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LOVE`S LABOUR`S LOST, OR...

7 questions to the Government concerning the Park of lovers

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William Shakespeare knew geography better than we do. Therefore he named his theatre the "Globe". After traveling around the world and settling in England and trying to avoid a conflict with the local authorities he chose to unfold the actions of his plays in Navarre and Verona, Genoa and Venice, in Medieval Denmark and Ancient Rome. At that time he did not know anything about Europe. In London of those times there was no mass media, without which it would have been simply impossible to persuade the mankind that merely the extremity of the Asian continent that was not washed by oceans is a whole continent- to be named Europe.

Given that back in the Shakespearean times there was no Europe "European values" also did not exist. And therefore he was writing about love and death, friendship and betrayal, honor and lie, devotion and revenge. That is to say about values common to all mankind that were not yet brought down to the abridged European standard. After all the European values differ from the Shakespearean as "Hamlet" in cartoons from the real tragedy. Nothing to say, but still, when Shakespeare wrote his "Love's Labor's Lost" the pilot project "European Union" aimed at global control of the mankind by curtailed moral standards was not yet a reality. What there really existed was the belief in the Word of Honor and Love.

Most probably it is the high moral level of Shakespearean works that conditions our overwhelming love towards the English language. However since the times of the great playwright the language has changed. No doubt it has been enriched by military and technological terminology; however it has definitely lost many of Shakespearean words and concepts. For example, those words that concern the main, i.e. Love. Love- it still is definitely good, but the area and phases of the long way have reduced substantially. Today love is only about what is between a woman and a man and sometimes even just the opposite. And if in English you fall in love, i.e. you love- you become a lover, which means you are both an enamored person and a lover, which are completely equal nowadays. In other words the jump from falling in love into the bed for the contemporary English-speaking sapiences is as flash-like as the jump of the post-soviet Georgia into NATO and European Union.

. . . But let's come back to our motherland and more precisely to our street. When twenty-two years ago we, together with my husband, just moved to the street named after the writer Demirchyan and were giving directions to our friends and relatives on how to find our new dwelling, the overwhelming majority of men were rolling up their eyes and telling us about their love to that street, which is crowned with the Pushkin Park. This was because the street and the park reminded them of their first bashful confessions of love and first kisses on their way to virility. And it is not surprising that people started calling it the alley of **lovers** (love struck- literally). And our ancient language from the very beginning fixed in the glossary that the concept of being love struck, or being in love fever is the integral part of being in love. The language and the concepts that are perpetuated in it are the private main of the Nation and God, and no one else. Maybe this is the explanation for the keenness of popular place-names of the later period, such as Kozirjok or Skvoznjachok, or the hunchbacked Kozern.

However it was in totalitarian soviet times that the people had the right to name the places, and the authorities were obediently fixing them on sign-boards. **Now we are on the democratizing way to the European Union, and the not disinterested sponsors, mysterious tenants and bureaucrats serving them become the godfathers of our alleys.** Because where Love ends, Law begins. But where Law ends the time comes for Permissiveness. Among others- the foreign. Thus last year we noticed that the Pushkin Park was fenced by the banners of "Hayastan" Fund with the vulgar advertisement of the Park of lovers. Similarly, once a group of singing Swedish transsexuals called themselves the Army of lovers.

However long before that, in 2005, the cadastre gave a certificate for the legal right for exploitation of 1.5 ha territory of the Pushkin Park for 21 years to the company "Robert Boghossian and Sons". The members of Boghossyan family based in Switzerland and France expressed their readiness to finance the reconstruction of the park as a gift to the residents of the capital of Armenia. And for the role of the architect of the Armenian park the family has chosen a France-born citizen of Switzerland and a specialist of Japanese landscapes, a non-French by origin Pierre Rambach. However the name of Pushkin was considered to contradict all this geographical variety. The author of the letters of Tatiana to Onegin and vice-versa did not fit in the Euro-Asian cosmopolitan perceptions of love. **Thus the Pushkin Park became the Park of Lovers.**

The estimated cost of the project is 228 mln. AMD (\$750000), however the fund considers that eventually it will cost much more. Still so far approximately \$75000 has been spent. The duration of construction works was supposed to last from **the may of the last year to the may of the current year**, however it will be terminated not by the day of independence from Turks but from the USSR, i.e. in autumn, when there will be no more need to hide from the hot sun in the park. On the other hand you can not hide from the sun there any more.

