (Human Development Report 2010). Houndsmill, Basingstoke, Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p. 89).
- <sup>17</sup> *Millennium Development Goals: Nationalization and Progress. 2005 National Report: Armenia*, Yerevan: UNDP and PRSP Secretariat, 2005, p. 1.
- <sup>18</sup> Armenia ratified without reservations the CEDAW on June 9, 2003 and the Optional Protocol to the CEDAW on May 23, 2006. While Armenia submitted its initial report to the CEDAW Committee in 1995 (which was considered by the Committee in 1997), it was not until the 571<sup>st</sup> and 572<sup>nd</sup> meetings of the CEDAW Committee held on 7 August 2002 (when the second periodic report submitted by Armenia in 1999 was considered) and especially in the aftermath of the meetings, when the Committee published its Concluding Observations, that the process got serious public attention and began making a policy impact.
- <sup>19</sup> In its Concluding Observations with regard to the third and fourth periodic report of Armenia the CEDAW Committee stressed particularly the issues of political underrepresentation of women (and the need of temporary special measures such as quotas to boost political participation of women), of violence against women, of the necessity to establish a national machinery for the advancement of women and to enact appropriate national legislation containing prohibition of discrimination against women, encompassing both direct and indirect discrimination, and to address deeply-rooted patriarchal stereotypes and cultural practices, among other things (*Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. Armenia*, CEDAW Committee. Document CEDAW/C/ARM/CO/4/Rev.1. 2 February 2009).
- <sup>20</sup> “The Declaration on Equality of Women and Men” adopted by the CoE Committee of Ministers in 1988.
- <sup>21</sup> The Council of Europe defined parity democracy as “the full integration of women on an equal footing with men at all levels and in all areas of the workings of a democratic society, by means of multidisciplinary strategies” (Sineau, M. *Genderware – the Council of Europe and the Participation of Women in Political Life*, Strasbourg: CoE, 2003, p. 28).
- <sup>22</sup> Duban, *Gender Assessment*, p. 4.
- <sup>23</sup> *Recommendation Rec (2003) 3 of the CoE Committee of Ministers to member States on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making* (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 12 March 2003). <https://wcd.coe.int/wcd/ViewDoc.jsp?id=2229>
- <sup>24</sup> *Appendix to Recommendation Rec(2003)3*. See Ibid.
- <sup>25</sup> A.E. Woodward, *Going for Gender Balance*, Strasbourg: CoE, 2002, pp. 11-12.
- <sup>26</sup> T. Davis, “Address,” *Human Rights and Economic Challenges in Europe – Gender Equality*, Proceedings of the 6<sup>th</sup> European Ministerial Conference on Equality between

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- Women and Men. Strasbourg: CoE, 2006, p. 25. The Resolution adopted at that Conference qualified gender equality as a prerequisite for economic development (Ibid., p. 7).
- <sup>27</sup> *More Women in Senior Positions: Key to Economic Stability and Growth*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2010, p. 14.
- <sup>28</sup> See CEDAW document A/57/38/part III, para. 27, p. 150 (2002).
- <sup>29</sup> *National Action Plan for the Improvement of Women's Status and Enhancement of their Role in Society in the Republic of Armenia in 2004-2010*, Yerevan: WRC, 2004 (in Armenian).
- <sup>30</sup> On the initiative of the country's President, a Public Council was established in 2009, which has a *Committee on Gender & Demographic Issues*. The Armenian Parliament also established a special task force, the *Inter-Party Advisory Body on Women's Issues Adjunct to the Speaker*.
- <sup>31</sup> <http://www.genderbasedviolence.am/en/content/show/55/national-documents-on-gender-and-gbv.html>
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>33</sup> See *Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Armenia*, CEDAW Committee. Document CEDAW/C/ARM/CO/4/Rev.1. 2 February 2009, para. 17.
- <sup>34</sup> See paragraph 2 of Article 108 of the new *Electoral Code of the Republic of Armenia* adopted on 26 May 2011.
- <sup>35</sup> It should also be borne in mind that this requirement that women constitute at least 20% among those on the ballot and the formula to be used for their inclusion do not ensure that women will constitute 20% of the elected parliament members.
- <sup>36</sup> This is a process "where a gender equality focus that was previously present in the framing of an issue gets lost during the policy process by shifting the emphasis on other actors (e.g., children or families, rather than the relation between men and women) or other goals (e.g., shifting the meaning of family policies from the goal of sharing to that of reconciling work and family life, where the goal becomes an efficient and competitive labor market rather than challenging traditional gender roles)." Mieke Verloo, Emanuela Lombardo and Maria Bustelo, "Conclusions on Framing Gender Inequality as a Policy Problem in Europe," in *Multiple Meanings of Gender Equality A Critical Frame Analysis of Gender Policies in Europe*, Mieke Verloo (ed.), Budapest – New York: CEU Press, 2007, p. 281.
- <sup>37</sup> V. Osipov, A. Tanashyan et al, *Report on the Nationwide Survey on Domestic Violence Against Women in Armenia 2008-2010*, Yerevan: UNFPA.
- <sup>38</sup> According to the survey results, the lifetime prevalence of intimate partner violence among ever-partnered women is as follows: 61.0% were exposed to controlling behavior, 25.0% were subjected to psychological violence/abuse, 8.9% to physical violence, 3.3% to sexual violence and 9.5% to physical and/or sexual violence (Ibid., p. 337).
- <sup>39</sup> Recommendation Rec(2002)5 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the protection of women against violence (Adopted by the CoE Committee of Ministers on 30 April 2002) <https://wcd.coe.int/wcd/ViewDoc.jsp?id=280915>
- <sup>40</sup> Naila Kabeer, "Gender, Development and Training: Raising Awareness in Development Planning," Paper Presented to the National Labor Institute/Ford Foundation Workshop on Gender Training and Development. Bangalore, 29 November – 6 December 1990.
- <sup>41</sup> See: *Recommendations for the Establishment of a National Referral Mechanism for Survivors of Gender-Based Violence in the Republic of Armenia*, Yerevan: UNFPA, 2011, p. 52.

