

**Institutions in Diaspora:  
The Case of Armenian Community in Russia**

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### **Introduction**

The disintegration of the Soviet Union made visible the problems of diasporas, which were not on the agenda of the social sciences during Soviet times. The policy of the state was characterized by the guiding principle of erasing any national differences. People were united by the institution of Soviet citizenship – the characteristic universal for peoples of all nationalities within USSR. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, many representatives of different ethnic groups found themselves facing a formerly unknown problem – that of national self-identification. They had to find their own niche in the socio-cultural environment of their host-states, to become conscious of their minority status, compared with titular nations, to pass through the difficult stages of social adaptation in order to find themselves in the new socio-economic and political situation while trying at the same time to maintain connections with their historic homeland and preserve their national uniqueness.

Social sciences in Russia are unfortunately not yet able to offer any serious research in this field. Meanwhile, the significance of the problem is growing, as influence of diasporas on the host states is increasing and some diasporas are becoming influential in solving not only socio-cultural, but also economic and political, problems.

This paper focuses on the analysis of institutions and agents in a diaspora community. It aims to analyse the social formations that developed within the Armenian community throughout its history in Russia. The history and the development of Armenian Diaspora institutions in Russia will be examined, as will the picture of

contemporary structures of the Armenian community in Russia. Finally, the analysis of the Armenian concept of their diasporan community will be presented.

### **The Concept of Diaspora: The Problem of Definition.**

How does the phenomenon of diaspora apply to contemporary Russian reality?

First of all, there is the continuation,, enlargement and organizational reinforcement of “old” diasporas such as Armenian, Jewish, Tartar, and Greek. In Moscow alone, there are more than 30 Armenian organizations of various types (from cultural to economic and political organizations).

Second, there have emerged and are forming diasporas of peoples whose states appeared only after the collapse of The Soviet Union - Ukrainian, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Moldavian, etc. While living within USSR, representatives of these nations did not feel the urge to organize and establish their interests. However, after Perestroika, people coming to Russia from the former Soviet republics started to be viewed mainly as guest workers. In such changed conditions, these people were and are forced to consolidate in the sphere of socio-economic, as well as, political relations.

Third, some diasporas on Russian territory emerged as the result of conflicts, civil wars, and international tension. Such conflicts gave birth and/or rebirth to Georgian, Azerbaijani, Tadjic, and other diasporas of peoples of the former USSR. These diasporas often reproduce their contradictory situations within their titular states. Some of these diasporas became the base for consolidation of forces for preserving their national culture, while others participate in opposition to the governments of their homelands.

Fourth, diasporas emerged that represent peoples of the Russian Federation itself - Dagestani, Chechen, Chuvash, Buriat, etc. Finally, there is a group of diasporas that exist in a semi-formed condition and that reflect the complex processes from the past and present. It applies to the Korean, Afghani, Bulgarian, and Meskhetinian Diasporas.

Analysis of the phenomenon of diaspora shows that there is no clarity concerning the use of the term. There are definitions of Diaspora that are “inclusive and extensive catch-alls” (van Hear, 1998), like that of Khachig Tölölyan, who considers diaspora as the semantic domain that includes such diverse terms as immigrant, expatriate, refugee, exile community, and even ethnic community in general (cited in van Hear, 1998). Such definitions are too general; they do not define diaspora as a specific phenomenon among other phenomena.

The majority of authors however do define diaspora in more specific terms. They conceptualise diaspora as a community, bounded on the basis of common cultural and ethnic references (Soysal, 2000). Among such references, the most widely accepted argument is that the first and foremost criterion of a diaspora is a forced dispersal or any other kind of catastrophic origin (Wahlbeck, 1998, Cohen, 1997). However, not every diaspora conforms to such a definition. There are diasporas that emerged for reasons other than genocide or any other catastrophic event in the past. Cohen, for instance, distinguishes between victim, imperial, labour, trade, and cultural diasporas, among which only victim diasporas by definition, have a history of tragic origin. And even here the issue is quite controversial. For example, as Cohen shows, not all Jewish communities (Jews being the archetype of a ‘victim’ diaspora) resulted from forcible dispersal. They do not have a single traumatic migration history (Cohen, 1997).

