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ARMENIAN COMMUNITY AND DIASPORA FACTOR IN IRAN-ARMENIA RELATIONS

Annotation

The factor of the Armenian Diaspora has played an important role in the implementation of the foreign policy of Armenia, which declared its independence in 1991, and in the establishment of economic and humanitarian relations with a number of countries. In the period before the collapse of the USSR, the Spryuk (diaspora), which tried to influence the political process in this country in various forms, mainly covertly, since 1991 has gained more influence in the country's politics. Although sometimes there were disagreements between the 'Spryuk' and the political regimes in Armenia on certain issues, in the end the two forces were able to unite for the same goals in matters related to the 'all-Armenian affair'. Armenia has actively used the diaspora in the implementation of foreign policy issues, propaganda on the so-called "genocide issue", distortion of the truth to cover up the occupation of Azerbaijani territories by Armenia.

The Armenian community and the diaspora have also played an important role in establishing and developing relations with Armenia's southern neighbor, the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI), one of the key regional geopolitical players. Although the Armenian side tries to present the Armenian 'community' in Iran more as a 'diaspora' in accordance with its political goals, but the historical and settlement features allow to characterize this community as a diaspora.

The study of the influence of the Armenian community and diaspora in Iran on the establishment of relations between the IRI and Armenia in the post-1991 period determines the urgency of the topic. It allows to clarify in what directions the Armenian state uses the opportunities of the community and the diaspora.

The methodological principles of the theory of political realism are preferred for the study of the subject. At the time of writing, sociological and cultural methods were preferred over general research methods, and mainly explanatory methods were applied over applied research methods.

The article clarifies the purpose of presenting the Armenian community in Iran as a diaspora, not a community, and assesses the role of Armenians in the political life of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the context of relations between the two countries.

Keywords: *diaspora (spryuk), community, Iran, Armenia, international relations, national policy.*

Annotasiya

1991-ci ildə müstəqilliyini elan edən Ermənistanın xarici siyasətinin həyata keçirilməsində, bir sıra ölkələrlə iqtisadi, humanitar əlaqələrin qurulmasında erməni diasporası amili əhəmiyyətli rol oynamışdır. SSRİ-nin süqutuna qədərki dövrdə bu ölkədə siyasi proseslərə müxtəlif formalarda, əsasən gizli təsir göstərməyə çalışan “Spryuk” (diaspora) 1991-ci ildən etibarən ölkə siyasətinə daha geniş təsir imkanları qazanmışdır. Bəzi dövrlərdə “spryuk”la Ermənistandakı siyasi rejimlər arasında müəyyən məsələlərdə fikir ayrılıqları yaşansa da, son nəticədə “ümumerməni işi” ilə bağlı məsələlərdə hər iki qüvvə eyni hədəflər uğrunda birləşə bilmişdir. Ermənistan xarici siyasət məsələlərinin həyata keçirilməsində, “soyqırımı məsələsi” ilə bağlı təbliğatın aparılmasına, Azərbaycan ərazilərinin Ermənistan tərəfindən işğalını pərdələmək üçün həqiqətlərin təhrif edilməsində diasporadan fəal şəkildə istifadə etmişdir.

Ermənistanın cənub qonşusu, əsas regional geosiyasi oyunçulardan biri olan İran İslam Respublikası ilə münasibətlərin qurulmasında və inkişaf etdirilməsində də erməni icması və diasporası amili əhəmiyyətli rol oynamışdır. Ermənistan tərəfi öz siyasi məqsədlərinə uyğun olaraq İrandakı erməni toplumunu daha çox diaspora kimi təqdim etməyə çalışsa da, tarixi və məskunlaşma xüsusiyyətləri bu toplumu daha çox diaspora kimi xarakterizə etməyə imkan verir.

1991-ci ildən sonrakı mərhələdə İran İslam Respublikası ilə Ermənistan arasında əlaqələrin qurulmasına İrandakı erməni icmasının və diasporasının təsiri məsələsinin tədqiqi mövzunun aktuallığını şərtləndirir. İcma və diasporanın imkanlarından Ermənistan dövlətinin hansı istiqamətlərdə istifadə etdiyini aydınlaşdırmağa imkan verir.