- <sup>42</sup> *Women Around the World: Fact Sheet*, Special Issue, March 2000, Center for Legislative Development Manila, Philippines.
- <sup>43</sup> A. Sen, "Many Faces of Gender Inequality," *Frontline*, Vol.18, issue 22, Oct. 27-Nov. 09, 2001, p. 15.
- <sup>44</sup> A. Graff, "Where did the Woman on a Tractor and the Cynical Tough Guy Go? Gender Innocence Irretrievably Lost," *Women in Times of Change, 1989-2009*, pp. 32-33.
- <sup>45</sup> A.S. Wharton, "Gender Inequality," in George. Ritzer (ed.), *Handbook of Social Problems. A Comparative International Perspective*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2004, p. 156.
- <sup>46</sup> "...[P]olitical will is necessary to give effect and set in motion concrete measures enforcing the existing action plans for advancing gender equality" *Participation of Women in Public and Economic Life*, Consolidated Summary, OSCE Human Dimension Seminar. Warsaw, 2003, p. 14.
- <sup>47</sup> "Emigration Threatens Armenia: Libaridian's Appeal," *Ianyan Mag., An Independent Armenian Publication*, <http://www.ianyanmag.com/2011/08/03/emigration-threatens-armenia-libaridians-appeal/>
- <sup>48</sup> *Gender Equality Standards and Mechanisms*, Recommendation CM/Rec (2007) 17 of the Committee of Ministers and Explanatory Memorandum, Strasbourg: Directorate General of Human Rights and Legal Affairs (Council of Europe), 2008, p. 31.
- <sup>49</sup> "Of course, starting conditions for women's and men's advancement are different in Armenian society, which means that women's and men's opportunities and achievements are also different. The Armenian Constitution, however, has no provision for equal opportunities" (*Study on Causes of Women's Underrepresentation in Decision-Making*, Yerevan: NILSR, 2008, p. 3).
- <sup>50</sup> S. E. Kurginian, "Posle Kapitalizma" *Manifest Dvijeniya 'Sut Vremeni'* (after Capitalism. "the essence of times," Akademiya Trinitaqrizma', Moscow, El. № 77-6567, publ. 16790, 28.08.2011 2011, p. 60, in Russian.
- <sup>51</sup> Hua. Haiyan, *School Wastage Study Focusing on Student Absenteeism in Armenia*, Yerevan: UNICEF, 2008.
- <sup>52</sup> A recent sociological survey found that a significant percentage of 1,200 respondents (from 5 regions of the country, including Yerevan) would like to see women holding the positions of Speaker of Parliament (45.1%), member of Parliament (82.2%, city/town mayor (48.6%), Regional Governor (46.3%), Government Minister (76.8%), Head of Condominium (67.3%) and even in the top positions of the country's President (28.7%) and Prime Minister (34.0%) (H. Hovhannisyan, L. Zakaryan and V. Osipov, *Gender Dimension of Civic and Political Participation in Armenia. Report on the Findings of the Sociological Study*, Yerevan: UNFPA & OSCE, 2011, p. 69).

