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NATIONAL IDEOLOGY AND CULTURE

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This lecture is a modest attempt at making observations on the content of national ideology and touching on its basis to show how important it is for preserving the nation and establishing statehood.

Since the time of its formation, each clan, nation and people has begun the creation of a system for preserving its existence. This system is national consciousness.

It is national culture that turns land into a nation and a fatherland. Throughout the centuries, the Armenian nation has achieved its independence, national character, content, and culture, which are all determined by the natural, climactic, and geographic conditions characteristic of the Armenian highland.

N. Adontz writes: "For a nation and a population, the fatherland is not merely a land mass. The consciousness of a people or a country is raised to the idea of Fatherland with the help of all the things that tie it with and bring it close to the people. Under the conditions of any given place, its links to nature, myths, tales, traditions, habits, linguistic particularities, and features of the internal world are developed".

Whether or not you agree, it is not just the living who play a prevailing role in the current life of a people, but also their ancestry. They adjust the criteria of morality and become the invisible determinants of creating morality. This is why experts consider mythology, traditions, and language to be the basic factors affecting the psychology of peoples.

National psychology emerged during the initial stages of human development as an element of national consciousness. Consequently, the study of national consciousness (particularly the sources of its formation) must begin with a discussion of issues related to mythology, traditions, habits, and language.

Regardless of the area, size of population, economic and military strength of a country, if the strategic goal of its people and the people's will to attain a national strategy are zero, then, regardless of what number you



multiply it by, you are going to get zero. This is the importance of the role that national consciousness plays in the survival, development, and strengthening of a people. This is why the national factor is considered to be "the most fundamental and comprehensive of all expressions of an individual's group identity". This is the reason why people and land belong to each other, yet not every land or area is Fatherland. Fatherland is "historic" land; it is "a natural home". Over several centuries, land and Fatherland may mutually influence each other, and land may thus turn into Fatherland. This is the reason why communicating with land is what determines ethnic identity, rather than living there.

This spiritual ordering of the mind leads current generations to the world of their ancestors. It allows them to understand their character, spiritual constructs, psychology, and the impact they have on the contemporary history of peoples.

The main factor in the formation of the psychology of a nation is the impact of the cultural atmosphere. This is because in the course of its historical development, each

clan, nation, or people creates its own system of cultural values.

The main means of preserving and developing all the elements of national consciousness is culture. A nation cannot exist without national culture. The first prerequisite for the formation and development of all the elements of national consciousness is the cultural atmosphere. In other words, the national culture.

This is why the systems of culture, education, and science have to have a national character and constantly be at the center of the state's attention. The role that culture plays in national consciousness determines the need to implement any new cultural policy that must have the following strategic goals:

- Recognize culture as a global developmental criterion;
- Search for new values and ideas, and create conditions to reproduce and develop the creative potential of society; and
- Create a civic society (including freedom of creative activity, citizenship, patriotism, and historic consciousness).

Twelve years ago, when a new process of spiritual and democratic transformation began in our society, we knew that the world is divided into nations, each of which has identity, history, and goals. It was clear that the nation was the source of all social and political forces and that faith in the nation must prevail. Humans must base their identity on national identity if they want to be a nation and be steady. It was clear that nations have to be secure, if peace and justice are to prevail in the world. We knew back then, as we know now, that this process will have a major impact not only on the economy, social relations, and foreign policy, but also on culture. Indeed, public speeches of representatives of the creative intelligentsia, the ambitions of creative unions, and the creation of various informal unions, shaped the opinion that the process of democratic and social transformation had been started. In the area of culture, in particular, it had gone much further than in other areas.

This is not the only issue. We have the right to insist that the social strengthening and vital significance of the role of culture, as well as the development of socio-cultural and spiritual sectors are as important for the future as the creation of an efficient economic mechanism.

Creative freedom of mind and feelings, as well as their unrestrained acquisition and expression, are based on a sufficient level of awareness of, attraction, and accessibility to the cultural heritage.

Only by meeting these conditions can one count on the possibilities of stability, experience, thought, spiritual

development, and the strengthening and viability of their moral foundations.

