THE ARMENIAN DIASPORA'S REAL CHALLENGE IS NOT TÜRKİYE, BUT THE CHANGING GEOPOLITICAL REALITY - 23.10.2026

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Response to Harut Sassounian: Diaspora, State Sovereignty, and the Future of Peace in the South Caucasus

One of the most consequential challenges facing Armenia today is not simply whether it should normalize relations with Türkiye and Azerbaijan. Rather, it is how the Armenian state can reconcile the responsibilities of sovereign statehood with the historical narratives, ideological expectations, and political priorities of segments of its diaspora.

This is not merely an internal Armenian debate. It has profound implications for sustainable peace, regional economic integration, and the emerging geopolitical order in the South Caucasus.

An article published by Harut Sassounian in The Armenian Weekly on October 20, 2026, entitled Turkish Research Center Repeatedly Praises Pashinyan and Criticizes the Diaspora, offers a revealing illustration of this dilemma.

In his article, Sassounian criticizes analyses published by the Ankara-based Center for Eurasian Studies (AVİM), including my study, Armenia Caught Between Diaspora Ambitions and State Memory.

Academic criticism is both legitimate and necessary. Indeed, the exchange of competing interpretations is indispensable to intellectual progress. Yet the credibility of criticism must be measured not by the nationality of an author or the country in which a study is

published, but by the strength of its evidence, the coherence of its reasoning, and its capacity to engage with geopolitical realities.

The essential question, therefore, is not why these analyses were published in Türkiye, but whether their central arguments can be convincingly challenged.

The Diaspora Is Not a Sovereign State

The Armenian diaspora possesses a deeply rooted historical consciousness, extensive organizational networks, and considerable political influence in several countries.

Its role in preserving Armenian cultural identity and promoting Armenian causes internationally cannot be dismissed. Diaspora organizations in the United States and France, in particular, have long exercised influence over international discussions concerning Armenia.

Nevertheless, a fundamental distinction must be maintained.

A diaspora is a social and political actor. It is not a sovereign state.

A state has internationally recognized borders, citizens, security obligations, economic responsibilities, and commitments under international law.

Diaspora organizations, by contrast, operate within the political environments of their respective countries of residence. Their priorities may reflect historical grievances, identity-based mobilization, domestic lobbying dynamics, or political agendas that do not necessarily correspond to the immediate interests of Armenias citizens.

An Armenian living in Los Angeles, Paris, or elsewhere is fully entitled to advocate historical or political claims.

However, transforming such claims into an unquestionable authority over the foreign and security policies of the Republic of Armenia raises a fundamental issue of sovereignty.

It is primarily Armenias citizens who bear the consequences of closed borders, economic constraints, security vulnerabilities, and regional dependencies.

The legitimate authority to determine the countrys future must therefore rest with Armenias people and constitutional institutions.

This position does not constitute hostility toward the Armenian diaspora.

On the contrary, it recognizes Armenia as an independent state entitled to formulate its own national priorities.

Does Every Policy Welcomed by Türkiye and Azerbaijan Harm Armenia?

One of the most questionable implications of Sassounians argument is the suggestion that the favorable reception of certain policies pursued by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan in Türkiye and Azerbaijan should itself be regarded as evidence that those policies are contrary to Armenian national interests.

Taken to its logical conclusion, this reasoning produces a troubling proposition:

Any peace initiative supported by Türkiye or Azerbaijan must automatically be treated with suspicion in Armenia, regardless of its actual substance or potential benefits.

International relations do not operate according to such a simplistic logic.

A countrys national interest cannot be defined exclusively by whether a neighboring state approves or disapproves of a particular policy.

States may have competing interests in some areas and overlapping interests in others.

Peace agreements, diplomatic normalization, transportation connectivity, and economic cooperation can create mutually beneficial arrangements without requiring either side to abandon its sovereignty or national identity.

Whether a particular initiative serves Armenias interests should be assessed through objective criteria: its implications for sovereignty, security, economic development, diplomatic independence, and long-term stability.

The fact that Türkiye or Azerbaijan welcomes a diplomatic initiative does not, by itself, prove that the initiative is detrimental to Armenia.

An approach that equates reconciliation with betrayal and permanent confrontation with patriotism reflects political dogmatism rather than strategic statecraft.

The Geopolitical Reality After Karabakh

The geopolitical landscape of the South Caucasus underwent a fundamental transformation following the Second Karabakh War in 2020 and Azerbaijans restoration of sovereignty over Karabakh in 2023.

These developments cannot be understood exclusively in military terms.

They have reshaped the regions security environment, transportation geography, economic prospects, and diplomatic priorities.

From Azerbaijans perspective, the restoration of its authority over internationally recognized territory marked a decisive new phase in the Karabakh question.

For Armenia, the central challenge is now to develop a sustainable national strategy within this transformed regional environment.