Another controversial issue within the diaspora concept is that of 'homeland'. It is accepted that a diaspora is an ethnic community which has a collective memory or myth about its homeland, keeps connection with the homeland, and such communication has an emotional character or is based on material factors (Lallukka, 2000). It seems that such emphasis on the memory, connection, or longing for the lost homeland undermines the fact that diasporas also have to make an effort to be part of the host country (Pattie, 1999). As Brah warns, the strong association of notions of diaspora with displacement and dislocation can lead to the situation where the experience of location can easily disappear out of focus (Brah, 1996). It is as important to study how, and in what ways, a community becomes incorporated within the social relations of class, gender, xenophobia, and any other aspects in the country to which it migrates. The way in which a group becomes situated in the host-country is as crucial for the analysis as the relationship of a diaspora with its homeland.

In this respect, applying the concept of 'transnationalism' is very useful. Transnationalism generally refers to various links and interactions, connecting people or institutions, across the borders of nation-states (Vertovec, 1999). This concept defines a diaspora as a transnational social institution, relating both to the country of origin and the country of exile. It also allows examination of how the migrant social, economic, political, and cultural networks involve both country of origin and country of settlement (Wahlbeck, 1998).

The most precise definition of diaspora seems to be the one presented by William Safran in the first issue of *Diaspora*. According to Safran (1991), diasporas are expatriate minority communities whose members share several of the following characteristics:

- 1) They or their ancestors, have been dispersed from a specific original 'centre' to two or more 'peripheral', or foreign, regions;
- 2) They retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland - its physical location, history, and achievements;
- 3) They believe they are not - and perhaps cannot be - fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it;
- 4) They regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return - when conditions are appropriate;
- 5) They believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and its safety and prosperity; and they continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such relationship. (Safran, 1991)

Thus, it is possible to distinguish three components of the notion of diaspora.

First, the term 'diaspora' is used with regard to the ethnic community of people dispersed from their homeland to two or more foreign territories (Van Hear, 1998). This dispersal is the initial attribute without which the phenomenon simply would not exist.

Second, a diaspora is not just a part of one nation living among the representatives of another nation. It is an ethnic community that has its own national characteristics (language, culture, consciousness), preserves them and maintains and contributes to their development. It would be wrong to define diaspora in terms of a group of people of certain nationality if this group has been totally assimilated into its host-state.

Third, a diaspora has certain organizational forms of its existence. It seems to me that this is the one point absent from the majority of the concepts of diaspora: Researchers mostly emphasize the "subjective" core of diasporic existence (collective

memories, religious beliefs, national traditions etc.). The tendency to be preoccupied only with “diaspora as type of consciousness” (Vertovec, 1997) leaves out the consideration of the “objective” (organizational, institutional) forms of diasporic existence. Diaspora as a social form remains under-analysed. Institutions and agents occupy a much less prominent position in the theoretical debate about diaspora than do cultural aspects of diaspora and the concept of diaspora as a form of consciousness (Cohen, 1981, Cohen 1997, Sokefeld and Schwalgin, 2000).

It is necessary to emphasize the fact that institutions are the core of a diaspora community. It is via institutions that a diaspora discourse, which creates the image of community, diasporan culture and consciousness, is produced and disseminated. Beside discourses of identity, institutions uphold different kinds of practices in which individuals can express and enhance their identification with a community. (Sokefeld and Schwalgin, 2000) However, while the uniting and preserving force of national ideas, historic memory, or religious beliefs causes the very possibility of Diaspora, the stability of this existence is achieved through the institutionalisation of Diaspora (mechanisms of self-management, educational, cultural, political, and economic organizations). It is impossible for an ethnic community to be considered a diaspora if the internal drive and need for self-definition but no organizational forms for the maintenance of its uniqueness.