Mövzunun tədqiq edilməsi üçün siyasi realizm nəzəriyyəsinin metodoloji prinsiplərinə üstünlük verilmişdir. Məqalənin yazılması zamanı ümumi tədqiqat metodlarından sosioloji və kulturoloji metodlara, tətbiqi tədqiqat metodlarından isə əsasən eksplikativ metodlara üstünlük verilmişdir.

Məqələdə İrandakı erməni toplumunun icma deyil diaspora kimi təqdim edilməsindəki məqsəd aydınlaşdırılmış, ermənilərin İran İslam Respublikasının siyasi həyatındakı rolu iki ölkə arasında münasibətlər kontekstində qiymətləndirilmişdir.

Açar sözlər: diaspora (spryuk), icma, İran, Ermənistan, beynəlxalq münasibətlər, milli siyasət

Introduction

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the new republics that declared their independence in the Caucasus became subjects of international law. Various geopolitical, national and international factors have influenced the formation of the foreign policy of the countries of the South Caucasus that declared independence. In the implementation of Armenia's foreign policy priorities, of the country the factor of the Armenian Diaspora has played an important role in the implementation of measures to overcome the critical socio-economic situation.

One of the main factors determining the Iranian-Armenian relations in the period after 1991 was the factor of the Armenian community and diaspora in Iran. At the present stage, Iranian Armenians play an important role in the regulation of relations with Armenia [1, p. 1088].

It should be noted that after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, a new wave of struggle for national rights began in the Islamic Republic of Iran, but mainly non-Persian Muslim nations and ethnic groups took part in this struggle. The third chapter of the Basic Law (Constitution) of the Islamic Republic, adopted on December 15, 1979, entitled "The Rights of the Nation" and some articles of the seventh chapter define the rights of the nations and national minorities of the Islamic Republic. The Basic Law states that the development of local and ethnic languages along with Persian, which is the official state language, and freedom of the press and other mass media in these languages [2, p.29]. However, all the Muslim nations of Iran, regardless of whether they are Iranian-speaking or non-Iranian-speaking, have been described in the official state concept as the "Iranian nation." The rights and statuses of the country's non-Muslim national minorities are more prominent than those of the Muslim peoples. Analyzes show that Iran, which is trying to form a positive image on the international stage by exaggerating the presence of the Armenian diaspora in the country, has in many cases made concessions to Armenia.

Iranian Armenians: community or diaspora?

Iran is considered one of the strongest countries in the world in terms of Armenian community and Armenian diaspora. 'The Armenian community' means Armenians who have historically settled in some parts of Iran. The Armenian Diaspora means Armenians who moved from the interior of Iran at different times, including the territory of present-day Armenia after the establishment of the USSR, and settled in Tabriz, Urmia, Qazvin and other cities.

It is known that since the 1980s, Armenians have classified diaspora organizations into two groups: 'internal diaspora' and 'abroad diaspora'. The internal diaspora included Armenians living in different republics of the former USSR and the organizations created by them, while the abroad diaspora includes Armenians in the West and the Middle East. In this sense, the Armenian diaspora in the Islamic Republic of Iran belonged to a abroad diaspora group. The Armenian state and Armenian official historiography are interested in identifying the issues of the Armenian community and the Armenian diaspora in the Islamic Republic of Iran. There are a number of political and aggressive reasons for this. Armenia's official and ecclesiastical policy always strives to characterize Iranian Armenians as a diaspora. Because, the diaspora is explained as a situation where the people live far away from the lands (homeland) to which they belong and historically live [3, p. 83-84, 4, p. 515]. By characterizing the Armenian community in Iran as a diaspora, the Armenian state also tries to justify the fact that this community once migrated from the imaginary "motherland" (so-called Armenian Ayrenik) that covers the historical Azerbaijani lands (which is now called Armenia) and Eastern Anatolia.

