

Freedom Talks

Nation-Army

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Artak Ayunts (AA) – Hello. We’re continuing our series “Line of Contact: Freedom Talks” and today we’ll be talking about the prospective for the resolution of the Karabakh conflict, war and peace, as well as the [nation-army concept](#). Our guests today are media expert Samvel Martirosyan and writer, public figure Armen Ohanyan. Thank you. I’d like to start with a quote from Defense Minister Vigen Sargsyan, who said this at the end of last year, and this will be the basis of our discussion today; I’d like to hear your opinions about it. He said the following – “The military and political events taking place in the region today and the military threats looming before the two Armenian states allow one to predict that the issues being faced by the security apparatus and armed forces of Armenia will not be subject to any major changes in the near future. We are thus obliged to strengthen and develop the defense capabilities of our armed forces by increasing our economic or demographic potential, or at least by using that potential to its maximum.” Now, there are several ideas in this quotation – he’s presenting several ideas, and I would us to talk about them. In particular, Mr. Sargsyan noted the military threats looming over the two Armenian states on the one hand, but on the other hand we know that Armenia does not recognize the other state—the Republic of Artsakh—and that has been a part of our political agenda for a long time. Nevertheless, having this paradoxical situation to a certain extent, where there is a second state but it is not recognized, there are certain military threats being faced by Armenia, by both states. In your opinion, this concept of the nation-army, which is being proposed at the official level – can it prevent to a certain extent these threats looming over the two Armenian states, taking into consideration that the second state isn’t even recognized?

Armen Ohanyan (AO) – Based on that quotation, a certain question arises – if we’re specifically using the expression “two Armenian states”, then which nation-army are we talking about? I mean, if there are two states, two nation-states in this case, then there should also be two nation-armies. Or are we talking about one nation or one people? How is the word “nation” being used here, what is the definition of the term? We need to understand how nationality is currently perceived in Armenia and in general. This is the main question in the end, because it can be interpreted in all sorts of ways. Now, let’s assume that for America, it is very clear it is a nation state that is not based on any particular ethnicity. If you mention two Armenian states, then the assumption is that there is a specific ethnicity involved. France might also say that it is a nation state, but it doesn’t matter whether the people living there are ethnically French or whether they are Arabs – everyone’s a citizen. Now, in our case, the situation is that the

majority of people in Armenia and Nagorny Karabakh are Armenians – 98 percent of the population consists of ethnic Armenians, or of people who consider themselves to be ethnic Armenians. So what do we mean when say “nation” in this case, based on which we will build this “nation-army” – this is another story. I think that in this observation, there is also the assumption that it is impossible for the situation to change. But regional developments can be quite unpredictable, by the way. If you follow politics, then you’ll see that many changes have taken place in the larger region after these words were uttered. So how can one assume that it is impossible, that nothing will happen in the near future? It sounds like we’re giving up on the concept of peace. So what are the negotiations about in this case? If this is impossible, we should stop the negotiations and mobilize ourselves around the creation of this nation-army. If we’re continuing to negotiate then we have different assumptions, or we’re just playacting.

AA – This was a quotation from the Minister which was supposed to be the explanation for why we need a nation-army, and because Armen raised another question, I want to discuss this thought with you, Samvel. It seems like the concept of a nation-army is a necessity for the two Armenian states, because we face a state of eternal war. That is, taking the situation into consideration, we should use the nation-army to resolve the issue of eternal war and, yes, the issue of peace is not even being discussed from this point of view. Would you agree with such an approach, that we stand before a state of perpetual war?

Samvel Martirosyan (SM) – I think the question has been worded the wrong way because we have been created by that war—that perpetual war—in the sense that when we started as independent Armenia, we were already in a state of war, and that war has in fact never ended, there has never been a [peace agreement](#), and I think that it’s a bit of a formality if we say that we had a war in [April](#) (2016). What actually happened in April was simply an exacerbation of the existing war situation. In reality, the war had never ended for a day, there had continued to be losses. One can assume that it will not be possible to find a single week over the past 25 years when there hadn’t been a death on at least one of the sides. So the war has existed. The issue is that, in Armenia, as Armen mentioned, we avoid clarifying our ideas in all areas. You may have noticed this in any idea-based arguments, any declarations that people make, and so on, and even in our political scene, and this doesn’t exist. And the same thing holds for the Artsakh or Karabakh conflict. We still don’t have a clear idea of what we want. There has not been a final and clear declaration of what our state wants in the Artsakh issue – to have two states, or to unite them? Are we ready for some compromises? If yes, what is the scope of that compromise? Although there have been some declarations on this issue, the political elite keeps saying contradictory things. All three presidents have, at one point or the other, declared that they are ready to return the liberated territories. But the political teams of those very same presidents have constantly denied the possibility of that happening. So if we can keep shifting from position to position, then it means there is no clarity and, very often, what is *de jure* is actually a mixed-up version of the *de facto* situation. We’re not even clearly declaring that it is our army that is standing there. We keep coming up with new wordings, saying that our soldiers are volunteering there and so on, and they think that there is no need to be clear. When they say that the situation is not going to change, then the assumption is that the Minister was saying that there will not be any peace, and war will be worse because, theoretically, Turkey could cause problems on the border and the situation could erupt into a heated war that could spill over on to this side.