The variety of functions that diasporas fulfil has to be considered. It has to be taken into account that members of a diaspora are occupied not only with cultural tasks, such as support of their ethnic culture, cultivation of traditions, etc., but also with certain social tasks (defence of social rights of an ethnic group, regulation of migration, employment, dealing with problems of citizenship, of racial discrimination and

xenophobia etc.), political tasks (influence on the political life in the homeland and in the host-state, lobbying etc.), and economic tasks (creation of different industries where representatives of diaspora can work, realisation of such economic functions as the right of trade etc.).

Thus in this paper I will refer to a diaspora as to a stable community of people with a shared, single ethnic origin, living in a foreign environment apart from its co-national state. This community has social institutions for its development and functioning.

### **The Armenian Diaspora in Russia**

The changes taking place in the period of post-Soviet transformation had an impact on the functional and structural dynamics of the national diasporas in Russia. There are trends indicating that diasporas alter their patterns of existence and adjust to the changing post-communist environment. This change is displayed in the process of the widening and deepening of the functions of a diaspora. During Soviet times, members of the Armenian Diaspora were mostly preoccupied with the preservation of their culture and religion, in opposition to the state policy of erasing national differences, now there is an increasing emphasis on economic, political and legal interests. It also seems that, at the same time, Diaspora loses its solidarity and becomes a highly fragmented and diverse community. Further analysis is required to determine any relationship between the shift of interests and an apparent fragmentation of the Diaspora.

As Dolbakian points in his work on the Armenian Community in Moscow, the community life of Armenians in Soviet times was practically non-existent (Dolbakian,

1998). It was diffused by the concepts of “friendship of peoples” and “new historical communities of Soviet people”. All life of the Armenian community was restricted to the House of Culture of Soviet Armenia in Moscow which existed from the mid 1950s. It hosted dance and musical activities as well as the Armenian Drama club. Moreover, many Armenians in Russia found it difficult to think of themselves as diasporans. They were citizens of the single homeland - USSR (Libardian, 1999). The phenomenon was also noted by Lourie: “ With respect to Armenian communities living in various cities of former Soviet Union, Armenians usually did not use the words ‘Diaspora’ or ‘Spiurk’. That may be explained by the fact that the territory was not perceived as foreign” (Lourie, 1999).

The renaissance of Armenian community life in Moscow and other Russian cities began in 1988 in the wake of Perestroika and with the Karabakh crisis. Using Libardian’s words on the Armenian Diaspora in general (whether in Russia or elsewhere), “the diaspora settled before the genocide, but was (also) replenished by it.” (Libardian, 1999: 119). One can say that the Armenian Diaspora settled in Russia well before the Karabakh crisis, but actually came to live only after, and even because of it. Most Armenian communities of the new Russia have a “Karabakh” origin, not so much in terms of the timing of settlement as in terms of activation of diasporan life. Various forms of Armenian community life started to develop with the wave of protests and spontaneous efforts to help Karabakh Armenians.

According to Lourie, those Armenians who, before the crisis did not even remember their ethnic origins, started to become active, attend meetings, and be interested in the events in Armenia (Lourie, 1999). In a sense, the events in Sumgait

reminded them about the terrible past of Armenian history and thus awakened the ethnic consciousness and desire to consolidate. In this period, Armenians in Russia were striving for the formation of specifically Armenian institutions.

