

## What the Expression “to Pour Water into the Enemy’s Watermill” Means

Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan – Good evening and welcome to another episode of *Article 27: Freedom of Expression*. Today we will discuss the following topic – what the expression “to pour water into the enemy’s watermill<sup>1</sup>” means. We often hear it said – don’t pour water into the enemy’s watermill. Let us discuss today what that means for Armenia, what one must do in order for Armenia to develop despite the current conditions of an unresolved conflict and continuing to be in a blockade. We have invited a few experts here today. I would like to direct my first question to Aharon Adibekyan, as an expert in social theory and social psychology. My question is the following – Mr. Adibekyan, in your opinion, what does a person feel when he or she is accused of pouring water into the enemy’s watermill, what goes on inside that person?

Aharon Adibekyan (sociologist) – That is quite an ambiguous question, because one can state a personal opinion, then there is the public view, there is the view of civil society and there is the position of the state, which covers the issue of censorship as well. It is not always possible to unite these views. Usually, the flow of information is kept under supervision in a country which is at war. More information is kept under the cover of being a state secret because this information can cause serious harm to the given country.

Gevor Ter-Gabrielyan – So how could one describe the situation in our country, from that point of view?

Aharon Adibekyan – I should say that if we look at statistics in Azerbaijan, they supposedly have a population of nine million – it turns out that in reality it is no more than six million - and they are trying to look not just like the most financially powerful country in the region, but also as one which has great population resources, such that they can have a larger army, they are a larger market and can make bigger investments; so they announce to the whole world that they have a population of nine million. In 1994, I was preparing a piece on the following topic – if Karabakh were left to face Azerbaijan alone, would they win or not? It is the numbers in the population that must create an army, create battalions and so on. When I counted the number of Azeri Turks in the population of Azerbaijan, it turns out that the proportion is the same as that of the Israeli population to its Arab neighbors – a ratio of 1 to 20. The proportion of

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<sup>1</sup> An Armenian expression which means to do something of benefit to the enemy

Karabakh to Azerbaijani forces was the same and that led to the question about the population that Armenia and Azerbaijan had at the time; I counted and discovered that one million people had emigrated. At that time, one of our sociologists was presenting his results at a round table and he announced that it was not twenty six thousand people who had gone from Armenia, but rather fifty two thousand. I was surprised, approached him during the break and told him that one million Armenians had left the country and that is a strategic number. It means that we are weak. Then the BBC, citing my center as the source, announced that one million people had left Armenia. It is difficult to conceal such data in Armenia. We have the right to collect and disseminate information, state statistics are open, it is quite difficult to cover them up and I think that this is becoming something linked to the self-consciousness of each citizen or the collective consciousness of society. If you think this is bad, then it will cause harm. Let me give you one more example. Years ago, I mentioned that we have a declining population, that the population of Armenia would be halved by 2050 and that this was a cause for alarm – we needed to change our policies regarding birth rates, abortions, encouraging young families and other issues. Some people laughed, asking how I could possibly state what the population of Armenia would be after fifty years. Last year, the UN announced its prediction about Armenia – our population is going to be halved between 2050 and 2100. No, we won't vanish, but we will decrease in number. Azerbaijan will become ten million, Georgia will be a little more than us. That is the situation – *not* talking about this would cause more harm to the country.

Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan – But you *are* talking about it and one would not say that you are being strongly accused of pouring water into the enemy's watermill.

Aharon Adibekyan – Yes, but the facts from any press conference immediately end up on Turkish-Azerbaijani websites within two hours. A day later – it's available from China to Mexico. Now they are saying that Armenia is a small country, it is a shrinking country, it will not have an army, the population is fleeing and the economy is collapsing. Do you think claiming Karabakh would not be a problem for us in such a situation? But in reality, things are done in a different way because there are things where quantity does not matter – quality does. Let us recall that the Americans could not win in Vietnam, the Soviets could not win in Afghanistan and that America left Iraq, despite being a superpower. So the issue is – I repeat - that this is an ambiguous question and that if a scientist feels that this is an important issue, he or she must speak out about it irrespective of whether that water flows to others' watermills.

Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan – I want to ask Anna a question. She is young, a journalist and whatever she has covered related to that issue she reports through blogs or newspapers and other media and now there are protests building up that this amounts to pouring water in the enemy's watermill. Anna, has such a thing happened in your experience and, if yes, what can you say? How does a person feel in this situation?

Anna Muradyan (journalist) – You mean the issue of Armenian-Azeri relations?

Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan – Yes, by saying pouring water in the enemy's mills they always mean to say that if – for example – one discovers a case of corruption, it amounts to pouring water into the enemy's mills because it shows that we are corrupted, so our defence system is not strong. That thinking can be expressed in any number of ways.

Anna Muradyan – To be honest, I have not had such a case in my experience as a journalist, I mean relating to Armenian-Azeri relations. There are some pressures applied to journalists, if one tries to circumvent the established norms. For example, there are certain issues which on which it is not acceptable to report and if you write about them, those pressures will definitely be felt.

Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan – Could you give us an example that would be relevant to our viewers – what is it unacceptable to write about?

Anna Muradyan – I don't know the extent to which this is relevant to this topic or this discussion, but I can give you the example of my piece on the woman who had raped a child. I had gone to the women's prison, spoken to the woman and written about the case. Armenian society – its conservative section – did not like the way in which I had described the case. In that sense, there had been quite a lot of pressure.

Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan – They accused you of pouring water in the enemy's watermill?

Anna Muradyan – If we look at it in that way, then yes; they told me that it was not right for me to prepare a piece like that, with the details that I had provided. I had not been told anything or given any information, but I felt that those details were necessary and it made the piece more powerful and informative for the reader. If we look at the issue on another level, for example if I prepare a piece on Armenian-Azeri relations or some other controversial issue and if I find that some details must be given or the case must be presented in a specific context, then that is what I will do, irrespective of whether or not pressure is put on me. Because I believe that if you are a journalist, if you work in that sphere, you have to adhere to the norms of journalism, which require such a piece.

Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan – The crime committed was rape. I don't know the details of your article – I don't remember them, although I had read it at the time. You investigated it and published a piece. You say that you added certain details. Did you need to do that, in order to get the facts across to the reader?

Anna Muradyan – Yes, I think there was a need because, in my opinion, news articles in the Armenian sphere of journalism are usually very boring.

Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan – So you did that to create a sensation?

Anna Muradyan – No, I did not add those details for the sake of a sensation.

Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan – So what was the necessity from a journalistic point of view to add those details?

Anna Muradyan – I already mentioned that when one is creating a piece and including various details, the piece becomes more powerful and effective than if you do not do so.

Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan – Well, that increases the sensationalism factor. That's how I interpret it.

Anna Muradyan – There is a certain section of society that interprets it that way too.

Aharon Adibekyan – That genre requires it – it needs these details to be emphasized. Let me give you an example. A girl is raped in an elevator, the *Moskovsky Komsomolets* reports on the front page that the rapist had done another dirty thing before raping her. The *Komsomolskaya Pravda* reports it on an inside page, the *Izvestia* has a small piece saying that yet another maniac has committed a crime. It is the attitude of the newspaper that is important, the audience to whom the paper is addressing the article. Some enjoy it – those are the tabloids. In this case, maybe the journalist is trying to have an esthetic effect on the reader.

Anna Muradyan – Excuse me, let me add something. Those opposed to my article were stressing the fact that there was no need to write about this issue at all, that such topics should not be mentioned in general, that there was no need to present it, especially in that way.

Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan – Would you like to add something?

Davit Alaverdyan (Editor-in-Chief, Mediamax Agency) – I would like to say that since I am also in that profession and I read a number of newspapers and electronic media a day, I watch television, there are almost no forbidden topics in Armenia, almost none; on the contrary, we sometimes see not just freedom of speech, but anarchy of speech. It would be good to have some kind of ethical limits, especially when it concerns cases such as rape, different kinds of violence, for which there are defined international guidelines like not photographing the victim's face or not revealing their name in full and so on, which are not adhered to at all in Armenia. There is also another issue in Armenia which is not fully regulated – it is regulated by law on paper, but the mass media do not pay any attention to it. This is the case of military and state secrets - when journalists discover information which harms national security. I have to say that I myself am naturally in favour of freedom of speech and the free flow of information, except for cases when freedom of speech clashes with the human right to life - that is when the human right to life is put on the scale against freedom of speech, any reasonable person would choose the right to life. There have been many cases in history – let's recall the famous case of Kennedy, for example – when he prohibited the *New York Times* from being published one day to prevent the secret from being revealed that they were preparing an assault on Cuba that

day. Everyone knows about that. Nevertheless, I continue to insist that even if the life of just one of your compatriots depends on it, you must be careful. For example, a simple fact – you have found out that the troops have been mobilized, you are a reporter, your logic dictates that society must know about this, but at the same time your civic duty must dictate that there are certain reasons for the mobilizations of the troops and speaking openly about it might harm you – not as a journalist in this case, but as a regular citizen.