Information on the number of Armenians living in Iran at the present stage is controversial. As some Iranian researchers have noted, the country's official statistical agencies

(organizations) are not interested in disclosing accurate information in this area [5, p. 368]. Karen Stepanyan, an Armenian author living in Isfahan, writes that if in the 1980s the number of Armenians in the Islamic Republic of Iran was around 200,000, there was no increase in later times. Akbar Velizadeh and Shiva Alizadeh, professors at Tehran University's Faculty of Law and Political Science, also write that the number of Armenians living in Iran is about 200,000, but many of them emigrate. However, A.Valizadeh and S.Alizadeh show the number of Gregorian Armenians in Iran in this way. They notes that along with Grigorian Armenians there are Catholic Armenians too [1, p. 1082]. Some representatives of the Armenian community in Iran go even further and claim that the number of Armenians in the country decreased to 50,000 after the Islamic revolution [5, p. 368].

Some researchers claim that this decrease is due to the fact that the Iranian state does not fully trust the Armenians. Thus, Armenians work in the Islamic Republic of Iran mainly in the fields of work, food production and car repair. Like other religious minorities, they cannot hold sensitive military or government positions. All these reasons influenced the rapid departure of Armenians from Iran in the post-Islamic Revolution period.

The migration directions of Armenians migrating from Iran are also of interest. After the 1979 Islamic Revolution, some Armenians in Iran moved to Western European countries, and after 1991 to Armenia and the occupied Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan. However, in the following period, the flow of Iranian Armenians to Armenia stopped. Gohar Isgandaryan, an employee of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Armenian National Academy of Sciences, explains why: 'Unfortunately, Armenia has not always been a destination for Armenian immigrants from Iran after the Islamic Revolution and the Iran-Iraq war. This is most likely due to the unstable socio-economic situation in Armenia, corruption, lack of justice and the unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict' [7, p.135]. Iranian researcher Mohammad Rasuli also touched upon this issue in his research on the spirit of solidarity of the Armenian Diaspora in Iran, which was acknowledged by a community representative in one of the interviews conducted by the researcher with representatives of the Armenian community. He noted that oil-rich Iran is more attractive for Armenians than 'desert' Armenia. A member of the community who visited Armenia in the past noted that, unlike the propagandized Armenia, he was confronted with a country dominated by corruption, extreme poverty and women's immorality [5, p. 344].

Ethnic and religious self-government (autonomy) of Iranian Armenians

In the Islamic Republic of Iran, Armenians are recognized as a religious minority under the official laws of the state. The Iranian constitution has given them many rights in the domestic, cultural and religious spheres that are almost equal to the right to autonomy. Currently, the Armenian community lives in three major Iranian cities - the capital Tehran, Isfahan and Tabriz. In addition, Urmia and Arak are among the cities with the largest number of Armenians. Armenian dioceses in Iran are officially subordinate to the Armenian Catholicosate in Cilicia. According to religious dioceses, the Armenian community in Iran is divided into three parts:

1. Central-Tehran diocese;
2. Southern Iran-India (Isfahan) diocese;
3. Azerbaijan (Tabriz) diocese [7, p.132].

The clergy who lead the dioceses are elected by the Governing Body of the Supreme Council of the Catholicosate of Cilicia. The dioceses were given the right to form representative councils to carry out their mission of resolving administrative, national, clerical, educational and territorial issues. These councils provide documents related to baptism, marriage, death, etc., and carry out some activities in the field of civil law. However, in matters of crime, Armenians are directly subject to the legislation of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Armenians participate in all elections in Iran. The rights of the Armenian community in the presidential elections are simply limited to the right to vote (vote), but the law does not recognize the passive right to vote (to be elected) to Armenians in this election. During elections, Armenians vote either in societies, churches or other community buildings [7, p.128]. During the parliamentary (parliamentary) elections, Armenians have both active and passive suffrage, ie, in addition to voting, Armenian representatives can be elected to the Assembly (Parliament).

Formed in the 1940s (1945), the Tehran community has bodies to carry out the functions of the Diocese Council. The formation of this diaspora was connected with the policy of the USSR during the Second World War and in the following years to gather Armenians from different countries of the world in the Caucasus. As it is known, under the influence of the Armenians under the Soviet leadership, the chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR I.V. Stalin and the director of affairs of the CPSU M. Smirnyukov on November 21, 1945 signed [9,p. 288-289].