From that time Armenian community life started to expand. Armenians have created language courses, Sunday schools for children and adults, and secondary schools. They have built chapels and churches, and published newspapers, magazines, and books. According to Dolbakian, today there are about 30 organizations operating in Moscow today (Dolbakian, 1998). Armenians are active in all sectors of social, political, and cultural life in Russia. For example, four Armenians currently act as deputies in the State Duma. One deputy sits in the Senate, and until recently there have been two or three Armenians occupying ministerial-level posts in Russia. There are also many Armenians operating in various business sectors, many of them Armenian-speaking and with strong ties to Armenia as well as to the Armenian Diaspora in Russia. There are at least seven Armenian newspapers published throughout Russia, some in Armenian, some in Russian and some combined. Most of these are locally based, although there are a few monthlies that have nationwide distribution (Baghdasarian, 2001).

Though life in the Diaspora at present is much more active and diverse than it was before Perestroika, the Armenian Diaspora in Russia does not have very strong political, financial, and organizational potential yet. However, there is evidence of organizational and financial growth being accelerated by the considerable material and moral support from the Western Armenian Diaspora (Poloskova, 1998a). Already Armenian organizations and unions in Russia, despite their diversity and isolation from each other, are considered as a possible tool in the development of Russian-Armenian relations.

Nonetheless, it seems that in spite of their activity and their large numbers, the Armenians in Russia do not form any united community with clear boundaries, a collective consciousness and articulated group interests or strategies.

There are several causes of the weakness and fragmentation of the Armenian Diaspora in Russia. First, it is not homogeneous in either a social or an ethno-cultural sense. The Armenian Diaspora in Russia consists of several “waves”, each of which has its own peculiar features and even exists in isolation from the others. The first wave were immigrants who came to Russia before Perestroika. Some of these people are totally assimilated and consider themselves Russians. However, the majority of these “old” immigrants constitute the core of Diaspora activists striving to preserve national culture, traditions, language and religion, as well as develop connections with their historic homeland (Poloskova, 1998b, p.98). The majority of Armenians who settled in Russia before Perestroika have usually adapted into legal and socio-economic spheres. This group is mostly represented by intelligentsia. Among the members of this first category of Armenians in Russia, one can find many members of the political elite.

By contrast, Armenians who came to Russia at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s are still trying to resolve the problem of their citizenship. They have difficulties finding jobs, and face many other social and economic problems. This second wave of immigrants is highly diverse with respect to their socio-economic and legal characteristics, political orientations, and motives of migration (Poloskova, 1998b, p.98). Most of these people came to Russia after the Armenian earthquake in 1988, pogroms in Sumgait and other Azerbaijani cities, and with the beginning of war in Nagorny Karabakh etc. (Kalmukhamedov, 1999). This “wave” mostly consists of people

with undefined citizenship, without jobs and often, with no place to live. Consequently, the centres organized by this category of Armenians function as forms of adaptation centres, where solving ethno-cultural and political tasks is not on the agenda. At the same time, it is among these Armenian immigrants of the 1990s where one can find people who created financial and commercial structures in Russia, and who actively lobby the economic interests of certain “clans”. This group of ‘newcomers’ is highly diverse. Here one can also find members of the rich business elite, owners of small and medium sized businesses. In contrast, it is here among the representatives of this group of immigrants, where people with undefined job situations, no place to live, and involvement in criminal and/or illegal activities can also be found.

“Old” members of the Armenian Diaspora in Russia are very suspicious of the “newcomers”, considering them to be criminals whose activity negatively influences the attitudes of the Russian population and authorities, towards all people of Transcaucasian and North Caucasian descent.

The ethno-cultural diversity of the Armenian Diaspora is evident in the isolation of the Armenians who fled Armenia from the Armenians who fled Azerbaijan. The latter usually consider the Armenian government guilty of starting the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict. The special “caste” in the Armenian Diaspora is comprised of Armenians from Georgia and Middle Asia. Armenians from Hayastan (Armenia) think of the former as being assimilated (Poloskova, 1998a).

