

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF ARMENIA

**THE ISSUE OF REPATRIATION: INTERNATIONAL PRACTICE AND
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ARMENIA**

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Abstract

The purpose of this internship project carried out at the Ministry of Diaspora is to study the role and importance of the issue of repatriation for the Republic of Armenia. Underlying that repatriation is the most vivid expression of vital connection of Diaspora with motherland, the paper addresses a whole set of issues and gives recommendations on this issue.

The paper analyzes the historical mass repatriation of Armenians to the Soviet Republic of Armenia first in 1921-1937 and later in 1946-1948. It reveals the shortcomings of those processes and the experiences of the repatriates.

The analysis of international best practices in regard to the organization and implementation of repatriation processes is made as well. As Armenia still has no law repatriation the study of international practices can be a useful tool for the successful development of the concept for repatriation on Armenians and recommendations for development.

Introduction

The essence of repatriation is perceived as a simplified method of acquiring citizenship of those compatriots that have left the territory of their homeland. There is a common practice in international history when the country grants citizenship to all its nationals living outside its territory. This is mainly done by “right of blood”. (Aghajanyan 2006).

In his article “The repatriation as a new way of Armenian state policy” Tatoyan (2007) mentions that while discussing the issue of repatriation it is necessary to focus on the following questions:

- How urgent is the implementation of repatriation?
- What factors make the repatriation imperative?
- What problems can be solved by organizing repatriation procedure?

The organized repatriation would address many of the problems facing the Armenian nation and state.

Throughout centuries Armenians’ emigration from their homeland was caused by economic, religious, and political reasons, ethnic persecution and cruelty. They were forced to settle new life in different countries of the world, thus resulting to the establishment of the modern-day Diaspora (Mkrtchyan, 2008).

The centuries-long continuous emigration of Armenians from their historical homeland predetermined their view of the outside world. Continuous life in foreign countries made Armenians to develop such traits and traditions that accommodated the societies and cultures while trying to preserve their ethnic and cultural identity (Melkonian, 2002).

Contemporary migration from Armenia still continues to be widespread. After the declaration of independence more than one million people emigrated from Armenia. Figures indicate that at least 35% of the population has emigrated from Armenia in the last ten years.

The outflow is quite large and all societal groups are being represented. The most common destination is Russia. However, due to a lack of data, the profile of those who have emigrated from Armenia is not well defined (Johansson, 2008).

The reasons of migration over years vary greatly. One of them main reasons of emigration before 1999 was the necessity of earning money as the unemployment was quite widespread in Armenia during these years. Another fact that is worth mentioning was the loss of trust, confidence and belief in future of society (RA Government Decree, 2009).

Within this context repatriation and return migration are one of the main components that can contribute to the improvement of country's demographic situation. The constant negative change of demographic situation of Armenia can be a serious threat for the country and its national security (Government Decree, 2009).

During the Soviet Union two parts of the Armenian people (homeland and Diaspora) lived in separation. The Diaspora Armenians had to find new ways for integrating in new societies. At the same time, separate existence of two parts of the Armenian people during the Cold War deepened the historical dissimilarities between the Western and Eastern Armenians, and continued among these two segments mutually misinformed, and unrealistic perceptions of ethnic and political life of Armenians on the opposite side of the dividing line (Melkonian, 2002).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, till 2008 no new structures were established in Armenia and the Diaspora that would deal with such issues as strengthening Diaspora-Homeland relations. The proper organization of Armenia-Diaspora cooperation envisages serious changes in the ideological and organizational life of the Armenian world based on the idea of the Armenians' repatriation and unification (Aivazian, 2006).

In 2008, when the Ministry of Diaspora was established, it adopted a policy of developing Armenian-Diaspora partnership. Today the so-called "hayapahpanum"

(preservation of the Armenian national identity) is one of the main objectives both in Armenia and in the Diaspora.

Therefore, repatriation is considered to be the most vivid expression of vital connection of Diaspora with the motherland.

Mkrtchyan (2008) also mentions another reason that focuses on the importance of the organization of repatriation procedure. As a result of a lengthy separation from their historical homeland, influences of foreign cultures and mixed marriages, a number of changes in the national identity and norms of behavior of Diaspora Armenians took place, as well as the social distance between Eastern Armenians, who live in another part of their historical homeland was increased. The magnitude of cultural assimilation threatened whole communities. Therefore, the number of Armenians who do not speak Armenian has a great tendency to grow, and the assimilation will be a serious problem for the Diaspora.

Therefore, repatriation is a challenge not only for Armenia but also for the Diaspora as during the time the latter is subject to disappearance. In case of Armenians their communities in Diaspora are rapidly disappearing due to number of national characteristics. The world globalization also contributes to the annihilation of Diaspora (Tatoyan, 2007).

Another factor determining the need of repatriation is that in a number of countries the Armenian Diaspora has to withstand the challenges threatening its physical security. Such dangers are mainly severe in the Middle East and in Russia. The growing instability in the Middle East causes the migration of Armenians as a result of which the abolition of Armenian communities of Iraq, Syria, Iran and Lebanon is gradually accelerating. Though, recently, there has been a large trend of movement to Armenia from the aforementioned countries, Armenians mainly move to the USA and Western Europe (Tatoyan, 2007).

Based on the gathered data and revealing the shortcomings of the repatriation processes of the past practices this paper attempts to answer the following research questions and give recommendations on this issue:

What strategies should be developed before Armenia adopts a Law on Repatriation?

Does Armenia need a Law on Repatriation?

Is Armenia ready to adopt such a law?