In accordance with the decision of the government, a committee was established under the Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia to receive and accommodate Armenian immigrants brought from abroad. This committee began to organize its work by sending appeals for the repatriation of Armenians from Syria, Lebanon, Iran, Greece, Bulgaria, and Romania. Communists in various parts of Iran, in the suburbs of Isfahan, engaged in agriculture and propagated among low-income Armenians, promoted the peasantry of the Soviet Union, while at the same time highlighting the alleged so-called "homeland" (Armenian Ayrenik) of Armenians in the Caucasus. Describing the process in the language of a representative of the Armenian community in Tehran, one Iranian researcher shows that some Armenians who came to Tehran from Isfahan to emigrate to the USSR later moved away for various reasons. These Armenians did not return to Isfahan, settled in the areas around Tehran and formed a community there [5, p. 338].

Currently, the diocese has an education council to monitor Armenian schools, a property council and a judicial council to deal with family issues such as divorce and inheritance. There are eight Armenian churches in Tehran [7, p. 132]. There are 25 Armenian schools in Tehran with about 7,000 students. In addition, there are a number of sports and cultural associations in the city and many periodicals are published. Armenians living in the Central, Tehran, Gilan,

Mazandaran, Gulustan, Khorasan, Kermanshah, Hamadan and Qazvin provinces (provinces) of Iran are under the curatorship of this diocese [8].

The diocese is currently headed by Archbishop Sabuh Sargsyan. Ardak Mamukyan, who headed the diocese in 1960-1999, played an important role in building and strengthening Armenian-Iranian relations, as well as strengthening Armenian influence over Iranian authorities. He established a large number of Armenian schools in Tehran. In the early days of the diocese, the center was the Church of St. Mary in Tehran, and in 1972 the center was moved to the newly built St. Sakis Church. The church is located on Karim Khan Zand street. Most Tehran Armenians live in the Majidiye, Narmak, Heshmatiyya, Tehranpars, Mirzashirazi, Bahar, Sanaye, Villa and Jumhuri neighborhoods.

The dioceses of southern Iran and India are sometimes called the diocese of Isfahan. The Iranian-Indian diocese was formed in 1606 at the direct initiative of Shah Abbas I when the settlement of New Julfa ('Nor Jougha' in Armenian) near the city of Isfahan was established.

It should be noted that most Armenian and some Iranian researchers present the issue of the construction of the city of New Julfa by Shah Abbas I and the gathering of Armenians here as allegedly the resettlement of Armenians from the Caucasus, Nakhchivan Julfa [5, p. 335] and thus try to present the territory of Nakhchivan as an "Armenian land". But what is the essence of the matter? The truth is that Shah Abbas I ordered the resettlement of the population of Julfa and Nakhchivan to the interior provinces of present-day Iran in order to prevent the constant attacks of the Ottoman army during the Safavid-Ottoman wars [10, p. 81]. The city of New Julfa was also established for this purpose by the order of Shah Abbas I. It is clear from the notes of the French traveler J. Tavernye that 27,000 families were relocated from Nakhchivan to other parts of the empire during this period [11, p.80]. But the problem is that in medieval conditions, 27,000 people could not cover 1,137 kilometers. In modern conditions, a person who moves freely can cover this distance for an average of 230 hours. Considering that there were children, women and the elderly among the displaced, it is difficult to find a logical basis for this opinion of the Armenian 'researchers'. Studies show that although the city of Julfa was built near Isfahan on the orders of Shah Abbas, the population of Nakhchivan Julfa was not relocated here. The resettlement of the population was carried out in stages, the population of Julfa was relocated to Garadagh, Tabriz, and a certain part of the population was relocated from Tabriz to Qazvin. There were displacements from Qazvin to the interior provinces of present-day Iran, and the migration process took place in this way. As a result, we can say that for the Armenians living in New Julfa near present-day Isfahan, it would be more correct to look for the "motherland of the Middle Ages" not in the territory of Azerbaijani Nakhchivan, but in the inner provinces of Iran. It should not be forgotten that even the data provided by a number of Russian and Western European historians who believe that the resettlement was direct have such a significant difference and confirm that it was not a resettlement but a gradual displacement of the population. For example, IP Petrushevsky shows that it was planned to relocate 15,000 families from Julfa to Isfahan, but only 3,000 families came to Isfahan [12, p. 277].