The second reason for fragmentation in the Armenian Diaspora is that, despite the fact that economic potential is quite high, especially in the sphere of medium-sized businesses (restaurants, stores, sewing and shoe-making ateliers, and bakeries etc.),

businessmen of Armenian origin rarely finance Armenian Diaspora organizations. According to the Armenian Embassy in Moscow, big Armenian business has a criminal character and is not interested in philanthropy. Medium-sized businesses also do not want to invest money in Armenian social and cultural organizations. The only activity in the diaspora which interests them is lobbying for their own economic interests. This situation is very different from that of the Armenian Diasporas in the USA and in Europe, where diaspora activity is almost totally financed by the Armenian business community (Poloskova, 1998b).

Third, the Armenian Diaspora in Russia is not fully developed at the institutional level. There is competition among diaspora organizations, leading to the absence of a central leadership, which would coordinate all the activity of the Diaspora. There is no single organization at the federal level that could coordinate Diaspora activity.

Political parties do not reflect the composition of a diverse Armenian Diaspora. In general, three main political parties represent quite a small fraction of the general diasporan population. Diasporans involved in any, organizations, not just political, usually number no higher than 20 percent (Libardian, 1999). Much of the human and financial resources of the Diaspora are not supervised or controlled by any of these organizations.

The Church, which was traditionally a public and political institution in Armenian life, perhaps because the authorities assigned it such a role to it (Libardian, 1999), still remains an institution that remains an important part of community life. As Pattie writes, “believers, atheists, agnostics, and anti-clericals alike participate regularly in the major life-cycle events held in the church... And unless one states otherwise, all who are

christened in the church are members for life” (Pattie, 1997). However, with regards to Armenian life in Russia, the church cannot serve as an umbrella institution covering all diverse interests and providing organizational consolidation for all the different fractions of Armenians in Russia. The church remains one of the symbols of ‘Armenianness’, but does not have the power and legitimacy to speak for the whole Diaspora.

It appears that the Armenian Diaspora in Moscow consists of various social milieux, which are relatively closed and have a weak interaction with each other. There are several criteria for distinction between these milieux:

- The length of time resident in the city
- The level of adaptation
- Social status (Brednikova and Patchenkov, 1999)

The combination of these characteristics forms diverse social communities within the Armenian Diaspora. It seems plausible to distinguish three communities within the Armenian Diaspora in Moscow and Russia in general:

- 1) “Old” members of the Diaspora who came to Russia before Perestroika. These people have usually adapted to the life in Russian cities. It is among them where the enthusiasts and activists concerned with Armenian life in Russia and with the situation in Armenian Republic can be found;
- 2) Successful businessmen who came with the second wave of immigration in the 1990s. They do not participate in any organizations created by the first category, are not interested in financing them. Their only activity is lobbying for their economic interests. Their connection to the homeland is mostly business in character;

3) Newcomers of the 1990s who were not as fortunate as the second category of Armenians in Russia, and who still have no secure legal status, reliable jobs or places to live. Many of these people still have families left behind in their hometowns and villages. Often they move between Russian cities and their places of origin.

In view of these three different diasporic milieux, it seems impossible to speak about the Armenian Diaspora in Russia as a unified community with a collective identity and common tasks. The question arises whether these three communities still form one Armenian Diaspora, or whether these are three different diasporas of Armenians in Russian cities. It is still to be answered whether the second and the third categories of Armenians can be considered diaspora at all. For example, if those successful businessmen of the 1990s are not preoccupied with questions of their national identity, homeland, culture and religion, on what basis is their diasporic identity formed? Perhaps, in this case, Cohen's typology of diasporas can be used to argue, that "old" Armenians in Russia form the "victim" Diaspora (characterized by emphasizing their catastrophic origins, preoccupation with the tasks of preserving national identity, interest in the development of their homeland etc.). The second category of Armenians is more of a "business" or "trade" diaspora (Cohen, 1997). In any case, both of these groups show the features of "mobilized" diasporas (Armstrong, 1976). They deploy their linguistic, network and occupational advantages to modernize and to mobilize.