Methodology

This essay examines the case study of Armenia, analyses international practices, (particularly Israel, Greece). In-depth interviews on repatriation issue were conducted with experts of the field. Academic books, journal articles, reliable web sites as well as historical records were used as the main sources of analysis.

The questionnaire used for in-depth interviews included several measures concerning the issue of repatriation in Armenia in the context of the current day Armenia-Diaspora relations.

Findings

According to experts being interviewed one of the main obstacles that hinders most Armenians living abroad to repatriate is the image problem that Armenia suffers today. Despite the economic growth after the independence in 1991, Armenia's unemployment rate and income inequality still remains high. This fact obstructs the repatriation to a less developed country with fewer resources.

Another image problem that Armenia has today is the lack of mechanism for proper implementation of legislation. The problem concerning the establishment of the Rule of Law still exists. Law-enforcement mechanisms are rather weak in Armenia. The country lacks not only the proper implementation of legislation but there are number of laws drafted with a lot

of loopholes. Free and fair elections, an independent and impartial judicial system, and especially the protection of human rights are the problems that need to be addressed.

To the question whether Armenia needs and is ready to adopt a law on repatriation all respondents think that it is already overdue. All nations with large Diasporas encourage repatriation and have legal provisions regulating the repatriation procedure of their compatriots (Israel, Greece, Germany, Hungary, etc). Even countries with large populations, such as India try to lure back its accomplished repatriates with economic and other incentives. But it is an uphill battle, since the country has not dealt with the deficiencies in the environment (unfairness, corruption, inefficiency) that drove talented, but frustrated people from its country to find dignity.

According to experts repatriation serves a number of beneficial purposes. Repatriation can help stabilize the demographics of the country, promote national security, economic development, and global networks, technology transfer. This is the reason that most countries want to encourage their compatriots to repatriate. Repatriation is an effective way to address human capital issues facing developing countries. Therefore it is especially important for small and developing countries that have suffered population loss and brain drain, like Armenia.

The respondents unanimously agreed, however, that before the organization of repatriation and the adoption of a law a number of policies should be implemented. As a first step, it would be useful to study (1) which groups are most likely to repatriate, (2) which groups Armenia would most like to see repatriate, (3) what obstacles they face, (4) whether Armenia has the resources and will be able to overcome those obstacles. Only then targeted policies can be developed and they can serve as the basis of a law that addressed the needs of these various groups. In addition Armenia should take into consideration all the mistakes made during the 1946-1948 and organize repatriation based on past lessons.

Past lessons: Repatriation of Armenians to their Homeland

3 distinctive periods of repatriation during Soviet Era

Repatriation has been mainly defined as the return of Armenians living abroad to their historical motherland and acquiring Armenian citizenship. Webster defines the word “repatriation” as “returning to one’s own country”. The Armenian equivalent of the word “repatriation” is literally defined as “coming back to homeland”.

In this sense the main flow of Armenians into Soviet Armenia had started in the early 1920’s and continued until early 1980’s. These immigrants were returning to a land the biggest part of which has been totally detached from them. The territory of Soviet Armenia had been under the rule of the Persian Empire for centuries. In 1836 the majority of these lands passed to Russian Empire which was known as Eastern Armenia. Most of the historic lands of Armenia were incorporated. The territory of Western Armenia was invaded by Seljuk Turks in the 11th century until the Ottoman Empire was established (Grigoryan, 1995).

Armenians inhabiting in the Ottoman Empire were subjected to the economic, political, and cultural oppression that began to increase during the time. This resulted in outflow of the Armenians in various directions, including towards the countries of North and South Americas. The continuous emigration of the Armenians was less than desirable but, at the same time, inevitable and advantageous outcome (Melkonian, 2002).

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, Diaspora was largely diversified by the emigration of Armenians to the US, where a small community of 50,000 was established before the World War I. As a result of the Genocide of 1915 organized against Armenians living in Western Armenia in the beginning of the 20th century, around 1.5 million Armenians were killed. The survivors enlarged Armenian communities in the US, Cyprus and throughout the Arab world, and created new ones in Greece, France, Canada, and Argentina (Tatoyan, 2007).

In the 20th century only Eastern Armenia remained the homeland of Armenians. Armenians inhabiting in this territory with the support of the Soviet authority called the Armenians of foreign lands to join them. In spite of difficulties and hard economic conditions the repatriates were returning to a familiar environment. This organized return was obviously ideal and meaningful for them. The repatriates were returning not only supported by Soviet organizers and officials but also by the immigrants themselves.

From the very first years of the Soviet regime the authorities adopted the policy of promoting repatriation of the Armenians in the Diaspora to the Homeland despite the fact that Armenia clashed ideologically with the political and other organizations in the Diaspora. The methods, scope and conditions of implementing such policy differed significantly throughout existence of the Soviet Armenia (Melkonian, 2002).

The repatriation of Armenians took place in three distinctive periods. The first attempt of repatriation to Soviet Armenia took place between 1921 and 1939 during which over 42000 Armenians immigrated from Iraq, Greece, Turkey, France, Bulgaria, and Syria (Grigoryan, 1995).

Already in December 1921, the Soviet government of Armenia negotiated with the British colonial authority in Iraq to organize repatriation of some 3000 Armenians living in refugee camps in Mesopotamia (Iraq). Armenian refugees were transported by sea to the port of Batumi, from where they proceeded to Armenia. Only 20 days later, on January 10, 1922, another group of 3000 Armenian refugees from Iraq arrived to Batumi. The same year, 3500 Armenians immigrated from Iran and Istanbul. This was the beginning of the Armenian repatriation, a process that continued with some disruptions in the following decades. About 1000 Armenians repatriated to Armenia from Western Armenia in 1923, mainly from Van and Iran, 4167 immigrated from Syria, Greece, France in 1924, and another 5016 Armenians immigrated from Iraq, and Istanbul in 1925. In the following decades (1926-1929, 1932-

1933, and 1936), almost 23 thousand Armenians returned to the homeland, bringing the total number of repatriates (hairenadardzner) to 42,000 since 1921 (Melkonian, 2002).