I think that there isn’t a political or civil force in Armenia that could present a clear formula through which we could achieve real peace. I don’t even mean a long-term program; I mean an abstract idea that

says, “Let’s achieve peace.” I think that everyone is a pacifist in the end, nobody wants war. But abstract pacifism is a very egoistic phenomenon. And today we’re in a situation where the army has a clear picture of what it wants to do while, at the other end, the pacifists do not have a clear picture. Naturally, the side that has a clear picture will end up getting ahead of the other.

AO – Let me just say one thing... an observation. First, if we want to clarify something, then first we need to clarify who we mean by “we” – we keep saying “we, we, we” – who’s “we”? Secondly, I think there is a political force, the Congress (*Armenian National Congress-ANC*), which has consistently pushed forward the idea of peace. And, unfortunately, not everyone is a pacifist, on the contrary – these last elections have shown that pacifism is a marginalized idea, if one can speak about ideas in Armenia today. This means that there is no other kind of pacifism. Pacifism means peace at any cost – this is the way people understand it. Pursuing peace in a very global sense.

SM – The army says “peace at any cost” too. It says “let’s destroy the enemy.”

AO – We’re going to be confusing all kinds of ideas at this rate. On the contrary, there is a very nationalistic, very melodramatic, idealistic confusion covered in pathos, and it is clearly militaristic; so the people’s mindset and everything, really, is militarized. And I think that Armenian society is heading towards militarization today. We can see that even at the school level. And you can see that patriotic—“military patriotic” as the guys from ArmComedy put it, rightly mocking the word—spirit being pushed forward everywhere. That military patriotic feeling exists. That propaganda is being conducted for years now and it is producing its results today, we can see it. Even when we see an incident in the news, another exchange of fire at the border, even the way that people comment on this clearly suggests that very few people remain who believe in peace. So the assumption behind the text that you quoted really exists. There is a prevalent opinion today that it is impossible, we will never be able to find common ground with the Azerbaijanis, the Russians are mixed up in all this as well, and they won’t allow it to be resolved...

SM – The problem is that Azerbaijan is doing everything it can to prove that this is how it is. If you look at the pacifism of the Congress (ANC), for example...

AO – No, I mean to say, Samvel *jan*, that we have to clarify what we mean by “we”. If we say “we” to push forward the discourse of the authorities—meaning that “we” is a reflection of what they’re saying—then that’s different. But if we’re talking in the name of Armenia or, I don’t know, of civil society...

AA – Let me say something here, we... Briefly, about that “we”. Indeed, I don’t understand it either, why shouldn’t there be different opinions? How do we imagine the resolution of the issue, after all? But, for a moment...

SM – Guys, when I say “we” I mean those people or powers who have a clear position, okay? There can be many of them – civil groups, political, NGO-based. But let’s agree that there are only one or two positions out there, all right? And they are all extremist. Just like the Congress (ANC) as an extremist position of pacifism, because...

AO – I wouldn’t call it pacifist. When it comes to pacifism, naturally I... I defend the idea, because pacifism is in a very weak position right now, and it’s a good idea in itself.

SM – Of course it’s a good idea.

AO – But I know quite well what I want – I want peace. But I wouldn't say that “we” want something even if I were speaking as a political party.

AA – Let's look at this “we”. In order for us to turn to this “we” and understand what the work done by each of us will look like in this context of the nation-army, I have another quotation I'd like to present. In the same speech, the Minister says that the idea of the nation-army assumes that all government bodies, civil and societal authorities, each individual must have a clear idea of the relationship it has to the country's security. For example, Armen, how do you see your relationship with the country's security? That concept of “we” is relevant here too. We must all clearly see that involving ourselves in defense is the priority.

AO – My relationship.

AA – Your relationship.