Today, the center of the diocese is the Holy All-Savior Monastery in Isfahan. Armenians of Isfahan, Fars, Khuzistan, Chaharmahal, Bakhtiyari, Kohkiluye, Boyarahmed, Luristan and Hormuzgan of the Islamic Republic of Iran are under the curatorship of this diocese [8]. The diocese used to have more than 100 churches. However, currently there are 24 churches in this diocese, 13 of which are in New Joulfa [7, p.132]. At present, the diocese is headed by Archbishop Babakan Chariyan. Armenians from Southeast Asia, India and Iraq are also considered subordinate to this diocese.

The third Armenian diocese in Iran is the Azerbaijan (Tabriz) diocese. Prior to the official formation of this diocese, its center was considered to be St. Tadevos Church near Maku. After the relocation of the center to Tabriz in 1830, the Azerbaijan Diocese (1833) was established. This diocese was formed and strengthened mainly by the Dashnaks who fled to Iran after the Sovietization of Armenia. Armenians of East Azerbaijan, West Azerbaijan, Ardabil and Kurdistan provinces of the Islamic Republic of Iran are under the curatorship of this diocese. At present, the diocese is headed by Archbishop Vaginak Melviyan. The center of the diocese is located on Shariati Street, south of Tabriz. In Tabriz, Armenians live in the Arami, Marallan, Baron Avak (Barnava) neighborhoods, in Urmia in the villages of Nahchavan Tepe, Rahvan, Badalbo and Gardabad.

What opportunities and threats does the Armenian Diaspora in Iran promise to this country?

As can be seen from the above analysis, the influence of the Armenian community and diaspora in the Islamic Republic of Iran is quite strong, despite the reduction in their numbers. This power comes mainly from the existing economic resources of the Armenians in the country's foreign trade relations and in some areas of production. On the other hand, the Islamic Republic of Iran is sending a message of tolerant state to the international community by strengthening Christian Armenians. Iran uses Armenians as a tool of pressure in the settlement of internal ethnic issues and regional foreign policy.

A.Valizadeh and Shiva Alizadeh describe the importance of the Armenian Diaspora for Iran as follows:

- a) The presence of the Armenian Diaspora in Iran has a positive impact on the formation of a positive image of Iran in the international arena;
- b) The Islamic Republic of Iran has the opportunity to use the lobbying opportunities of the Armenian Diaspora in the United States and Europe;
- c) The Islamic Republic of Iran uses the existence of the Armenian Diaspora and the conditions created for them to prevent negative propaganda about the human rights situation;
- d) Iranian Armenians play an important role in the settlement of relations with Armenia;
- e) The presence of Armenians is also considered an opportunity to ensure the flow of tourists to the Islamic Republic of Iran. Iranian authors point out that thousands of Armenians from around the world come to the Islamic Republic of Iran in June-August each year to visit the Black Church (St. Faddei-Tadeus Church) near Maku;

- f) In terms of attracting foreign investment, the opportunities of the Armenians are considered as an opportunity in Iran;
- g) The Islamic Republic of Iran often uses Armenians in the regulation of relations with the Republic of Azerbaijan and Turkey, in other words, in putting pressure on these states;
- h) The relations of Armenians are considered important in attracting aid from foreign countries [1, pp.1084-1088].

In return, the existence of the Armenian diaspora also poses a number of threats to the Islamic Republic of Iran:

- a) The activation of Armenians in Iran may lead to ethnic strife;
- b) At a time when relations with Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan are not needed, the initiatives of the Armenians may strike at Iran's foreign policy;
- c) Pressure from the strong Armenian diaspora to protect Armenian interests can create problems;
- d) Increased emigration of Armenians from Iran may hit the country.