Tigran Paskevichyan (screenwriter, public figure) – May I add something? We're talking about ethics – of course, ethics is a very important thing – but I see a certain phariseism here. Those ethics are not observed in the Armenian journalism sphere. I remember the vehement anger that arose when the private conversation between political prisoner Alexander Arzumanyan and his wife was published in the papers and then aired on television. For example, did the Mediamax agency express its position on that occasion, or not? Why do I say this? Because on the occasion of Seyran Ohanyan's picture there was an intervention as to why his picture was published on impress.am. So let's not use the rules of ethics as a serious tool to prevent or suppress people's freedom of expression.

Davit Alaverdyan – When we spoke out on that issue, it was the position of our agency. But during the period which you mentioned, we weren't yet working online and we didn't have the opportunity to express our position. If we had the opportunity, we would have definitely made our position clear.

Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan – Do you think that everyone is obliged to express an opinion?

Tigran Paskevichyan – If one is talking about ethics, then that must always be observed. A little while ago you asked us to give examples. It would have been good to mention that three years ago we expressed our anger at the publication of the conversation between Alexander Arzumanyan and his wife. A few days ago, we spoke out on the issue of Seyran Ohanyan and we will continue to express our anger whenever ethical codes are not observed.

Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan – All right, I would like to ask Naira a question, if possible. Let us return to my first question. I am interested in a person's state of mind when he or she is accused by his

or her compatriots of pouring water in the enemy's watermill. Let me explain why this interests me. I think that the development of society must take place in this way. So the state works thanks to the money we pay, it elects a National Assembly, forms a government, the government works and keeps society informed through freedom of speech about what must be fixed, what must be done better – that is the general plan. And when someone is criticized in these conditions of freedom of speech, that person does not like it. The general thinking is – as you said – that this is a violation of ethical norms, or that is how it is interpreted. As Anna said through her example, they say, “It is shameful, why are you writing about that?” The phenomenon has different names – they say that you should keep skeletons in the closet, avoid washing the dirty laundry in public. Now I want to address Naira as the representative of an organization which impresses certain sections of society as being – within quotes – “dangerous”; she works at the British Embassy. Certain groups say that this is the place which supports the development of material that pours water into the enemy's mill. Naira, how do you feel when you hear that accusation?

Naira Sultanyan (Programs Manager, British Embassy in Armenia) – Let me also start with an example, so that I can be clear but brief. When our neighbors were actively discussing the events of March 1, there were naturally many statements by the Azeris saying, “How could you continue to think about Karabakh? Karabakh has no future with you if you are like this,” and so on. I really liked the reaction of the Armenian side, which did not choose the strategy to conceal or act defensively, but instead chose a much more constructive and useful path. That was to present everything from a viewpoint which also revealed the positive sides of the horrible events of March 1, saying that this firstly showed that our civil society has matured to a certain extent, that there is a diversity of opinion in our political arena, which led to a conflict, but that this is necessary for the establishment of democracy. So I believe that our societies – both of them – need to be freed of that paranoia. Concealing something is never a solution to the problem. Whether it is nine million or six million in reality, it will be revealed in a war, God forbid. Maybe we will not be able to achieve a complete victory. This is why it is better for us to reach a more constructive level of dialogue, when we tell each other the truth and analyze it with specific facts.

Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan – What truth can the Azeris say, which would encourage them to have a more constructive position towards the Armenians? And what can they say to us? Please give me an example – either you or one of our other guests.

Tigran Paskevichyan – Let me add something. When we tell the truth, it's not the Azeris that we should be considering, but we should be thinking about our own inner state. We should tell that truth inwards. In this time period, when communication has become transparent like a glass of water, trying to hide something – in my opinion – is foolishness. Let me give you an example. This was years ago, when I was working at the newspapers *Hetq* and *168 Hours* simultaneously. At *Hetq*, the Region Center was doing interviews of Armenian and Azeri intellectuals and politicians, and they asked me to invite one of the intellectuals - whose name I cannot mention - since I was acquainted with literary circles. When that person found out that the piece was going to be published in the Azeri media, he refused, although he had some very important things to say about democracy and internal political life. A few days later, I told him that a *168 Hours* reporter wanted to do an interview with him about our internal political life. He happily agreed. He then called me, expressing amazement that the interview was also published in English and Russian, which he considered an honor. He did not understand that people in Azerbaijan were also gathering information from the articles printed in *168 Hours*.

Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan – Now we will watch a brief video clip, a Skype interview with an Azeri woman, Arzu Geybullayeva, who has collaborated with a number of people from Armenia and is quite a well known figure in certain circles. She is known as a blogger, a journalist, always participating in various projects with Armenians from Armenia and Karabakh; they do joint peacebuilding projects. Let's watch this brief interview with her, after which we will continue our discussion.