AO – Well, I don't know. I can't imagine what relationship I should have, because I wouldn't want to carry a weapon, I'm against weapons as a matter of principle. But there is no need for a relationship. I don't understand this concept of nation-army in general, because it raises all kinds of questions in me. Even the concept of the nation is not defined, there is no clarity on what it covers, but usually, all other things equal, people shouldn't even have to think about these things because they're working, they're creating things, they're paying taxes, and those taxes are being used to maintain an army, such that every individual is not supposed to think, “I've sealed these four jams of preserves for the winter, now I'll prepare one for the army” – that's absurd, really.

AA – How do you see it, Samvel?

SM – That's not absurd because, in a state of war, even large countries end up in such situations where they need to involve large groups of the general population. Take the Second World War. The US wasn't waging war on its own territory and was actually fighting with detachments overseas. But even there, a lot of work was being done to involve the population because the army had a problem. It had a financial problem because war—you can pay as much tax as you want—will keep increasing the costs of your army, and this is especially true now. The second issue was one of recruitment, because you need to keep having battle-ready soldiers on the front line, not people who would flee after a couple bullets were fired. That's why the army has a motivation issue.

AO – Well, nobody fled after the April War, did they? We didn't hear of any such cases, I think.

SM – There were such cases, in reality. And I think that this was one of the forces, one of the engines of it, because one of the concepts—the transition to a contracted, professional army—in April, from what I know, based on what I've heard, what they've shown – these were the contracted soldiers who mostly deserted their positions, rather than the eighteen-year-old boys. I think that this too has led to a review. This is very subjective, because I've heard certain things from here and there, I don't have a clear picture, but the army is something very different for those of us living in conditions of everyday peace than it is from the inside. If you're forced to maintain an army, then you must understand that the army is a place where they teach you how to kill. It's not about walking around on the grounds, in the end you're prepared to strike the young person standing on the other side and poke his eye out. Secondly, you're also prepared to die. This is a serious psychological issue and I think the army has several ways to resolve this. It's another thing that you might be injecting too much militarism into your society and

your society has no immunity towards this, then all of this is transformed into that military patriotic nonsense, such that children are made to stand on stools in kindergarten and recite these things. And this doesn't end up being a nation-army, it ends up being a nation-weapon.

AA – So now let's look at our reality, at the order that we have created at the level of democratization, the functionality of social institutions and so on. Does the concept of a nation-army improve the country's security? Do you see the possibility of the country—or the two Armenian states—becoming more secure?

SM – That depends on the direction in which the concept heads. To be honest, I don't have a clear and final picture of what the ideal situation is for this nation-army concept.

AA – Using another sentence from the speech, this is what is meant – the army is not just a consumer, but also a producer. So we're not just putting money in—let's say that the army is not just given a budget—but the army also provides jobs to the economy. Is that realistic in our conditions, taking all the other problems into consideration that exist in the country – starting with corruption, all the way up to human rights... in the army too – human rights...

SM – Theoretically, if this means that the connection between the nation and the army is going to grow more transparent, then that assumes that corruption will decrease. And that should be a real connection, not just a formality. So, in times of peace, the population should have mechanisms of knowing what is going on, and to have some influence. Secondly, it can truly become a part of the economy if the army ceases to be a consumer of foreign-manufactured weaponry, which I think is also the result of corruption, that is – it is easier for a corrupt official to import all kinds of artillery, even bullets, because he gets paid under the table for each shipment. All of us know that the weapons industry is immensely corrupt around the world, unless you're manufacturing weapons for yourself. And manufacturing for yourself means... It doesn't just mean it—the experience of other countries has demonstrated this to be true—it is a serious boost for high-tech, and science, because...

AA – Are you saying this is theoretically possible, or practically doable in Armenia?

SM – It seems at some point like these changes are taking place, when a deputy minister was appointed who was charged with the military industry, and when some information technology companies began to work with the Ministry. The results of all that aren't clear yet.

AO – I think they will never be clear, because Armenia was always doomed when it comes to being a country with a well-developed military industry. We don't have, I mean we don't know whether a serious analysis has been done on this, but with my limited knowledge I can assume that, in the same way that agriculture can't go on the same way in Armenia... I mean that there need to be certain prerequisites. I don't think that the military industry is a priority area for Armenia today, that it can develop and suddenly give the economy a boost given the small market and the blockade situation. I mean, manufacturing weapons and selling them to others.

SM – If you start manufacturing good drones, for example, having a closed border doesn't stop you from putting them on a plane and selling them here or there.

AO – Well yes, unless the story with Jermuk repeats itself here.

SM – This is a completely different case.

AO – I only agree with one thing – the army definitely needs to open up. Whether we call it a nation-army, or what not, these are all formalities. The army needs reform and it needs to open up, it's impossible to consider another scenario. Secondly, any comparisons to America here are probably not relevant. We live in a different reality—an ambiguous, polarized, bipolar one—because you don't feel the constant presence of war in Yerevan... in Yerevan, which is essentially half the country, because everyone is over here.