The analysis shows that the Armenian Diaspora in Iran is both secret and open in order to disrupt relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan. Armenians living in Urmia, Marand and Julfa regions play an active role in organizing secret activities against the Republic of Azerbaijan. In particular, this activity could be observed after the return of national leader Heydar Aliyev to political power in Azerbaijan and the improvement of relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran. In one of the letters of the diplomatic service, the information about the news published in the newspaper "Comhuriye Eslami" on November 16, 1995 attracts attention in this regard. The report said that on November 14 of the same year, 'Students and teachers of Urmia organized a demonstration and condemned the anti-Islamic policy pursued in the Republic of Azerbaijan. ... The resolution warns the officials of the Republic of Azerbaijan for not including Islam in the constitution. It should be noted that the embassy (meaning the embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan – E.K.) also received petitions from the residents of Joulfa and Marand'[13, v. 213]. It is possible that at that time the embassy did not have the opportunity to study this process in the Islamic Republic of Iran in depth, or a point in the letter sent in connection with diplomatic procedures was not clearly stated. The point is that the protests did not come from Azerbaijani-populated cities such as Tabriz, Ardabil, Gazvin, Astara, or from religious centers such as Gum and Mashhad, but from Armenian-populated cities such as Urmia and Marand. Undoubtedly, the organization of such fake protests was in the interest of some forces in Iran. Iranian Armenians skillfully used this opportunity.

The role of the diaspora and community in Iran-Armenia relations

As mentioned above, the diaspora has been one of the main tools for the implementation of Armenia's foreign policy in the post-independence period. However, in some periods (especially during the reign of Levon Ter-Petrosyan) there were tensions between the political authorities and the spruce. During the Ahmadinejad-Sargsyan era, which can be considered as

one of the most active periods of Iran-Armenia relations, attempts to use the opportunities of the Armenian diaspora in Iran increased.

During Serzh Sargsyan's visit to the Islamic Republic of Iran in April 2009, Diaspora Minister Granush Hakobyan was one of the key figures in the Armenian delegation to Iran. One of the main issues highlighted during the meeting of the Presidents of the two countries was the place and role of the Armenian community in Iran in the development of relations between Iran and Armenia. In fact, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who has been in open conflict with the United States and Israel over the years and has been known for his anti-Semitic rhetoric, was in dire need of the Armenian diaspora to defend his country's interests abroad. The Islamic Republic of Iran tried to use the Armenian Diaspora against the strong Jewish Diaspora in different countries of the world. During the visit, Serzh Sargsyan also held a special meeting with representatives of the Armenian community.

Nicole Pashinyan, who seized power after the 'street revolution' in Armenia in 2018, also tried to use the power of the Armenian community and diaspora in Iran to restore the damaged relations with Iran. During his visit to the Islamic Republic of Iran in February 2019, he met with representatives of the Armenian community in both Tehran and Isfahan. During a meeting in Tehran on February 27, Nicole Pashinyan said: 'I want to emphasize. Yes, there may be discussions, debates, different approaches and views on various issues related to the diaspora in Armenia, but first of all, I want to say that the previous government created mistrust between Armenia and Armenian diaspora organizations abroad, as well as in Iran. However, this unity is more important than any political or party interests, our unity is above all, and we all simply serve this union' [15].

Nicole Pashinyan praised the efforts of the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Armenian Catholic Church and the Armenian Evangelical Church to unite Iranian Armenians. He stressed that the goals of the Republic of Armenia and the Armenian Diaspora are not different, but the same, and tried to strike at the Iranian-Azerbaijani relations by voicing provocative views on the occupied Azerbaijani territories. The slogans raised by the Armenian community in Iran were also provocative, and there were certain tensions not only in Iran's foreign policy, but also inside. It should also be noted that Armenia often uses various Armenian-language publications in Iran and the opportunities of Armenian deputies in the Iranian parliament for its provocative purposes, trying to propagandize against other countries, especially the Republic of Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Conclusion

As a result, we can say that despite the fact that they do not make up a large part of the population of the Islamic Republic of Iran, with a population of 83 million, the Armenian community in this country has considerable influence. The Republic of Armenia, which is experiencing a deep economic and social crisis due to its aggressive policy, is trying to use the opportunities of the Armenian community in this country to establish and develop relations with

the Islamic Republic of Iran, which is the main 'economic breath'. The Islamic Republic of Iran has special economic and propaganda goals for the Armenian community in the country.

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