Throughout the last year 19 age-old living trees and many six-year old trees planted by students of Yerevan higher education institutions during the subbotniks of 2001-2002 were cut down. A lonely drain giant has been scalped and left as a decorative element or for our, local aboriginals` edification. All Armenian shrubberies of jasmine, azalea, honeysuckle and others, as well as the underbrush are destroyed to ensure a better view of **the Japanese landscape**. Currently the territory is crossed by concrete channels for brooks that will start from artificial mini-waterfalls, to design which sizeable boulders with the gross weight of several tones have been brought from all over Armenia. The construction of a concrete amphitheatre for audience of 200 with the view on the lawn with five trees has been completed. **As the logic of pop concerts matches the idea of a flower-bed to be stepped on, similarly our eternal fight against stones on the ground matches the idea of a Japanese garden of stones: the destiny of the trees and the lawn most probably is already decided.** The project competition was announced two years ago among students of the Yerevan State University of Architecture and Construction. The ideas of the students have been partly used but not paid for unlike the work of the 83-year old French master of Japanese landscapes with his sizable Swiss fee.

Among undoubtable advantages of the initiative the promise given by the organizers to provide the remaining trees with tablets with Armenian and Latin names should be highlighted. Also- the plan of building chargeable places of convenience for men, women and persons with disabilities should be mentioned. This is of course an important task, as the unfinished building of LLC "Eurostan" that was brutally alienated from the territory of the park historically is placed on the hole, dug by the Soviets for the same purpose of building a lavatory for the same men and women. Secondly, because toilets are those narrow places of tourism in Armenia, which definitely need expanding. Especially taking into consideration the fact that the benefactors are planning to create a café on the territory of the park, which, by the way, is not mentioned in the initial project plan.

The reconstruction of the park one more time came to prove that neither the municipality nor even the state security bodies possess sufficient information on underground communications including the strategically important ones. Thus as attested by the coordinator of the project Sarhat Petrossian the process of paving channels for brooks was attended by surprises of discovering channels of special communication of the National Assembly and even the Presidential Palace. It also for another time demonstrated the diagnosis of epidemic acute cataract of our chiefs in the field of urban development, who during the process of coordination failed to notice the underground station which is situated just below the park and which at the beginning was being irrigated by Japanese brooks. The diagnosis of professional glaucoma can not be excluded as far as the staff of the greening stock of the central prefecture is concerned, that throughout the recent years have been spending their time in an office situated on the territory of the park and philosophically watching the diseases of surviving giant trees. The trees of the park continue to be sick now as well. And as it seems this tendency will grow as any construction on the territory is a heavy shock for a tree. How possibly these trees will serve as the "lungs" of the micro-district if their rootage is partly soldered in concrete, with the rest of them being covered by concrete dust, which is a dangerous poison for the trees? At the same time both the staff members of the greening stock that are hiding on the territory and the Swiss specialist of Japanese landscapes know perfectly well that minimum 1 meter in diameter of the soil surrounding the trunk of the tree must be carefully tamped and nourished, and definitely not filled by concrete as was witnessed by the president of

the social-ecological association Srбуhi Harutunyan. Being a fighter by nature Srбуhi literally cries when remembers the ruins in place of the park. She demonstrates pictures of the recent past, where the park is captured in all its natural beauty of thickly growing trees of more than twenty different types.

At the same time the destruction of the trees continues: during the last few days the trees are being cut down from the side of the crossroad of Demirchayn street and Baghramyan avenue aiming at the maximum Japanization of the new entrance of the park. The park that was carefully preserved by the residents of the neighborhoods despite the cold winters in early 90s is perishing. A thick park where at times squirrels were frolicking. All this is what can be fixed by the vision. But what about the sounds that are fixed by our hearing? “Kar-Kar” and the roar of dump-trucks. Birds have vanished. No whistling and warble of tits, orioles and nightingales that were nesting in the perished trees can be heard any more. And none of our foreign benefactors and local executives of their will have ever given consideration to that. Moreover, neither a silvical nor ornithological studies preceded the concrete-stony-wood-cutting transformations that are thoroughly described in any manual for landscaping. **This means that by cutting down the trees and post factum acquiring signatures of**



most obedient environmentalists giving thus their consent, no one in the fund with a patriotic title “Hayastan” was concerned about finding out the reasons of the weakening and sickness of trees, diagnosing their diseases, developing a plan for their treatment and preventive measures aimed at protection and preservation of the park. They have simply cut down the trees and bushes, destroyed the grass, frightened away the birds and made up a typical plan of discarding as if in a shoe ware-house. Thus they have created a parody on the walk in a cross-country, or a lesson to all those who hope for improvement through “European patterns”

Therefore both the residents of the neighborhood and citizens of the country can not but have a number of questions to the government:

1. WHY THE CHARITABLE FUND HAYASTAN CONTINUES TO REMAIN ONE OF THE LEAST TRANSPARENT ORGANIZATIONS FOR THE SOCIETY, despite the fact that it manages public property in general, and the Pushkin Park in particular? Why neither the secret renaming of the park, nor the reconstruction project, bid of contract works, the name of the winning contractor, or this French-Swiss Japanese undertaking itself became a subject of public hearings while they were still intentions, instead presenting everyone with a fait accompli of destroying one of the last islets of green spaces in the center of the city?