SM – Did people feel the presence of war in Washington D.C. in 1944?

AO – In a certain sense, they did, because the economic situation was a very different one, but we have gotten used to it. It was brief here. Here, we've been living for more than twenty years in a state of “no war, no peace,” psychologically speaking... We go to festivals, there are events, parades, all kinds of things, but at the same time there is this thing...

SM – No, but for example there was a big decline in tourism after April, and that affected real people. So people saw that war impacts them directly.

AO – Economically, yes. But what I'm more interested in here is that polarization, to which we have become accustomed. It's as if we gained a sort of immunity to it over the years, that something was happening over there, at the border, but life would go on here. And that polarization exists and it is more profound because at its fundament, in essence, there is in my opinion the concept of social injustice first of all, because the people dying in the army come from poor and socially vulnerable families. We have no precedent at this point that, let's say, the son of a deputy minister, or minister, or, I don't know, a rich person—not that I want anything to happen to their children—but no such case where we could say, “See, the rich people are going to the front line, the rich people are fighting too.” So the whole thing is built on social injustice and now a new layer has been added to that social injustice which is a conceptual nation-army or whatever you call it, which I think will just lead to everything collapsing. On the contrary, at one point they would say that we have “the most battle-ready army in the region” or something like that. Praising the army has been a practice that has existed from the very first years of that army's creation. It's nothing new, it's just been packaged differently now. But back when they were calling it the most battle-ready army in the region and so on and so forth, there was still a group of people who believed that myth. Who really... because there was that... that freshness to the victory, we had won, we had taken over, now we'll speak and a political solution will be found to the problem, but we're more than halfway there. Now I think that there is a bit of... especially after the April war, and I consistently continue to call it a war because it has remained in people's perceptions as a four-day war, even though I agree with the idea that the war overall... But this is the way that people think of it. That war removed that psychological advantage from people's minds to some extent, and made that sense of social injustice stronger. You constantly see it—on the media, on Facebook, everywhere, it's always there, you always see it—that these are the kids from poor families, they're always the one's dying. People keep saying, “Let's collect a thousand drams each”. This is no way to solve the issue and you can't resolve the army's problems by plucking it out and separating it from everything else. It is a part of a large, global system, because social injustice is rampant in the country.

SM – If you see an expensive jeep with a Ministry of Defense license plate drive past you, you've already got hundreds of questions swirling in your head. Especially if the cops don't stop it when it commits traffic violations as it zooms by everyone. These might seem like small things, but a nation-army should not just mean the army's entry into society, but society's entry into the army as well.

AO – But I don't understand that – what is this, a *matrioshka* doll, for one piece to go into the other? It's not something that has been separated from the nation, is it? (--Well, it is separate, to a certain extent). In any case, naturally, there is a certain amount of secrecy, it's closed off and so on, but we're a small country, so if there is a family that has a child serving in the army, then that family gets information on a daily basis today – they call, they talk, they ask around, they come and go. It's not like that kid is in prison, like he's locked up and you're not going to see his face for two years. There is contact, and information goes around. And the issue seems not to be that the nation-army must not be separated—no such separation has existed in reality—but the shortcomings are becoming more noticeable, it is becoming clearer how socially unjust... unjust, how corrupt that so-called army is, and it is turning into a monster that is causing the people suffering. And we can't simply say that the monster is ugly, but it's ours and we have to love it.

AA – You know, people sometimes use the example of Israel...

AO – Because it's swallowing us, do you understand? The function of that army... what is its function? To protect us, right? But, in reality, we don't know whether or not it is actually protecting us. It seems like it protects us only in certain situations. It could do a better job of protecting us, but that's another story. But it's also swallowing us along the way. That monster is eating us up on an everyday basis and we must make it protect us, not turn around and consume our lives.

AA – We were talking about militarism, about a militaristic society. People sometimes use the example of Israel saying that they've been living in a state of war for decades, but they've been able to build a more-or-less democratic state in this time at least on the surface, of course they have issues with the Palestinians, how they treat them and so on, but there is the position that the constant possibility of war doesn't necessarily have to impede the democratization of the country. These two processes do not oppose each other and Israel, as an example, has tried to build a democratic country in that state of war and it has succeeded. And they also say that the army occupies an important place in Israel, in Israeli society. To what extent are such comparisons relevant to our situation?