The adjustment of repatriates of the 1920's was not so much complicated because they were establishing themselves in a country that had been itself newly established. It was felt like the repatriates were having an active participation in recreating their homeland as everything that was new to them and new to everyone else. For this reason the repatriates of this period could quickly integrate into the Armenian society. The newcomers were rather quick in entering new educational system and acquiring language skills.

The newcomers also played an essential role in reestablishment of Armenian cities, especially Yerevan. The new areas which were mainly on the outskirts of Yerevan were given distinct names such as Zeitoun, Marash, Malatia. These were all towns in Turkey which Armenians were forced to leave.

However, in 1936 when Soviet authority closed its doors to the outside world the first phase of state supported repatriation came to an end. Already for a few years Moscow had begun observing the threats to local nationalism and to socialist unit. Learning of Russian became compulsory for all Soviet students. Russian chauvinism began to influence the Soviet policy as a result of which the years of relative freedom of expression came to an end (Grigoryan, 1995).

However, the state supported repatriation of Armenians during 1920's remained a unique implementation of the Soviet nationalist policy of the period.

The second period of repatriation known as "Great Repatriation" took place during 1946-1948. After World War II the Soviet government asked that district of Kars and Ardahan in Turkey be given to the Soviet Union. The demands took on a nationalistic face and encouraged the organization of new way of repatriation to Soviet Armenia. The territories had to be returned to their ownersthat is to Armenians. Therefore, having more

Armenians in Soviet Armenia also could serve as a good rationalization for territorial compromises.

For the preparation of repatriation procedure the Soviet Armenian government worked both at home and in the Diaspora (Grigoryan, 1995). Therefore a committee was established with the mission to organize the repatriation of Armenians from abroad. They built new settlements and houses for the repatriated people (Mkrtchyan and Tsaturyan, 2006). Papken Asvatzadourian was the president of this committee and Sahag Karabetian, Haigaz Marzanian, Mardiros Sarian, Ardashes Melik Adamian were its members. Its aim was the facilitation of Armenian immigration by sending its members on a visit to the Balkans and the countries of the Middle East. For instance, for the acceleration of the immigration scheme two representatives from Soviet Armenia arrived in Athens when the departures were to start during the months of July 1946 in Greece. The first group of Armenians repatriates comprising of about 2,000 persons some of whom registered unwillingly as a result of pressure, left Greece at the end of July. The cost of this repatriation was 50 dollars per person. The expenditures were covered by the Greek Armenian Community and by the Armenian Benevolent Society in the US (Seydi, 2003).

Such a repatriation scheme was also applied for the Armenians living in Romania, Greece, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq. Soviet diplomats in these countries played a great role in it. As a result, 50000 Armenians from Aleppo registered for repatriation. However, actually only ten thousand were likely to be repatriated from their region within a year. In the end, approximately three thousands Armenians returned to Soviet Armenia in two caravans from Syria and the same number from Greece in the summer of 1946 (Seydi, 2003).

Hot discussions about repatriation program were rather popular among the Armenians in Istanbul, and particularly among those who had relatives in Syria. The Soviet ship named Garcia which was carrying Armenian repatriates. As for Istanbul there were no organized

meetings or activities among the Armenian colonies there, nor were any actions made by the Soviet Consulate. They were inclined not to take any action but wait and see how things would turn out. The reasons for such an approach were determined by the fact that the Armenians in Istanbul were not subject to Soviet propaganda and were rather hesitant about the conditions of life in the USSR. They were waiting to find out how the repatriates from other areas would settle in their new homes. Another factor that kept them from moving to homeland was that the Armenians hoped that steps would be taken by the Turkish government towards improving their life conditions in Turkey. However, during the process of the Soviet recruitment of Armenians throughout the world, 1,200-1,400 Armenians in Istanbul registered for immigration. But after the Turkish government's announcement regarding facilitation of their departure, there were a number of withdrawals (Seydi, 2003).

Between 1946 and 1948, more than 100,000 Armenians living in the Middle East (e.g., Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria) and in Europe (e.g., Bulgaria, Greece, Romania) returned not to their original home territories but to a quasi-national space (the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic) which they had begun to accept as the homeland of all Armenians and a place where Armenian national identity would be preserved. These Armenians being the survivors of the genocide of 1915–1922 could not return to their own or their parents' villages and towns, which were already part of Turkey (Ishkanian, 2004).

Though, ethnic Armenians were returning from different parts of the world, however, the biggest flow of repatriation took place from Iran. The following was mainly due to the fact of having a large number of Armenians in Iran and because of hard living conditions there. As a result of the hard socio-economic and political situation created by the Islamic Revolution and Iran-Iraqi war a large number of Iranian Armenians began to emigrate from the country. Though the procedure of repatriation was organized on the state level some problems emerged with the settlement, distribution and employment of repatriates. Being

urban residents, repatriates refused to live in rural areas and wanted to live mainly in Yerevan. The Iranian Armenians of 1946 repatriation were settled in Sissian, Goris and Ghapan (currently Syunik) regions. The climatic conditions of the abovementioned cities were rather uncomfortable for them, since they were used to living in hot areas of Iran, which evoked reasons to many complaints. Besides, the relatives and different members of the families were settled in different (and far) areas of the country, which caused a number of difficulties during the process of adaptation to the new environment. This was yet another reason for complaints, since the repatriates ended up living far from their previous social and cultural relationship. The separation from the previous social relationships and cultural ties resulted to additional difficulties among repatriates and destroyed the social-cultural inclusion. Language (mainly dialects), sub-ethnic psychological and behavioral differences and sometimes incompatibilities hindered the process of integration and assimilation. These problems resulted in a large decrease of repatriation, and brought about the opposite process, their immigration back to Iran (Mkrtchyan and Tsaturyan, 2006).