2. WHY WHILE THE SUMMER IS AT ITS HEIGHT BOTH PUSHKIN PARK AND CASCADE BEING THE ONLY RECREATION ZONES IN THE SMALL CENTER ARE STILL IN THE PHASE OF RECONSTRUCTION AND ARE NOT ACCESSIBLE FOR THE RESIDENTS OF THE CITY? After all this deprives the kids and the elderly of the neighborhood of the possibility of having a rest. Why do the city authorities fail to notice that on each of these construction sites 10 workers at maximum idly carry out their tasks because of the parsimony of the financing organizations that save on the salaries on the account of the health of the residents of neighborhood and the city? And on whose permission the right of Yerevan residents for air is violently breached?

3. WHY NO ONE EVER ASKS US IF WE WANT TO HAVE A JAPANESE STONE GARDEN, A MONGOLIAN GOBI OR AFTER ALL AN ISLET OF ANIMATE NATURE IN THE PLACE OF THE PUSHKIN PARK? Or what odd creature this time will be exhibited in Cascade that will have its impact on the formation of tastes of our children? And why overall the initiatives of foreign investors in their historical motherland very often grow not on the soil of love, but on the ground of liberal laws on sponsorship in the countries of their residence, that entail substantial tax remissions? And why the citizens of Armenia as objects of benevolence have no control over the projects of reconstruction of green spaces? Why no one from the local authorities or local administrators of the funds of our foreign compatriots do not prompt them, that love is not only what is between man and a woman and even just the opposite, but is the sense of responsibility and commitment without which any efforts aimed at helping might eventually become fruitless and even disastrous?

4. WHY IS ANY INITIATIVE AIMED AT IMPROVEMENT AND RESTORATION ATTENDED BY A NON-PUBLICISED COMPETITION OF WHO IS THE COOLEST? For example, president’s guard is cool,

therefore on the territory alienated from the Pushkin Park last year a whole SPA was built with gyms, saunas and other incredibilities of our days. Cool can be applied also to the offices of the central prefecture that are located on the territory of the park, and thus the temporary owners of the park build a similar office building on account of the green spaces of the park. Even "Eurostan" falls in the category of being cool, despite the ugly huge what-not that should have been taken down long ago. Even the foreign sponsor Bogossian turned out to be cool enough not to limit himself to the dubious initiative of reconstruction but to get hold of the park for twenty years. But the coolest are probably the guys that covered a part of Tumanyan street near what was once an Opera garden by a crashed stone fencing it with red flags as if to protect it from the citizens as from wolves. Doesn't the prosecutor's office of the republic notice that in our country being cool always implicates being illegal? Or is it involved in this shameful competition of the cools?

5. DO WE REALLY INTEND TO FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION AND TO FILL THE BUDGET WITH ADDITIONAL TAX PAYMENTS? If yes, then why not to apply international practice concerning situations when targeted deadlines for construction and reconstruction are not being met? As far as the dubious initiatives like the café on the territory of Conservatoire alley, the tall building on Demirchyan street with the crane stuck there in the middle of the pavement for already three years, "Eurostan" office, Pushkin park and many others disfigure the city damaging its environment, then why not to pass a law on fining the unfinished constructions? And to set fines paying which would be less beneficial for the contractors than to recruit large groups of workers and to complete construction and reconstruction timely instead of dawdling for years with a small group of multi-tasking workers. Also why aren't the deadlines of construction works mentioned on the banners of advertising contractors to help the people in assisting the authorities in carrying out control? After all any good authority should only dream of such help. And then why not to collect taxes for real estate from the empty skyscrapers, that were built not by the market demand but merely out of a desire for easy money? And of course to design everything scrupulously enough to make the deal with the supervision instances impossible?

6. HAVE THE GOVERNMENT OR 'HAYASTAN' FUND EVER RECEIVED PROPOSALS FOR FOUNDING NEW PARKS AND GARDENS? Have there ever been proposals on establishing parks in the place of abandoned lots or private lands instead of disfiguring the existing ones? If no, then why in your opinion? And why is the earthwork, where any enormous sums can be easily dug, are the most favorite object for foreign sponsorship and local funds representing them?

7. WHEN WILL THE RIBBON OF THE NEW PARK IN THE CENTER OF THE CITY BE CUT? Will there ever be a huge park instead of private houses that will be deconstructed not for construction speculations but out of love towards residents of Yerevan? After all long ago the great Tamanyan designed Yerevan as a garden-city, as he was led by professionalism mixed with love towards the city and the people. However in the times of his successors of our days N.Sarkisyan and S.Danielyan we found ourselves in a dull garden of stones, as their motivations are well known. Today the stony Tamanyan stands surrounded by construction waste and sand as if to prove that contemporary Yerevan is reined not by love but by totally different foreign categories. Maybe its time that the city authorities add a little bit of love towards Yerevan and its residents to the love of cutting red ribbons?

There is still another last question to be asked: Who will answer for the disgrace connected with the Park of lovers? However the answer is known in advance: Pushkin again.