AO – I don't think they are, we have no reason to compare ourselves to Israel all the time. First of all, geographically, historically, and so on... it's a very different situation, and then, in the very beginning, we said that we're talking about a nation-army and two Armenian states. There is no such issue in Israel. There is a single state, one nation, one army and so on, and they have their own way of promoting this concept. Things are slightly different here, the nature of our conflict is different. We have the case of an unrecognized state here, one that has its own population, its citizens, who want to... there is the need for their will to be expressed, that is how it has been from the very start. Now, I think that someone living in Los Angeles, in Glendale, should not have a say in the decision of the future of the people of Karabakh. That person should not be involved in this issue simply because he is an Armenian as well. So what if he is? If you look at it that way then there are eight million of us outside the country, let those eight million decide the fates of these two states. Each country's fate is decided upon by its citizens—this is democracy, after all—it has to be the citizens. That is why comparisons to Israel here are pointless, and I say again that this nation-army concept is not clear in the case of Karabakh because “Vigen Sargsyan, who are you to decide the fate of the people of Karabakh?” The people now have their own (whether formal, or informal) elected president, defense minister and so on and so forth. They must decide on their own issue.

AA – So you see a clear distinction between the two Armenian states.

AO – He sees a clear difference, he says so in the text of his speech. I have my own opinion, of course, but I’m citing the text. The text says “two states” and then mentions the nation-army. So which state is this about and what self-determination does that state have? Now, the world may not have recognized them, but they have a constitution or something formally, they elect their president, they have their defense minister, who, by the way, has not declared his readiness to join this concept of the nation-army and so on. This is a political...

SM – Well, that issue has formally been resolved, in reality, because the Ministry for the Defense Army is officially a Deputy Defense Minister. So that link exists and the army is perhaps the only institution officially linking those two states. In the case of all the remaining structures it is truly unclear – two National Assemblies, two presidents and so on, and the future is unclear – will they join us, will they remain separate? This is a global issue in general and I think that even the people of Artsakh do not have a clear position. Various surveys suggest that half of them believe that they are separate from us, half believe that they are a region of Armenia, and so on... But coming to Israel, there really isn’t a point in making that comparison for several reasons, for example...

AO – The demographics, economy, there’s so many... Just take the demographics, for example...

SM – There is one area where we could learn from their experience – the mechanisms for solving problems on a small piece of territory. But in Israel, one way or another, the first they have is a clear ideology based on religion, which we don’t have. For us, Armenia is a completely different concept, compared to what Israel is for the Jews. We’re miles apart in this case, they have a completely different picture.

AA – They also have different perceptions among themselves.

AO – In any case – there is the concept of nation-state.

SM – What do you mean?

AO – It’s a nation state. I think that’s enough to...

SM – It’s a nation state to such an extent that a lot of people even blame it of being a fascist state, because non-Jews are not allowed to marry. They have to leave Israel, register their marriage in another country, and then return. There are many issues there, because Israel uses a very different concept of religion and nationality, but what I’m saying is that you can learn from their experience not only in the case of the military, but also information technology, for example, where we have a problem. Each startup we have here can’t serve only the domestic market, because the market is too small. There’s only so much you can sell to a population of a few million people. So we can learn from them – how they have tried to expand from that point of view, even building their own army, and so on. But you can’t really expect to catch up with them when it comes to the army or their military industry, because this is one of the only states that manufacture its own tanks while being a very small country. Turkey, for example, ended its tank production program a few days ago. That massive country is unable to manufacture its own tanks, while Israel...

AA – Yes, but Israel started all that at some point, right? It’s not like Israel suddenly...

SM – Yes, they did. But the concept there is completely different.

AA – Nonetheless. Anyway, before we end, I'd like us to also spend some time on the following important issue. The nation-army concept, and the other issues related to it (the economy, economic growth, democracy, anti-corruption, the list goes on) with their various approaches, are all for the end goal that we live in peace. I mean, this is all aiming at peace, not to constantly be in war and to always be destructive. After all, our objective—and I think the objective of any rational person and leader—is to establish peace. Of course, it's a very complicated thing, but that is the objective. Now, by pushing these concepts forward, are we preparing for peace or, on the contrary, are we constantly preparing for war because peace is still very far away, as you said? Does this thinking, after all, exist that we must eventually live in peace with our neighbors?

AO – Does it exist in whose mind?

SM – I think...

AA – In the minds of the authorities and those who proposed the concept...