Culture is extremely important for self-determination. It reflects images of a possible and desirable life, whose completeness and finality are still unreachable within the historical present. It is given "here" and "now", rather than in the distant future. It is presented by the imagination for the mind and senses, by which individuals obtain their spiritual existence -- independent of the surrounding circumstances; and can have a surrealistic, creative, and unique position in regards to culture.

In this sense, culture becomes the main place where various valuable orientations, styles, ideas, and feelings are tested. Scenarios of life-producing behavior are considered. They will make people easier to accept and to be appreciated than in the jumbled and camouflaged circumstances of life. This is the place where civic culture grows. This is where the historical wings of a people are spread. It is the place where spiritual life is rehabilitated. Much has already changed in the spiritual aspect of our society. Atmosphere is important, but it passes away quickly.

Speaking of democratization and the abolishment of our political heritage, the issues of freedom of thought and the completeness of human rights arise.

And what of the cultural area? There is much hope in forming new models of creativity and informal creative activity. We do not have any reason to be lethargic. One of the reasons we are concerned is the slow speed at which the active institutions of culture and social grouping treat the formation of a new cultural policy: one that meets the broad requirements of a cultural field. Its institutions and social researchers must currently represent it. Social and creative people, and anyone else, for whom culture is significant and fundamental in his/her everyday life, must also play their roles.

One cannot say that we have not had a policy in the area of culture. Many bitter words have been said in this respect. Having some hope in the democratization of cultural life, we now count on publicity, because we see it as the guarantee of the expression of thoughts, freedom of creation, and accessibility of cultural values. But publicity has another meaning: this word contains one's position on real problems, the solution to which brings about self-determination, gives birth to ideas, and words that express those ideas. This fundamental role of publicity is more significant in the area of culture than in any other area. All of its objectives (goods, images, creations, and monuments) deal primarily with ideal and spiritual values, and secondly, with material ones. This is why a cultural policy is carried out by means of treating



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culture as a whole.

Today, cultural policy can be based only upon itself. This is clearly expressed in the declaration of values that it shelters while preparing for it to grow and spread.

With the granted freedoms and the silence of officials, it seems to many people that the cultural sector can be targeted even without a policy. They claim that culture is self-regulatory and cannot be subject to management, and that it is worthwhile to extend the initial accumulation phase of spiritual freedoms as much as possible, without setting any political goals. They count on the magic of demand and dollars, rather than on viable values. Amongst such opinions, fear of any kind of political activity, which was injected into us for seventy years in a row, prevails. However, should we continue lying to ourselves as we did in the past? Is policy something to be dealt with by elected groups, rather than those interested in renewing life and defending the moral and spiritual values that exist inside humans? Our spiritual rebirth will never become a common task without a cultural policy that is based upon the actual situation in the country, is democratic, and is constantly renewed.

In the spiritual sense, policy is sensed as the responsibility of free individuals who see the main problems in life through the eyes of people. They ought to be individuals that have accepted the morality of serving the highest values in a country and of the majority that determines the spiritual features of the nation. Culture is alive at the depth of creative initiatives and the perfection of their embodiment, as well as the ability to recognize and appreciate them on the basis of the greatest achievements of spiritual development that we have inherited from history. Cultural values may become outdated in the historical sense (by turning into, for example, monuments or historical evidence). This happens, however, only at the time when new cultural values with the same values as the older ones come to the fore. Consequently, it is simply pointless to brake or to accelerate developments in the cultural sector. The required cultural policy can only be one of creative freedom, as a means of spiritual growth and revival.

Public opinion has already developed quite clear benchmarks for seeing what the desired cultural policy can turn into. In sketching this policy, one has to consider:

- The unification of forces that are significantly interested in spiritual revival;
- The freedom of cultural projects and initiatives from supervision; and
- An organic combination of creative artistic, scientific, academic, and popular views on culture.

It is worthwhile to consider the factors that can impede this process. This is necessary in order for us to understand what the essence of cultural policy should be like.

From the past, we have inherited two approaches that can be used for implementing any cultural policy.