During 1946-1947 about 280 people were arrested for the attempt of illegal crossing of the border. Despite the state's attention towards repatriates the emigration trend increased in the following years. In the first half of 1948, 14 people succeeded in crossing the border (Virabyan, 2009).

The repatriation program of 1947 was considered to be unsuccessful experience. Only 35401 people repatriated instead of 63000. Though the authority of Iran prohibited the repatriation of Armenians, epidemics broke out in Egypt and Palestine and the government of Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay did not authorize repatriation and the program of repatriation also failed in other countries (Virabyan, 2009).

In 1979 the Soviet government officially stopped the organization of continued repatriation.

The third and the final phase of repatriation started in 1962 which lasted until 1982. During this period only about 32000 people repatriated to homeland. Though the repatriates came from thirty different countries, the majority of them were from Iran. During 1970's many repatriates who arrived to Armenia had already realized that their homeland could serve as a stepping stone for receiving migration visas to the United States. The second half of repatriation of this period was perceived as temporary and as a means to another end. Majority of the repatriates arriving to Armenia were ultimately successful in immigrating to the United States (Grigoryan, 1995).

Soviet Legacy of Repatriation: Lessons learned

From the 19th century till the mid 20th “*depi yerkir*” movement signifying the return of Armenians to Armenia from Europe, the Middle East and America, was a central theme in the ideology of Diaspora. The Armenians of Diaspora were continuously living by the dream of returning to the land from which their ancestors were exiled.

So pro-Soviet Diasporans listening to the call to return to the homeland in the 20s and especially in the 40s and 50s, instead of embrace and welcome, they felt and were treated as “strangers in a strange land,” which often followed cruel persecution (Samuelian, 2003).

From the very first moment of their arrival they acknowledged that it was the Armenia they had longing for a long time.

Hatred and offense started from the very first steps the repatriates arrived to Armenia. The corrupt system and unbearable conditions led to a complete disappointment of repatriates. They never managed to fully integrate into a new society and were rather resolute to leave their mother country as soon as it would be possible. They felt like they were betrayed by the Soviet government. These decades had left sense of bitterness and hatred in the memory of many repatriates (Grigoryan, 1995).

The hostility and antagonism from locals were mainly experienced by the Armenian repatriates from Kessab, Syria, who decided to move to Armenia immediately after the end of the World War II and set a new life in their homeland. The primary inspirations that led the Kessab Armenians to engage in a “nerkaght” (repatriation) were patriotism and the belief that they were going to strengthen, even to save, the underpopulated homeland. They believed that if Armenians did not repatriate and increase the population numbers in Armenia, Stalin would annex parts of Armenia to neighboring Georgia or Azerbaijan. However, the repatriates were encountered by the hostile reception upon the arrival to Soviet Armenia, though in this case the source of hostility was dual—social, originating from ordinary Armenians, and political, emanating from the suspicions of the Stalinist regime. The newcomers were often accused of spying or other anti-Soviet activities and a large number (around 20,000) were exiled to Siberia in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The Armenian repatriates were frequently discriminated against and called offensive names.

The discontent and negativity of the new wave of emigres from Armenia and the stories of their predecessors, largely children of 1940s repatriates, has produced a sense of bitterness toward the idea of repatriation.

Despite all disappointments and difficulties that the repatriates were faced upon the arrival to homeland one cannot deny the positive influence of Soviet organized repatriation brought to the Soviet Armenia and its nationals.

During the Soviet era a number of intellectuals, scientist and government officials were subjected to purges of Stalin leaving a big gap in these fields. The repatriates were just in time for filling this void. Upon their arrival the repatriates had higher education and could find top positions. Numerous repatriates were elected to political positions. In the late 1980s a lot of repatriates or their children were already running top government positions. One of the

examples can be the fact that a repatriate from Beirut was holding the post of financial director in the Ministry of Health.

The fields of art and literature were also greatly influenced by repatriates. For example, Berj Zeytouniants, a repatriate from Egypt became a famous writer and later for a short time a Minister of Culture. Hacob Hacobian another returnee from Egypt had a great contribution in Armenian art with his exclusive depictions of life and of Gyumri. Their presence in Armenia resulted in the development of national identity as well as in intellectual renovation (Grigoryan, 1995).

Thus, taking into consideration all the advantages and disadvantages of repatriation during the Soviet period we can conclude that the Soviet Armenia was not ready yet to accept such large number of immigrants as it lacked proper mechanisms for integration and absorption process of new arrivals.

International practice

Revealing past lessons of the repatriation of 1940s it is important to consider the successful experience of repatriation.

International practice is extremely essential during the organization of repatriation as a social, economic and cultural procedure, especially for those countries that are still on their way of implementing their own concepts and methods (Aghajanyan, 2006).

According to Aghajanyan (2006) Israel is the country that which has the experience of developed and organized repatriation processes. Moreover, the Israeli experience can be essential for Armenia because of historical (Genocide), demographic (the majority of population lives out of the country) and politico-economic (hostile neighbors, poor natural resources) factors.

