

15 PRINCIPLES OF ARMENIA'S FUTURE

SUMMARY

1. [Urgent change is our last chance](#)

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November 9 marked exactly one year since the 44-day war in Artsakh ended. According to Armenian traditions, it was a year of mourning as we paid tribute to the deceased, and now is the time for all thinking and caring people to join forces in comprehending the events of the past three decades, both last and this year, and, upon the analysis of all the missteps and achievements, offer a summary. The time has come for each of us to finally realize our responsibility not only for our own future and the future of our loved ones but also for that of our country and nation.

Sure enough, many people out there believe that the latter is none of their business, that they always have a backup plan in case things go terribly wrong in Armenia. Believe me, this is an illusion, exactly the same as the one that the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire used to cherish in 1915. Many of them were confident that they would be able to negotiate with the slayers and buy their way out as the massacre was unfolding in a neighboring village. The ability of Armenians to easily adapt to new circumstances and integrate into new communities has always been our asset, but our tragedy lies in the ease with which the Armenians have been leaving their homeland in search of a better life. Everyone saves themselves instead of uniting and joining forces to save their homeland and their people, whose fate is no less important than that of a single Armenian.

I wrote this paper to discuss precisely this and many other things, above all, personal responsibility. The best epitome of what it is, in my opinion, was phrased by the prominent opponent of Nazism, the Lutheran pastor Martin Niemöller (1892–1984), who said: “First they came for the Communists, and I did not speak out because I was not a Communist. Then they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out because I was not a Socialist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak out for me.” Sadly, many Armenians follow the same logic: when Syunik is about to get hit, it is none of my business because I live in Tavush; when the Armenian community of Lebanon is on the verge of extinction, I could not care less because I am not a Lebanese Armenian; when in Armenia, school-age children do not have regular access to education, it is a shame, but my family is happily settled in Europe or the US and our children go to a prestigious school, etc.

When the majority of Armenians (80%, according to the surveys) quietly accept the defeat in the war and the loss of most of the lands of Artsakh, this means a loss of unity and a sense of collective responsibility. The loss of Artsakh can be just as easily followed by the loss of Syunik and then the Tavush region, etc. Disunity and indifference are the dangerous ills of our society that need to be addressed as soon as possible.

It is always difficult to bounce back from a defeat, and yet those with a strong spirit do not give up. Instead, they muster the courage to realize and admit their mistakes, man up, and work painstakingly toward avoiding the repetition of these mistakes in the future. And now, a year after the war ended, the time has come to come to terms with the fact

that we can ensure peace only if we ourselves become strong, if we are united and can show this unity to the rest of the world. In no case should we put up with defeat, especially since for our neighbors, this victory is not enough, and sooner or later, they will strike again. This does not mean that I am calling for revenge—rather, it is about becoming self-sufficient since the constant expectation of help from the outside makes us vulnerable and dependent. Our security is our own business. We ourselves must create it and learn how to protect it. Then, external assistance will come and will be effective. Having become strong, we will be able to have peace on our terms and become masters of our future and worthy partners to our allies.

The main idea that I would like to convey in my work is my conviction that Armenia has every opportunity to become a strong country, and the Armenians a successful modern nation that will revive its traditional values, relying on its glorious past, while being future-oriented. To do this, we need to get out of the sleepy stupor in which we find ourselves, considering the defeat in the 44-day war as just a sad episode of the past that has nothing to do with anyone personally, realize where we are now, and take a step toward change.

A sensible choice of a development trajectory and model that would ensure security, prosperity, and preservation of national identity for the citizens of Armenia and the Armenians of the whole world should become one of those decisive actions that must be taken so that the chilling prospect of finally losing Artsakh, and, with it, Armenia, does not become a reality. Fortunately, there are reasonable forces in Armenia and the Armenian world that are poised to take responsibility and spearhead the positive transformations that we need sorely.

Thirty years ago, in the early 1990s, the formation of the young Republic of Armenia was a grueling job. We were not ready for independence and did not fully capitalize on our right to choose our path. Worse still, having won the war for the independence of Artsakh, we did not learn how to be victors and did not lay the foundation for a reliable peace in the form of a strong and advanced army and a prosperous state. The state in which Armenia has been for 24 years cannot be called either peace or war.

Over the past three decades, we have failed to adapt the giant Soviet legacy to the needs and capabilities of the new state and society and to arrange a form of life that would propel Armenians to prosperity. The political and military elite of Armenia considered that victory in the war legitimized it and entitled it to rule the country single-handedly. We missed the opportunity to make incremental, evolutionary changes. The changes that began after the April 2016 four-day war, albeit fueling optimism, unfortunately, have not resulted in profound reforms. We also did not use the window of opportunity opened up by the events of 2018. The Armenian and diasporan elites did not join forces to build the country and revive the nation. The full-scale crisis that broke out last year and the war in Artsakh have provided us with the last opportunity to make changes, which cannot be postponed any longer.

Previously, I have reiterated that I refrain from direct participation in political processes, but the current critical state of affairs does not leave me any other choice but to join the discussion of the most important political and social issues: what kind of Armenia we are building and how we envision the future of the Armenian nation. In this sense, my

partners and I are entering the political field. At the same time, I want to emphasize that we are still public, not political actors.

There are two ways social advances can be made: either *aggression and conflict caused by the struggle for limited resources and benefits* or *empathy and interaction toward the joint enhancement of these benefits*. The choice is clear to me, just as it is obvious that to change the current situation, getting involved in the struggle of political parties and striving to secure the Prime Minister's job are not necessary. All I want is to do my utmost for the good of my homeland and my people and to be of use to them in any capacity they see fit.

Undoubtedly, the work you are about to read is just a sketch, a roadmap, which warrants a full-fledged and open discussion, multiple corrections, and amendments.

2. [Previous social contract](#)

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The leaders of the early 1990s vowed to ensure security, stability, and social welfare to be able to monopolize power and take control of Armenia's material assets and cash flows.

The security guarantee also underlay the social contract between Armenia and Artsakh. And although Armenia did not officially recognize its independent status, it assumed the responsibility to solve all crucial issues, thus eliminating the Artsakh people themselves from participating in the negotiations, building their own security system, and making other equally important and fateful decisions.

As for the Diaspora, in exchange for charitable assistance and non-interference in Armenia's domestic affairs, it got a sense of "belonging to the nation," cordiality, and hospitality of fellow countrymen in Armenia.

An unspoken agreement between the government and society, Armenia and the Diaspora, and Armenia and Artsakh seemed to have worked until April 2016. Influenced by external circumstances, domestic policies began to change. The country's integration into the international community and the transition to greater openness and transparency of state structures were all steps in the right direction. However, the actions taken were half-baked as they did not lead to profound transformations, and most importantly, the authorities retained the previous semi-authoritarian regime where the shots are called by one person only.

Citizens vehemently protested against the authorities' refusal to renegotiate the terms of the breached social contract and their attempts to roll the relations back where they were before. However, revolutions do not necessarily achieve the goals set by the revolutionaries. If you continue to stick to the usual model of existence, a dragon slayer will inevitably devolve into a new dragon over time.

3. [New social contract between the government and the society](#)

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The new leaders who came to power on the heels of the events of the spring 2018 proposed a new social contract: the government pledged to fight corruption and show more respect for citizens. At the same time, the new ruling elite, like the previous one,

considered itself fully entitled to monopolize the country. The old power mechanism was neither discarded nor transformed, there was still no openness, and ensuring security and stability was never part of the game plan.

A new social contract is needed, which must be based on sufficient consensus on the following issues:

- security; p. 14
- identity; p. 16
- prosperity; p. 17
- collective responsibility of the most active public circles for the future of Armenia and the Armenian people and participation in governing the country; p. 17
- balance between hierarchies and networks. p. 17

In my opinion, the following principles should form the basis for building a new society: p. 18

- transparency, meritocracy, professionalism, competence, and common rules for everyone;
- consistency;
- an institutional framework for decision-making and interaction;
- introduction of mechanisms for regular evaluations of the achievements;
- introduction of a system of checks and balances to fledgling institutions;
- a holistic approach to development;
- scalability;
- studies and implementation of advanced global practices;
- lifelong learning;
- collegiality;
- respect for people and partnership;
- improved feedback mechanisms;
- engagement.

4. [New social contract between Armenia and the Diaspora](#) p. 19

Armenia will unite the Armenian world if it offers the Diaspora a multilateral partnership, which is possible under the following conditions:

- a fundamentally different format of relationships;
- at least 50,000 families moving to Armenia;
- the opportunity to participate in the country's development and in making decisions that are vital for Armenia and the Armenian people;
- the opportunity to hold high public offices.

5. [Vision for the future: what kind of Armenia would we like to see?](#) p. 23

Depending on the model chosen for the country's development, each of our problems—whether it is the settlement of the Artsakh crisis, international relations, or even relations

with our own Diaspora—will have various options for a long-term solution. Questions to help determine our choice:

- What kind of society do we want to build: open or closed? What are the pros and cons of each model?
- How do we want to live: obeying the law or observing a vague unwritten code? What does each of the options mean? p. 24
- What role does the church play in modern Armenian society? p. 26
- How are we going to solve the Artsakh issue, build relations with Azerbaijan, and ensure our security? p. 26
- How will our relations with Russia be built? p. 28
- How are we preparing for the potentially open borders with Turkey? p. 28

6. [How can we secure a better future for Armenia?](#) p. 30

Already, we should take the following steps:

- agree on the socio-economic model of Armenia’s development;
- determine the form of government and establish a state government system;
- conduct a full audit, inventory of our assets, and certification of personnel both in the state and public sectors;
- attract the investments necessary to reboot the entire system of Armenia;
- hire top-level professional executives and experts;
- determine the extent of digitalization required;
- create a free economic, scientific and technological zone in Armenia;
- modernize the mining and metallurgical industry;
- reform the education system, starting with preschool education, focusing on the best international standards;
- engage young people (aged 25–35+);
- empower women to participate in social and economic life, as well as in governing the country;
- restore respect for the family and family heritage;
- debunk myths about ourselves and about the world in general.

7. [The FUTURE ARMENIAN initiative and its goals](#) p. 37

In April 2021, my partners and I announced the launch of our new public initiative, The FUTURE ARMENIAN, aimed at developing a common framework of understanding for all Armenians, as well as Armenian organizations and institutions, about the sustainable

development of our country and nation as a result of an open discussion. Anyone can engage by co-signing the list of 15 goals of our initiative at futurearmenian.com.

I am convinced that those who have come to power today will be fully legitimized if they establish a constant dialogue with the public. In other words, the mandate of trust received from society does not mean a monopoly on decision-making. The source of the new government's legitimacy will be a new social contract between it and society.

15 goals of the FUTURE ARMENIAN initiative:

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- Vision setting
- Assured sovereignty
- Historic responsibility
- Free Artsakh
- Armenia–Diaspora unity
- Strong Diaspora
- Strong alliances
- Exponential growth
- Growing population
- Excellence in education
- Preeminence of science, technology, and creativity
- Good governance
- Just society and reduced inequities
- Preserved heritage
- Evidence-based decision-making

These goals should be discussed by representatives of different strata of society in today's Armenia and the Armenian Diaspora. The most important mission of The FUTURE ARMENIAN initiative is to build a state and nation amid a disturbing crisis of trust throughout the world and the threat of a lost identity lingering over many nations. Given all this, if we manage to figure out an optimal development model that combines security, prosperity, and identity preservation, based on a balance between networks and hierarchies and using the format of public-private partnership as a tool for interaction, the consequences will benefit not just us but all humankind.

Urgent change is our last chance

This year, Armenia has celebrated the 30th anniversary of its independence. The sovereign Armenian state has existed for about a third of a century, and this is an important milestone that warrants an earnest discussion about what we have today, what we have managed to build, and how the current state of affairs shapes our historical destiny. The loss of a significant territorial share of Artsakh, for whose independence so much blood was shed in the late 20th century, became for me personally and for many people who take the fate of Armenia and Armenians to heart, that red line, crossing which we simply must begin to act decisively so that the frightening prospect of finally losing Artsakh, and with it Armenia, does not become a reality. The existential threat we have experienced once again forces us to rethink the current model of existence and dictates the need to choose a development trajectory and model that would ensure security, prosperity, and preservation of national identity for the citizens of Armenia and Armenians around the world, would help them reclaim a sense of dignity and pride in their country and nation.

The millennia-long history of the Armenians features periods when we were deprived of our own statehood for a long time, a position that is extremely vulnerable amid ever-accelerating civilizational development, which does not leave us a chance to maintain a significant place in the global context, and, therefore, the Armenian people, despite their small number, always plucked up the grit to fight for the restoration of their own statehood within the boundaries of their historical territories. In the late 20th century, the common dream of Armenians finally came true: in 1991, an independent Armenia came into being on a small portion of what historically used to be Armenia. The conundrum, however, is that an independent Armenian state appeared on the world map not as a result of deliberate and purposeful joint actions of the elite and numerous attempts of the people to defend their right to sovereignty through diplomatic and military means, but in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union. The situation was different, though, when it comes to the independence of Artsakh: all social elements united and armed themselves to defend it, and paid a high price for it.

At the watershed juncture when Armenia finally gained sovereignty, the domestic and diasporan elites did not come together to jointly choose the development trajectory for both the country and the nation as a whole and did not work out a common agenda that would define a set of necessary reforms.

The formative years of the fledgling Republic of Armenia proved tough: the country had not yet recovered from the consequences of the catastrophic earthquake of 1988, followed by a territorial blockade and a war in Artsakh. In this setting, Armenia's political elite was preoccupied with the problems of survival, and issues of a long-term development strategy were hardly of greatest concern for it. Unfortunately, at the watershed juncture when Armenia finally gained sovereignty, the domestic and diasporan elites did not come together to jointly choose the development trajectory for both the country and the nation as a whole and did not work out a common agenda that would define a portfolio of necessary reforms. We proved to be ill-equipped for the independence, which we had craved for so long. We failed to use the right to choose our path, and as a result—and this was not the only reason—as automatically, we adopted an extractive, paternalistic, state-centric model of existence and a single-vector path of development.

Of course, Armenians all over the world were proud of the emergence of their own state. There are many wonderful examples when the Diaspora not only helped the warring Armenia economically (sometimes the Armenians of the Diaspora volunteered in the republican army and showed true heroism) but also invested money in the future of the country, building infrastructure facilities and creating modern educational institutions. Unfortunately, this assistance lacked systematicity. The political and military elite of Armenia considered that victory in the war was possible mainly through its own efforts and using internal resources, and that ostensibly gave them the right and legitimacy to monopolize the rule over the country. For this reason, they did nothing for the diasporan elite to have a say on fundamental issues of modernizing state and economic institutions, and the diasporan elite mostly assumed the role of a bystander. To make things worse, the country's leaders of the early 1990s milked the new opportunities ushered in by unbridled capitalism for personal financial gain, without ever laying the foundations for Armenia's future prosperity.

Despite the obvious positive effect that the creation of their own national state and the victory in the war for the independence of Artsakh had, it would be a stretch to claim that the Armenians set up the basis for national unification. Representatives of the creative intelligentsia, scientists, talented executives, military men, and engineers did not relocate to the young independent Armenia, as was the case in the 1920s and 1930s. On the contrary, the newest, post-Soviet diaspora included those who left and continue to flee their homeland after it gained independence. The brain drain, which was picking up the speed especially in the first decade after the collapse of the USSR, took a disastrous toll on the young sovereign state. Society was practically stripped of its moral leaders. Unbridled capitalism prompted a shift in moral priorities: brute force trumped intellectual and cultural prowess, while dexterity and getting rich without any qualms outweighed respect for work and professional reputation, the once traditional value the Armenians used to cherish.

After a short while, the emotional upsurge aroused by the gained sovereignty and victory in the war gave way to disappointment. As a legacy from the collapsed empire, we inherited an extensive hard and soft infrastructure: industrial facilities and transport routes connecting them, research institutes, academies of sciences, cultural institutions, and healthcare organizations. Though it is hard to believe in this day and age, in the late 1980s, the Armenian SSR was the hub of innovative technologies of a powerful state and was on a par with the most advanced states of its time, such as South Korea, Singapore, and Israel. However, the hard infrastructure, a leftover of the USSR, turned out to be largely obsolete and even redundant, and it eventually ran out of funding. Many elements of the old soft infrastructure also became a luxury a small country with limited resources could not afford. We missed the fact that the enormous Soviet legacy is not only a guarantee of future prosperity but also a burden of responsibility, and, consequently, we failed to adapt it properly to the needs and capabilities of the new state and society.

Seventy percent of Armenian residents are satisfied with the current state of affairs.

I hate to say that over the past 30 years, we have been unable to create a model of existence that would lead Armenians to prosperity, and blown the opportunity to carry out incremental, evolutionary changes. The dream of Ankakh Hayastan (Independent Armenia), our own state on biblical land, a safe and prosperous homeland for all Armenians, contrasts too sharply with the real present-day Armenia. On the one hand, this contrast has become a source of constant disappointment, which makes

Armenians roam the world in search of a better life, undermining their homeland, while the Diaspora is limited to the role of a benefactor who every once in a while helps Armenia. On the other hand, it gave rise to apathy and indifference in many. Recent opinion polls have shown that 70% of respondents are satisfied with the current state of affairs. There is an unbridgeable gap between the mundanity of survival and the dreams of unattainable prosperity, which deprives people of the will to act and ravages the belief that they are able to contribute to improvements on their own.

As we all remember, the April 2016 four-day war has appreciably exacerbated the internal and external political situation in the Republic of Armenia. However, the changes that began as a response to this, which fueled optimism in many people both in the country and in the Diaspora, unfortunately, did not result in profound reforms aimed at fundamentally changing the current system.

Undoubtedly, the events of the spring 2018 was the result of public discontent caused by a dead-end model of existence, corrupt officials evading prosecution, rampant crime, machismo, rudeness in the public sphere, etc. The most significant consequence of those events is allegedly the fact the protest movement has brought together people with different views on the country's developmental path. In itself, such a unity prompting representatives of different social strata to actively participate in the renewal of the state is an invaluable foundation on which we could jointly build our future.

The new government, however, made the same fatal mistake as it considered itself to be entitled to monopolize power in the country.

The resignation of the country's former leadership does not mean an automatic change in the development model. The new leaders found it easy to criticize their predecessors, but much of what they declared was incredibly difficult to implement. Even the merciless fight against corruption announced by the new government has been carried out inconsistently and, therefore, has almost drawn a blank. As I have already pointed out, the feeling of unity greatly facilitated the implementation of systemic reforms, which could be much more successful and effective if it were possible to consolidate the national elite and jointly work out a vision for our future. Regrettably, we did not take advantage of the opened window of opportunity; the elites of Armenia and the Diaspora did not unite to jointly build the country and revive the nation. Worse, society has split into upholders of the new government and those who support the previous leaders. The new government made the same fatal mistake as their predecessors in the early 1990s, considering itself to be entitled to monopolize power in the country. As a result, the task force who was to carry out the much-needed reforms was selected from those loyal to the new government. The brightest minds, top-tier professionals, and talented executives from both Armenia and abroad were left on the sidelines.

As I have already mentioned, after gaining independence in 1991, the Republic of Armenia, as if by default, adopted an extractive political and economic model from the Soviet Union. It means that all our tangible and intangible assets are not used for creative activities, but mainly in an extractive way, that is, to derive rent. This model allowed the country to repel the acts of Azerbaijani aggression along our border, as well as in Artsakh, but failed to ensure a level of defense capability that would have thwarted even the thought of encroaching on our borders. Over the course of three decades, the country has failed to create an environment conducive to domestic and foreign investment, providing a level of innovative defense capability that any attempts to use military force against Armenia and Artsakh would be pointless. For Azerbaijan, the lessons learned from the defeat in the war for the independence of

Artsakh bore fruit: all these years it was beefing up its potential to attack us, and our greatest mistake was to turn a blind eye to it, deluded into our own invincibility.

It is difficult to carry out systemic reforms in a state of stability and prosperity, albeit imaginary, especially if the society itself is not prepared for changes. The overwhelming majority of Armenian citizens have never traveled abroad and do not have the faintest notion of how the world is changing, how people live in other countries, and what should be chosen as priorities and standards when building their own future. The full-scale crisis that broke out last year—the pandemic and its consequences, the war in Artsakh, the split in society, the political drama—furnishes the last opportunity for us to make changes, which cannot be postponed any further. If even this situation does not motivate us to unite and act, if we again miss the chance to jointly comprehend our plight and agree on our course of action, if we continue to stagnate and are change-averse, Armenia will lose its sovereignty, at least de facto if not de jure, and the Armenians, although they can avoid total assimilation, will cease to exist as a national-civil unit and will become representatives of the ancient nation scattered around the world.

Previous social contract

Any reforms and transformations are fully legitimized only when they are rooted in a social contract. By “social contract,” I mean a kind of exchange of expectations between the authorities and society, Armenia and the Diaspora, Armenia and Artsakh. In other words, to avoid social calamities and carry out changes conducive to development, the accepted format of relationships and the distribution of roles have to suit all parties, and they, in turn, need to fulfill their obligations.

The paternalism of the authorities has taught citizens to be dependent, to dodge personal responsibility, and to believe in an omnipotent central power capable of providing access to resources.

Those who led the Armenians to victory in the war for the independence of Artsakh in the early 1990s vowed to ensure security, stability, and social welfare to be able to monopolize power and take control of Armenia’s material assets and cash flows. In the structure built over a quarter of a century, the presence of a “kind master” was convenient for both the authorities and the majority of society: the paternalism of the authorities taught citizens to be dependent, to dodge personal responsibility, and to believe in an omnipotent central power capable of providing access to resources.

The security guarantee also underlay the social contract between Armenia and Artsakh. According to the tacit agreement, Artsakh was considered an integral part of the Armenian world, Armenia ensured its security in exchange for the Armenians to continue living and preserve their centuries-old heritage and unique culture in the land of Artsakh. And although Armenia did not officially recognize its independent status, it assumed the responsibility to solve all crucial issues, thus eliminating the Artsakh people themselves from participating in the negotiations, building their own security system, and making other equally important and fateful decisions.

The Diaspora’s financial assistance in most cases did not take the form of investments in development projects, instead encouraging a general dependent attitude.

As for the Diaspora, in exchange for charitable assistance and non-interference in the internal affairs of Armenia, it got a sense of “belonging to the nation,” cordiality, and hospitality of fellow countrymen in their historical land. As a result, the financial assistance of the Diaspora in most cases did not take the form of consistent material and spiritual investments in development projects and did not create added value, remaining a source of easy money and only encouraging the consumer attitude of Armenian citizens toward it, a general dependent attitude. The Diaspora’s involvement in the affairs of Armenia has always been irregular and episodic and typically only rises whenever Armenia and Artsakh are hit by tragic events. And one cannot only blame the Diaspora because any rapprochement requires mutual efforts.

A conspicuous example that best epitomizes the non-inclusivity of Armenian political institutions is the mandatory Armenian citizenship and / or many years of experience in public service, as well as command of the Armenian language for candidates seeking to assume any responsible office. We must realize that three-quarters of the nation is the Diaspora, and when we introduce such restrictions even at the middle executive level, we shun the opportunity to attract the brightest of the brightest to work for the good of our country. Of course, all the necessary mechanisms for ensuring national security and protecting national interests should be created if high-profile government posts are held by individuals who are non-citizens of Armenia, as well as the procedures for teaching them the Armenian language and getting them to know the culture, history, and traditions of our country. We see such practices used by countries of varying geopolitical clout: Israel, the Baltic states, the UK, and others.

A tacit agreement between the government and society, Armenia and the Diaspora, Armenia and Artsakh seemed to be working without a hitch, barring isolated outbursts of discontent. It would seem that the middle-of-the-road position of neither peace nor war, in which the country lived, seemed to satisfy everyone, and until April 2016, the state government system seemed, for all its opacity and corruption, to be reliable and stable. The four-day war, though, clearly demonstrated the system’s backwardness and fragility and exposed a host of unsolved problems in the economy, in public life, and in the military. Both the elite and the citizens became convinced that the existing model was not capable of ensuring the most vital thing for the majority of Armenians—the security of Artsakh—and if so, all the sacrifices made by the nation over a quarter of a century might turn out to be pointless. The situation clearly showed that Armenia had no tangible margin of time to keep going with the flow. Paradoxically, at that moment, even opposing political forces realized that the country’s development model needed drastic changes.

External circumstances (the four-day war and the armed protest of the Sasna Tsrer [Daredevils of Sassoun] group) propelled changes in domestic policy. In an attempt to maintain a balance between different political forces and breeze through the difficult stage of the power shake-up, President Serzh Sargsyan reshuffled the ruling circles: the executive power team has been renewed and become more dynamic. The economy began to grow, reforms were launched in agriculture and in relations with the regions, and the government was shifting toward more advanced administrative practices and communications with citizens. An important achievement indicative of the country’s course toward integration into global economic processes was the 2017 signing of the EU-Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA); at the same time, the economic interaction with the Eurasian Union and, especially, with Russia was blossoming, too. However, all the changes were carried out within the existing system, modifying, but not transforming it on a fundamentally different basis.

It is important to summarize the past, without just forgiving everyone and forgetting everything, but to stop finger-pointing and instead be reasonable analyzing the mistakes and learning from them for the sake of the future.

Of course, criticizing the authorities is the simplest of things. An objective assessment of its decisions and actions over the past decade will only be available years later since the positive and negative consequences of the actions of any government never show up immediately. At the moment, it is important to summarize the past, without just forgiving everyone and forgetting everything, but to stop finger-pointing and instead be reasonable analyzing the most obvious mistakes made by everyone who has ever been in power in the Third Republic and learning from them for the sake of the future.

It can only be argued that the country's integration into the global space, the transition to greater openness and transparency of state structures were steps made in the right direction. Nevertheless, I believe that the actions taken were half-baked, leading to superficial tweaks, rather than to a deep transformation of the model of existence. Progress lacked systematicity, only concerned narrow areas, and, essentially, did not affect the moral aspects of the life of the society, which did not notice appreciable changes for the better. Even more upsetting was the fact that the government won the parliamentary election, but retained the previous semi-authoritarian regime where the shots are called by one person only.

The government retained the previous semi-authoritarian regime where the shots are called by one person only.

Hoping to maintain their positions, the elite has a limited choice of scenarios that, at least outwardly, look *legal*. The head of the country can either implement a constitutional or structural reform that leaves him at the helm legally or ensure the continuity of power by transferring it to a successor (or a group of successors), or find a way to control power mechanisms informally, without an official state tenure. Like any leader of a semi-authoritarian regime, President Sargsyan, after being reelected for a second term, as a seasoned statesman, could not help but mull over these options for retaining power, but he was in no rush to make the final choice, leaving the largest room for maneuver. A constitutional reform was carried out in the country, and the transition to a parliamentary republic was completed. The president viewed a more conservative candidate and a more progressive one as would-be successors. Nevertheless, at the last moment, he decided to nominate himself as prime minister—in other words, he opted for the first scenario, which is quite typical for semi-authoritarian and authoritarian regimes, with no transparent and effective feedback mechanisms between the government and society, where the leader's closest circle, normally including his immediate family, persists in making him think that no one but he can be the sole guarantor of stability. It should be noted that the ex-president, according to him, was motivated by the desire to resolve the Artsakh issue before handing over power to a successor.

Formally, the appointment of the former president as prime minister was perfectly legal, but this act, orchestrated by the ruling party, ran contrary to an earlier promise. Armenian citizens viewed this step as a manifestation of disrespect and vehemently protested against the authorities' refusal to revise the terms of the breached social contract and their attempts to roll the relationship back to where it was. In

2018, people took to the streets and participated in the protests, not so much for political reasons as out of moral considerations and personal convictions.

The events in Armenia caused a stir in the Diaspora, especially those who had already left independent Armenia. Most of the “new” Diaspora endorsed the protesters, which proves that when the chips are on the line, we can mobilize. Unfortunately, most of the institutions of the traditional Diaspora—especially party-related and charitable ones—proved their conservatism and archaic nature and stayed away from the events of the spring of 2018, showing once again that they too need profound transformations.

If you continue to stick to the usual model of existence, a dragon slayer will inevitably devolve into a new dragon over time.

Revolutions do not necessarily achieve the goals set by the revolutionaries. Both the Great French Revolution and the bourgeois revolution in Russia devolved into terror, warfare, and millions of victims, although they ultimately led to a radical change in the state and social system. The only way to avoid negative scenarios is to quickly create inclusive political, economic, social, and cultural institutions, a system of checks and balances, an effective parliament representing the interests of all social strata, to hire competent professionals for government work, and to develop platforms for public-private partnerships in all areas where it can be done. But if we stick to the usual model of existence, then, as history has taught us multiple times, a dragon slayer will inevitably turn into a new dragon, acting as a totalitarian “father of the nation” or a populist, a “kind master.”

New social contract between the government and the society

The new leaders who came to power on the heels of the events of the spring 2018 proposed a new social contract: the government pledged to fight corruption and show more respect for citizens. Indeed, the atmosphere in society began to improve. Citizens felt more freedom and more confidence, having gotten rid of the way of life imposed on them by the previous government.

However, as I have already mentioned, the new ruling elite considered it their right to monopolize the country, without involving either society or the Diaspora to participate in the reform process. The government was formed not based on meritocracy, involving the best executives and the most qualified and experienced professionals, but based on the loyalty to the new leaders and their ideas. The old power mechanism was neither destroyed nor transformed, and without the grease of corruption, which previously ensured its fairly well-oiled operation, it began to malfunction, slowing down all processes. The country remained closed just as before. Ensuring security and stability, the key points of the previous social contract, was out of the question, too.

We need a new agreement between the government and the society, based on common ideas about the future of the nation, which will allow more actors to affect political processes.

Apparently, we need a new agreement between the government and the society, based on common ideas about the future of the nation, which will allow more actors to directly or indirectly affect political processes, thereby boosting the inclusiveness of the political and economic institutions of the state. It is

inclusive institutions that incentivize development, reward talent and creative ideas, and, therefore, make sustainable and lasting prosperity more likely for a nation.

In my opinion, a new social contract should be based on sufficient consensus on the following issues:

- **Security.** After the collapse of the USSR, many Soviet Armenian officers moved to Armenia and Artsakh and contributed to our victory. Unfortunately, we have yet to set up a school for training new generations of military personnel. The reality is that serving in the army was no longer synonymous with honor for young men, much less for girls. Despite the fact that the creation of a professional army is a constant talking point, there is a lack of understanding in society that the willingness to serve our homeland is the staple of the patriotic education of young people. It is with deep regret that I conclude that the unity of the army with the people was never the case.

To ensure our defense capability, a professional army is not enough—we need the support of citizens, the willingness of young people to repay their debt to their homeland, and we need volunteers and allies.

Armenia is a small, sparsely populated country with limited resources, surrounded by unfriendly neighbors. With this in mind, it is necessary to rebuild our entire way of life: the civilian population must be perfectly prepared for life where military conflict is always a possibility, like in Israel. To do this, it is necessary to establish a constant dialogue between society and the state about the challenges facing the country and to understand that a professional army is not enough to ensure our defense capability—we need the support of citizens, the willingness of young people to repay their debt to their homeland, and we need volunteers and allies—in other words, a well-coordinated mechanism.

It is important, however, to understand that security is not limited to high defensive capabilities, which will not allow anyone to even think about military action against a sovereign country and its citizens. We are talking about a *safe environment*, a broader and more comprehensive concept. Security suggests that citizens are not worried about their children walking the streets and the lives of our sons and daughters at the borders—they are not afraid of unjust treatment and abuse by authorities in all areas of life. *The health of the nation* is also a national security issue. It is necessary not only to effectively cure the sick, but also to minimize and possibly prevent morbidity by conducting regular free prophylactic medical checkups of the population. I would like to note that in addition to the existing set of platforms for the implementation of projects, which will be discussed below, my partners and I have created another one: healthcare. I hope that the implementation of various initiatives on this platform, such as the creation of a center for the prevention and treatment of diabetes mellitus or an anti-aging wellness center in Dilijan, and many others will provide residents with access to quality healthcare services and will contribute to the transformation of Armenia into one of the key global centers of medical tourism.

The focus is on *strict adherence to quality standards* for imported and local foodstuffs and medicines, *the availability of clean drinking water, and a high level of sanitation. The state of the housing stock, the preservation of the biosphere, the unacceptability of barbaric methods of exploiting natural resources, a healthy urban environment, safe transport and construction infrastructure, the absence of hazardous production facilities*—all these are necessary conditions for

ensuring the health of the nation along with the physical safety of citizens. On the Climate Uturn platform, a system of food standards is being developed as part of the food safety program. At the same time, a program is being designed for the identification, seizure, and disposal of counterfeit and expired medications sold in pharmacies and posing a truly serious threat to human health.

More than 30% of the population of Armenia is thinking about leaving the country today, and two-thirds of them have already decided to emigrate.

Security is directly linked to prosperity: the stronger the economy, the more opportunities a country has to attract significant investments not only to protect its borders but also to ensure security in a broad sense, and a safe and development-oriented environment, in turn, contributes to the growth of prosperity.

Another important aspect of security is the *decline in population due to migration*. The current state of affairs jeopardizes the security of the country and the nation as a whole, pushing people into emigration, forcing them to seek a safer haven. Opinion polls show that today, over 30% of Armenia's population are considering leaving the country, that is, almost a third of its residents, and two-thirds of them have already decided to emigrate.

Migration from rural areas to large cities, mainly to the capital, also poses a security threat, imbalancing the development. A situation where a third of the country's population lives in the capital and the number of residents in the second-largest city is ten times less illustrates the inequities. Moreover, another third of the population lives in rural areas. Equal development of the regions is necessary, which will gradually smooth out the differences. For this purpose, my partners and I have identified several support zones in which our anchor projects are concentrated:

1. Tatev – Goris
3. Dilijan – Sevan
4. Gyumri – Ani
5. Yerevan – Echmiadzin

The choice was based on an in-depth analysis of those hidden assets that we consider necessary to develop. Each priority region boasts its own specifics: for Tatev – Goris, it is cultural heritage and tourism; for Dilijan – Sevan—education, healthcare, and international relations; for Yerevan – Echmiadzin—culture, urbanism, tourism, high tech, and the banking sector; for Gyumri – Ani—tourism, culture, high tech, crafts, etc.

Immigration and demographic aspects of security are equally important. Another indicator of the instability of our situation besides population decline is the population's median age. According to the CIA World Factbook, the population of Armenia is 3,011,609 people. The median age in Armenia is 36.6 years, while in Azerbaijan and Turkey, the figures are lower (32.6–32.2 years, respectively)¹. A dwindling and aging population limits the country's development opportunities, as the labor market hits a demographic limit. At the same time, government spending on welfare and pension payments is growing. And this makes the country less attractive for international development institutions, institutional investors, and developed donor states.

It is important to ensure the inflow of those categories of migrants into the country that boost the concentration of capital and talent where their flows are directed.

As for the immigration aspect, the motives that drive voluntary migrants, which are the majority of the global flow, can be different, including the desire to provide for themselves and their families a higher standard of living and stable living conditions, the penchant for creativity, the desire of affluent individuals to optimize taxation or find a country with a more attractive investment climate. It is important to ensure the influx of migrants who are qualified professionals. An interesting example is Switzerland, which, for decades, was a global financial hub, but in recent years, it has attracted the best specialists in high tech from different countries around the world, and the results have skyrocketed. We often learn from the news about a famous businessperson or cultural celebrity, who decided to relocate. Quite often, elderly people leave their homeland, who, for whatever reason, prefer to spend the rest of their lives in another country. Numerically, this category is insignificant, but such dynamics lead to the concentration of capital to these destinations, and this has an undoubtedly positive effect on the economy of the respective country or metropolitan area. Below, I will get back to immigration.

- **Identity.** In developing an awareness of our identity we must overcome the victim nation complex and change our self-perception, regaining a sense of dignity and calm pride. No one can erase the glorious chapters of the Armenian past, but one cannot but admit that our present is not exactly something to be proud of. We soon need to create new symbols of identity that would encourage Armenians living in Armenia and in the diasporan communities around the world to come closer and make them want to associate with a nation that has spurned victimhood and has instead chosen an active role in today's world.

It is necessary to create new symbols of identity that would make Armenians want to associate with the nation.

Along with love for their native land and the fear of losing it, healthy ambition, pride in their achievements, in the success of their children, in their city, country, and nation—that is, in everything that can spark respect for those around them—should become a powerful motivator for Armenians. Such pride has nothing to do with vanity, elevating oneself at the expense of humiliating others.

Another important aspect is that, for the first time in our history, we began to live in a monoethnic country, where the main ethnic group comprises about 98% of the population. Armenians have always been part of large empires, and the monoethnicity of today's Armenia is a serious challenge for the people who have lived for centuries at the intersection of civilizations and cultures. We have lost the habit of living side by side with "others," have become arrogant, and, paradoxically, are prone to discriminating against minorities. Are we ready to accept people of a different ethnicity, religious creed, sexual orientation, etc. in our homeland? How can we preserve the traditional pillars of our identity, such as the Christian faith and the church, family and the Armenian language, while preventing them from conservation and stagnation? How do we find a fine line between permissiveness and intolerance, without slipping into the extremes? These issues are vital for open

discussion in a monoethnic closed society, which is oversensitive to anything that regards national identity.

Many of our problems are rooted in our minds. However, changing consciousness is a daunting task. It takes time, incredible effort, will, and determination. Besides, one needs patience for people to believe that change for the better is a possibility. Sometimes politics contributes to this process, other times politics and the introduction of regulatory measures are not enough, and here is where consistency in the implementation of adopted laws and regulations comes into play, and most importantly, a change in the understanding of what is acceptable in our society and what is not.

- **Prosperity.** There are two ways social advances can be made: either aggression and conflict caused by the struggle for limited resources and benefits or empathy and interaction toward the joint enhancement of these benefits. The choice of the path is obvious to me, and, therefore, partnership is at the heart of all my projects. In my opinion, for a nation to thrive, wherever its representatives live, several elements must unite: an increased income, a harmonious living environment, an advanced cultural state, and a reinforced identity. None of these should prevail, artificially bloated at the expense of others: prosperity is impossible without the harmonious balance of these elements. A shift from preservation mode to prosperity mode is inconceivable without the revival of the nation based on sufficient consensus regarding the ways of its development.
- **Collective responsibility of the most active public circles for the future of Armenia and the Armenian people and participation in governing the country.** One should not expect that the leader of the country and their team will fix the entire minefield of problems overnight. This cannot be done by a small group of people alone, even if it consists of seasoned professionals. We must not absolve ourselves of responsibility for the country and the nation—this is our common task, and I would like to emphasize this. It is very much possible to create conditions where all caring people—whether they are Armenians or friends of Armenia, regardless of where they live—could be engaged in our reforms. This requires significant professional and financial resources, the creation of mechanisms that ensure unprecedented transparency, and an honest systemic dialogue between the government and society.

Even the most experienced professionals cannot fix the entire minefield of problems alone.

As I have already mentioned, we missed the moment when, in the wake of the general emotional upsurge, it was possible to change the paradigm of Armenia's development. Now it is necessary that the fear for its fate and the fate of the Armenian people be channeled into fruitful networking to fulfill a shared dream.

- **Balance between hierarchies and networks.** In the past 200 years, amid the struggle for access to resources, the structure of society has been dominated by institutions built around the principle of hierarchy. However, in the 21st century, when an individual and their talent become the main resource, the ratio of hierarchies and networks has started to change. Technological platforms that have led to the creation of a multitude of social media are already beginning to bring together humanity. Digital communication is increasingly used not only for information exchange but also for the joint involvement of many people in solving problems, which is difficult for traditional

institutions, from funding cultural and environmental projects to jointly discussing key political documents.

I hope that Armenia will discover a unique formula for interaction between the state, institutions, and the global Diaspora network.

While trust in traditional institutions (government, businesses, NGOs, and the media) has hit a historical low, trust in people we know personally, at least as members of our networks, is on the rise and will continue to be that way. This, of course, does not mean to say that networks will completely replace hierarchies. Rather, one can expect parallel processes: the reform of hierarchical structures and the simultaneous formation of various forms of network interaction. I am convinced that the right balance of hierarchies and networks, as well as public-private partnership, which enables you to properly use the institutional power of the state along with the flexibility and resources of communities, will lead us to effective solutions to both local and global challenges. Trust should be the basis for effective network relationships between people, as well as between state institutions and society. I hope that Armenia will be able to set a unique example for the whole world, one of a country that has weathered its problems thanks to the discovered formula of interaction between the state, institutions, and the global Diaspora network.

Below is a number of principles that, in my opinion, should underlie the building of a new society. International practice shows that following these principles empowers you to successfully manage groups of people united by a shared goal, be it a commercial company, a team implementing a large-scale development project, or even a state:

- Ensuring *transparency, meritocratic principles, professionalism, competence, and uniform rules for all*, both in relations between public structures and institutions and within them, and ultimately achieving the maximum expansion of the circle of social trust. Of course, there are no rules without exceptions, but there cannot be many of those, and their presence (or absence) must be clearly and reasonably justified.
- *Consistency*. This principle was perfectly phrased by the architect of Singapore's economic miracle, Lee Kuan Yew, whose political activity is an example of successful building the relations between the government and society. "Three things are the worst," he wrote. "The first is hesitations where you seek to please each and everyone. The second is unfinished projects. Even if you were wrong, finish what you have started. The third is non-observance of the rulebook. Once the rules are announced, they may not be applied selectively or change along the way."
- *An institutional framework* for decision-making and interaction. We are talking about the effectively working civil society institutions that control the actions of the government and the country's leader, preventing them from slipping into a "manual control mode" of the government.
- *Launch of mechanisms for regular development assessments*. As you know, what cannot be measured, cannot be managed effectively. Without the cohesive work of independent think tanks, which should constantly monitor social dynamics, analyze data, evaluate how decisions are implemented, and offer high-quality expert assessments, a systemic dialogue between the

government and society is unfeasible. (So far, initiatives in this area come from the private sector: to date, the Armenia-2041 Foundation has conducted five public opinion polls in order to identify the reaction of Armenians to the current situation, actions, and decisions of the authorities, as well as to identify the most pressing problems. One of the polls found that among the most concerning issues for residents of Yerevan, Gyumri, and Dilijan, second only to security, is the soaring number of stray dogs in said cities. To solve this problem, we started developing a special program.)

- Introduction of a *system of checks and balances* to fledgling institutions. It is necessary to work out the rules of management and decision-making in advance, with an emphasis on ensuring that the created structures do not degenerate, do not devolve over time into a traditional hierarchy, into uncontrolled bureaucratic juggernauts.
- *Holistic approach* to development: importantly, all the initiatives being implemented should be interconnected and should gradually add up to a *streamlined system of change*.
- *Scalability* and vision of the grand scheme of things: we need to focus on *strategic anchor projects* that set off a range of new development initiatives that collectively change reality.
- Interest in what is happening outside the country, study and consistent implementation of *best global practices*.
- Promoting *lifelong learning opportunities for all*, as stated in one of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- Admitting that our today's problems can only be solved *collectively* and developing skills for solving complex problems *in a team*.
- *Respect for people* and rejection of archaic models of governance and interaction with citizens in favor of new relations, akin to a *partnership*.
- *Establishing feedback mechanisms* designed both to ensure accountability and efficiency of state structures and to involve as many citizens as possible in the processes of state and nation-building.
- *Engagement*. Let me quote Lee Kuan Yew again: "It is impossible to achieve something if you do not love the subject of your pursuit and are not ready to sacrifice everything else for the sake of success." In other words, the dream of a strong and prosperous Armenia will come true only if caring people unite around it, the ones who love their country and their people and put their well-being above all else.

We need to stop separating in our minds the citizens of Armenia and the Armenians of the Diaspora.

New social contract between Armenia and the Diaspora

Armenia will be able to adequately fulfill the historical role of the centering and integrative element that will unite the Armenian world only if it offers the Diaspora a multilateral creative partnership, enabling a

fruitful synthesis of the fragmented nation. Establishing such a partnership, in my opinion, is possible under the following conditions:

- *A fundamentally different format of relationships.* First of all, we need to stop separating in our minds the citizens of Armenia and the Armenians of the Diaspora. The Diaspora, which finds itself in the deepest slump, needs a prosperous Armenia no less than Armenia needs a strong Diaspora. We must jointly find the optimal balance for the formula “a network nation — a strong country” to work. In other words, it is necessary to restructure the relationship between the Armenian communities of different countries and between the Armenian Diaspora as a whole and modern Armenia. And this suggests an intense dialogue and a search for compromises. The task of our elite is to establish meaningful and productive interaction between the fragments of a disparate nation, while overcoming the characteristic individualism of Armenians. This is the key to the future success of the nation as a whole. Relations between the Diaspora and Armenia should become bilateral. The Diaspora will be fully supporting Armenia only if Armenia is supporting the Diaspora.

At the moment, the largest entrepreneurs of Armenian origin, whose combined fortune is several times Armenia’s GDP, donate funds to charity, but do not invest them in the country’s future. We must face the truth: \$200–300 million of direct foreign investment over the past two years, the lion share of which is money coming from the Armenian Diaspora, look pathetic against the background of an annual amount of \$2.3 billion of remittances that migrants make for the livelihood of their families in Armenia. This measly figure shows that over 30 years of independence, Armenia has not become the focus of the Diaspora’s vital interests. Fortunately, things are changing: businessmen from the Diaspora are launching investment programs in Armenia, and I trust that the day when \$2 billion in aid is complemented with \$20 billion in investments is not far off.

The joint projects implemented today in Armenia by the citizens of the country and the diasporan Armenians are the most successful, but they are still a rare exception. There is a need for a transition from one-off charity to systemic investments that speed up the country’s development based on social entrepreneurship. However, in order to boost the country’s appeal to institutional investors, the government needs to have a clear vision of the future.

- *At least 50,000 families (150,000+ people) moving to Armenia.* Armenia should become a magnet for the brightest minds who, by joining forces and sharing experiences, will be able to come up with fresh ideas. First and foremost, these should be members of our Diaspora, but one can expect that these talented people, using their extensive contacts in different countries of the world, will be attracting others.

This is by no means a fantasy: the past hundred years have seen several waves of resettlement to Armenia, and with each of them, the Armenian society has changed noticeably. In the 1920s and 1930s, more than 16,000 Armenians arrived in the Armenian SSR, mainly from Europe and Russia. Braving ideological differences, part of the world Armenian elite also decided to move to Soviet Armenia at the invitation of the Soviet government and the Armenian Apostolic Church. In the 1940s, as a result of Stalin’s forced policy of repatriation, a further 150,000 Armenians from Greece, Syria, Egypt, Iran, France, and the United States relocated to the ASSR. The late 1980s and early 1990s saw a wave of resettlers come from Azerbaijan. In the 2000s, about 30,000 Syrian Armenians

arrived in independent Armenia, and our country has welcomed about the same number of refugees from Artsakh since late last year.

For Armenia, which is going through a demographic crisis, the first step in achieving high population growth rates should be the development of a modern immigration policy.

Apparently, the mass resettlement does not go smoothly: despite the fact that Armenians moved to Armenia, they found themselves in a different social and cultural context, which inevitably caused trouble between them and the local residents. Not without rejection on both sides. Some repatriates, unable to adapt and disappointed, left back; for some, Armenia became a transit point on the way to other countries. For example, we did not take advantage of the wave of resettlement in the late 1980s and early 1990s and did not create conditions for the most educated and hardworking migrants to live and work in Armenia, as it was in the first half of the 20th century, when the intellectual elite of Soviet Armenia was formed mainly of repatriates. Those were examples of mutual enrichment: the repatriates diversified social and cultural life of Armenia, introducing knowledge of foreign languages, jazz, cozy sidewalk cafés, the national cuisine of the countries they came from, and much more.

Evidently, for Armenia, which is going through a severe demographic crisis, the first step in achieving high rates of population growth should be the development of a modern immigration policy. And it needs to be developed based on the experience of previous waves of repatriation. We must scrutinize each of them, fix our mistakes, analyze all the pros and cons to avoid repeating the past, which resulted in massive outflows of disillusioned repatriates. In addition, we need to study the experience of repatriation that is available from other countries, and not only from Israel. Such work, of course, will entail serious effort.

What mechanisms need to be created to make it easier for people to immigrate and adapt? Should it be simplified processes for obtaining a residence permit and citizenship, at least two working languages of international communication, special educational programs for children, public-private agencies in charge of these issues instead of ineffective ministries and departments? What else? That said, not only the state should be driving the transformations—society also needs to make efforts to integrate its new members. All this is important to discuss right now, if we want to tap into the unique potential the Diaspora has to offer, which is really capable of transforming our society in a fairly short time and thereby helping Armenia ensure explosive economic growth. Nevertheless, we have already begun work on a set of measures to facilitate the relocation, integration, and adaptation of 50,000 Armenian families from other countries coming to Armenia.

For 20 years now, my partners and I have been implementing initiatives aimed at the development of Armenia and the Armenian world. We have invested more than \$700 million in these projects, and a significant share of this investment—\$350 million— has come from my family funds. However, until recently, I was a citizen of the Russian Federation, and this, oddly enough, helped me handle the multiple pitfalls of working in Armenia. Back in the early 2000s, my partners and I attempted to initiate a public discussion of the future of Armenia and the Armenian people within the framework of the Armenia-2020 project. Calling on the Armenians of the Diaspora to move to Armenia in order

to build a common Armenian state together with its local residents and convinced that we ourselves must create the future of our dreams, I was granted the citizenship of the Republic of Armenia.

- *The opportunity to participate in the life of the country and in making decisions that are vital for Armenia and the Armenian people.* In today's world, the Republic of Armenia is a rare example of a monoethnic country with a global multicultural Diaspora in about 100 countries. Amid a surge in migration flows, relations between the sovereign state and the Diaspora are becoming increasingly pressing, and the choice of optimal models of interaction between the sovereign center and the Diaspora communities can be immensely useful not only for themselves but also for their countries of residence. Representatives of various Armenian communities around the world, willing to be more actively involved in the affairs of Armenia, need to determine an acceptable format for their participation in the life of the country and its development:
 - move to Armenia without becoming its tax resident, continue to do business outside its borders and pay a fixed part of their income (as is customary, e.g., in Switzerland), or support the country's economy as a consumer of its products and services;
 - set up their own business in Armenia and become its tax resident;
 - go on to reside where they are, but work remotely in Armenia, making an intellectual and financial contribution to its development;
 - donate 10% of their income to the Development Fund of Armenia;
 - continue to provide charitable support to Armenia occasionally, as before.

*It is necessary to create all conditions for attracting people who are Armenians
by Choice to work for the good of the country.*

The Armenian Diaspora, while remaining in fact a financial donor for many citizens of the country, is practically not integrated into the real life of modern Armenia and has no leverage to influence the current changes. In recent years, the civil society of Armenia and some circles of the Diaspora have been discussing issues of granting citizenship to members of the Diaspora and the electoral rights for expatriate Armenian citizens. It is about involving the Diaspora in the life of Armenia, on the one hand, and ensuring the principle of inclusiveness for its citizens, on the other. Our proposition is to take the problem in a broader context: is the Republic of Armenia ready to create transparent technological mechanisms that will allow citizens residing abroad and diasporan Armenians to participate in referendums that solve certain problems of the development of the country and the nation? Given a lack of trust in the authorities, it is necessary to look for new ways to ensure national consensus. Nevertheless, we should bear in mind that the right to participate in solving issues of vital importance for the country and the nation entails certain obligations.

Self-identification with the Armenian world as a conscious choice deserves a separate mention. Many of those who are Armenians by blood and citizenship do not think of it as something important. At the same time, many people who are 1/8 Armenians or even have biologically nothing to do with the Armenian ethnos are deeply worried about Armenia's fate and do their utmost for it. These people made a conscious choice to be Armenians, Armenian by Choice, and we need to create all conditions for their involvement in work toward the good of the country.

It is important to identify prominent diasporan Armenians, such as Nobel Prize winner Ardem Patapoutian, and motivate them to engage in the development of the country.

- *The opportunity to hold high public offices.* It has already been pointed out that by imposing restrictions on holding offices in Armenian state structures, we deny ourselves a golden opportunity to attract the best minds of the Diaspora to work for the good of Armenia. A case in point is Israel: throughout its history, the diaspora has been a powerful source of ideas, finances, and talented and proactive individuals who constantly helped the country prosper and contributed to its development. Fortunately, the active part of the Armenian Diaspora has not lost interest in Armenia. Right now, in my opinion, it is important to make joint efforts to design mechanisms, in particular special programs, that will help us identify 20–30 prominent diasporan Armenians (such as, for example, molecular biologist Ardem Patapoutian, who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine 2021), create conditions for their permanent or temporary work in Armenia, and motivate them to engage in the development of the country, putting their knowledge, professional and managerial experience in such key areas as education, healthcare, science and technology, etc., at the service of the state.

Vision for the future: what kind of Armenia would we like to see?

I am convinced that following the defeat in the recent war, our vision of Armenia and Armenians in the 21st century has become a pressing issue. Depending on the model chosen for the country's development, each of our problems—whether it is the settlement of the Artsakh crisis, international relations, or even relations with our own Diaspora—will have various options for a long-term solution. In my opinion, discussing our future will be groundless and futile without answering a number of questions, in the first place:

- What kind of society do we want to build: open or closed? What are the pros and cons of each model?

Today's Armenia as a capsule state is in decline. Without a generous 'sponsor,' a breakthrough is highly unlikely for us.

The model of existence prevailing in Armenia now can be defined as a “capsule,” a closed country, minimally involved in the global community and focused on its own conservation (typically, stemming from a conscious choice of political elites). Armenia is a capsule backed by Russia. However, the 2017 signing of the EU-Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) ushered in new prospects for us. The capsule (correlating with the course of isolation) certainly contributes to the preservation of national identity and monoethnic composition of the population and can be successful if one can build a reliable security system, independently attract the necessary material resources, and create a favorable environment for ensuring economic and social prosperity.

Today's Armenia as a capsule state is in decline. Without a rich and generous 'sponsor,' overcoming it is highly unlikely for us, much less a breakthrough. It begs two questions. First, can we build relations with our current 'sponsor' (Russia) so that we could turn the capsule into a prosperous and

safe isolated and closed country for ethnic Armenians, a country which Armenians do not want to leave in search of a better life and which, on the contrary, can become a magnet for the Diaspora? Second, can our capsule have another 'sponsor' or an extra one? By the way, the sponsor of the capsule should not necessarily be another state: for example, Israel, besides the United States, is funded by the global Jewish diaspora.

Myself and like-minded people are proponents of a 'glocal' future for Armenia and a hub model, that is, its full-fledged, albeit not reckless, integration into the global community. A hub country is a state with a small territory and a small population, but thanks to the skillful choice of the developmental trajectory and the accumulation of special competencies and skills, it amasses a huge creative potential. The states that once chose the hub model managed to make breakthrough advances and catch up with or even surpass developed nations. This was the case with Singapore, which turned from a poor port city into one of the most advanced economies in the world.

I prefer the hub model, but like any other model, it has its drawbacks.

Like any other model, the hub model has its advantages and drawbacks. Deep involvement in global processes will accelerate the movement toward prosperity, opening access both to the resources of the Diaspora and to direct foreign investment. There are also pitfalls associated with this model. To a large extent, they are explained by joining the international community, which will make global problems even more pressing. We must also be aware of the fact that abandoning isolation inevitably involves fiercer competition, for which we are not yet ready. This should be accompanied by the accelerated development of the institutions of civil society. Apparently, such a transition will not come easy. Although the likely increase in income seems to be a crucial factor, one must also remember about security, and not just at the borders but also within the country. Preserving the ethnocultural community once Armenia is open to the outside world should be imperative. Besides, we should try to minimize the emerging risks. There is nothing wrong with being proud of ourselves, knowing our history and culture, but we also have to learn to accept other cultures whose representatives will want to come to Armenia to live here and do business together with us, like the Yazidi and Russian communities in our country.

You can learn more about the advantages and limitations of various models and development vectors from my discussion paper titled [At the Crossroads](#), co-authored with Nuné Alekryan.

- How do we want to live: obeying the law or observing a vague unwritten code? What does each of the options mean?

An extremely sensitive aspect of any model of existence is the idea of justice, that is, written and unwritten laws that determine the norms of behavior in society, as well as formal and informal institutions that ensure compliance with these laws. History offers examples of communities that successfully existed and developed without political institutions. However, human communities cannot exist without a judiciary, legal regulators, and generally accepted norms of behavior.

The centuries-old existence in non-legal states has instilled in us the habit of living according to the unwritten laws, as opposed to the enforced ones.

In the early 1990s, it was a popular notion in the Republic of Armenia, as in other post-Soviet states, that a multi-party system and universal suffrage would automatically ensure the supremacy of law and a fair court system. At this time, great efforts were made to create a regulatory framework for the young state. However, we faced two unexpected ramifications. First, the formal consolidation of the democratic principles of statehood and universal suffrage, as well as the new legal framework, does not lead to the rule of law in public life by default. Second, the centuries-old existence in non-legal states has instilled in us a classic doublethink: the habit of living according to the unwritten laws, as opposed to the Constitution and current laws. Hence the current prevalence of the criminal and semi-criminal code of unwritten principles. Another noteworthy factor is that because the imperial laws (Ottoman, Russian, and then Soviet) were perceived as alien, imposed from the outside, the ability to circumvent them was considered a kind of valor, a sign of intelligence and ingenuity. In the newly independent Armenia, eradicating this stereotype turned out to be a tall order.

The inevitable implication of abiding by an unauthorized code is pervasive small-scale corruption. Those multiple instances when it was ubiquitous in Armenia are still a recent memory for many. Any employee endowed with any powers, whether a low-level official, policeman, doctor or a teacher—could demand additional material incentives for their services. Moreover, people were often willing to offer ‘remuneration’ for the prompt solution to an important problem or for a reduction in the penalty in case of minor offenses.

The basis of corruption gets eroded once the legislation and legal framework underpinning the operations of the state apparatus are improved, its transparency is boosted, and the interaction between civil servants and society is institutionalized. It is important to bear in mind that you cannot stamp out corruption only by laws and efforts of law enforcement agencies: you need to change the extractive system, which finds reliable support in “invisible institutions”—cultural and behavioral stereotypes—and in prohibitive attitudes embraced by the majority.

Present-day Armenian society needs clear moral guidelines, and teachers, doctors, military people, and varpets should again become role models.

Whether culture predetermines the nature of political and economic institutions—extractive or inclusive—or, on the contrary, established institutions change cultural matrices is a difficult question. Either way, it is safe to assert that the institution of culture and other social institutions influence each other and evolve together. That is why it is necessary to eradicate the above-mentioned relics of the post-imperial cultural matrix, to rehabilitate the value of personal reputation, and to restore respect for education, work, and professionalism. Present-day Armenian society needs clear moral guidelines, and teachers, doctors, military people, and varpets (virtuoso masters) should again become role models.

The supremacy of law is interconnected with security: in a state based on the rule of law, citizens are not afraid of arbitrariness in all areas of life. However, effective security structures and an independent judiciary and legal system alone are not enough to change things. The law should not be exercised selectively, in the interests of the elite, but equally for all citizens. A person is sensitive to injustice, especially when it comes to their property and civil rights. Lawful violence is a necessary condition for the existence of any state, but the legitimacy of the state itself must be secured by the

inclusiveness of its institutions and by the general understanding that there is no room for discrimination against citizens who do not belong to the elite or are distant from it.

The legitimacy of the state must be secured by the general understanding that there is no room for discrimination against citizens who do not belong to the elite.

- What role does the church play in modern Armenian society?

Acknowledging the supra-ethnic nature of Christianity, the Armenians nonetheless succeeded in establishing an independent church. The Armenian Apostolic Church has become the moral core of ethnic communities, a repository and source of knowledge, a breeding ground for enlightenment and education. For centuries, our church has remained the only stable institution on which the nation could unconditionally rely in its development. During long periods when Armenians did not have their own statehood, the church performed some functions of the state, in particular, managing foreign policy, but still it could not replace the state as a full-fledged institution that ensures the consensus of the elites. The church has encouraged the Armenians not to assimilate, and its cultural significance can hardly be overestimated. Today it still has to serve as a centerpiece of national spirituality and a consolidating core, but the church, apparently, cannot cope with this.

We are facing a serious challenge: how do we protect our religious traditions in the face of ongoing global secularization?

- How are we going to solve the Artsakh issue, build relations with Azerbaijan, and ensure our security?

After the victory in the 1994 War of Independence of Artsakh, Armenia's stance nevertheless remained uncertain: on the one hand, it did not conduct full-scale military operations; on the other hand, armed clashes took place along its borders, and the toll of both military and civilian casualties kept growing. Throughout this time, attacks from Azerbaijan, including the 2016 four-day war, were testing its breaking point. Having beefed up, united with a strong ally, and using the opened window of opportunity, Azerbaijan dragged us into a 44-day war in Artsakh, where we suffered a severe loss of life, and Artsakh was deprived of a significant part of its territories.

On the morning of September 27, 2020, I happened to land in Yerevan, and from there, I went to Artsakh, thus witnessing the early stage of the war. I saw the dedication and commitment of people going into battle for their homeland, and the general emotional upsurge in the first days of combat. At the same time, the disorganization visibly reigned supreme. There was no clear plan of action, and we were ill-equipped for war, either militarily or among the civilian population.

Today, we are still in a limbo state of neither war nor peace, and this uncertainty prevents us from deciding in which direction we should move on, how to build relations with a neighbor who has gained a territorial advantage and is profiteering on this. Sure enough, many of us rightly fear a resumption of armed conflict in the near future, so it is necessary, as soon as possible, not only to analyze the mistakes that handed us the defeat but also to arrive at the right conclusions and make profound changes both in the army and in society as a whole.

We are faced with a number of difficult tasks: we need to overcome the grave consequences of the war, restore the broken economy, transform our security system both in terms of military and economic power, so that it provides us with full-fledged protection for decades to come, resolve border issues, rebuild destroyed transport communications and infrastructure, help the families of the dead and wounded, and return prisoners of war and refugees home. Finally, we need to enlist the support of allies in this strategically important region (Iran may be one of them; in addition, we should develop partnerships with India and China), making the further manifestation of aggression toward us as costly as possible, if not unreal.

On top of that, we must be seeking a peaceful solution to the Artsakh issue, however difficult it may be. But a peace agreement does not mean the establishment of peace on any terms. Negotiations should be conducted not between the defeated and the victor, weak and strong opponents, but between two equally strong parties who can agree on the basis of understanding the benefits of peace for both of them.

The task of the Armenian elite is to extend the stay of the Russian peacekeepers in Artsakh for a longer period and to work out a solution to the Artsakh issue within the framework of the OSCE Minsk Group based on the principles of respect for the right of the people of Artsakh to self-determination.

Of course, getting stronger takes time and billions of dollars in investment to make up for the losses incurred, rebuild and modernize the army, and train career officers in the shortest possible time. We need “smart” money and intellectual resources intended for the development of science and technology, the establishment of defense contractor companies, a technological cluster that enables the development and testing in artificial intelligence (including by Russian companies), and improved production in this area. Fortunately, we have young talented scientists, founders of successful startups, who can use their expertise and knowledge to contribute to the development of the science and technology industry.

We must build a robust economy that will not allow Azerbaijan and Turkey to unleash a new war against Armenia. To do this, we need a strong partner who will provide us with a sense of security and the ability to focus on making a developmental breakthrough. Although Russia is evidently such a partner for us, we need to forge relations with other countries. A partnership involves a bilateral agreement. We cannot demand protection from influential powers or expect them to help us out of pure altruism. This is a process of mutual exchange, so before we understand who our allies are, we need to know what we have and what we can offer them.

Today, Russian peacekeepers play a key role in creating the so-called security belt of Nagorno-Karabakh and, more importantly, in preserving Artsakh as a territory where Armenians have been living and will live. In my opinion, the most important task facing the Armenian elite is to unite and make every effort to extend the stay of the Russian peacekeeping mission in Artsakh for a longer period, spell out and formalize its mandate in detail, and achieve a solution to the Artsakh issue within the framework of the OSCE Minsk Group based on the principles of respect for the Artsakh

people's right to self-determination and realizing that this issue transcends the interests of individual states and concerns the future of the entire South Caucasus.

- How will our relations with Russia be built?

The reality is that the Russian Federation is the main strategic partner and one of the main creditors of Armenia, the most important export market for our goods and services, as well as the labor market that attracts migrants from our country. Russia is Armenia's leading foreign policy and military and strategic partner, besides being our arms supplier. The Russian armed forces guarding our borders guarantee our territorial integrity.

We need to build such a model of relations with Russia, within whose framework Armenia, as it fulfills its partner obligations, will receive the opportunity for economic development, while maintaining its identity and international positioning, whatever its status may be: an independent sovereign state, a member state of the Eurasian Economic Union, or a member of the Union State. Regardless of the chosen format, relations between Armenia and Russia should be based on complete trust and the principles of mutually beneficial cooperation. Otherwise, Armenia risks becoming a satellite of Russia, a country with a small population and a significant presence of the Russian military bases, which will make it even more dependent on Russia and vulnerable both economically and socially.

A weak Armenia is extremely disadvantageous for Russia. Instead, it needs a strong and prosperous Armenia.

However, a weak Armenia is extremely disadvantageous for Russia as a partner constantly relying on the help of a stronger one. A weakened Armenia becomes a target for manipulation by forces, which are unfriendly to Russia but which promise more substantial aid. In order for Russia to be able to maintain its role as an integrator of the South Caucasian countries into a single socioeconomic space, it needs a different kind of Armenia—not a sparsely populated capsule state, which exists mainly courtesy of the sponsor state, but a strong strategic partner.

Despite being an independent state for 30 years, Armenia still cannot be considered part of the outer perimeter of Russia's sphere of influence. Over the past three decades, the socioeconomic relationship between Armenia and Russia has become multifaceted. This manifests in the constant flow of labor resources between the two countries, in one of the largest Armenian communities being based in Russia, maintaining ties with its homeland, and in the representation of Armenians in the Russian elite circles. Everything that happens in the Armenian economy, politics, and social sphere is inevitably represented in the corresponding spheres of life in Russia. Therefore, it is apparent that everything that happens in Armenia is projected into both the foreign and domestic policies of Russia. That is why, I reiterate, a weak Armenia is dangerous for Russia—it needs a strong and prosperous Armenia.

- How are we preparing for the potentially open borders with Turkey?

Since the border with Turkey was closed almost 30 years ago, we have grown accustomed to the lack of economic and cultural ties with our neighbor, and many are quite happy with the way things are. Opening the border still seems unlikely today. Nevertheless, we should be gearing up for this

scenario, and the responsibility of the elite is to work out a detailed plan in case the border is opened, so that this happens on conditions acceptable to Armenians living in Armenia, as well as in other countries of the world. In this regard, a number of factors need to be addressed.

First, the gap between the Turkish and Armenian economies has narrowed significantly. Whereas in 1993 the GDP per capita in Turkey was ten times that of Armenia, today, it is only twice as high: \$8,538.2 versus \$4,267.5.ⁱⁱ Second, the population (mainly Kurdish and Hamshen) of practically all Turkish provinces bordering on Armenia is poorer than the population of Armenia. Third, over the decades, both economies have managed to adapt to the negative impact of the closure of the border and the blocking of major routes, and today, the Turkish economy has practically no impact whatsoever on the Armenian economy, which means that Turkey has no opportunity to influence the situation in our country.

Obviously, the opening of the border will boost the economic development of both countries through the free movement of goods, capital, and people. Many Armenians, who still live in Turkey, for example, Hamshen, will finally have the opportunity to visit Armenia, which will undoubtedly bolster cultural exchange between Armenian sub-ethnic groups and their gradual reconciliation. Significantly higher tourist flows will stimulate wealth growth in the poorest border regions, which, on the one hand, will strengthen their ties with Armenia, and on the other, will keep loosening their economic and political dependence on Turkey.

It all boils down to two options: do nothing, fearing the arrival of the Turks in Armenia, or be proactive to fully prepare for the opening of the border.

Openness, however, not only creates new opportunities, but poses new challenges, mainly directed at regional security due to the emergence of a new channel for the transfer of terrorists to South Caucasus. An obvious and immediate ramification of the open borders will be the overflow of Turkish products on the Armenian market. And even today, with closed borders, these are readily available in the country thanks to supplies through intermediary countries like Georgia and Iran. Certainly, the opening of the borders will jeopardize Armenian agriculture, as it is significantly smaller to the corresponding sector of the Turkish economy. In addition, the requirements for the competitiveness of the local population will soar, as will the risks of transferring key Armenian assets under the control of Turkish investors and entrepreneurs with large capital. Finally, opening the border will be a real stress test for our identity, which is already heavily influenced by Turkish and Arab culture, particularly music. The measures needed to maintain the Armenian language and culture will be discussed later.

When mulling the conditions on which our relations with Turkey will be built, we should detach emotions, no matter how strong the pain from the tragedy we experienced in the past and no matter how righteous the indignation toward those who caused us irreparable harm and suffering, and instead be guided by common sense, sober pragmatism, and a clear understanding of our own interests. We need to take into account all the emerging challenges, work out in advance the rules and procedures governing the exchange of goods and migration between the two countries, temporary or permanent residence of Turkish citizens on the territory of Armenia and vice versa, spell out legal issues related to business, property, and taxation for foreigners, deliberate on the conditions of access to Turkish ports, and much more. Of particular importance is ensuring the

protection of the interests of the Armenians in Artsakh in the event the Turkish border is opened. With that in mind, the interests of Armenia in Artsakh should by no means be sacrificed.

Today, two options are available to us. The first is to do nothing, passively expecting and fearing the arrival of the Turks in Armenia. The second is to be proactive and act coherently in order to fully prepare for the opening of the border. My partners and I, as well as like-minded individuals, favor the second one. One of our initiatives in this direction will be the creation of a \$1 billion fund to invest in the development of the territories of historical Western Armenia. In fact, this all-important endeavor requires a much larger amount of money. That said, it must certainly be part of a general large-scale and ambitious development plan for Armenia, the Armenian world, and Artsakh, which, among other things, will include the creation of a state-of-the-art security system, and will cost \$15–20 billion in investment money over the next five to ten years.

The creation of the fund is a project that has more to do with our worldview. The lands in question are the ancestral home of millions of diasporan Armenians, the descendants of those who fled from the Genocide in the Ottoman Empire. We do not want to put up with the “abomination of desolation in the holy place,” as St. Matthew says, and we consider it important to restore our presence on the land of our forefathers and to revive our culture and traditions there.

Let me stress once again that we are talking about the development of not only Armenia but also the Armenian world as a whole. We should remember not only about the heritage that has been accumulated in Armenia for millennia, but also about what the Armenians have left all over the world: in Jerusalem, Venice, Paris, Vienna, and Tbilisi, as well as in Syria, Poland, Singapore, and many other places.

Now is too early to talk about specific details. Yet one thing is clear: whether the borders will open in five, ten, or fifteen years, we should be preparing for this in advance. I understand that such a project will not be of interest to everyone, but I am sure that there will be people who will appreciate its importance, huddle around this idea, and will be ready to invest more money, time, and effort to implement it. Above all, we need to agree on a common vision for the development of these territories, to compile a database of what needs to be restored and what kind of business is worth developing there, to form an expert task force—in other words, to understand where we are now, where we want to go, what we lack, and what we already have.

Summing up the above, I would comment that we need an in-depth and impartial analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of our neighbor, and we need to adopt their art of government of a state, which is to ensure the effective functioning of this institution, regardless of who holds the power.

How can we secure a better future for Armenia?

It goes without saying that we all want to see Armenia thrive, but for the majority, a prosperous Armenia is an abstract notion. Much has been said about the country’s prosperity, but in fact, few are able to go beyond personal interests and concern for the well-being of their own family, close friends, and relatives. Since 2001, our partners and I have been trying to initiate a broad public discussion about the future of the country and the people, and we constantly face the reluctance of the majority to get involved in this intellectual pursuit. To make matters worse, a notable drawback of our social life is that we are not always ready to patiently discuss difficult and unpleasant topics, and we still have to learn

the art of dialogue. However, without such discussions, we will never achieve a public consensus, which should form the basis for making specific decisions about the future of Armenia and the Armenian people.

Much has been said about the prosperity of the country, but in fact, few are able to go beyond personal interests and concern for the well-being of family, close friends, and relatives.

Each of us holds their views, system of values, priorities, and criteria for success, and, therefore, their own vision, whether broad or not, of the way things should be and their own planning horizon. For some, the prosperity of Armenia is the stability of economic growth and the security of state borders, while for others, its role in world politics is key. Someone puts above all the well-being of our citizens, whereas others prioritize the country's capability to be the center of the Armenian world. Someone thinks in the medium term; someone is concerned about the future of their children; others think about several future generations of Armenians. The final chapter of the discussion paper [At the Crossroads](#) focuses on our vision of the future of the Armenian nation—mine and that of my partners and associates. Below are my ideas for what steps we should take now.

- *Agree on the socioeconomic model of Armenia's development.* Choosing the path is not easy. It would be a simplification to divide development models into 'good' and 'bad': a more accurate argument dwells on the optimality of a particular model for a particular country and nation, the ability to provide *the best conditions in terms of prosperity, security, identity preservation, and its development* in a new reality. The choice of the optimal model should be made consciously as a result of the consensus of both a pragmatic and responsible, selfless elite, supported by the most active and fairly wide public circles. The challenges that we will have to cope with are ensuring the transparency of discussions at all stages and the decision-making process, as well as the subsequent implementation of these decisions.
- *Determine the form of government and establish a state government system.* We are talking about building a system of checks and balances, as mentioned above, which would prevent the concentration of power in the hands of a single person, be it the president or the prime minister, ensure the separation of the main branches of government and accountability to their citizens, boost transparency and inclusiveness of the processes of making decisions that are important for the country and the people in order to reduce the likelihood of influence on these processes by groups representing certain interests. We can see a successful historical example of such a system in the political system of the Venetian Republic, which existed for over a millennium.

Many still harbor paternalistic illusions, pinning hopes for a better future on the familiar model of a strong, even authoritarian, industrial state.

In my opinion, we need to get back to discussing the distribution of the roles of the president and the prime minister, their powers, and responsibilities. The same is true for the heads of local authorities as the communities expand. We develop training and incentive programs to help local leaders more effectively attract private investment in regional development and manage projects. Besides, changes in legislation are needed that will allow communities to channel the income received from investments for their own needs and further development.

Today, the future of nation-states as the basis of the world order is increasingly being questioned. In my opinion, it is rather a matter of rethinking their role and principles of functioning, as well as the search for new mechanisms of interaction with society. Unfortunately, most of us still harbor paternalistic illusions, pinning hopes for a better future on the familiar model of a strong, even authoritarian industrial state, which exercises fatherly care for its citizens. These views of the state are becoming increasingly anachronistic. Now the key thing is not just boosting the efficiency of state institutions—we need to understand what their role and functions should be in the 21st century to create a harmonious and safe environment suitable for tapping into people’s creative potential.

- *Conduct a full audit, inventory of our assets, and certification of personnel both in the state and public sector.* For a movement to be reasonable, we need to clearly imagine the starting and ending point of the route, that is, to understand where we are, where we want to go, and what material and non-material resources the country and the global network nation have. A whole different story is analyzing the effectiveness of the state apparatus of the Republic of Armenia: it is necessary to assess the number of employees in state institutions, their goals and objectives; to carry out their certification; to identify offices that can be canceled as redundant, or, on the contrary, that should be introduced; to develop and implement systems of motivation and assessment of activities that improve performance and accountability.
- *Attract the investments necessary to reboot the entire system of Armenia.* The republic’s government plans to ensure a minimum GDP growth of 7% by 2026. Surely, GDP cannot be the sole indicator of a nation’s well-being, and yet, I believe that Armenia should go much further in its aspirations and try not just to double but triple this indicator. In addition, rebuilding the post-war economy and civilian infrastructure requires significant investment. As I have already noted, I estimate the amount of investment needed at \$15–20 billion. It appears to be possible to create a system of funds designed for these purposes, which would become an example of public-private partnership.

The anchor in this system will be a \$3–5 billion private equity fund in development with a planning horizon of up to ten years. At the same time, it is important not only to raise the necessary funds but also exercise good judgment in deploying them. The Development Fund of Armenia will play an important role in changing the entire structure of investment in projects in our country. For it to succeed, four components should be in place: 1) funds of the Armenian Diaspora; 2) engagement of the government of Armenia; 3) investments of international development institutions and owners of strategic assets in Armenia (primarily from Russia); 4) attracting international capital.

GDP cannot be the sole indicator of a nation’s well-being, and yet, Armenia should try not just to double but triple this indicator.

Second, we need to set up a fund in the amount of \$1 billion intended to create various enterprises and attracting investments in the former Western Armenia, as mentioned earlier.

Third, it is important to establish a fund for the support and development of the Armenian language and culture. Along with honing our own linguistic culture, we need to expand the study of foreign languages, both European and Eastern: primarily Russian, English, and French, as well as Farsi,

Turkish, Arabic, and possibly Chinese. We must be a polyglot nation to have an edge over our neighbors.

Cooperation of different actors—the state, private investors, development institutions, NGOs, and others—can only be productive if there is a certain institutional framework that meets the highest international standards, which sometimes have to be developed by ourselves. Such a framework is created by a set of platforms. The platform is a real or virtual foundation for interaction, providing concentration of resources, coordination, and acceleration of processes. A set of platforms is an underwater part of the iceberg, without which you cannot move from an idea to its implementation. They help you organize and unite the participants, make the necessary calculations, carry out day-to-day management, etc. An important function of platforms is to minimize costs. On the basis of the same platform, it is possible to implement both large-scale and small-format projects that will be able to use existing services.

The platform is an institutional foundation for interaction, ensuring the concentration of resources, coordination, and acceleration of processes.

All projects that my partners and I are implementing in Armenia create a single space, pursue a common goal, and rely on several platforms: technological (Foundation for Armenian Science and Technology, FAST), humanitarian (Aurora Humanitarian Initiative), educational (Scholae Mundi Foundation), healthcare (Tree of Life), environmental (Climate Uturn), cultural (Ani), financial (Ameria Group), tourism and urbanism (Tourism and Urbanism Foundation, TUF), and a platform for social entrepreneurship (IDeA). Our partners, the Arar Foundation, have created a platform for the implementation of projects in the field of security. For completeness of coverage, agricultural, mining and metallurgical, and export-import platforms are also needed.

- *Hire top-level professional executives and experts.* Over the 20 years of implementing various projects in Armenia, I have faced four main challenges: the lack of qualified executives, the lack of large-scale multi-purpose projects that would cause a chain reaction of positive changes, the lack of money for the implementation of such projects, and the lack of a favorable and stimulating environment for their emergence and implementation. All these challenges are interconnected, but the main one, in my opinion, is the first one, and if we can find an answer to it, this will serve as the key to solving all other problems. Institutional and private investors, as well as development institutions, will be more willing to allocate money for projects, knowing that their implementation will be carried out by world-class professionals who, on the one hand, have experience in managing such specific institutions, and on the other, are well-acquainted with Armenia and its features. The hallmark of large-scale multi-purpose projects is that they tend to be mushrooming and fostering the emergence of new initiatives, thereby creating the environment we need.

Our interaction is increasingly going online, and this enables us to significantly hone our competencies, engaging the required specialists anywhere in the world. In order to capitalize on this advantage, we need to remove a number of internal restrictions in the country's governance system and create a database of experts who are ready to devote their time—in part or in full—to work on development projects in Armenia that are being implemented in the public and private sectors. In this regard, it will also be necessary to create a 'bank of time' and conditions for remote work or, on the contrary, for professionals of different ages to move to Armenia.

- *Determine the extent of digitalization required.* Cutting-edge technologies are changing the nature of infrastructure, markets, products, business structure, and production organization. Due to the COVID-19 restrictions, a significant part of the interaction, as already mentioned, has shifted online, which contributed to the explosive growth of tech companies, which have multiplied their economic and financial figures, including capitalization. Meanwhile, many other industries hit the skids. I am convinced that the recession will be overcome by those who can best adapt to the new normal. The Airbnb example shows how a seemingly doomed company was able to rebuild itself, radically change its business model, and offer users a convenient service, which today connects more than 4 million hosts and more than a billion guests in virtually all countries of the world.ⁱⁱⁱ

Personal data is commodified in a new economic formation known as surveillance capitalism.

Of course, one must clearly realize that the achievements of the new technological revolution can be equally used to make good and bad things. The boundaries of the private are getting more and more blurred. Personal data is commodified and becomes the most valuable resource on earth in a new economic formation known as surveillance capitalism. At the same time, companies that are missing out on digitalization will become invisible to customers and partners and will gradually sink into obscurity and cease to exist.

“The choice for mankind lies between freedom and happiness and for the great bulk of mankind, happiness is better,” wrote Orwell in his novel 1984. On one pole are those who choose the comfort and security that can be provided by AI and voluntarily give the system and corporate giants access to their personal data, while the other pole is populated by marginalized people who resist digital totalitarianism. In this sense, finding the right balance is important in order to turn digital platforms into interaction venues, a tool for expressing trust and strengthening reputation.

- *Create a free economic, scientific and technological zone in Armenia.* As a member of the EAEU on the one hand and an EU Associated Country on the other, Armenia can become a location where the production of equipment essential for the modernization of the economy not just of Armenia but of other countries, namely Russia, is established, solving the problem of the supply of equipment and technology. This will allow several aims to be achieved: attracting investment from international (in particular European) companies that are interested in collaborating with Russian partners but which are constrained in their cooperation; restoring Armenia’s scientific and technical legacy dating from the period of the USSR, which was partially lost in the 1990s, attracting back Armenian specialists throughout the world who left Armenia during that period, and creating a technology hub; reducing levels of unemployment and labor migration, by creating a region of cutting-edge development.
- *Modernize the mining and metallurgical industry.* Along with the extraction and processing of stone, this industry is no less important than technology and alternative energy, agriculture and agricultural processing, as well as travel industry and financial services, for achieving effective economic growth based on increasing labor productivity while creating new jobs. The modernization of the industry will require the abandonment of methods for the development of mineral deposits that cause irreparable damage to the environment and human health, the modernization of technological processes and the use of digital technologies, the development and implementation of environmental standards, land reclamation and restoration of water bodies, a revision of the

taxation system, factoring in current trends, affecting the global mining sector in general and local specifics, and attracting investment.

- *Reform the education system, starting with preschool education, focusing on the best international standards.* Already 20 years ago, as part of the Armenia-2020 project, we identified education as one of the priority areas for Armenia's shift toward the hub model. On the one hand, education is the largest modern industry that sees a constant growth in demand outstripping supply, which results in a significant contribution of this industry to the economy. On the other hand, though, this is the area that spurs the development of all other industries—and talents play a key role here.

Between 8% and 10% of children across Armenia do not go to elementary school at school starting age.

This paper will not dwell on the problems of preschool and school education—instead, I will just say that between 8% and 10% of children throughout Armenia do not go to elementary school at school starting age, a situation that is unthinkable in a country where secondary education is compulsory.

In my opinion, the benchmarks in the process of reforming higher educational institutions can be, above all, Armenian universities listed at the top spots of the world's most prestigious education rankings and, secondly, an increase in the export of educational services by attracting a larger number of foreign students. To do this, we need to make international announcements for President jobs at Armenia's leading universities and seek applicants among world-renowned scientists, create boards of trustees, and hire notable researchers as deans at various departments. For example, among the rectors of Russian universities, eight have historical ties to Armenia.

The model we inherited from the Soviet times, in which scientific research hubs are separated from higher educational establishments, also calls for reform. Practice has shown that this model is less successful than the Anglo-Saxon one.

Obviously, due to the increase in life expectancy and the dim prospects of retirement benefits, people will have to stay in the labor market as long as possible and, therefore, engage in lifelong learning. Probably, higher education in its current form is not the best fit for it, which means that, in addition to universities, it is necessary to create centers for additional education, professional and personal growth, and leadership skills in Armenia. One of these centers, the Matena International School of Leadership and Professional Development, is being created in partnership with the Moscow School of Management SKOLKOVO; in the near future, it will launch the first program, Executive MBA, designed for C-level executives and business owners.

- *Engage young people (aged 25–35+).* We see how in developing countries the fortunes accumulated over the past three decades of rapid economic development are going to the generation of today's 20–30-year-olds, who, before even reaching middle age, become owners of enormous financial resources. Business has grown significantly younger: an active economic life often begins as early as 15 years old, thanks to the opportunities made available by digital economy. It seems that, for the first time in the history of mankind, we are faced with the fact that the transfer of knowledge and skills does not go down from the older generation to the younger, but vice versa. Young people's unorthodox views and independence of judgment make us reevaluate many of the features of our current situation.

Unfortunately, 30 years of independence, which our ancestors had spent centuries aspiring to, did not turn Armenia into a country capable of keeping young and talented individuals from emigration. Most of the Armenian youth currently do not participate in our country's political processes and do not hold memberships in any political parties, mainly because none of the current political forces in Armenia offers an ideological platform that would unite people. We must make every effort to keep thinking, determined, persistent youth in Armenia and in the Armenian world, those who have working imagination and a proclivity for self-expression. This requires letting these youths lead the charge when it comes to reforms.

- *Empower women to participate in social and economic life, as well as in governing the country.* According to former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, “there is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women and girls.” Raising the question of the greater political and economic representation of women, I, of course, do not mean quotas, but the need to embrace the principles of meritocracy. A 2011 study at the BI Norwegian Business School, led by Professor Martinsen^{iv} and based on the survey of personality traits of 3,000 managers from various fields, showed that female leaders outperform men in four of the five categories: ability to take initiative, be clear and communicative; ability to innovate, be curious and have an ambitious vision; ability to support, accommodate, and include employees; and ability to set goals, be thorough, and follow up.

Women in Armenia are usually more overloaded with work than men and at the same time, for the most part, remain powerless and downtrodden.

The world is witnessing a transformation of the traditional distribution of family roles, when a man acts as a breadwinner and protector, while a woman is a keeper of the hearth. Armenia is no exception, either, especially since, due to the difficult political, economic, and social plight of the 1990s, high unemployment rates, forced labor migration, etc., the role of men in Armenian families has changed dramatically. They have no certainty in the future; they are afraid of losing their incomes and their social status. This often gives leads to internal frustration, which sometimes manifests in compensatory responses: aggression and intolerance. As I have already mentioned, a big problem in Armenia, especially in the political sphere, is the prevailing atmosphere of rogue machismo, when any communication comes down to asserting one's own superiority in the eyes of others without trying to have a conversation and jointly find solutions.

The woman, on the other hand, acts as a kind of social stabilizer, smoothing out rough edges and ensuring adherence to the unwritten code of social behavior. Sadly, today, women in Armenia are usually busier with work than men: it is women who are burdened with unpaid work caring for their families, children, the sick, and the elderly. At the same time, for the most part, they remain powerless and downtrodden: they endure domestic violence, suffer from lack of decent job opportunities, and face professional segregation and gender pay gap.

It is essential, however, to take into account that education begins in the family, and the leading role in it is typically played by the mother. Today, almost any homework can be automated, but only a mother can give a child the energy and love that shape their personality and spur their development. I believe that finding a harmonious balance between preserving the traditional family with its values and creating conditions for the empowerment of women, their self-realization, and greater involvement in social, political, and economic life will help to solve many problems and to

achieve greater resilience of local communities and the country as a whole. Men should also be affected: their role in society will change as they take on nontraditional gender roles, such as raising children.

Changes need to affect different levels, including the level of “invisible institutions,” in particular prohibitive attitudes, signaling the unacceptability of practices, such as gender selective abortion, which harm a country facing a demographic crisis.

- *Restore respect for the family and family heritage.* The key to the success of any nation and any state, according to Confucius, is a strong family, a system of values, traditions, and rules, as well as a leader with noble and lofty aspirations. I am deeply convinced that the family community is one of the pillars of identity, thanks to which Armenians, wherever they live, have been and continue to be a single ethnic group for centuries. Unfortunately, in the 20th century, when the role of the state and its institutions increased, the family community began to lose the function of an institution serving the transfer of traditions and knowledge. With the modern context in mind, we need to rethink the role and place of the family, find a harmonious balance in the distribution of functions between the family and the state, revive the value of personal and family reputation, restore respect for one’s name based on the contribution of the family (dynasty) to the development of the country and society.
- *Debunk myths about ourselves and about the world in general.* Myths and legends are an integral part of the cultural matrix of every nation. Here we are talking about blinding and dangerous delusions that substitute reality and prevent us from making decisions that are comparable to the challenges and threats that actually face us. As I have already noted, blinded by our victory and the illusion of our invincibility, we failed to ensure the security of Artsakh, and the security of Armenia itself came under threat. We need an unbiased, evidence-based analysis of our past and present to help us understand what our strengths and weaknesses are and decide together how to build the country we want to pass down to our children, effectively using our assets and deftly bypassing the limitations. To accomplish the tasks set, it will be necessary to create an open information space and develop a system of effective measures to combat fake news and accounts of events.

Sure enough, this is just a broad sketch, which will have to be widely and openly discussed, revised, and reworked.

The FUTURE ARMENIAN initiative and its goals

2041 will mark 50 years of Armenia’s independence, and now we need to do our utmost to make this date a festive occasion, and not something we will be embarrassed by. All this makes the debate about possible scenarios for our development a pressing issue. Therefore, in late April 2021, my partners and I announced the launch of our new public initiative The FUTURE ARMENIAN.

The most important reason why we are doing this is our willingness to create a common network of understanding for all Armenians, as well as Armenian organizations and institutions, about the sustainable development of our country and nation. Anyone can engage by co-signing the list of 15 goals of our initiative at futurearmenian.com. We invite all people with a proactive attitude—citizens of Armenia, Armenians of the Diaspora, and friends of our country—to take part in the upcoming

discussions about what the future of Armenia and the Armenian people should be and how to achieve it, as well as contribute to the joint planning of our future steps.

The current critical state of affairs does not leave me the luxury of evading the discussion of the most important political and social issues.

Despite the fact that the beginning of our information campaign coincided with the Armenian general election campaign, The FUTURE ARMENIAN initiative has no political aspirations and does not pursue political goals. Previously, I have reiterated that I refrain from direct participation in political processes, but the current critical state of affairs does not leave me any other choice but to join the discussion of the most important political and social issues: what kind of Armenia we are building and how we envision the future of the Armenian nation. Most people agree that the closest and most evident way for an individual trying to adapt their life strategy to anticipate the future is to change the current situation through active engagement in public life, the struggle of parties, political forces, and civil society institutions. But this way is not the only option—others are available, too. The current crisis is not limited only to the political sphere, and I do not see any political force capable of dragging the country out of it. I believe, it is necessary to create a public council with the best representatives of the global Armenian elite, which would solve the issues of sustainable development of the Armenian world, which are inseparable from the issues of the state structure of Armenia in the current conditions. The government of the republic is an important participant in this process, but not the only one.

I do not see any political force capable of dragging the country out of the crisis.

In this sense, my partners and I are entering the political field. At the same time, I want to emphasize that we are still public, not political actors. Our task is to contribute to the transformation, expansion, and diversity of Armenia's present-day political scene, the professionalization of political polemics, and the departure from the established practice, when voters endorse not so much for the program of a party but its face—a leader who, thanks to the media hype, has managed to gain significant publicity and influence. It should be noted that this is typical not only for Armenia.

The mandate of trust received from the public does not mean a monopoly on decision-making.

Armenia has chosen its representatives—now it needs to *choose a model of the future through open debates involving the general public*, which will attract and unite the forces of Armenians in the country itself and around the world, and our initiative is designed to bolster this process. I am convinced that those who have come to power today capitalizing on people's desire to better understand what is happening will be fully legitimized only if they recognize and analyze the past mistakes, explain to the people what they are going to do to avoid such failures in the future, and establish a consistent dialogue with the public using various tools, from public opinion polls to referendums on various issues of public life. In other words, the mandate of trust received from society does not mean a monopoly on decision-making. The source of the new government's legitimacy will be a new social contract between it and society. Only on such conditions is it possible to consolidate the Armenians and begin to rebuild the country through joint efforts.

Today, The FUTURE ARMENIAN community includes over 100,000 people from more than 100 countries, which proves the interest many Armenians and friends of Armenia take in the future of the country and the nation and enables us to really discuss and shape the future agenda and legitimize it in our society. Obviously, in the current context, the authorities can no longer ignore the active part of society; therefore, it is important to develop new mechanisms of constructive interaction whose purpose will be to fight not *against* something or someone but *for* our common future.

15 goals of the FUTURE ARMENIAN initiative:

1. *Vision setting*: define and own Armenia's future collectively. To do this, we need to pragmatically set realistic goals and objectives and establish a path for achieving them.
2. *Assured sovereignty*: acknowledge our threatened security and construct a more effective and forward-looking defense system. The tasks in this regard are as follows: to guarantee the inviolability of Armenia's borders and the physical safety of its citizens, so that they can live and work peacefully in the land of their ancestors; transform the armed forces of Armenia into a modern army, employing the latest scientific and technological achievements, the art of management and military intelligence; and actively develop the military-industrial complex, which should be supported by the development of all other industries.
3. *Historic responsibility*: honor the memory of the victims, the saviors and survivors of the Armenian Genocide through global advocacy and humanitarian support to prevent, combat or heal from all acts of violence against humanity. For this purpose, our shared pain and the experience of past generations must become a force for good. Our mission is to contribute to the triumph of humanism and to support all efforts to eradicate violence on a global scale. We will continue to raise awareness of the Armenian Genocide and its dire consequences, and we will also look for the best means to tell the world about Armenia and its experience.
4. *Free Artsakh*: guarantee Artsakh's physical security and establish its legal status. Artsakh should be perceived by Armenians as an integral part of their homeland, and our task is to have it prosper, so that people want to live there again. To do this, it is necessary to design a clear plan and find allies who are ready to join us in ensuring the security of Artsakh and its residents.
5. *Armenia-Diaspora unity*: transform the relationship between Armenia and the Diaspora into one based on mutualism and trust. To this end, we need to find an optimal model of interaction between the state and the networked nation. The state must become a central node of this network in order to obtain the key to the vast potential of the Armenian world. The key to the effectiveness of such a model will be the involvement of the Diaspora in setting national goals and priorities, on the one hand, and its responsible participation in building the nation and the state, on the other. Armenia and the Diaspora must join forces because only together can we attain the nation's prosperity. Creation of transparent and clear mechanisms of interaction that spark confidence on both sides will contribute to deepening mutual understanding between them and strengthening their partnership.
6. *Strong Diaspora*: update and enhance Diaspora's institutions and structures to ensure their vitality and preserve Armenian worldwide heritage. Traditional diasporan institutions need to be modernized to reverse the trend of emigration from the Diaspora and establish strong ties

within the global Armenian network. We need to strengthen the presence of Armenians in strategically important regional centers, such as Jerusalem (Armenian Quarter), Georgia, Turkey, Iran, etc.

7. *Strong Alliances*: counter isolation and gain relevance through strategic partnerships regionally and globally. Armenia should gradually raise its status in the eyes of its own citizens, regional neighbors, and international partners, investing in building up soft power and promoting the agenda of Armenians' revival as a forward-looking global nation, relevant to the rest of the world.
8. *Exponential growth*: foster a competitive economy that attracts human and financial capital. Boosting productivity and finding disruptive, adaptive, and decentralized business models that can drive sustainable growth in sectors, such as information technology, energy, food, transportation, and building materials are top priorities.
9. *Growing population*: address Armenia's demographic challenges by ensuring population growth, repatriation and skilled immigration to secure its future. It is necessary to make every effort to reverse the flow of emigration and stop the outflow of population from socially disadvantaged communities, as well as to develop a friendly immigration policy.
10. *Excellence in education*: prioritize education as the highest societal value for Armenians worldwide. Education should become a key component of public policy at both the local and national levels. While attracting investment in the development of this sphere, we should raise the salaries of teachers and restore the high status of the teaching profession and respect for it.
11. *Preeminence of science, technology, and creativity*: invest in science, technology and creativity to drive innovation and development, especially in health, environment and knowledge economies. Armenia should become an international innovation hub. This means that spending (by the government and the private sector) on applied science and technology must be comparable to that of the countries with the most advanced economies. Besides, it implies establishing research institutes in the country and forging partnerships with international organizations.
12. *Good governance*: develop effective and accountable institutions, commit to excellence and professionalism in government and society. We need to reform the public sector, improve the admission criteria for public service, while raising the salaries of officials.
13. *Just society and reduced inequities*: overcome poverty, build an open and honest society. A just society means equal opportunities for access to social benefits for all its members; therefore, it is important to provide support and ensure involvement in the economic and social life of the most vulnerable demographics—the elderly, people with disabilities, women, and war veterans—and help them pick up new useful social skills.
14. *Preserved heritage*: build upon our unique identity and historic experiences and use them to inspire and guide our future. Our tasks in this regard are to preserve and develop the Armenian language and culture, ensure their accessibility and appeal for the young generations of Armenians; to revive traditional Armenian values and adapt them to the realities of the modern

world; and to help the Armenian Apostolic Church reclaim its connecting role in the Armenian society and the Armenian world.

15. *Evidence-based decision-making*: demand from leaders and society that national decision-making be based on facts rather than illusions. This will be facilitated by the establishment of transparent communication between all participants—the government, society, and the Diaspora—as well as the creation of a clear rule-based system that encourages innovation and ensures the redistribution of wealth and the protection of citizens.

We assume these goals should be discussed by representatives of different strata of society in today's Armenia and the Armenian diaspora, become a subject of discussion for the intellectual, political, business and military elites, and draw the attention of people of all ages, especially young people who are now entering adulthood.

We must feel responsible for the future of our country and become its masters.

By jointly reflecting on our past, present, and future, we will be able to draw closer to a way out of the current situation and identifies the mechanisms and ways of our interaction. We do not expect perfect agreement on all points, but we are sure that a frank conversation will help to clarify a lot of things. As I have already argued, people who are empowered to make decisions about the future of the country and the nation must rely on public consensus, which is unattainable without such a discussion.

I believe in the partnership of the state with the private sector working in Armenia, with the Diaspora, and not-for-profit organizations. Building a strong and effective network is real. It is indeed not an easy job that requires different approaches, but in this area, we have a competitive advantage rooted in our historical experience. The most important mission of The FUTURE ARMENIAN initiative is to build a state and a nation amid a dire crisis of trust seen throughout the world and the threat of a lost identity lingering over many peoples—a major threat of the new millennium. Armenians, like residents of other countries, feel distrust of the authorities, especially in the wake of the recent turmoil the country had to go through. People do not believe in their own future and the future of their children in their homeland, and we must reverse this trend—the sooner, the better. To do this, we must feel responsible for the future of our country and become its masters; we must believe that the future can be harnessed by us, each one of us.

The search for an optimal development model that harmoniously combines three key elements—security, prosperity, identity preservation, and its development in the new normal—based on a balance between networks and hierarchies and using the format of public-private partnership as a tool of interaction involves a fair deal of experimentation. If we succeed when ravaged by a systemic chaos and a high level of mistrust in everything and everyone, if we find such a model and implement it, involve in this experiment interesting, bright, and open-minded people, living in different parts of the world, but ready to share our values and work together with us, the consequences will certainly be beneficial not only for us but for all of humanity.

The impossible becomes possible if many people believe in a dream and join their efforts to make it come true.

Over the 30 years, during which my partners and I have been implementing large-scale projects that unite people with different backgrounds, experience, and capabilities, I have repeatedly heard that what we are undertaking is simply impossible. Indeed, it is impossible to create an investment bank in Russia to the best international standards, which will become the leader of the financial market, or build a national business school using private funds, which will be later listed on the prestigious international rankings. Moreover, it is impossible to make sure that teenagers from different countries come to Armenia to study, and the cable car leading to the ancient monastery breaks world records and prompts the revival of the entire region. Nevertheless, Troika Dialogue, the SKOLKOVO business school, the UWC Dilijan with the Wings of Tatev cable car, and many of our other projects clearly illustrate the fact that the impossible becomes possible if many people believe in a dream and unite their efforts to bring it to life.

I remain an optimist who believes in our people. I have no doubt that they are able to unite, brave the difficulties of a dangerous historical period, lay the foundations for the prosperity of new generations, and make the difficult but the sole correct choice at the next historical crossroads leading to a dignified future.

ⁱ CIA World Factbook data as of September 9, 2021. URL: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/> (date accessed: September 15, 2021).

ⁱⁱ World Bank data: GDP per capita (current USD) — Armenia, 2020; GDP per capita (current USD) — Turkey, 2020. URL: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?locations=AM> (date accessed: 10/11/2021).

ⁱⁱⁱ Airbnb: Fast facts. URL: <https://news.airbnb.com/about-us/> (Date accessed: October 12, 2021).

^{iv} Øyvind L. Martinsen. Personality for Leadership // BI Norwegian Business School. – 20.03.2014. URL: <https://www.bi.edu/research/business-review/articles/2014/03/personality-for-leadership/> (date accessed: 22.09.2021).