The first policy is ministerial, and it is effectively a technocratic approach that leads to a system of cultural servicing. Here, the number of visits to cultural institutions, the ability of mutual compensation ("art products, their consumption, and the demand for them"), rather than the beauty of images and the ability to be inspired by them. Let us not forget that this rough approach on managing culture continues to exist nowadays. Of course, managerial work

requires knowledge of the level of attractiveness of various cultural values, the awareness of various groups of the population, and their actual accessibility. Such assessments, however, become meaningful only in the framework of a cultural policy that has been developed and discussed in advance. The policy should have clearly established benchmarks for the value of cultural growth, and agreement on priorities among all the official, creative, and social forces concerning the objectives of cultural development. Without this agreement, the only outcome will be the fact that government agencies will plan and be accountable, and scientists will write articles. Real life and culture will remain behind the curtains of decorative activity.

The second approach on the social management of culture is when culture, together with its spiritual values and consciousness, are made equal to "sophisticated" ideological concepts at the level of journal headlines and mottoes. Lowering culture to the level of consciousness or turning down culture and the

self-recognition of creative and spiritual life can have severe consequences. This is why it is now important to assess them realistically and to be as sincere and critical as possible when either benchmarking the bases for a cultural policy or wishing to accept the sovereignty of cultural values and the idea of spiritual life. The choice has to be made in favor of spiritual renovation and the revival of the people.

The practice of being guided by the aforementioned two principles has effectively made any meaningful understanding of culture -- as a whole and as a live entity -- unnecessary.

Administrative planners used to deal with cultural servicing. This is important as a general activity. They did not comprehend, however, the content of the values that were presented. Ideological workers dealt with the inability to control general conditions, remaining faithful to rule-making principles.

Accepting the originality of culture does not at all mean that it should be left alone in all regards. In order to reasonably consider the possibility (or impossibility) of social management of culture, however, we must consider it to be an atmosphere that is alive, meaningful, and has creative potential. It must have certain positive values and characteristics, be subject to growth or transformation, and be pure, life giving, and disease-killing.

The danger of technological and socio-organizational innovations targeted against culture, market relations that are not quite clear to us, and the search to hold on to practical and spiritual values, are the basic points considered by the world's humanistic (social) minds. In this era of all-inclusive change, we must also think of the priorities amongst the values with which we are entering a new historical cycle, as well as the system that we are going to use to express it in the name of culture. Ultimately, the objective of a cultural policy is defined as our precise recognition of culture's role in all the areas of our lives. The process of cultural self-determination and the path that leads towards it were discovered with the help of democratization and the freedom of expression. But they have only just started. It is clear that in any situation, however, we have to take care of the spiritual image that we have inherited from our ancestors as our purely unique feature in the multiplicity of world culture. Let us not be attracted to the affirmation that

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modernization will be kind to us and will spare us. The structures that are expected are mainly created by technical and organizational means. They are designed, planned, and implemented by an administrative system. Regardless of how successfully the humanization and modernization of the administrative and designed culture are implemented in the future; this is quite a difficult process that requires much concentration of spiritual and physical strength.

How difficult is it to avoid this evil? Some say that it will be settled. Others say that modernization is inevitable. But the obedience of some people and the aggressiveness of others are far from the desired human consequences of technological and social transformations. One cannot say that all the negative consequences are the result of the ability to restore cultural values and the desire for a new and better future. Regardless of how each of us envisages the past and what each of us hopes to gain from the future of culture, s/he lives by the spiritual past and the emotions and ideas of the time. Culture is the reasonable field and life-creating spiritual atmosphere that has the values and the potential that we need in our day-to-day lives. This is valid also after the basic designs of cultural development have been implemented. Neither any network of cultural ties between institutions, nor the messages and events they contain, are developed and considered as units for projecting the future and accounting for plans. The concentration has to be shifted towards the capacity, multiplicity, and comprehensiveness of the cultural atmosphere that is secured by these networks and survives with the help of their ability to create life. Ultimately, a cultural policy is the creation of new and modern conditions for spiritual growth in the vibrant field of culture.