Those Armenians who fall into the third category – economic migrants from Armenia who have lived in Russia for not more than three years are exceptional. They are the least integrated into the urban communities. They are poorly adjusted to the new conditions of life in the "alien" culture. They are problematic and vulnerable in the

context of the xenophobia existing in Russian society. A further analysis of the situation of this community has to be done, in which it should be examined whether the term “diaspora” can be applied to this category of people (for example, “labour or trade” diaspora in Cohen’s terms, “incipient” diaspora in van Hear’s terms (Van Hear, 1998) ... or “proletarian” diaspora in Armstrong’s terms (Armstrong, 1976). Conversely, should they be described in terms of what Cohen defines as “borderline culture” (characterized by bi-locality, syncretism, and ambiguity)?

What are the implications of such fragmentation and diversity for the organizational life in the Armenian Diaspora? Is it possible to distinguish three kinds of organizations – those of “old” Armenians, those of “business” Armenians, and those of the “borderline” Armenians?

As an example of the first type of organization, there are Moscow-based organizations like the International Centre for Cooperation with Armenian Communities, the International Armenian Assembly and other organizations which attempt to establish coordinating functions and make close contacts with Armenian communities in Russian regions.

For instance, the International Centre for Cooperation with Armenian Communities declares its main goals to be the support of Armenian businesses in Russian regions, political coordination within the Armenian electorate, and defending the interests of national minorities as well as the interests of the Armenian republic.

However, the efforts of the Centre and of various other organizations have mostly been unsuccessful. The explanation lies in the fact that all such initiatives belonged to and were derived from, the intellectual forces in the Armenian Diaspora while totally

lacking the support from business. Another problem yet to be solved is how to prevent the danger of over-centralization of all the forces in the capital and at the same time, not falling into the trap of letting communities in the regions to be totally independent and thus fragmented. The organizations of the second category - “business diaspora” – would appear to fall into the class of business associations, leagues etc., not concerned whatsoever with any issues of national culture and identity. To reiterate, the organizations created by the third category of Armenians mainly resemble adaptation centres where the matter of ethnicity does not play any actual part.

Is there any prospect for the unification and coordination of such a diverse and fragmented diaspora?

In 1999 a new Armenian organization emerged within the Diaspora in Russia - the Union of Armenians in Russia (UAR) - that claims to have found the optimal model of organization, in which the necessary centralization of intellectual forces in Moscow would be combined with total independence of local communities, and in which operational tasks of various kinds (cultural-educational, legal, human rights, defence etc.) would be combined with tasks strategic for both Russia and Armenia. Moreover, the founders of the UAR realize that, without combining the efforts of intellectuals and the money of businessmen, their organization would not be able to fulfill all their ambitious tasks and would become another community of enthusiastic loners and a kind of leisure club.

It also seems that the UAR has potential to attract the attention of business since, along with the goals of uniting regional Armenian communities and solving problems of the Armenian republic, one of the main tasks of the organization is to contribute to the

creation of a set of rules and regulations that would make it possible to legitimise Armenian business in Russia entirely.

The analysis of the program documents, reports and interviews of UAR leaders shows that this organization has a significantly new, realistic and pragmatic level of understanding their tasks and this fact distinguishes it from many other organizations. Moreover, while most organizations of the Armenian Diaspora in Russia are still confined to solving cultural and educational tasks, the UAR has a broader scope of interests in the political and legal spheres. The UAR considers itself to be a “whole-Russian nongovernmental organization, a part of emerging Russian Civil society”. It intends to “correct” the activity of Russian politicians, to direct their activity in certain aspects relating to Russian-Armenian cooperation, and to lobby for the interests of Armenian business and businesses in Russia. The organization is public (not political) but that does not mean that it will not attempt to solve problems related to politics. For example, many Armenians supported Vladimir Putin in the presidential election. They proclaim that they hold up to the new policy of strengthening the Russian state, and they intend to contribute to the reinforcement of international peace and stability in Russia.