Video Clip – Hello Arzu, I am very happy to see you. Thank you for agreeing to talk to us. It is very important to us. I have a few questions. Our topic is “Pouring water into the enemy's watermill.” I think this is a very common expression, equivalent to “doing the dirty laundry in public.” I would like to first ask whether you have a similar saying in Azerbaijan, one with the same meaning.

Arzu – Yes, of course we have a similar saying. People use it in conversation often, saying that there are certain people who do this. It is very unpleasant and affects the work of people like us, who try to change something in the relations between the two countries.



Question – And how do they treat you? You write on topics of peacebuilding and internal politics. What is the attitude towards those people who talk and write about these topics? Is there an attitude of animosity towards people who wash the dirty laundry in public?

Arzu – Yes, of course there is, but when I first began my blog in 2008, the criticism leveled at me was much more. They would ask how I dare write negative things about Azerbaijan at all. I would receive unpleasant letters, and read nasty comments about myself. They would say the same about peace – “why are you working on that, it is unnecessary.” I was forced to get used to it. It became something common.

Question – So you are not afraid of it.

Arzu – No, it’s not that frightening.

Question – I have a question. In your opinion, are there any forbidden topics, which one should not write about, issues that are automatically considered to be pouring water into the enemy’s watermill?

Arzu – The situation today in Azerbaijan is such that if you write anything that contradicts the official position, then you are already pouring water into the enemy’s mill, because you are disliked for each forbidden topic which you address, even if you are writing about something like corruption. If you write about the situation prevailing in the universities, you are again disrespected, how could you dare write things like that? Not to mention if you try to write about the conflict. It is completely unacceptable to write about that, because it is a delicate topic and not just anyone can write about that.

Question – But are there any limits to freedom of expression for you personally, or do you think that it is acceptable to write about everything?

Arzu – I believe that people have the right to write about everything, anything that they wish to address... to write as they wish, to write what they think. As a blogger and journalist, I am used to always having the opportunity to write about what I think. And that is very important.

Question – And my final question. Looking at the issue in the context of everything that was said, how do you think it is possible to facilitate the improvement of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan? How can the conflict, which unfortunately exists today, be resolved?

Arzu – I think the most important thing is having the belief that the conflict can be overcome, that it cannot continue, that the situation will change and that we will be able to interact freely with each other again, visit each other. The second issue is the media. Both at our end and at yours they write very unpleasant stories. If we really believe in this cause then we should not pay attention to it because we both know what the media truly is. That is what the press has always done; it is their job, their professional calling. One should not pay attention to the media, but one should think more independently, constructively, in an alternative way about resolving the conflict. This is already something specific, a small step, if you talk about peace or about Armenia, and they treat you badly. If you interact with your neighbor and speak out about this, it is very important. People must know that there are people who believe in the improvement of relations. This is the least that one can do.

Question – Thank you and goodbye.

Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan – I want to draw attention to the fact that Arzu was quite diplomatic in her choice of words. She knew that the conversation was going to be broadcast on Armenian television, that we are preparing a program of this kind. And she expressed herself more diplomatically in this interview than she usually does. I know her personally and I have read her work – when she writes in her blog, she has a very honest and critical attitude towards her own side.

I would like to ask a question to Tigran Paskevichyan. You cover a myriad of topics in your work and there are thousands of opportunities to accuse you of pouring water into the enemy's watermill. There is no basis to these accusations, except that you give the first priority to the right to freedom of speech, which can lead to accusatory interpretations. How do you define the borders – how can there be no limits to freedom of speech, but also no harm born from it?

Is it a case of self-censorship or based on the correct perception of certain values? How is that regulated?

Tigran Paskevichyan – That border is honesty. If you are honest in your thoughts, your expressions, then you have already clarified the border. If you aim to be shocking – for example, you say that Khojalu is also recognized – then you cross the border, you are trying to cause a shock. I have worked a lot with Azeris and I have to say that such people are often the subject of disdain on the other side as well. That is to say, they understand that this is being done with some ulterior motive and calculations. But if you are balanced in your actions and honest in your words – without the need to cause a sensation – then that is perceived as normal on both sides. Of the people here today, at one time I was the one most accused of pouring water into the enemy’s mill, because I ran a big Armenian-Azeri program. They accused me, asking why I presented the facts that the Azeri prisoner was held captive for two years, while the Armenian was kept for only 101 days. Only my patience has allowed me to explain to them that the quality of the conditions of captivity had been very different – the Armenian side had not caused any harm at all to the Azeri prisoner over two years, while the Azeri side had even plucked the nails off the Armenian kept captive for 101 days. This is the truth. But the general belief was that I was pouring water into the enemy’s mill, because their prisoner had been held captive for two years, while ours was set free in 101 days.

Naira Sultanyan – I would like to discuss that issue in more detail. I took a few interviews from history teachers recently and studied the textbooks, looked at the walls of our schools and came to a very depressing conclusion. Irrespective of how history is interpreted in our textbooks and by our teachers, the pupil leaves school carrying or inheriting the burden of these two big conflicts. He or she does not have any skills at all – how to negotiate, how to defend his or her rights, how to manage in tough situations, how to diplomatically answer questions. I would really like us to end the discussion of pouring water into the enemy’s mill and to work on the teaching of communication skills.

Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan – Go ahead, Mr. Alaverdyan, but let me just add one thing. You mentioned that the human right to speech and the right to life must not contradict each other. That is a simple case. A more complicated situation arises when, for the sake of the country’s economic and social development, it is necessary to have criticism of corruption, poorly organized elections, electoral bribes and other negative phenomena. If one speaks out on these issues – even on the occurrences in the army, for example – they say that one is pouring water into the enemy’s mill, that one is hampering the development of the country and society,

one is not telling the truth. How does one decide the proportionality of the right to freedom of expression in such cases?

Davit Alaverdyan – Let me say that if you follow today's mass media, you will see that they criticize everything today – both justifiably and baselessly – and there are no limits in these cases. That also includes the cases in the army, there are no limits. They even mention the name of the military base, the names of the people involved, they show the faces of the guilty parties and so on. I don't see any issues of freedom of speech at this moment. There were some barriers five years ago. They no longer exist. I see that anyone can open their personal blog and post their personal opinion or a piece of information about anything that happened here or there, often also leading to misinformation or the publication of unreliable information.

Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan – And he or she will not be brought to account or will not come under pressure by society.

Davit Alaverdyan – Society today is not uniform, there are no clear rules of the game stating in which case one can criticize, in which case one cannot. As a person who has researched Armenian-Azeri relations – I have written a doctoral thesis in the field of information on the topic of information war – I know that people like Arzu are struggling in Azerbaijan today against a huge mass of people, who are being ruled by state propaganda. This plants hatred towards Armenians and everything related to Armenia. I meet many colleagues from Azerbaijan in neutral territories and we interact without any problems. They ask for forgiveness, saying that when they return to their motherland, they will be forced to write bad things about me as well, because if they don't they can even be accused of treason. This is quite a common thing on their side because the state machine is very powerful.

Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan – It's easy for us to say, we are here in Armenia and we are surprised by this, but the situation is much worse in Azerbaijan. Therefore, there is nothing to be worried about and nothing specific needs to be done. The question, however, remains the following – how does one use internal resources in those situations and not infringe upon the freedom of speech, irrespective of the fact that the opposite side is even more anti-democratic and violates freedom of speech? But we cannot solve the conflict. Yes, Mr. Adibekyan, go ahead – then we will end the program.

Aharon Adibekyan – The case of Fatullayev says it all.

Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan – Please tell us about it in brief.

Aharon Adibekyan – He was the only reporter who felt that Khojalu was organized by Azeris, not by Armenians. That is why he has been incarcerated, he is now in prison. If there were many people like him, they would make them heroes. Let us put the official aspect and the human aspect aside for a moment; there is such a thing as the sociology of gossip, which states that if something is said about you, you should not react, because anything can be interpreted in two ways – the positive and the negative. For example, we fight corruption - one group of people does not like that, another group of people applauds it. The same phenomenon can be perceived and interpreted differently. Each journalist must understand which is of primary importance – the benefit of the nation, the good – or information that can harm national security.

Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan – Let us summarize what was said, although it is difficult to sum up everything. A lot of interesting thoughts were voiced, one of which was Naira's call to teach specific skills to the new generation, to convey the culture of correct communication to them. That is a slightly different topic; maybe we can address that in future episodes. Basically, we cannot say that we see any progress on this issue. On the other hand, we have clearly said that in recent years there has been noticeable progress in their freedom of speech in Armenia, but taking the existing conflict into consideration we cannot be satisfied with just this, because that progress is perhaps only significant in comparison to the authoritarian and stagnated situation in Azerbaijan. But we must create those conditions for freedom of expression in Armenia through which we can overcome the difficult situation in which Armenia currently finds itself. Thank you, we will meet again.