

ARMENIA AFTER INDEPENDENCE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF MIGRATION

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Abstract:

Armenia has faced with population drain in the last decade. The immediate post-1991 period produced difficulties, particularly in terms of economy. The transition to the market economy from the command system with an incompatible systemic heritage, and the war in Karabakh produced economic difficulties. People inclined towards considerably more developed regions of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Europe, and of course, the United States. This population outflow from Armenia provided political stability and contributed to the state budget on the one hand, however, also resulted in money and human capital loss. It also created problems in the destination countries, as well.

Keywords:

Internal Migration, International Migration, Transit Migration, Emigration, Diaspora, Political (In)stability, Human Capital, Refugee, Cheap Labour

Population movements, internal or international, have always been a matter of concern for the policy-makers. Internal migration has flown from the less advanced regions to more advanced places, that's from villages and towns to cities. International migration follows a parallel path from developing/underdeveloped to the developed countries or even continents. This direction of migration, regardless of being internal or international, gives a clue about the reasons of the phenomenon, and outlines a general rule: people emigrate from places having political, social and especially economic problems to the ones which offer better services and opportunities, and conditions.¹ The place-village, town, city, region, country or

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¹ For a general overview of migration, see W.A.V Clark, *Human Migration*, (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, c1986); Paul Boyle, Keith Halfacree and Vaughan Robinson, *Exploring Contemporary Migration*, (Essex:

continent- which is emigrated from, usually has high rates of inflation, unemployment, economic and political crises and it is faced with an additional problem of draining of its human resources after migration. Especially, the people with higher education migrate in order to satisfy their expectations, and this in return prevents further economic development. Considering the international migration, the migration process may also have positive impacts on the political stability and the economy by pushing the discontented groups out of the country and increasing the state budget with the money transfers from the Diaspora. On the other hand, from the perspective of the receiving country, the migrants are sources of dynamic and cheap labor. For this reason, in the history, some countries welcomed, even demanded labor migration. However, this is true only to the extent that this reciprocal voluntarism is valid. Otherwise, drastic problems emerge, and this is the common situation of many European countries at present. First of all, social problems arise out of the cultural differences between the migrants and the native people. These social problems may range from simple dislike to serious racist/fascist tendencies, even to violence. The rise of ultra rightist parties in the European politics is a good example in this respect. Secondly, the influx of cheap labor leads to the increase in unemployment rate of the native population. Moreover, the government programmes plotted according to the official statistics, are jolted by the arrival of migrants, who entered the country secretly and illegally.

Moving from the theoretical framework to the recent course of migration, one question is very significant: "Although migration has always existed in the history, why did it move to the forefront agenda of policy-makers especially in the last few decades?" The answer to this question lies in the boundaries the issue has reached and in the nature of the international conjuncture. Previously, the advanced countries had been in need of cheap labor. Nevertheless, their capacity is saturated in terms of labor both because of the size the migrant population reached, and due to the declining demand for labor by the developments in the production technology. The problems emerged because of the mass inflows, and the Western countries began to rethink on the political migrants (asylum seekers and refugees) after the end of

Longman, 1998); Peter A. Morrison, *Population Movements : Their Forms And Functions In Urbanization And Development* (Liege(Belgium) : Ordina Editions , 1983)

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the Cold War. Currently, mainly the US, Canada and European countries are in the process of tightening their migration procedures day by day. The 11 September Attacks on the US have further affected this process. However, none of the attempts succeeded in preventing the population movements, rather changed its course more from legal to illegal ways.

The migration context of Armenia reflects this historical and theoretical framework as well. There have always been Armenian population's movements between countries and continents. The Armenian Diaspora, particularly located in the US and Europe, corresponds to a figure of 3,5-4 million people out of total 7 million Armenians on the Earth. This Diaspora has its own advantages and disadvantages to the home country as well as to the destination countries, politically, socially and economically. Comparing the last level, migration in the world and Armenian migration have reached, both have gravitated to the illegal ways: migrant smuggling and trafficking. In this article, this last stage of Armenian migration after the independence will be analyzed.