AO – Artak *jan*, I have serious doubts in my mind that everyone's objective is peace, because we shouldn't forget that war is a business, and many people are making a lot of money through that business to this day in Armenia, including within the army itself. That is why the army is opening up with such difficulty, because there are issues there that involve millions of drams and dollars. That is why it's difficult – there's money involved, and that's why it's closed, otherwise it would be very open. There is no other obstacle – we're a small nation, after all, and we're all related to each other, so to speak. That's the first thing. So, not everyone is ready for peace. Secondly, I'm assuming that the author of this text has himself erased any possibility of peace simply through the sections cited today. He can't be on our side today for the simple reason that he has declared an idea—a nation-army, or whatever—which has remained declarative in nature, if we don't take into consideration that pathetic and laughable idea of the 1000 dram contributions. And we see today that there is a prime minister, there's a government, Karen Karapetyan is not particularly involved in the establishment of this nation-army, he's going to events of a completely different nature, you can turn on *Haylur* every day and you'll see that nobody is manufacturing tanks, nobody is manufacturing drones, so it was just something declarative. They were shooting blanks – they said “nation-army, nation-army” but what did they do in practice? Where is the process? We see that the government, in any case, is working on completely different issues. Nobody is boosting the military industry and it's not like if we manufacture tanks, we can sell them to the rest of the world and we'll blossom and solve the other issues we have, and then save money, and more Armenians will come and pour into Armenia. I think this is a road that leads nowhere, but there are more specific steps that can be taken. For Armenia... (I say this with regret, but this is how it is)... if you don't have nuclear weapons, and you don't... If you don't have nuclear weapons, then the biggest thing you can do for your security is to become a part of the democratic world. That's it – democratization will be the biggest guarantor of our security. Other guarantees – we can't have these guarantees using weapons, because we don't have the weapons that would allow us to act crazy and say, “If you do that then we'll blow up the whole world, including ourselves.” So we have to go towards democratization, there's no other way.

We would end up in a system that would give us peace – because you don't see wars between democratic countries today, at least not with armies firing at each other, boom, bang, killing each other. I mean, you won't see, say, Poland starting a war like that against France, right? Because there's already... there's already a world out there, where the rules of the game have changed. There is still

violence, but it's not that overt. But that can happen quite easily in Syria. Now, coming to that issue, where Serzh Sargysan also said at one point, didn't he, that "We have no plans of turning our country into Syria, our country is not meant to be transformed into Syria," and so on and so forth, he's absolutely right – you need to understand, at which level are you playing your game? If you're playing in this league which has different rules, then this is where you can find your guarantees of security. You won't have tanks, and Kalashnikovs won't be your guarantors of security, nor will there will eighteen-year-olds who are dedicated and ready to go to their deaths for you. Those youths won't be there either. Your guarantor of safety will be, yes, a system, that will give you that guarantee and where you will also have an army. In that case – yes. But to pin all of your hopes on the army, and to say that the army will do this and that – that's absurd, especially in the current demographic situation where you see that there's almost nobody left in the country, people are leaving. The people aren't leaving because they're struggling with their livelihoods, or because... People are now starting to leave because there is no vision for the future. Because of exactly these thoughts that Vigen Sargysan is now expressing, that there's no other way out, that we need to mobilize and build an army – people don't like that. A person thinks, "I've only got one life to live, and my child is just ten years old. I don't want my son... I don't want my son to die. I'll go to another place, somewhere where there's peace."

AA – So is the nation-army concept doomed to fail?

SM – Let me continue Armen's line of thinking first. Democracy is the only normal way forward, in any case. It doesn't matter whether you're talking about a nation-army or whether it's agriculture or something else. But democracy will never protect you. It might make you safer but it won't protect you because, as they say, "democracies don't fight against each other," there's this axiomatic thing, but it's more of a hypothesis and it hasn't been verified, maybe if we live for another hundred years, we'll see if it's true. Who knows what will happen at that point? Secondly, in any case, you can see that democracies wage war against non-democracies and they do this all the time. We see that – for example, how American troops in Mosul...

AO – But nothing is happening on its territory, right?

SM – There's a war on its territory too, because the Islamic State is blowing up...

AO – Terrorism, yes, that's different.

SM – It's not different. In that case, you'll start saying that the national security service should develop, and a nation-NSS concept should be developed, is that better in any way? So, I think that...

AA – So it's possible to boost democratic processes using such concepts as well. For example, the possible militarization of society, turning it into an army-nation, or the opposite. I mean, I'm exaggerating all this, definitely, but still.

AO – This does not oppose democracy. Sorry, Samvel *jan*, but if you're armed, it doesn't mean that you aren't tolerant, democratic and so on – it's just that you're armed. The issue is all about how you use those weapons. You can kill a man with an ax, after all, can't you?

SM – Is the USA a democracy today? Well, if it is, then the USA is nevertheless the country that is involved in the most wars today and has waged the most over the past thirty years, right? Or, fifty years – if we go back to Korea, it's even more.

AO – Well, there’s democracy to the extent that the citizens can vote for that idiot, and that idiot can become President, it can happen.

SM – Yes, but what I’m trying to say is that... war, in any case...