During several decades before and after the establishment of the State of Israel the notion of “the unification of all the Jews in the world” was in the basis of their ideological,

political and social development. The Israeli society was formed and continues to be formed as a result of repatriation of a number of Jews spread all over the world. Since the establishment of Israel its government and society has to deal with the continuous flow of immigrants and their integration into Jewish socium (Marutyan, 2009).

The sustainable development of Homeland-Diaspora relations is considered as one of the priorities of the Israeli foreign policy. The government considerably emphasizes the repatriation of Jewish Diaspora as a guarantee for preservation of Israeli statehood and its further development (Veranyan, 2005).

Jewish aspiration of returning to Israel was so intense and was called Aliyah. Literally it means “ascending,” because it implies rescue in ancient Jewish and modern Zionist traditions.

On May 14, 1948 the State of Israel was established for the purpose of repatriating the Jewish people from the Diaspora, to give every Jew anywhere in the world the option to return to the land of his fathers. It emphasizes the purpose of Israel as a homeland for all Jews (Law on Return, 1950). In the Declaration it was mentioned that “The State of Israel will be open for Jewish immigration and for the ingathering of the exiles”.

For this purpose on July 5, 1950 after the establishment of the State of Israel the Israeli Knesset (the Israeli Parliament) passed the Law of Return which gives right to every Jew to immigrate to the country.

The Law on Return has also served as a means of maintaining a Jewish majority within the State of Israel by promoting Aliyah. During the 1940s and 50s, Israel’s population balance was positively shifted through the state organized immigration of millions of Jews (Plenn, 2003).

In 1970 an essential amendment was made in the “Law on Return”, which stated that non-Jews who are either children or grandchildren of a Jew, the spouse of a Jew or the spouse

of a child or grandchild of a Jew has the right to immigrate to Israel. The amendment was mainly aimed to accept to Israel families, mainly from Eastern Europe, where mixed marriages were rather spread (Law on Return, 1950).

The adoption of the “Law on Return” brought to a number of immigrants to Israel. The immigrants were mainly people that were exiled during the Holocaust. During 1952-1964 nearly 240000 Jews returned to Israel from North Africa. A large portion of repatriates arrived from Arabic and Middle East countries (Marutyan, 2009).

In the beginning of 1991s the new wave of repatriates increased the number of Israeli population. It was mainly determined by the collapse of the Soviet Union and by the formation of new independent countries in the post Soviet area (Veranyan, 2005).

The difficulty of organizing mass immigration or repatriation is determined first and foremost by the fact that it demands a deep knowledge of the issue, huge preparatory works, financial means as well as hard work in the new place of residence. It must be noted that internally in Israel there has always been a consensus on the issue of immigration and absorption (Marutyan, 2009).

At the end of 1960s a need emerged to review the previous operating repatriation mechanisms as a result of increase in the number of returnees. In 1967 “Jewish Agency for Israel” (Sochnut) was established for the purpose of coordinating the works of Israeli government and that of the Jewish agency (Veranyan, 2005). The representatives from Jewish Agency present in all the Jewish centers of the world provide the potential repatriates with appropriate information as well as necessary assistance (including monetary one) for immigrating to Israel. The activities directed towards the promotion of Aliyah are one of the priority issues of the Agency (Marutyan, 2009).

In 1968 a decision was made to establish the Ministry of Immigrant Absorption. The agreement was made with the Jewish Agency that the latter would deal with issues of

organizing the repatriation to Israel while the newly established Ministry took the responsibility of providing the favorable living conditions to immigrants (Veranyan, 2005).

The Ministry of Immigrant Absorption is mainly responsible for providing government assistance to new immigrants and returning residents. The Ministry helps immigrants from the very beginning of their arrival to the country, facilitates their full integration into Israeli society. It is responsible for the economic, occupational, social, and cultural integration of immigrants during their first three years in Israel. The Ministry also encourages others, public institutions, volunteer organizations, schoolchildren, and university students, to promote immigrant absorption and integration.

At the stage of integration the government tries to be aware of the differences between new immigrants and the local population. It helps in achieving common goals such as wealth, security and the establishment of rules that apply to all levels of society (Lav, 2009).

The Ministry of Absorption together with the Jewish Agency and local authorities, has initiated a group repatriation and absorption plan for immigrants for the purpose of encouraging repatriation and improving absorption procedures. The program is designed to assist the immigrants throughout the whole process of absorption. The special proctor accompanies the family during initial absorption in various areas such as Hebrew studies, registration of children in schools, finding employment, social and cultural areas.

With the help of absorption program, immigrants receive financial aid, rent an apartment for themselves, register at Hebrew Intensive Course, and try independently to integrate into Israeli society.

As for finding a job in a new place the Ministry of Immigrant Absorption helps new immigrants integrate into the local job market in accordance with their education and work experience. The programs are quite different based on the immigrant's profession, personal capabilities, and professional requirements in Israel. Some professions do not require any

preparation other than study of Hebrew. There are other professions that require a preparatory period such as vocational Hebrew studies, licensing or qualifying exams, and a specified period of internship (Lav, 2009).

The Ministry of Immigrant Absorption together with two independent ministries (the Ministry of Construction and Housing and the Ministry of Finance) provide housing assistance for new immigrants. There are two different kinds of housing assistance that is offered to newcomers which is dependent on the path of absorption they choose. For example, if they prefer to settle in the absorption center, they can apply either before arriving to Israel or at the airport when they meet the representatives from the Ministry of Absorption, who can provide them with transportation to the place they choose. The second way is when newcomers want to find apartments on their own. In this case they get a certain amount of money according to the size of the family, their age, and other individual circumstances.

