
Appeal of January 6th, 2021 to the Armenian Diaspora in France

« It is essential to better organise the Armenian diaspora in
France in order to create a new momentum »

On this January 6, 2021, we are passing through one of the most alarming days in the history of the Armenian people. Even before the catastrophic end of the war in Artsakh came to undermine the hopes of the last thirty years of independence, the changes in the political context in France, in Armenia/Artsakh and in Turkey/Azerbaijan had already highlighted the need to strengthen and improve the structuring of the Armenian diaspora in France and to increase its efficiency. The dramatic consequences of the conflict that we have just experienced call for the diagnosis to be sped up in order to quickly implement the essential decisions to give the Armenian diaspora in France a new momentum.

New stakes

Today, we find ourselves at a turning point because we realise that beyond traditional political and cultural issues, enormous new challenges are in front of us. The benevolence benefited by the French people of Armenian heritage in the public opinion should not blind us to the scale of those stakes.

It is, first of all, the preservation of the Armenian cultural heritage in France that is at stake today. Among the younger generations, the commitment to the Armenian language and culture deteriorates as their integration strengthens. The decline of our cultural institutions and the weak financial resources of the schools do not make it possible to remedy it in a satisfactory manner.

Moreover, the choice of an exemplary integration of the French people of Armenian heritage has now been overtaken by the growing hostility, on the French territory, from the historical enemies of Armenians. This situation, unimaginable a few years ago, takes different forms:

denial of the genocide by militant organisations (fight against recognition and its criminalisation, litigation for the revision of history programmes; ...), physical threats by paramilitary organisations such as the Grey Wolves, entry into the French political life (local councils, organisation, etc. ..) by parties responding directly to the orders of the Turkish government.

This situation certainly requires special vigilance to prevent that by the time the achievements of the Franco-Armenians and conditions necessary for the viability of their Armenity are being questioned.

Failures

The focus on political objectives is probably the chapter that seemed the best structured on a national scale, up until recently. The war has just demonstrated that this setup is proven to be insufficient.

If the mobilisation of the diaspora in France has been exemplary, it did not have sufficient relays to alert on time and significantly to redirect French politics to assert France's interest in supporting Armenia at a State level, the right to self-determination and respect of international laws. The reasons deserve to be studied and solutions provided: late and superficial lobbying, limited relay in media, universities and political circles, insufficient intelligence and financial resources, etc...

The lack of professionalism in the diaspora that emerges from this war appears all the more incomprehensible as, unlike the past decades, the current generations of French people of Armenian heritage have acquired remarkable positions through their work and thanks to the republican meritocracy, whether in business, in politics, in the scientific and intellectual world, research or medicine. We urgently need to get down to the essential professionalization of our coordination.

Representativeness

The French people of Armenian heritage form a diaspora of more than 600,000 members. It was formed in the interwar period of the last century and has benefited from successive

waves of immigration which led it to develop in a protean way. Still today, this diaspora continues to grow with numerous families, who came directly from Syria, Armenia and Artsakh who are gradually integrating while being in search of new community benchmarks. This plurality is a source of enrichment if it is federated. As the increasingly integrated first generations move away, the diaspora failed to connect with the new generations by fully playing its integrative role. In addition, there are many French people of Armenian heritage who are talented but disincentivised to get involved in the collective dynamic for lack of transparency and professionalism in our organisation.

New generation

For several decades, the CCAF has succeeded in making the voice of French people of Armenian heritage heard by the public authorities. If the most visible part of its mission is the annual dinner attended by the President of the Republic, the more discreet work of national coordination of its structures should not be underestimated.

However, the challenges mentioned above call for a new ambition. To guarantee its sustainability and legitimacy, the CCAF should be endowed, on the one hand with additional resources both nationally and regionally, and on the other hand with governance based on plural and democratic representatives, free from political pressures of any kind, all to activate an object, a broader ambition.

Act fast and forcefully

- In order to successfully carry out the actions succinctly mentioned above, it is essential to acquire **substantial financial resources**, which are sorely lacking in the CCAF today.
- Next, we must quickly invest in **media and digital** tools to connect all components of the diaspora on the one hand, and ensure modern communication with decision-makers and the public of its positions, actions and achievements on the other hand.
- To ensure effective operation, **a transparent and democratic governing entity** must be put in place, **based on consultative bodies**, framing a national and regional organisation allowing the largest participation. In other words, the circle of participants should be widened, currently limited to organisations only.

- Finally, there is an urgent need to create a strategic research body that will gather researchers and experts in order to guide the actions needed in favour of Armenia. It is with these new resources and this new setup that the CCAF will be able to implement a policy and actions to promote the Armenity based on the following 3 pillars:
 1. **Influence** our educational, political and social environment by instigating the interests in Armenity-related topics. This includes the promotion of human rights protection and the fight against hatred and injustices, which are structural values in the political DNA of French people of Armenian heritage. This should be done, in particular, by extending actions related to the recognition of the genocide, its link with France and Europe, as well as the rejection of history denial in schools, universities and the intellectual spheres in France.
 2. **Coordinate** numerous initiatives across the country, in the cultural, educational, intellectual, religious, and economic fields in order to develop synergies, perhaps sharing out certain functions to ensure the sustainability of their economic models, while preserving their autonomies, which would be a guarantee of a remarkable dynamism.
 3. **Communicate** with modern mediums within and outside the diaspora via an institutional site, a presence on social media, traditional media, and the development of new media (podcasts...).

The work is now immense to rearm the diaspora intellectually, financially and functionally and to make the qualitative leap that the challenges facing us call for. The sole objective of this appeal is to identify and qualify the needs. It was drafted by a group of French people of Armenian heritage convinced by the urgency of the task and unrepelled by its magnitude. On each of the subjects mentioned above, reflections and primary work have already been initiated. But many questions still remain to be raised which fall under collective reflection and work, and in particular the coordination between the numerous organisations, societies, and groups which today drive the diaspora in the various fields mentioned above.

This first reflection group does not have the will to take ownership of the reflection on its own and wishes to broaden the discussion. It will be enriched by some additional goodwill, which will not fail to manifest itself once familiarized with this call.

But it is urgent to act, and to start the process it is proposed to receive and analyse the first reactions and reflections at the following email address: contact@francais-armeniens.com.

The participants and contributors to this reflection will then, and at the earliest, be invited to participate in a meeting to develop a comprehensive plan. This plan will then be presented to the current decision-making bodies of the CCAF.

In the terrible context we are experiencing in Armenia and in France, we must conduct this reflection and come to ambitious decisions so that the flame of the Armenity in France does not go out and remains fiery.

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