In my study, I have relied on the resources by the international organizations, Armenians, and to an extent by the Turkish writers. In this respect, the reports of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) on Armenia construct the basis of my arguments. The studies of Armenian Sociological Association are used in analyzing the impacts of migration on the Armenian state and society. Main aim of this study is to set up a neutral outlook to the migration process in Armenia with its causes and effects. The forms of migration, the historical process of population movements after the independence, the reasons behind the population outflow, the migrant profile, the destination countries, and lastly the impacts of the concept over Armenia will be studied in the framework of this intention.

HISTORY OF MIGRATION IN ARMENIA

In Armenia, interstate migration materializes in two forms: transit migration, and emigration from Armenia. The transit migration over Armenia is usually from the Middle East, South Asia and Africa, and the final destination is usually Europe and Russia. These people come via Tehran, Tbilisi and New Delhi to Armenia with the help of international crime organizations. So far as the emigration concerned, the figures are astonishing. 2002 census declared the number of people living in Armenia as 3.200.000. Since the official number in the initial years of independence had been 3.800.000, the statistics indicate a loss of 600.000.² However, the real number is pretty much higher than 600.000, and closer to 800.000- 1.000.000 according to Ovsanna Babayan, the national coordinator of International Organization for Migration to Armenia.³ Even the National Statistics Service declared that “the country’s ‘permanent population’ which includes ‘temporarily absent’ citizens” is meant by this number.⁴

The first population flow from Armenia in the last 15 years started with the 1988 earthquake, which resulted in the death of 25.000 people, left 500.000 homeless. Consequently, over 300.000 people migrated, 100.000 of which spread to different regions of the country and almost 220.000 to the countries of the former Soviet Union. Another migration movement after the outbreak of Karabakh Conflict, which started in 1988 and lasted until 1994, followed this first wave, and a third came in 1990 after the termination of trade relations between the country, Turkey and Azerbaijan. Subsequent economic crises additionally worsened the conditions. The independence of Armenia was born into such situation. The emigration process that Armenia has been

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experiencing traces back to the days under the Soviet Union. Total number of people who left the country in this period, now amounts to almost a quarter of the population.⁵

² Sedat Laçiner, ‘Ermenistan’ın Dış Politikası ve Belirleyici Temel Faktörler: 1991-2002’, *Ermeni Araştırmaları Dergisi*, Sayı 5, Bahar 2002, p. 177

³ Ken Stier, *Study Highlights Inefficiencies And Evils Of Armenian Emigration* (04.06.2002), <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/business/articles/eav041602.shtml> (24.11.2002)

⁴ Anush Dashtents, *More Armenian Census Data Released*, Armenia Liberty, 23.10.2002

⁵ “Sayılar Kafa Karıştırdı”, *Agos*, 22.02.2002

THE REASONS OF THE EMIGRATION

The main causes of the emigration can roughly be summarized as the economic problems in the country and better opportunities and services of the West, which totally count as the general rule of migration around the world. Moving to the details, the transitional period from the command economy to the free market one by the dissolution of the Soviet Union put a hunch on the back of the economy. The Karabakh Conflict, and consequent closure of the main transportation ways, the hyperinflation between 1992-1994, the continuing impacts of 1988 earthquake combined with the incompatibility of the economic heritage with the free market system resulted in a deep crises in this transitional period.⁶ The economic embargo from some of the neighboring countries and the decrease in the industrial production contributed to the economic problems and led to impoverishment especially in the urban context.⁷

Against this difficulty of life conditions of the country, existence of high standards for living in Europe and America pulled people who have already decided to leave the country. That's, push effects intermingled with the pull effects and the basis for the migration has been prepared. In addition to these basic reasons, some points maybe not caused them to migrate, but motivated. There exists a huge and prosperous Armenian Diaspora that

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arrived in Europe and the US long years ago and that has moved upwards economically, socially and even politically in these years. Existence of relatives or friends in a target country provides accommodation and probably a job, and culture shock is easier be overcome with these already known people. In addition to this outlier effect, in the home country the legal codes are not designed well for the prevention of emigration. Although recently signed, Armenia has not ratified the United Nations Protocol on Smuggling of Migrants in relation to the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime yet.⁸ Moreover,