Large scale immigration and positive integration serve as a powerful incentive to Israel's development and progress in all areas (Lav, 2009).

By organizing repatriation the Israeli authority strengthens not only Homeland-Diaspora relations but uses it as a tool for regulating problems existing in the country.

First and foremost the provision of Jewish repatriation played a substantial role in the development of different spheres such as science and education. By encouraging repatriation the Israeli government strives to contribute to the improvement of national defense and security (Veranyan, 2005).

The face of Israeli society has been irreversibly and radically changed as a result of million immigrants that arrived to Israel during the final decade of the 20th century. This group, as a whole, has prospered, and brought about a unique economic growth, cultural innovation, and technological advancement. Tens of thousands of engineers and academics, along with thousands of scientists, artists and musicians, constitute unique "human capital".

They are educated, professional, and dedicated with an invaluable capacity for advancing the economy, technological knowledge, and creative culture in Israel.

The whole absorption program accelerates the integration of immigrants into society and significantly contributes to preventing emigration, and encourages further immigration (Lav, 2009).

We can conclude that during the decades much has been done for the successful organization of repatriation and integration issue in Israel. The fact that the Jewish Agency and the Israel Ministry of Immigrant Absorption have declared May 5 as "Aliyah Day 2008", marking the immigration and absorption of more than 3,000,000 new immigrants over the 60 years since the State of Israel was established may serve as a proof of all mentioned above.

Greece

Modern Greece has always been a country of emigration. The two world wars and the 1947-1949 civil war resulted in seizing the country's technological and agricultural development. Unemployment became the most serious problem bothering post war Greece, leading to serious economic outcomes. Between 1951 and 1981, 12 per cent of the Greek population emigrated to such countries as France, Belgium and mainly Germany. Emigration was considered to be a reasonable solution for solving the economic issues. However, later problems arose since the rural areas were abandoned, and labor shortages were noted, both in agriculture and industry. International events such as oil crisis of 1973, and domestic ones like restoration of democracy after seven years of dictatorship (1974) and the improvement of the Greek economy stopped the emigration flow. Greeks started returning to their homeland. (Siadima, 2001)

The modern repatriation of Greeks began after the collapse of the dictatorial regime in Greece, in 1974, and it took a new wave in 1983, when the decision of the Greek government for free repatriation, was put into effect (Vergeti, 2003).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union the Greek government invited its nationals abroad to come back. The Greek state acknowledged that it could benefit from their coming back to recover the weak growth of the population and to increase the work of active population. The Greek government made several promises to repatriates. The Greek embassies in the capitals of the republics put stamps on the passports of those repatriates who could prove their Greek origin for the purpose of facilitating the repatriation procedure.(Glutz et al, 2005).

Gradually the migration policy started to pursue the goals of the strengthening Diaspora-Homeland relations and establishing legal protection of repatriates. The above mentioned goals were directed at supporting the processes of integration of people of Greek origin into different fields of society such as economic, educational and cultural. In the period between 1971 and 1986, 625,000 people returned and settled permanently in Greece. During the years of 1988 and 1997, 147240 repatriates came back to Greece. Some of them were second, third or even fourth generation. About 40000 persons were received and settled in Thrace (area serving as a meeting point of different cultures where the Muslim minorities live.). In 1990 the Greek government established the National Institute for Repatriates Reception and Rehabilitation (NIRRR). The services provided to the repatriates included housing, food (for the first 12 months), language and school support, allowances, employment guidance, social care, access to health services, support for legalization (to get citizenship and change the names) and family reunification. Furthermore, new comers had access to the whole social security system (several allowances, national health system and insurance services). After the arrival of repatriates the government soon realized the importance of integrating repatriates into the society. Therefore, the Ministry of Education organized programs to support them. They established reception classes for the children, tutorial classes, intercultural schools, language courses for adults, etc. The NIRRR initiated a

program of building houses for these immigrants. Some employment programs were also organized for the repatriates (Glutz et al, 2005).

The repatriates coming for permanent residence to Greece are mainly Political Refugees of the civil war, who left the country in the 1946-1949 period, Greeks from the former Soviet Union and Greeks from Albania. The number of modern repatriates (starting from 1974) is as follows: more than 50,000 Greek Political Refugees, 155,000 Greeks from the former Soviet Union and 150,000 Greeks from south Albania (from the region of Northern Epirus) (Papaioannou et al, 2001).

The laws in force consider the Political Refugees and the Greeks from the former Soviet Union, who in their majority are Pontian Greeks, as repatriates and the Greeks from Albania as emigrant Greeks from abroad. (Vergeti, 2003).

The Pontian Greeks (people of Greek origin initially living in the area along the coast of the Black Sea), as the main wave of repatriates, came to Greece from the former Soviet Union during the last decade. Since the beginning of the 20th century, several waves of Pontians came to Greece whenever it became possible by the historical and political circumstances. The last massive wave of migration took place after the collapse of the Soviet regime when nearly 150,000 Pontians from the former Soviet Union moved to Greece for permanent residence (Papaioannou et al, 2001).

During the years of 1989-1993, the Greek state adopted a policy of official invitation to Greece toward the Pontians from the former Soviet Union. On the basis of their ethnic origin the newcomers were identified as “repatriated” and, on the administrative level, they were naturalized as Greeks through relatively simple procedures.

