

THE ACTIVITIES OF THE HUNCHAKIANS IN TRANSCAUCASIA, 1918–1920

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Abstract

During the final period of World War I, the visible victory of the Entente on one hand, and the collapse of Tsarism in Russia on the other, created objective prerequisites for the restoration of Armenian statehood. The national parties, having assumed the role of the Armenian people's political leadership, attempted to orient themselves within the vortex of rapid geopolitical events. Each of them had its own unique vision for solving this problem.

The Hunchakian Party was in a similar situation. Although the Hunchakians' vision of independent statehood differed from that of the ARF (Dashnaktsutyun), which played a dominant role in Armenian socio-political life, throughout the entire existence of the First Republic of Armenia, the Hunchakians considered it an inseparable part of United Armenia. After the fall of the Republic, the Hunchakians declared that they were setting aside ideological differences and were ready to cooperate with the Soviet authorities of Armenia.

Keywords: Hunchakian Party, Transcaucasia, Russia, Turkey, Armenian statehood, Republic of Armenia, Dashnaktsutyun Party, "Gortsavor" (Worker) newspaper, Entente powers.

Introduction

In October 1917, the Bolshevik Party of Russia overthrew the Provisional Government and took power into its own hands. Shortly thereafter, Russia deviated from its natural path of development and found itself in ideological, political, and economic chaos. This event had a turning point significance in the lives of the peoples of Russia. Objective prerequisites were created for conquered peoples on the path toward separation from Russia and self-determination.

The objective of this article is to comprehensively, impartially, and completely present the activities of the SDHP (Social Democrat Hunchakian Party) in Transcaucasia during a period that was chronologically short but of decisive significance in the life of the Armenian people. From this perspective, the issue is being highlighted for the first time².

The emphasis on the importance of Transcaucasia is due to the fact that as early as the initial period of World War I (1915), the center of the Hunchakian Party had

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Received 25.04.2026, revised 01.06.2026, accepted 25.06.2026

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² During the period under discussion, the activities of the Hunchakians have been addressed by A. Kitur (1962); R. Khurshudyan (1979); V. Melikyan (2010); E. Djeredjian (2017); G. Hovhannisyan (2014). ¹³

moved from Paris to Tiflis (Tbilisi), which increased the role of the Transcaucasian Hunchakians and that region within the party. Transcaucasia had objectively become the center of Armenian political consolidation. It was no coincidence that the activities of Armenian political forces, including the Hunchakians, were concentrated here.

The Restoration of Armenian Statehood and the Hunchakians

The October Revolution was perceived in Transcaucasia as a betrayal of the February Revolution and the democratic development prospects of the Provisional Government. All political parties in the region, except for the Bolsheviks, condemned the illegal seizure of power³. The vast majority of Hunchakians in Transcaucasia stood on this same ideological foundation; their anti-Bolshevik position had been demonstrated as early as June 1917 at the conference of Hunchakian branches of Russia, Persia, and Transcaucasia held in Tiflis⁴.

The Soviet government of Russia unilaterally withdrew from the war and began separate peace negotiations with the Central Powers. This policy led to the withdrawal of Russian army units from occupied areas of Western Armenia starting in January 1918. Taking advantage of the exposed front, the Turks began their advancement. Resisting the enemy became the primary task for the Armenian people. Like other national-patriotic forces, the Hunchakians also committed themselves to this cause.

To clarify the party's priorities and coordinate actions in the current situation, the Central Executive in Tiflis wrote to the American branch in January 1918, proposing to convene a general representative assembly of the Hunchakian Party⁵. However, that meeting did not take place, primarily due to the lack of safe travel and transportation caused by the war. (The previous 7th General Assembly had been held in 1913).

On February 8, the Yerevan branch of the Hunchakian Party for "Turkish-Armenians" (meaning Western Armenians) published a call urging people to take up arms and defend the fatherland⁶. During this period, the issue of Armenian autonomy became a subject of wide discussion in the influential Hunchakian periodical "Yeritasard Hayastan" (Young Armenia). Its editor, Sapah-Gulian, did not believe that after the withdrawal of Russian troops from the Caucasian front, "Turkish hordes would not enter Armenia under false pretenses"⁷. Events proved that Sapah-Gulian's fears were not unfounded. This view was also shared by A. Babyan, head of the SDHP Central

³ Melikyan 2010: 7.

⁴ National Archives of Armenia (NAA), f. 1456, l. 1, g. 206, p. 1; etc.

⁵ NAA, f. 1456, l. 1, g. 2014, p. 1. (Note: Since the start of WWI, the party had been unable to convene due to unfavorable conditions. The Turkish branches were destroyed. The Paris center, consisting only of Sapah-Gulian and Varazdat, was inactive. By the initiative of US Hunchakians, a new Central Executive was elected via referendum to be based in Tiflis).

⁶ NAA, f. 1456, l. 1, g. 215, p. 1.

⁷ Yeritasard Hayastan, 1918, №78, February 23.

Executive. In his article "The Armenian Question at the Present Moment," he wrote that for the many sufferings it had endured, the Armenian people should be rewarded not only with autonomy but also with political self-determination⁸.