Recognizing this reality does not require unconditional support for every policy pursued by Nikol Pashinyan.

His decisions, like those of any political leader, remain open to legitimate criticism. Armenian citizens have every democratic right to question their governments policies and hold their leaders accountable.

However, criticism that disregards changing power balances and emerging diplomatic opportunities risks becoming detached from political reality.

Defining Armenias future solely through the continuation of historical disputes may deprive the country of opportunities for regional integration and economic development.

Peace does not require the abandonment of historical memory.

It requires a willingness to prevent the past from holding every possibility for the future hostage.

Diaspora Memory and State Memory Are Not Identical

This distinction lies at the heart of my earlier analysis.

Diaspora memory is frequently structured around the preservation of identity, the transmission of historical narratives across generations, and the maintenance of collective belonging.

State memory must incorporate these considerations while also addressing sovereignty, diplomacy, territorial security, economic welfare, and international responsibilities.

These two forms of memory are not necessarily incompatible.

However, when tensions arise between them, the democratic decision-making institutions of the sovereign state must retain their legitimate authority.

If Armenias foreign policy becomes excessively dependent on the expectations of diaspora organizations, its ability to respond pragmatically to its own geopolitical circumstances may be weakened.

The political objectives of organizations operating within foreign political systems do not always coincide with the immediate security and economic needs of Armenian citizens.

The issue is not whether members of the diaspora love Armenia or remain committed to Armenian identity.

The more consequential question is:

To what extent is the diaspora prepared to respect Armenias right to determine its own future?

Armenia Does Not Have to Be a Loser in Peace

The normalization of relations between Türkiye and Armenia, a sustainable peace between Azerbaijan and Armenia, and the development of transportation connections across the South Caucasus could generate substantial economic and strategic opportunities for the entire region.

Naturally, such processes require mutual confidence, respect for sovereignty, implementation of agreements, and sustained political commitment.

The legitimate security concerns of all parties must be addressed.

Yet the economic, political, and social costs of prolonged confrontation cannot be ignored.

Normal relations with Türkiye and Azerbaijan do not imply the disappearance of Armenian identity.

On the contrary, an Armenia capable of maintaining constructive relations with its neighbors, diversifying its economic partnerships, and exercising greater independence in foreign policy could strengthen its own state capacity.

Preserving Armenian identity and achieving regional peace are not mutually exclusive objectives.

Presenting them as incompatible unnecessarily restricts Armenias strategic choices.

Questions for Harut Sassounian

In light of Mr. Sassounians criticism, several questions deserve serious consideration.

Why should Armenias peaceful coexistence with Türkiye and Azerbaijan be perceived as a threat to the Armenian diaspora?

By what objective criteria can one conclude that every diplomatic initiative positively received by Türkiye and Azerbaijan necessarily damages Armenian interests?

When the historical demands of diaspora organizations conflict with the immediate security and welfare needs of Armenias citizens, which should take precedence?

And finally, if reconciliation with neighboring countries is continuously viewed with suspicion, what viable alternative regional security framework do diaspora critics propose?

These questions are relevant not only to Türkiye and Azerbaijan but, above all, to Armenias own future.

Conclusion: Geography Is Permanent, Politics Can Change

I welcome Harut Sassounians engagement with my work as an opportunity for substantive academic debate.

Differences of interpretation are inevitable, particularly in a region whose modern history has been marked by conflict, competing narratives, and profound political transformations.

Nevertheless, scholarly arguments should be evaluated according to their analytical consistency and evidentiary foundations, not the nationality of their authors or the location of the institutions that publish them.

My position is clear.

Türkiye, Azerbaijan, and Armenia can coexist within the same geographical space through security, stability, and economic cooperation.

Achieving this objective does not require denying historical disputes. It requires acknowledging present realities and accepting responsibility for the future.

An Armenia that respects Azerbaijans sovereignty, develops normal relations with Türkiye, and prioritizes the welfare of its own citizens can become an important participant in regional peace.

The Armenian diaspora therefore faces an important choice.

Will its political organizations continue to prioritize the reproduction of historical grievances as instruments of political pressure, or will they contribute constructively to Armenias peace, development, and independent decision-making capacity?

Armenias future is a matter of greater consequence than the determination of particular diaspora organizations to perpetuate historical confrontation.

One geopolitical fact must not be forgotten:

Türkiye and Azerbaijan are Armenias neighbors. That geographical reality will not change. What can change is whether these relationships are defined by confrontation or by peace and mutually beneficial cooperation.

Historical memory matters.

But the responsibility of statehood is not merely to preserve the memory of the past.

It is to possess the political courage and strategic wisdom to build a future beyond it.

This article responds to Harut Sassounians Turkish Research Center Repeatedly Praises Pashinyan and Criticizes the Diaspora, published in The Armenian Weekly on October 20, 2026.

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