AO – But we don’t elect idiots to office, they force themselves upon us. There’s a very important difference there. If we’d elected them, then we would have said, “Fine, we voted for this.”

SM – No, but war nevertheless hinders democracy, because war forces a serious part of the population to prioritize stability and security over freedoms and, naturally, these people become a leaning post for the powers that want to weaken democracy. So we should at least be conscious of this, but it doesn’t mean that this nation-army can do the opposite – that it can boost democracy. Because if you turn the army into a model, for example—this is all theoretical, but it could end up becoming true—if the army becomes a model, which can be monitored by society and so on, and this works very well, then the anti-corruption movement works well based on this, and becomes a model for the next...

AO – Yes, so for example if there are gay, openly gay generals in that army, for example, who are serving in that military well and are a clear part of that nation-army concept without being subjected to discrimination, then we will definitely have something to learn from that nation-army. But in this case, I believe that we have nothing to learn from the army, because the army, on the contrary, is the litmus paper that shows all our issues, all our shortcomings in a much clearer light. The army is, after all, a mirror—or, I don’t know, you can use another metaphor to describe it—that shows us who we are at this point in time.

SM – But you have to see it in order to be able to show it.

AO – Exacerbated, you mean?

SM – No, I mean that there are many things you aren’t even able to see.

AO – There’s no need to, because it’s clear that it keeps sending you corpses. You can’t ignore that, you see it every day. Eventually, it becomes a death machine, which—as I said earlier—unfortunately, is a monster or, I don’t know, a demon that not only spews fire in that direction, but also turns around sometimes and strikes you.

SM – I understand, and spewing fire in that direction isn’t a good thing either, but that is what the army does – the army is death. That is the only task it is given.

AO – No, this is not what the army is. We’ve come to a philosophical issue here. In my mind, the armed forces can be done away with entirely, of course, and pacifism can be supported, but if it does exist, then it is there to protect life, not to promote death.

SM – Well, of course... everyone knows that there are many problems out there, but let me say again that if the army is ready to become a model of some kind, and you solve some problems within it, then you will definitely be able to have a much easier time solving those issues in agriculture, governance – I’m talking about governance. After all, the army can be quite clear when it comes to a governance model.

AO – Yes, but it’s a hybrid. It’s a hybrid because there’s something we don’t understand here either, and it’s linked to that part about the nation. Vigen Sargsyan and the others, who have come on this

wave, they aren't experienced military men, you could call these men self-taught. And then there is the whole body of officers in the army who have a legacy that goes back to the *fidayeen* movements and then the whole Soviet experience, naturally – they have a clear methodology. In any case, we can't say today that this army is “national” because from the moment of its creation, from the beginning of the establishment of the military, there was a Russian model... Even the Soviet Army, which was based on the Russian Tsarist Army... that was their starting point. I mean, I'm not a military specialist or expert, but I do understand that you've taken that legacy and you've attached our *fidayeens* to it, and you've ended up with a hybrid, a mixed marriage, the children of which are not yet visible.

SM – No, but...

AO – There's also an inner conflict. For example, the officer in the Russian or Soviet army sees that there are problems at Stage X, just like Seyran Ohanyan had problems. His worldviews and so on, his approaches, did not work well with the other group – the *yerkrpahs*, the *fidayeens*, and they had conflicts.

SM – Yes, but in reality we shouldn't even realize that this nation-army has already long since come into being, in the sense that... After all, those commanders entered the political arena, they became governors and so on, all this has been studied. In reality, the army very quickly penetrated into half the institutions in our political and social fields and of the problems that we have today, many of them come from this reason, from the fact that there was no membrane or no immune system when that military sector came streaming into the political...

AO – But now you see the opposite happening. For example, if you look at Vigen Sargsyan and the others, it's not like... I mean, if you consider a country that is at war, the army is developing and so on, it's the military elite that dictate terms, right? In the end, the military elite has for years, let's say, provided the stamp of approval. But it looks now like that is being avoided. We see very clearly today that the military elite—the generals or what not—they are no longer the ones who solve problems.

SM – I'm sorry, but the president you have today... Whether he's your president or not, whether you've voted for him or not, he has come from the army.

AO – He did come from there, but... He came from there, but see, he's weakening those factors in any case. The Defense Minister... is not an important figure. The Defense Minister exists for such declarative texts. They took the uniform off of him, and turned him into a regular person with a briefcase, in order to blur all those lines. Now it is he, Serzh Sargsyan, who is in essence working on this nation-army in the way that he imagines it, which is in much more of a KGB-style, but I see very clearly that the move away from that previous model is very much there, and this concept of the nation-army will not be understood without Vazgen. It would have been understood in his time, and that was essentially what he was doing. I'm going to take them all, he would say, I'll take them all, even if he's my first cousin.