A National Foundation for the Reception and Settlement of Repatriated Greeks (EIYAPOE) was established that started its activity in 1991. The Foundation’s main objectives were to receive the immigrants, to organize their settlement in the new place

(hospitality centers and reception hostels), to provide them with immediately necessary items; and to prepare them for social integration (learning the language, familiarization with the workings of the state agencies, health services, psycho-social support).

The Foundation worked out a plan aiming to create the infrastructure for the permanent settlement of a large part of the Pontians in Thrace. The plan provided for the housing (through the granting of houses) and for the occupational accommodation of the participants in the program. 19,857 people took part in that program. The Foundation designed and implemented programs for the promotion of entrepreneurial activity that constituted specific policies targeting mainly the Pontian immigrants. They include cash subsidies (the sums usually cover a small part of the required capital) and of rent subsidies to businesses for an initial period of their operation.

The repatriated Pontians as a vulnerable social group have formal access to additional programs aimed at promoting and supporting self-employment (Papaioannou et al, 2001).

However, despite the efforts made by the Greek government and the fact that the returnees were granted Greek citizenship they faced serious problems in finding jobs. Greeks from the former Soviet Union had serious problems of economic incorporation. This was mainly determined by the facts that their language skills were not at a good level and also because the state did not recognize their educational diplomas acquired abroad (Triandafyllidou, 2009).

The large proportion of Pontian Greeks worked as unskilled workers being employed in cheap labor force irrespective of their educational level. Among the common occupations were those of constructors, cleaners and – especially for women – housekeeping (Triandafyllidou, 2009).

The state was unable to assist effectively the integration of children in the education system and to regulate the compatibility of particular specialties of degrees of repatriated

persons with the degrees of Greek Tertiary Education Institutions. A number of laws and ministerial decisions were legislated on the basis of which tutorial departments and schools for pupils and students of Greek migrants were organized. Despite all the efforts made, almost half of the children of migrants did not receive any kind of assistance until 1996. In 1996 the state policy initiated a program of the intercultural education, for achieving the adaptation of the school programs to the “particular education” (Vergeti, 2003)

As for political refugees, their main repatriation trend started after 1974. Until 1983, their repatriation occurred only in an individual manner that is every application for repatriation by a political refugee was examined individually. After 1983 a ministerial decision was made by the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Public Order, stating in the Code of Greek Nationality that all ethnic Greeks taking refuge status as political refugees during the civil war of 1946-1949 may return freely to Greece, even if they have been deprived of their Greek nationality (Triandafyllidou, 2009).

However, as for the other groups of repatriates the economic problems were also present, even more intense for the political refugees of first generation who repatriated before 1983. These persons of Greek origin left states where they had permanent work and medical care, moreover, the pension programs covered their needs. There was no bilateral agreement for the transfer of pensions and social security contributions. After returning to homeland repatriates had no source of income at all. The only solution was the agreement by relatives in resolving questions of family property, which during the period of 1947-49 due to forceful emigration had been confiscated in or had changed owners. Since 1983 the transfer of pensions was allowed and it somehow started to ease the life of Political Refugees (Vergeti, 2003).

The expectations of the overwhelming majority of repatriates were not met in the homeland and they could not properly utilize their educational and occupational qualifications.

The above mentioned examples show that there are several countries that have both bad and good experience of organizing and implementing repatriations. The way and policies of organizing repatriation are different and there are lessons to be learnt.

As a conclusion it can be said that international practice is extremely essential.

While developing the policies for repatriation Armenia should take into account both the successful and non-successful experiences of international practice. The policy should address the return migrants' problems aimed not only to meet immediate but also long-term needs.

While comparing Armenia and Greece we can say that these two countries have much in common in regard to their history, socio-economic and demographic situation, etc. Studying the practice of Greece and revealing the shortcomings of the state organized repatriation (such as problems of economic incorporation, job finding, integration of children in education system) it is obvious that Armenia would face the same problems that may lead to complete failure of the process. Therefore, organized mass repatriation of Armenians has never been on state agenda of the independent Armenia as at this stage the state is not ready for organizing large scale repatriation due to a lack of resources.

The successful integration and absorption programs of the Israeli state can be used as basis for the development of the policies. The characteristic features of our country and the Diaspora should be taken into account and be adjusted to the country's own social, economic and cultural characteristics.

Current Dynamics

The idea of strengthening Homeland-Diaspora relations has been one of the major issues of all times both in Armenia and in the Diaspora. Such issues as preservation of the Armenian identity, strengthening of the Armenian family, repatriation and others need to be addressed to further foster Armenia-Diaspora relations.

Though much has been done in the absence of a dedicated state body over the past 17 years there was a need to adjust the relations between Armenia and the Diaspora on the state level. For this purpose the Ministry of Diaspora was established in 2008 by the decree of the President of the RA. According to Minister of Diaspora, Mrs. Hranush Hakobyan, by the establishment of such an institution the President of RA acknowledged that the government had to deal with issues and make decisions that impact Armenians all over the world. There are three important principles in president program related to Armenia-Diaspora relationship: preservation of the Armenian identity (*hayapapanutyun*) in all its forms, identification of the Armenian potential and its use for the development of Armenian-Diaspora partnership as well as repatriation.

In regard to repatriation Ms. Hakobyan clarified that it does not necessarily mean only physical repatriation. It primarily means developing spiritual and psychological ties with the homeland, which she considers just as important. More people want to return to their roots, more it helps to strengthen the Homeland.

However, here we should talk about voluntary repatriation and have policies and legislation for those who wish to return and settle in their Homeland.

