

# Introduction

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**P**reparing this special issue of *Demokratizatsiya* on the Republic of Armenia presented two major challenges. First, the analysis of the transformation process needed to be as free from the vagaries of journalistic sensationalism and the most circumstantial of considerations as possible. In other words, we needed to begin delineating between politics and history. And, second, we needed to project the fact that it might no longer be appropriate to label the former Soviet republics as “newly independent states” and “in transition.”

It is clear that these republics have a track record now and not every failure and misstep can be ascribed to the “evil empire” and its culture. But it is not clear, fifteen years after the collapse of the USSR, that scholarship has overcome the euphoria of the early 1990s, when it was assumed that the right legislation and a general desire for freedom and independence would produce a swift transformation of societies, political cultures, and states.

Most of the scholarship that has been produced and most of the criteria used to assess progress in the South Caucasus have been colored by the muted or mini cold war that has followed the collapse of the USSR. The tenuous relations between Russia and the former Soviet republics, on the one hand, and Russia and the United States, on the other, would explain the emphasis on security issues from a Western perspective. In the case of Armenia, the intense and, at times, bitter struggle led by some diasporan organizations against the first administration in Armenia further compounded the problem. The decision of the Ter-Petrossian administration to seek the normalization of relations with Turkey without any preconditions—while most of the organized diaspora considered the recognition of the Armenian Genocide by that country the single most important item on its political agenda—was one reason for that conflict. Nonetheless, that conflict also skewed the perspective of many scholars who have written on Armenia.

The December 1988 earthquake, which devastated the economy, is another factor that distinguished the processes in Armenia from other republics. In addi-

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tion to some 25,000 deaths, that earthquake destroyed one-third of the country's industrial capacity and a good portion of its agricultural industry.

Finally, in addition to the difficulties of transition common to all former Soviet republics, Armenia's transformation was undertaken in conjunction with a military conflict with Azerbaijan related to the status of Nagorno Karabakh and the security of the population of that Armenian enclave in Azerbaijan. The conflict resulted in the closing of Armenia's borders with two of its four neighbors—Azerbaijan and Turkey—while sapping the state's meager resources.

The euphoria of the early 1990s has given way to a sort of acceptance of regimes that are neither fully democratic nor fully dictatorial and economies that, while legislated as free-market economies, lack independent regulatory and judiciary branches, among other prerequisites for a fully successful transition, that are often present in older capitalist societies. It is possible that while not in a final phase, we have entered a less-than-satisfactory phase in economic and political transformation that will last for some time. The varieties of nationalism that by and large replaced the "Soviet man" and "brotherhood of nations" as principles of state building and bases for the legitimization of power are also likely to offset the worst effects of globalization.

Hypothetically, the distance of fifteen years may make it possible to assess the road traveled by Armenia since 1990 against the Soviet experience or systems preceding it. In nearly three millennia of recorded history, Armenia has not had any experience with democracy, except for the tentative years of the First Republic, 1918–1920. The road traveled since independence can also be measured against those of the neighboring republics, the constitution of the country, or even some abstract ideal. Regardless, the question of "political culture" and the intertwining of domestic and foreign policy—particularly in this small, landlocked country—cannot be avoided.

My hope is that, first, when addressing the issues of transformation and transition, the authors of the articles in this special issue will have bridged the gap between politics and history; and, second, the young scholars who have contributed to this issue will have provided perspectives from within—a necessary, although not sufficient condition, for informed policymaking, in or outside of Armenia.

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