Apart from such ambitious political functions, the Union of Armenians in Russia will also fulfill certain social functions. It already finances orphan boarding schools and houses for Veterans of World War II. It plans to build churches and to give aid to the poorest strata of the Armenian community in Russia.

Hence, the Union of Armenians in Russia aims to be a collective “mediator” between the state and non-governmental structures in Russia, between the centre and the regions, and sometimes even to fulfill the function of public advocacy. The Union

represents a new level of Armenian Diasporan organization with respect to how it sees its mission and what tasks it seeks to fulfill. If the organization succeeds in their determination, it could become an example for other national communities in Russia, which are impeded in their development by the local authorities, indifference of the Russian federal centre, by inner disintegration and by the inability to combine their intellectual and financial resources.

### **Conclusion**

The Armenian Diaspora in Russia stands out among Armenian communities in other countries. During Soviet times the words “diaspora” or “spiurk” were not used with respect to Armenian communities in different Russian cities, since the territory was not perceived as a foreign land. This means that it was only after the collapse of the Soviet Union that members of Armenian communities in Russia started seeing themselves as members of the Diaspora with a resulting the rise of ethnic and diasporic consciousness and the search for identity.

The Diaspora in Russia is unique compared to Armenian Diasporas elsewhere. It seems that members of the Armenian Diaspora in Russia do not strive to build a traditional diaspora (one which is mostly based on a collective memory of a past genocide, religious beliefs and the attempt to establish diasporic identity within the task of preservation of national traditions, language etc.). The Armenian Diaspora within Russia is far more preoccupied with an array of legal, political, and economic interests. Most probably the explanation for this is that while members of Armenian Diasporas in different Western countries can afford to be preoccupied with such traditional tasks,

members of Armenian Diasporas in Russia have yet to achieve the same level of affluence of their Western counterparts.

This paper has focused on the analysis of institutions and agents in the diasporan community. It has aimed to analyse the social formations that developed within the Armenian community throughout its history in Russia. I has emphasised that institutional factors in within the Diaspora are as important as cultural factors or the factor of its ethnic consciousness. It is through institutions that diasporan discourse, culture and consciousness, are formed and disseminated.

The analysis of institutions within the Armenian Diaspora in Russia shows further peculiarities of the diaspora in question. The Armenian Diaspora in Russia is fragmented and diverse. It does not seem to have clear boundaries and collective consciousness, nor articulated group interests and strategies. As a result, it is not entirely developed on an institutional level. There is a competition among diasporan organizations resulting in the absence of one, or even several organizations, which would and/or could organize all the activities within the Diaspora.

The explanation for this lies in the social and ethnic diversity of the Diaspora. The community consists of different social and ethnic milieux, which are relatively closed and have strained contact with each other. The criteria for distinction among these milieux involves the length of time of Russian residency, the level of adaptation, and their socio-economic status.

It is possible to distinguish three communities within the Armenian Diaspora in Moscow (and Russia in general). Firstly, there are the “old” members of the Diaspora who came to Russia before Perestroika and who have adapted to the life in Russian cities.

They are the active members of the Diaspora. Second, there are the successful businessmen from the wave of immigration in the 1990s, who are mostly interested in the Diaspora as an instrument for lobbying of behalf of their economic interests. Finally, there are the immigrants of the 1990s without legal status, respectable jobs, and often no place to live. They are often living on the edge of being involved in criminal and illegal activities. This latter category participates in the life of the Diaspora only as recipients mainly of financial assistance.

In view of these three different diasporic milieux, it seems impossible to speak about the Armenian Diaspora in Russia in terms of being a unified community with a commonly accepted identity and collective interests.

The questions for further research are whether these three communities still form one Armenian Diaspora, or are these three different diasporas of Armenians dwelling within Russian cities? And is it possible to consider the second and the third categories of Armenians in Russia members of a diaspora at all? And finally, we must ask, what are the implications of such fragmentation and diversity for the organizational life in the Armenian Diaspora?

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