**ՍԵՌԵՐՈՒ ՀԱՒԱՍԱՐՈՒԹԻՒՆԸ ՀԱՅԱՍՏԱՆԻ ՀԱՆՐԱՊԵՏՈՒԹԵԱՆ ՄԷՋ  
ՆԿԱՏՈՒԱԾ ԿԱՐԻՔ, ԹԷ՞ ՊԱՐՏԱԴՐՈՒԱԾ ՆԱԽԱՊԱՅՄԱՆ  
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*Հեղինակը մանրամասնորեն կը ներկայացնէ Հայաստանի Հանրապետութեան մէջ սեռերու հաւասարութեան վիճակին համապատկերը:*

*Խորհրդային Միութեան փլուզումով, ճեռնհաս քաղաքացիական հասարակութեան մը բացակայութիւնը յատկանշականորէն տկարացուց դէպի ժողովրդավարութիւն*

անցումի գործընթացը: Աւելին՝ ձեռնհաս քաղաքացիական հասարակութեան մը բացակայութիւնը պատճառ դարձաւ խեղաթիւրումներու, դուռ բացաւ հայրիշխանական կարծրատիպ մտայնութեանց եւ կիրարկումներու վերայստիւնումին: Հայաստանի Հանրապետութեան մէջ սեռերու հաւասարութեան հարցերու գիտական արծարծումը սկսաւ հայրիշխանական կենսաձեւերու առաւել խրամատաւորումին լոյսին տակ, ինչպէս նաեւ՝ ի տես տնտեսական, քաղաքական եւ հանրային մարզերուն մէջ սեռերու անհաւասարութեան աճումին: Այս ծիրին մէջ, հեղինակը կ'անդրադառնայ 1990ականներուն ՄԱԿի գումարած բազմաթիւ միջազգային գիտաժողովներու եւ հանրաժողովներու, որոնցմով հանրային լայն ուշադրութեան արժանացան սեռերու հաւասարութեան շատ հարցեր:

1990ականներուն, Հայաստանի եւ յետ-խորհրդային երկիրներու համար էականօրէն կարեւոր էր պարզել աշխարհին, թէ իրենք կը հետեւին «եւրոպական» արժէքներու, որոնց կարգին՝ մարդկային իրաւանց յարգում, խտրականութեան վերացում եւ հաւասար պատեհութեանց միջոցներ: Այս սկզբունքներուն հանդէպ յանձնառութիւնը նախապահման էր միջազգային եւ շրջանային կազմակերպութիւններու անդամակցութեան: Հետեւաբար, զարմանալի չէր որ լուրջ բարեկարգումներ ընթացք ստացան եւ տեղական իրաւական համակարգերը ներդաշնակուեցան միջազգային օրէնքին:

Հայաստանի Հանրապետութեան մէջ հազարամեակի դարձը յատկանշուեցաւ սեռերու հաւասարութեան հանդէպ հանրային ըմբռնումներու եւ կեցուածքներու նոր շրջանի մը սկիզբով: Հազարամեակի Զարգացման Նպատակները, Փեքինի Վերատեսութեան Գործընթացը, մարդկային իրաւանց միջազգային փաստաթուղթերու տեղեկագրումը եւ Եւրոպայի խորհուրդին անդամակցութիւնը հանդիսացան փոփոխութեան գլխաւոր գործօնները:

Բազմաթիւ միջոցառումներ եւ կարեւոր քայլեր պէտք էր առնուէին՝ յանձնառութիւնները յարգելու համար: Սակայն, ինչպէս հեղինակը կը մատնանշէ, Հայաստանի Հանրապետութեան կառավարութիւնն ու խորհրդարանը դեռեւս պէտք է իրենց լրիւ կշիռը ներդնեն որպէսզի վերոյիշեալ յանձնառութիւնները գործադրուին: Կանխահաս է յաւակնիլ թէ սեռերու հաւասարութիւնը թիւ մէկ առաջնահերթութիւնն է Հայաստանի կառավարութեան, մասնաւորաբար՝ խորհրդարանին: Թէեւ որոշակի քաղաքականութիւն մը որդեգրուած է, սակայն՝ կիրարկումը լուրջ խնդիրներ կը դիմագրաւէ: Այդ խնդիրները կարելի է ազդու կերպով լուծել միայն երբ հաստատուի սեռերու հաւասարութեան համապետական մեքանիզմ մը, որ պիտի ապահովէ այս ուղղութեամբ տարրուող աշխատանքներուն շատ անհրաժեշտ ու տակաւին բացակայող համադրութիւնը:

Իբրեւ եզրակացութիւն, Օսիփով կ'առանձնացնէ երեք մղիչ գործօններ, որոնք իմասն կրնան հանդիսանալ կառավարութեան, խորհրդարանին եւ քաղաքական ու հասարակական քաղաքացիութեան գլխաւոր դերակատարներուն կողմէ յայտարարուած սեռային հաւասարութիւնը իրականութիւն դարձնելու յանձնառութեան: Այդ գործօններն են՝ ա) քաղաքական կամք, բ) սեռերու ժողովրդավարական մշակոյթ, գ) ձեռնհաս քաղաքացիական հասարակարգ: Ասոնք, սակայն, պայմանաւորուած են ժողովրդավարացման եւ ազատականացման գործընթացներով: Հեղինակը կը հաւաստէ որ իրապաշտօրէն կարելի չէ ակնկալել որ սեռերու հաւասարութիւնը իրագործուի Հայաստանի Հանրապետութեան մէջ ներկայ քաղաքական եւ տնտեսական սահմանափակումներուն մէջ: