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**NEW POLITICAL MYTHS:
IMPEDIMENTS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT
OF CIVIL SOCIETY**

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NEW POLITICAL MYTHS: IMPEDIMENTS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY

The reality of a myth is an absolute truth for the most ancient and archaic consciousness. The political myth, too, is recognized as a reality, but with less conviction and depth as the ancient myths. Even if it seems that the political myth is the offspring of reality, it is always the creation of someone. The political myth is shaped by somebody, and it is initially perceived as a possible, but much later as an apparent reality. The political myth is a distinctive one which preserves, in the collective memory of the people, the latter's societal experiences as well as the imperative of the spiritual and ethical changes in the political processes.

“The complex of the social and political myths serves as an important indicator for the complete state of the society's political culture. At the modern-day phase, the universal ideas and values are primary for these myths. But ultimately these are not the things that set aside the particularity of the development of the national, political processes. They rather create a certain civilizational backdrop and, by being compared with this backdrop, the structure and content of the ideological guarantee of the modern-day political processes are subjected to adjustments in different countries. The mentioned distinctiveness is rather predetermined by the identical facts about the political reality, that is, by the self-styled social and mythical notions. These notions create a shade of inimitable national and political culture, and this shade's unique inner quality.”¹

“The political myth's logic dictates that several cause & effect links, which were disputed as a result of social crisis, be transferred to the sphere of the mythical images, where they can find new cause links and afterward be transferred to the political reality. Thus, the political reality possesses a unique logic of quest, and this logic functions with the complete lack of the initial data.”²

The basis for the relatively “long-lasting” political myths contains social **stereotypes**. The latter are used in one way or another, they can also be consolidated as such and contribute to the “fast and involved” spreading of the political myth that is created.

Let us now examine several “myths” that are created and being spread nowadays, and which are not only realities but, by also consolidating, obstruct the democratic values' penetration into and establishment within the society, and impede the formation a of large-scale tolerance toward some “pathogenic” phenomena.

Today, Armenia is in a political, moral, and psychological crisis. The country's economy continues to be governed by a group of people and the authorities take no real steps to dispose of that system. And at least because of some internal, personal disagreements, or for some other reason, the leadership can “dethrone” an oligarch. Let us consider this as a particular stereotype toward which the other social strata have an unclear stance because the country's wealth is held in the “hands” of several affluent officials and oligarchs, and this situation naturally supposes the presence of intolerance.

Another social stereotype, which has become further emphasized and stressed since February-March 2008, relates to Armenia's legal and justice system, specifically the judicial power and the entire system of law enforcement, whose “instructed” work is apparent, unconcealed, and comprehensible for all social strata, starting from the villager and ending with the oligarch. No one is protected against becoming the **victim of the capriciousness or vindictiveness** of someone from the “pyramid” of the authorities, or going bankrupt, or being **punished** by an official's “private legal system.” The numerous daily violations and abuses of the fundamental

constitutional and human rights are carried out **as customary** and they remain unpunished. If we merely observe the “vocabulary” used to describe the country’s legal system—even if just the expressions highlighted in the abovementioned passage—we can deduce the emotional foundation and the “particles” with the help of which the myth of the “legal injustice and corrupt system” has established.

Conversely, a number of NGOs have “monopolized” the activities as well as the “attempts” and the “mission” toward establishing a civil society. If we study these processes from a more global perspective, when an NGO receives a grant program and convenes its next series of seminars and conferences—and makes the more active segment of the civil society get involved—all this seems to start and then come to an end as a formality, that is, on paper. The Western organizations provide funding so that a legal, civil society is established in a country like ours, yet the true working myth of corruption and bribery is still entrenched. This is a matter of national psychological structure and character, in the case of which a very long time is needed for a change. “Accepting as norm the way in which the nations learn to control and govern their instincts, and find the **willpower** and consequently the **power** upon themselves, they begin to comprehend the importance of law and order, and the need to sacrifice oneself for an ideal and to ascend all the way to a civilization.

The advanced races differ from those that are more primitive by their character traits plus intellect, whereas the advanced races differ from one another primarily by their character traits. These traits are formed by the combination of the various amounts of different constituent parts and components. Among those character traits that play a greater role are obstinacy, energy, and self-control; these are characteristic features that come from willpower, and they are volitional qualities.

And even though morality is a combination of more complex emotions, it likewise must be mentioned, as morality is another basic component of the character traits.”³

The huge and important poles that function in politics, and which include different strata, are also stereotypical, and in the society these poles are the authorities and the opposition. Both parties manifest a more emphasized intolerance toward a stratum. In addition, it is the media that highlight and further enlarge the diverse “black cavities” within a smaller society. The two-pronged domestic informational and technological terrorism is envisioned more toward the politically “uninterested” masses. Since the society is quite politicized, the real “preaching” is not aimed at winning over such masses but instead it comprises brutal “head-to-head” attacks and counterattacks between the poles. In other words, just like a sadist, who has a great psychological dependence on his victim, whom he tortures to prove his existence, one pole can not exist without the aggression by the other pole. In the general sense, the know-how is perhaps the same everywhere, but the political culture, which is “embellished” with the Armenian national psychological structure, is a basis for “diverse” and unpredictable situations.

One hundred years ago, Gabriel Tarde⁴ had already underscored the impact of the “print run” of the “conclusions” that are disseminated through the newspapers. The important thing is neither the depth nor the veracity of these conclusions but rather, and especially, it is their print run. Correspondingly, the “loss” of a myth’s “prominence” can be compensated with the aid of the print run being disseminated for a certain period of time. Hence the media are resources, and the myth can be offered with the help of the media. A different—and a more effective—myth, which conversely does not have methods (the television, for example) that “bring” a huge attention and prominence, is condemned to being “spread” by the ancient means and pace. The media rules, however, are such that—and Tarde has also pointed this out—the journalists are obliged to conform to the moods and “preferences” of the masses. In one way or another, the archetype is

expressed in the **society's directive**, which the journalists can not disregard. **The media's weakness lies in the fact that they do not create a completely self-developing myth.** They use a “mixture” of “segments” from different mythical subjects and, by the aid of these segments, the masses can be incorporated, but only for a very brief time period such as during elections.

“The authorities are aiming to rig the elections, this time as well.” This is a myth that functions with real facts, and everyone in Armenia—the opposition and the pro-government group alike—yields to this myth because, when repeated numerous times, it just becomes an **existing real expectation.** Everyone accepts this myth, the **mechanism of expectations** operates, and this mechanism “needs” to be put into effect and thus the expectations from the anticipated line of conduct must be “justified.” The pro-government group is “content” with the propagated myth because its (i.e., the group) actions are no longer perceived as “unacceptable” or uncivilized, there is tolerance—still in the social subconscious—and the election fraud needs to be made so that the opposite side can have the opportunity to manifest itself. This real myth is a distinction of the societies in undemocratic countries, and **it is a myth that impedes democracy.**

There is also a multilayered social intolerance. Each and every Armenian not only has at least one Armenian enemy but also the remaining strata and the stereotypes functioning in the Armenian society are no less than “distant” for him. Without making a thoughtful analysis and manifesting a balanced approach, the standard-bearers of the civil society accept the “seemingly” reverse and oppositional views as the foundations for democracy. Nonetheless, the frivolousness and arbitrariness in the two poles must be differentiated from the right of free speech and the creation of an enemy image among the nation. Even now, the society's news system functions spontaneously. When carrying out a brief monitoring and reading several Armenian newspapers (*Azatomutyun*, *Hayots Ashkharh*, *Chorrord Ishkhanutyun*, etc.), we see that the hatred and the preaching are present from the very first glance; we can also observe the predominance of vengeance in addition to commonplace and “bad quality” slander with respect to intersocietal, inter-Armenian, and internal-type relations.

Instead of recognizing the external danger as a challenge, the latter is directed toward the inside and it weakens the society. **The foreign enmity is used toward the society, and with the intention of implanting domestic enmity and creating internal enemies.**

“Hovik Abrahamyan's mission failed; the page of March 1 is not only unturned but it has opened in its entirety. The authorities could not allow anyone to hear about such failure. **The leadership, however, could not find anything better than the ‘inimical conspiracy’ of ‘Postanjyan's alliance with the Turks and the Azerbaijanis.’**”⁵ To conceal their own weakness, the authorities always create a scapegoat and put the emphasis on the latter by way of drawing parallels with the enemy (Turks, Azerbaijanis), exaggerating the reality, and attempting to create the image of a more dreadful “enemy” in domestic politics. The internal-type enmity plus, and to put it mildly, the inter-Armenian “disagreements” which have existed all through history, continue—like a fixation—in the collective unconscious and, by presently “pushing” on the corresponding myth and activating it, the societal “uniorganism” and unity weaken directly and indirectly.

The examples for the distortion of social values include the emotional, sensual, rational, and behavioral apathy and “receptiveness” with respect to the negative stereotypes. **The uneducated and “immoral” politician's “prevalence” and “heroizing” are among the beneficial myths and, by gaining strength, this phenomenon makes it more difficult to adopt the long-“dreamt” democratic system of values.** The problem is the existing social duality. In parallel with the dissemination of the news about the apparent uneducatedness and behavior of the

unethical, cruel, greedy and wealthy politician, **the said person's rating grows**, this causes "reverence," afterward, however, the negative emotions are removed from the context, and thus the person is mythicized and then becomes a myth. Much later, such an image plus his conduct as well as morals and manners are "accepted" not just as normal but also as "standard," ranging from the number of the members of his entourage to his business investments. To be exact, when it is said that the given politician is not smart, the question that begs an answer is: For which masses? The myth about this politician is accepted equivalently, and **he is an identical image in today's politics and among the most politicians.**

"Ever since the ancient times, all rulers of all levels also widely use mythmaking to reach their objectives. To consolidate their authority, they have organized and continue to organize the dissemination of information on their activities, and this information ascribes them merits that even reach the supernatural level. Here is a working example: **"Due to his courage, the 'father of the nation,' 'the publicly elected president,' etc., it became possible to secure the homeland's prosperity and the citizens' wellbeing."**⁶ Observing the fact that **the large-scale belief in this myth is also among the interests of the people**, we therefore can assess the entire "picture" of the 2008 presidential elections, and the "candidate of the authorities" could have predicted this picture because:

1) It is not a secret that, against the negative backdrop in connection to the former authorities, the "Karabaghtsi" stereotype was functioning and, during the presidential elections, **no new myth was created and no ideological nor even a "unique" action was taken**, and instead it was the monotonous continuation of the past ten years.

2) The society witnessed a political manhunt and "heroism," to which were added the myth of the "first president," and **the myth of legitimacy could no longer "work" in the case of self-deception.**

"Our incomparable **dictator** has an astonishing character. He can not in any way do a seemingly good deed that would make the people express words of appreciation or gratitude. This creates the impression that he is prepared, even at the cost of being humiliated and sacrificing the national interests, to **reconcile** even with **the Turks and the Azerbaijanis**, but **never with his own people**. In all probability, we are dealing here with a unique manifestation of integrity and dignity, which deserves to become an object for examination by the psychoanalysts."⁷ By making an analysis, we can see that the same behavior is also particular to the speaker of these words. On the road to "the monopoly to become the authorities and the opposition," the inter-Armenian and the internal-type aggression and hatred are also appropriate for the larger branch of the opposition, but until to the point of self-eradication. The opposition's monopolistic mentality and work method are manifested by the harassments against another political party that supports the opposition. That is to say, the myth, according to which the relations between the authorities and the opposition are polarized to the outermost point, in actuality does not bring any moral and psychological advantage or another quality; this myth simply shows that the same conduct repeats in the same spectrum and against another pretentious force, such as the conduct by the powers that be. **The myth of the intolerance between the leadership and the opposition is "nourished" by huge "factors" and by different "particles" and stereotypes, and it also contains more sensual and emotional elements. Over the course of many years, it can also change qualitatively and, with the imperative of the opposition's qualitative change, it can be "ennobled" further.** The most important peculiarity of mythicization in the political scene is the **struggle** between the good and evil, without which any theory loses its charm. When the subjective differences disappear, the myth loses its influence on the conscious, and **this gives rise to the myth which says that they must "nourish well" to remain current.** In the case of this myth, the politicians—from any spectrum—who are disciplined by the

existing political culture, display the greatest aggression and intolerance, and he who curses the most is considered the greatest opposition or pro-governmental figure.

The political prisoners' political mythicization will **continue unless** the authorities come to understand that they do not need to tolerate the existing "heroic myth" and release all the political prisoners.

The political myths—whether great or small, short-lived or long-lasting—are either intersocietal, or inter-nation, or interethnic, or international.

The "football diplomacy" is a small myth that was put into "circulation" by the Armenian president, and in connection with the first steps⁸ taken in the Armenian-Turkish relations; these steps must be followed by other logical and diplomatic steps. In parallel with the "freezing" of these relations, however, or, more correctly, as a result of Turkey's halting of the next step—that of not opening the borders—the said myth will disappear in a very short amount of time. If we look at the opposite case, specifically if any Armenian-Turkish contact and communication continues, the myth of the "football diplomacy" will function as a very important "start" for these relations, and also as a neutral "headline," which is convenient for the two sides. In time, and together with this myth, however, a number of small but extremely deep-rooted myths can "cave in," which form the parts of and complete a huge and solid myth that says the Armenian-Turkish enmity **is age-old**.

The inter-Armenian conflict, whose basis was formed as a consequence of the events taken place at the turn of the 20th Century, is not yet resolved. According to the Yerevan-based mindset that is set down, the divisive events and the animosity among the nation exist since the Soviet times. The Soviet era—which the Armenian people went through—the general social and economic, moral and psychological condition, the level of national solidarity, the enmity to maintain the political party's regime, and the betrayals among the nation are all significant developments for a small nation, and in a matter of just one century. In those years, the most diverse short-lived and long-lasting myths perhaps had either helped or hindered the life of the nation. There existed the myths about a "one, united empire" and the "latent" ethnic symbols. Together with the political changes, came forth new symbols, new ideas, and new benchmarks and, in compliance with this, new myths emerged. From a more global perspective, however, the symbols being created during these uncertain political times are also more constricted, trivial and egocentric, and they are virtually conditioned by solely reciprocal domestic political challenges.

The "huge" myths create "history," and they are mythicized within history. The "small" myths, on the other hand, help form an opinion on the social value system, the prevailing moral and psychological mood, the state of solidarity, and the conflict situation during any period of time. It is also possible to make known the society's susceptible sides, i.e., its "cavities." Similarly, the myths, which function in Armenia's current political spectrum, are the distinctive "mirrors" of that spectrum, and therefore they reflect the true image and at the same time help consolidate the negative phenomena.

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ENDNOTES

¹ Shestov, N.; *The Political Myth: Now and Before*; Editor: Prof. A. Demidova, Moscow, 2005, Golden Collection, page 7; in Russian

² Savelyev, A.; *Political Mythology*, 2003; in Russian

³ Le Bon, G.; *Crowd Psychology*, Moscow, 1998, pages 33-34; in Russian

⁴ Tarde, G.; *Opinion and the Crowd*, Moscow, 1998; in Russian

⁵ <http://lragir.am/src/index.php?id=comments&pid=27624>; in Armenian

⁶ Krisko, B.; *The Secrets of Psychological Warfare*, Minsk, 1999, page 330; in Russian

⁷ Levon Ter-Petrosyan; an excerpt from his speech delivered during the July 2, 2008 public meeting; in Armenian

⁸ Accepting the Armenian president's invitation to watch the football match—between the national teams of Armenia and Turkey—together, the Turkish president arrived in Yerevan, in September 2008