⁶ Mahmut Niyazi Sezgin, 'Geçiş Sürecinde Ermenistan Ekonomisinin Değerlendirilmesi', *Stratejik Analiz*, Cilt 3, Sayı 28, Ağustos 2002, p.45

⁷ See the report of the International Organization for Migration for the statistics and overall analysis of the migration process in Armenia after the independence. (IOM) *Irregular Migration and Smuggling of Migrants from Armenia*, International Organization for Migration, (Geneva: 2002)

⁸ IOM report, *Irregular ...*, p. 10

amendments to the Criminal Code have been made, but it has also not entered into force yet.⁹ Plus, there is no direct reference in the Constitution other than simple punishment of illegal transpassing of the boundaries. The economic difficulties, the motivating factors and the attractiveness of West drained the country of its population in the end.

THE MIGRANT PROFILE

A survey conducted by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in the year 2002¹⁰ puts forward that the majority of migrants are married males who have children and who are in the 30-49 age category. (See Table.1 below). They usually migrate alone and try to bring their families later. An important aspect of this study is that it indicates a correlation between the desire/attempt to migrate and the education level. The higher education level creates a higher desire to migrate since the educated people have more courage and more capital (human capital) and therefore have more chance to find a better job in the West. After the disintegration of U.S.S.R, many of the university graduates became unemployed or underemployed. A last point about the migrant profile is the economic motives rather than the political problems are prior to the migrants. Although the reports of Human Rights Watch¹¹ and Amnesty International¹² indicate ongoing human rights violations and political suppression, most of the asylum applications are turned down by the European countries. One reason is the persistence of economic factors behind the political applications, and the other reason is the changing asylum and refuge criteria of Europe after the end of the Cold War and the increasing problems rooted in the migrant population.

⁹ IOM report, *Irregular ...*, p. 28

¹⁰ IOM report, *Irregular ...*, p. 16

¹¹ www.hrw.org/europe/armenia.php, 20.11.2002

¹² <http://web.amnesty.org/web/ar2002.nsf/eur/armenia!Open> , 18.11.2002

Sex	Number
Female	33
Male	67
Age	
18-29	8
30-35	21
36-49	57
50-65	14
Marital Status	
Single	8
Married	71
Divorced	10
Widowed	10
Children	
Yes	83
No	17
Accompanying Family Members	
None	51
Spouse	37
Children	37
Grandchildren	1
Education	
Secondary	57
Graduate	43
Place of Origin	
Yerevan	67
Alaverdi	4
Armavir	5
Echmiatzin	4
Talin	4
Pyatigorsk	2
Villages	10
Other	4
Occupation in Armenia	
Own/family business	6
Unemployed	65
Blue collar employee	6
White collar employee	12
Other	11

Table 1: Profile of Irregular Migrants according to a UNHCR survey (cited in the IOM report)

MIGRATION PROCESS

Once people decide to migrate, they begin to gather information about the conditions and migration policies of the target country via friends and relatives in the Diaspora. Which country will be chosen to migrate, depends usually on the possibility to stay in that country, once they entered by one way or another. The statistics show that most of the Armenian migrants

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roam inside the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) as there is free movement inside the Commonwealth other than Turkmenistan. This is provided by the 1992 Bishkek agreement and some bilateral agreements between the countries. So, most of them go to Russia (70%) and Ukraine (12%).¹³

Also the transportation cost is considerably lower in migrating inside the CIS compared to Europe and the US. Considering that going to Spain costs more than \$3000, it is not so difficult to calculate the costs to enter other countries.

Despite the costs and other difficulties almost 15% of the migrants move to Western Europe and the US usually via illegal ways. Germany, Belgium and Netherlands can be mentioned as the first three countries preferred by the Armenians because of the level of life standards. However, the tightening of policies of Western countries towards the migrants cause a decline in the flow especially after 1998, but could not stop it (See Table 2 and 3 below). This policy change and relatively cheap transportation costs increased the demand to Poland and the Czech Republic as new destination countries after year 2000. Switzerland and Greece are other countries that are preferred. The migrants usually do not go directly to these countries, rather they initially enter Russia, Ukraine and Belarussia where they can pass the borders more easily, and where the middlemen and international migrant smugglers are mostly located.