In this sense, the cultural policy of a state is the most important sector of the state's policy because it determines the place that state and nation will have in general politics. The main defender of national spirit, national self-consciousness, and national character, is national culture. Cultural policy educates the young generation in the spirit of patriotism and the defense of the fatherland. Cultural policy nationalizes international values by means of making them equal to the national life and character of the Armenian nation. Indeed, our country still does not have a policy on this important sector; it has not had such a policy any time in the past, except for Soviet times when we were clearly dictated a culture that was shaped in national terms but contained socialist ideas. The emphasis on the national shape was more in terms of the Russian culture, the greatness of which was not subject to suspicion. Of course, one cannot forget the fact that Russian art and culture created a great opportunity for recognizing international culture. However, we currently need a culture that will have an international shape and will be able to overcome national limitations and comply with the world's culture, while preserving its national content.

It is unquestionable that a national culture, through its content, has a valid place in the area of world culture. In this sense, the state has an important role to play. Where should we start developing a cultural policy? I believe that we have to start by cleaning our culture from foreign influences and everything else that can distort its national

content. In doing this, we cannot be guided by the simple principle that people enjoy "rabbeess" (trite, crass, cheap, and popular referring to "rabotsheye eeskoostvo" or "workers' art"—ed.) or foreign music. Culture cannot decline to the level of a casual user. It must raise its audience to higher, humanistic values. In order to inject Armenian national taste and national feelings, one must spread Armenian traditions and customs. Of course, we understand that there is a contradiction between the various desires of artists. Some of them wish to act in European culture, thinking that they have nothing to do in Armenian culture. This is wrong. Europeans, Americans, Asians, and Easterners will find it more natural if one delivers one's national culture to them, rather than go to their countries with their own culture. Here, we need Beethoven, Shakespeare, and Verdi.

I will try to summarize what I have said, although this topic is endless and needs to be studied in great detail.

Having lost its statehood and sovereignty for many centuries, our nation has stuck to its national culture as the correct guide. In different phases of its development, this national culture substituted statehood and performed the nation-saving task of governing Armenians. Being one of the elements of national consciousness (in our case, it is the most important element), national culture has governed the nation in spiritual, intellectual, ideological, and moral terms. I emphasize the words "ideological and moral".

In our case, these elements cannot be separated. Any form or creation of art that either has a cultural value or will become our cultural heritage in the future, cannot exist for ever unless it has a profound moral character, in addition to the ideological element, and unless it carries the trace of moral values.

Today, the key to Armenian national consciousness is the actual existence of the independent Republic of Armenia; the domestic and foreign policies of which are fully implemented on the basis of a strategy and tactics that are founded upon national consciousness.

At this point, one must note that national culture, which is one of the elements of national consciousness, can achieve significant results for the fatherland (in this case, for the nation, state, and the people). These results include resolve, togetherness, character, devotion, unselfishness, and real love for the fatherland and the country. Without them, the idea of a fatherland could not exist and, as a result of the spiritual-cultural policy, we would neither have a national army nor a cultural heritage that would be considered part of our concept on changing values as required by time.

One should also consider that as far as re-thinking spiritual-cultural values goes, this has been done in all countries that undergo political changes. Before they affirmed their orientation in terms of their future policy, their cultural policy was transformed into political culture that served the purposes of disseminating such information. A similar activity took place in our country, as well. It was expressed in various forms of art that make culture complete. It was clearly emphasized in literature and fine art, but after re-considering the values, it was appreciated and recorded as important in the spiritual-cultural heritage life of our people. This example

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can be used to prove something else. Without preserving and developing national self-consciousness, national character, and national essence, the system of national culture would not exist because it is national culture that secures this development. This is why the absolute assessment of nation, fatherland, and independent statehood is mainly done by means of cultural policy. Having a historical and cultural heritage of five thousand years, this country is adopting new and modern developments in this

area. It does not have an alternative besides establishing an image, role, essence, and character, within the cultural multiplicity of the world and in the way it uses national cultures.

We are old not only in terms of the past and history, but also -- more importantly -- for the future.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

-One always hears that the Armenian people do not have a national ideology or consciousness. Do you agree with this viewpoint? If not, how do you explain it?