SM – I understand, but after October 27, Kocharyan had the problem of breaking that mold... And, in reality, all this began with Kocharyan, it wasn't just Sargsyan doing it, but not all of it was possible then.

AO – Yes, and the issue now is that part of our national capital has been created in the army itself, I mean we have very few businesses... We have very few oligarchs who have established themselves

outside the army. And a part of Armenian business, if you go back to its origins, started with people who grew rich from the war. It's a game, in any case, for a part of the national bourgeoisie, and that is why the bourgeois revolution has failed also in the sense that a part of the national capital today was born in the army, that's where its genesis occurred, and it is circulating in the army and that money is very difficult to break down. And there are very few people, like let's say Gagik Tsarukyan and so on, whose genesis is not linked to it, but they also want to sell things to the army or buy things from it, and so on. It's not like they don't want to own a share of this. So it's a business, in the larger picture. It's a business, and that business has been given yet another packaging which, unfortunately, puts our children's lives at stake.

SM – But let's get that right, that our children's lives are at stake not just because of corruption, but also because this is not allowing pacifism to really develop.

AA – Summing up today's discussion, to what extent there is a prospective for peace with our neighbor and neighbors, in your opinion?

SM – Let me put it this way. The army—if there isn't a political, diplomatic solution for peace—the army will always act in one way – it will achieve peace by suppressing the enemy, which means that there will always be war, or a fear of war that will frighten and suppress them. So, without a diplomatic, political solution, that is how the army will seek peace. And, in today's situation, I honestly don't see the political possibility of peace.

AA – So coming to a solution of the problem or problems without violence...

SM – I don't see it happening, because... It's impossible, because the different elements in our neighboring country are becoming more and more extremist. In response to that, extremism is growing here as well. I mean, if you compare our society ten years ago to today, we are more extreme now. Naturally, in Azerbaijan this is ten-fold to what we have here. And if you have societies that are not ready for any compromise, and you have a political elite that cannot even imagine what compromise is possible – not just talk, but real compromise... this is not clear.

AA – It seemed like the rulers of both countries accepted the [Madrid Principles](#) as the basis for a compromise that would resolve the issue. I think this is still ongoing, isn't that so?

AO – Yes, it's still ongoing, of course. Political solutions will be found sooner or later, that's not the problem. Any war ends eventually, even the Hundred Years War finally came to an end.

SM – But it lasted more than a hundred years.

AO – Let's hope our war doesn't last a hundred years. Let's hope we see that peace established during our lifetimes. The thing is that this extremism, which Samvel mentioned, has a positive side, in my opinion. Because it's like a wound, it's like pus; it piles up, piles up, piles up, and must burst eventually. Perhaps in a way this will accelerate the process somehow, because the people must eventually desire that peace. Wherever it comes from, whether it's forced upon us, whether it is negotiated, the leaders sitting around a table or what not, the people must eventually desire peace and good neighborly relations. When the people desire it, the rest consists of political issues. In the end, when that kid standing on the border lowers his gun, then that other kid will drop his weapon too—I don't know, I have this idealistic image in my mind—but I understand, in any case, that there needs to be an internal

demand for this to happen. We... Our job is that we should not neglect this every day, we should talk about peace.

SM – But the elites need to desire this as well. In December 1914 (-I believe, in any case...), the soldiers dropped their weapons—the Germans and the French—and started playing football.

AA – In 1914.

SM – In 1914. A few days later, a few officers were shot and they were forced to fight again. So until the elites are ready...

AO – I don't think the societies of today are the same as the societies of 1914, even in Germany, France or, I don't know, take whatever example you like. Because people today are much better informed, and people today know how to influence decision making processes, and that we aren't a flock of sheep that can be dragged here or there, we can't be told – fight, get up, and so on. After all, we...

SM – When you say “we”, who do you mean?

AO – Yes, that “we”... That “we” consists of the citizens of the Republic of Armenia, the regular citizens – me, you, Artak. After all, why are we talking so much about all this? Because none of us is a representative of the elite, so what we say would have zero impact, if we didn't understand, if we didn't realize the significance of our own words. So this whole conversation stems from that positive factor that we believe that we can make decisions... that we can influence decision making processes, and not just a bunch of people wasting time here. If we didn't believe that we were the ones who decided our own lives and our own fates, this conversation would have ended up being pointless, and would only be a video on YouTube with 400 or 500 views.

AA – Let's hope... let's hope that more people will watch this video and the rest of our series “Freedom Talks.” Thank you. Keep watching the “Freedom Talks” videos.

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