The first international conference organized by the Ministry of Diaspora, together with the National Academy of Sciences, Yerevan State University and the Noravank Foundation, was titled "The 1946-1948 Repatriation and its Lessons: The Issue of

Repatriation Today," took place on December 12-14 of 2008 in Tsakhadzor,. The conference was called not only to look back on the events of 1946-1948 but to draw lessons from it.

This was the first time ever in Armenia's history that the 1946-1948 repatriation plan was publicly discussed. Different academics from Armenia and abroad, researchers, journalists, and members representing Diaspora organizations and political parties discussed the history and future of repatriation.

Nowadays a number of steps are being undertaken for activating Armenia-Diaspora partnership and particularly addressing the issue of repatriation. They are specifically mentioned in the "Concept Paper on Armenia-Diaspora Partnership Development" drafted by the Ministry of Diaspora and approved by the Government of the RA. The Republic of Armenia supports the repatriation of Armenians independent of the country of residence and of arrival. As a result of adoption of the "Law on Dual Citizenship" nearly 5000 people applied for acquiring citizenship of RA during the past three years. While developing policies for voluntary repatriates RA government pays a substantial attention to the continuous improvement of legislation regulating rights and obligations of dual citizens as well as gives much importance to elaboration of reintegration program of returnees. Another objective is to work out programs encouraging repatriation of Armenians. Repatriation as one of the vital connection of each Armenian with his motherland should be expressed through permanent residence and start up activities. (Concept paper, 2009)

The Government views the repatriation as one of its most important objectives. To this end a policy facilitating repatriation of Armenians living in foreign countries must be developed and introduced enabling these people to directly contact Armenian state bodies electronically. A body comprised of representatives of state authorities dealing with repatriation processes should be formed for developing and using the scheme. Reforms will be implemented in the area of entry visas to foreign citizens, processes of issuing residence status to them and

registration as well as in developing and introducing regulations on their employment activities in Armenia (Government Program, 2008).

To address all the issues related to repatriation and the integration of returnees in Armenia a concept program on repatriation is currently being elaborated by the Ministry of Diaspora on the basis of the program of the President of the RA and the Government of Armenia. For the very purpose a substantial work is currently being carried out by the Ministry of Diaspora, particularly:

1. thorough and scientific study of organized repatriation during the Soviet Era, clear distinction of its applicable elements, lessons and mistakes,
2. investigation of capabilities and resources both in Armenia and in the Diaspora, clarification of issues and elaboration of methods in regard to the organization of repatriation,
3. the elaboration of “repatriation” program contributing to spiritual and psychological return,
4. analysis of international practice and examination of applicable methods and perspectives,
5. study of international legislation, elaboration of the law on repatriation,
6. ways of implementing repatriation procedure,
7. development and implementation of integration program for repatriates (Hakobyan, 2009).

Today the RA state bodies and specifically the Ministry of Diaspora underline the role and the importance of having the law on Repatriation for Armenia. The necessity of adoption of such a law currently is conditioned by different reasons. Repatriation is important for different parts of Diaspora for not being subjected to speedy acculturation and assimilation as well as it is rather important for solving the demographic, territorial-strategic issues for RA.

The law on Repatriation shall regulate legal and adaptation issues of the persons and families wishing to repatriate to their homeland. The persons should be aware about the state policy towards repatriation issue, the procedure of presenting the application for repatriation, the regulations of granting citizenship to repatriates as well as socio-economic and educational-cultural issues of repatriates.

Recommendations and Conclusion

The final objective of this Policy Internship Project is to provide recommendations which can be applicable and practical for Armenia.

A decision to repatriate is not an easy decision taken overnight. The element of time and the possibility of a thorough preparation are crucial for the returnees. Based on the analysis of findings, international practice and past lessons the paper gives the following recommendations on the issue of repatriation.

First of all if Armenia wants to encourage repatriation, it needs to have a well-designed policy for repatriation. Government policies are usually set forth in laws. If the current legal framework is not succeeding in achieving the government's goals it needs to be changed. The next step should be the development of a mechanism aimed at successful implementation of the laws. This task can be accomplished by society's awareness raising of the legal field, having direct participation in law drafting activities, by organizing the round tables, etc.

It is of great value to be able to provide continuity in repatriation activities and projects because repatriation involves all aspects of life i.e. job, housing, education, social security, network etc. The program should be designed to assist the immigrants throughout the whole integration and absorption processes.

One of the most important things that RA government should accomplish is the facilitation of the full integration of returnees into the Armenian society. The government

should meet the housing needs and provide housing assistance for new immigrants by providing free land for house construction, dwellings for the neediest families, free housing opportunities in the cities and villages of Armenia.

The government should design a special health-insurance plan and provide returnees with complete health insurance (ambulatory care, medical assistance, and hospitalization) until the repatriates will be able to address their needs on their own. Furthermore, bilateral agreement are needed for the transfer of pensions and social contributions.

Armenian language courses should be organized free of charge as well as extra-curricular classes facilitating education and integration process.

As for finding a job the government should integrate the immigrants into local job market in accordance with their education and work experience. The programs must be organized according to repatriates' professional, personal capabilities, and professional requirements in Armenia.

In regard to legal field the repatriates should acquire a citizenship of the RA upon their arrival to Armenia and this repatriation status should be preserved until the complete integration and adaptation process.

Another important aspect that should be taken into account is the provision of the complete and correct information about Armenia's current situation to persons wishing to repatriate. This task can be implemented through the organization of one time visit to Armenia. Only in this case people will be able to get acquainted about the advantages or disadvantages that Armenia can offer to new arrivals.

To sum up it is very important to mention that repatriation is a rather complicated process especially because of Armenia's current socio-economic situation and the obstacles and failures may hinder the successful implementation of the process.

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