-No, I do not agree. I believe my whole lecture dealt with this issue.

-Is national consciousness a cultural or political category?

-National consciousness is a national, political, and cultural category. There is no country or state without national consciousness. I believe the person asking this question is familiar with the announcement that national consciousness is supposedly a fake category. I believe this announcement was made for political reasons and had nothing to do with the idea of national consciousness.

-How do you evaluate the role of modern-day schools in terms of shaping national consciousness?

-Several aspects of this role have to be evaluated. First of all, this touches the quality of pedagogues and textbooks, as well as the upbringing that children receive in their families, not to mention the psychological condition of children during the learning process. These are important factors that have to be taken into consideration. I believe that as far as textbooks go, we still do not have an adequate quality for teaching national consciousness as a category and to have our children digest it during the whole process of learning. I think that there is also a need for improving teachers. These are probably the most important factors. It is also important to consider the understanding of the fatherland that children have before they start attending school.

-What are the ideological cornerstones upon which national consciousness has to be built? You touched upon the elements of national consciousness. What are they?

-The elements of national consciousness are all the possible means for securing our existence in the future. We must be able to use them to express our image, features, originality, traditions, will, and morality.

The most important element is spiritual-cultural upbringing.

-In your opinion, how big is the conflict between national consciousness and the existing expressions of globalization?

-This is quite significant in the area of culture. In general globalization and the multiplicity of culture, there is great competition among nations, states, and peoples that wish to establish their presence. I believe that all those who can display a cultural heritage that is characteristic of their national character in that multiplicity and globalization, will have -- and keep -- their place. But if they try to borrow elements from what was created by the cultures of various nations and tie them up to get some recognition, they will fail.

-Are there specific plans for cleaning Armenian culture of low quality influences?

-One cannot secure quality with force, other methods, or licenses. I believe that competition is the only way for cleaning our national culture from the phenomena of "rabbeess" and "love-everything-as-long-as-it's-foreign".

-In your opinion, what social structures currently bear national consciousness in our country?

-One has to be very careful about this. If, by saying "social structures", you mean creative unions, then I have a different position. I believe that creative unions cannot continue their existence and activities in this way. This is not what should bear national consciousness. I believe this function has to be performed by the education system and NGOs, unions, associations, and organizations that operate parallel to it. Once they exist, they will be likely to be active; and once they are active, they will actively fulfill their mission of upbringing, and the spreading of national consciousness. I believe this can be done efficiently amongst students of universities by means of creating unions and other organizations that can accomplish this. If you look at this issue from the perspective of political organizations, there are currently political parties that bear national consciousness in Armenia (these are the traditional parties such as the Armenian

Revolutionary Federation, the Democratic-Liberal Party, the National Democratic, the Republican Party, and the Union for Self-Determination.

-In your opinion, does Armenia have the necessary cultural and spiritual atmosphere that will facilitate the formation and preservation of national consciousness?

-Atmosphere, as a factor, is too weak to facilitate the formation of this consciousness. I believe many people want this. They can facilitate the formation of this consciousness. I would not say that we have not formed a national consciousness; but, the process is continuing, and the outcome may change along the way. I described the political fluctuations that our country is currently in. Nevertheless, the atmosphere exists.

-What is the role of the Armenian Church and religion in Armenian national consciousness?

-Of course, they have played an enormous role. In cases like this, I use the word "faith" instead of the word "religion" because the former is broader. Undoubtedly, our church (which is undergoing active changes in its spiritual structure) and its subdivisions use new and more visible methods of preaching to increase the role they play in relation to the people. I evaluate these processes as positive. I think that the settlement of the relationship between the Etjmiadsin and Cilicia catholicoses is very important.

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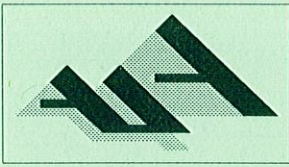
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NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND CULTURE

By

Mr. Roland Sharoyan

Minister of Culture, Youth Affairs and Sport

Friday, 2000 07 28 18:00

American University of Armenia,

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