¹³ IOM report, *Irregular...*, p. 13

Year	Western Europe	Central Europe	USA/Canada
2000	4,991	1,579	1,332
2001	3,026	1,306	1,614
Total	8,017	2,885	2,946

Table 2: Source-governments, compiled by UNHCR, asylum seekers in Europe and Canada in 2000-2001 (cited in the IOM report)

Country	2000	Country	2001
Belgium	1,331	Germany	654
Germany	882	Austria	558
Netherlands	812	Netherlands	401
France	379	Belgium	387
Austria	165	France	385

Table 3: The number of Armenian asylum applicants in the top five Western European countries in 200-2001 (IOM statistics, www.iom.int)

IMPACTS OF MIGRATION ON ARMENIA

Migration has a dual impact on Armenia: one in the positive direction, the other one in the negative direction.

Looking at the positive impacts of population outflow, with an economy unable to sustain jobs enough to a young population, in fact the political system of the country benefits. The unemployed, and particularly educated, population otherwise might have created social disorder and political instability. Although the opposition forces criticize president Robert Kocharian for the high migration rates, system somewhat relies on this outflow. On the other hand, economy also takes the Diaspora as a premise. As stated before, usually young but married men migrate without taking their families together. Therefore, they transfer money to their families and relatives on a regular basis. It is a known fact that the Armenian Diaspora is not only socially but also politically and economically organized,¹⁴ this characteristic of the community living far from the home country is a source of constant revenue. The money transfer from the Diaspora amounts

¹⁴ See the article by Mahmut Niyazi Sezgin mentioned above for further information about the relations between the Armenian Diaspora and home country.

to the three fourth of the national budget.¹⁵ Although the money transfer from the Armenians in Russia has decreased by 40% since the August crises of 1998, still significant amounts of money flow go on.

On the other hand, migration can be seen as population loss from the negative perspective.¹⁶ Majority of the migrants are from the dynamic and economically active class of the society. The reports of the Armenian Sociological Association relate the failure of Armenia to establish a middle class, which is very important for transformation of economy to this reason.¹⁷ In the long-term, improvement of the economy relies on the human capital at some point and the transformative class of Armenia even does not exist. Moreover, the migration smuggling market is around a \$100 million. This huge and profitable market can explain the high number of international crime organizations. This situation means that an additional \$100 million has gone out of the economy, which could have lead to a 3,6% rise in the Gross National Domestic Product (GNDP).¹⁸

CONCLUSION

In the last decade, around 800.000-1.000.000 people have left Armenia in order to go to the CIS countries (mostly to Russia and Ukraine), Europe (mostly to Western Europe), and the United States, either legally or illegally. The reasons behind this are overwhelmingly the economic problems dating back to the war in Karabakh, and the transitional period from the command economy to the free market system. Usually young and educated people have migrated by getting help and information from the Diaspora, cooperating with international smugglers if the illegal ways will be used. The population flow on the one hand has ensured political stability by pouring out the dissatisfied population, and economic relief by the money transfers from the Diaspora community. Nevertheless, it is likely to produce economic and therefore

¹⁵ Ken Stier, *Study...*

¹⁶ Sedat Laçiner cites this point in his article that population is very important for a state to exist and he analyses Armenia's losing a quarter of her population from this perspective. Sedat Laçiner, *Ermenistan'ın...*, p. 178

¹⁷ Gevork Pogossian, *Armenian Returnees From Germany, Back to Homeland*, Report, Armenian Sociological Association, (Yerevan: 1997)

¹⁸ Ken Stier, *Study...*

political problems in the long run: a territory devoid of population.¹⁹ On the other hand, as discussed, it has also produced cheap labor, but social discontent, and economic and political problems to the destination countries. The sponsoring of the international studies on Armenia and her population movements by the government of the Netherlands cannot be taken as a mere coincidence in this context. The narrowing criteria for asylums, refugees and migrant workers are an outcome of the process. As a conclusion, although slowed down, emigration from Armenia seems to be continuous in the future, unless the problems of the home country are solved.

¹⁹ Huge Pope, "Armenia After a Decade of Statehood, Suffers Rapid Loss of Human Capital", The Wall Street Journal, 06.07.2001