The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, signed in March 1918, caused deep disappointment among the Hunchakians. That treaty "ignored and annulled the principle of self-determination of nations adopted by the Bolsheviks and the decree 'About Turkish Armenia,' giving preference to the problem of maintaining power. In Brest, the rights of the Armenian people were trampled, and a far-reaching deal was signed to hand over regions that did not belong to them to the Ottoman Empire"⁹.

"Yeritasard Hayastan" also addressed the ideology of the representatives of the former Tsarist government—or as Sapah-Gulian characterized it, "Old Russia"—regarding Armenian autonomy. In his opinion, the representatives of Old Russia "did not want us to exercise our right to self-determination on either side of Masis"¹⁰.

On April 9, 1918, under pressure from the Menshevik-Musavatist block of the Transcaucasian Sejm, Transcaucasia separated from Russia and was proclaimed the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic. Realizing the grave consequences of this decision, the Central Executive of the Hunchakian Party published a call to the population of Transcaucasia in Armenian and Russian on April 11, condemning the Sejm's decision to separate Transcaucasia from Russia and declare an independent republic. It condemned the "counter-revolutionary nationalists and false socialists of Transcaucasia, who, by uniting, have severed ties with the Russian Democratic Republic and based the international legal-political status of Transcaucasia on a Turco-German orientation"¹¹.

The consequence of the Sejm's anti-Armenian policy was the collapse of Erzurum's defense and the city's fall¹². On April 25, Kars was surrendered to the Turks, and on May 15, Alexandropol followed. Eastern Armenians faced a mortal threat. On May 16, 1918, the SDHP Central Executive issued a call to the Armenian people to set aside all party differences, unite, and take up arms to struggle against "the enemy invading the country." The call stated that it was better to die with a weapon in hand for the people and the achievements of the revolution "than to fall slavishly before the enemy's sword and bullet"¹³.

It should be emphasized that in the struggle against the Turkish troops during the winter and spring of 1918, Hunchakian figures such as Sargis Armaghanyan, Vahagn Nalbandyan (Sebastatsi Vahagn), Sargis Chebejian, and many Hunchakian volunteers

⁸ Yeritasard Hayastan, 1918, №33, August 24.

⁹ Melkonyan 2015 (Ed.): 614.

¹⁰ Yeritasard Hayastan, 1919, №95, March 26.

¹¹ NAA, f. 1456, l. 1, g. 216, p. 2.

¹² Melikyan 2019: 138.

¹³ NAA, f. 1456, l. 1, g. 219, p. 1.

distinguished themselves¹⁴. Pandukht (Mikael Seryan), a devotee of the Armenian liberation struggle and a figure of the Hunchakian Party, also made an unreserved contribution to the fight against the Turkish invaders. In 1918, we find Pandukht in the battles of Sardarapat, and later in Karabakh-Zangezur. In April 1919, after Turkey returned the Kars region to the Republic of Armenia, Pandukht and his small number of comrades-in-arms were stationed in the border town of Sarighamish¹⁵.

The Turkish invasion of Transcaucasia further deepened the disagreements between the Armenian, Georgian, and Muslim deputies of the Sejm, which resulted in the collapse of the Transcaucasian Federative Republic. Under conditions where Turco-Transcaucasian peace negotiations had begun in Batum on May 11, the Georgian and Muslim deputies—under the patronage of Germany and Turkey—announced their withdrawal from the Sejm. On May 26, the independence of the Republic of Georgia was proclaimed, and on the 27th, that of Azerbaijan. Nothing remained for the Armenian deputies of the Sejm but to orient themselves toward the independence of Armenia. On May 30, the Armenian National Council in Tiflis declared the independence of Armenia. It was a historical necessity and, under the created conditions, had no alternative¹⁶.

This historical event was not unequivocally accepted by all Armenian political forces. In a leaflet-call published on May 31, 1918, the Central Executive of the Hunchakian Party condemned the May 30 decision of the Armenian National Council in Tiflis to proclaim itself the sole supreme authority of the Armenian provinces of Transcaucasia. The reason for the dissatisfaction was the significant influence of the Dashnaktsutyun Party within the National Council—a reality with which the other parties did not wish to reconcile. This was why the Hunchakians proposed forming a “New Provisional National Council consisting of an equal number of representatives from all political, revolutionary, and socialist organizations”¹⁷.

In the socio-political life of the First Republic of Armenia, created after the heroic May battles, the Hunchakians—along with the Mensheviks, Bolsheviks, SRs (Socialist Revolutionaries), and “Specifics” (Social-Democrat Armenian Workers’ Organization)—formed the left wing of that political field.

The Baku Commune and the Hunchakians

As a result of the Turkish invasion of Transcaucasia, the borders established by the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk had already been violated by May 15, 1918. Turkey sought to seize the oil of Baku, then advance to the North Caucasus and ultimately to Central

¹⁴ Djeredjian 2014: 200-202.

¹⁵ Djeredjian 2018: 217.

¹⁶ Melkonyan 2010 (Ed.): 15-16.

¹⁷ NAA, f. 1456, l. 1, g. 221, p. 1.

Asia to realize the project of creating “Great Turan”¹⁸. Since April 25, 1918, a Council of People’s Commissars had been established in Baku, headed by Stepan Shahumyan.

The task of halting the Turkish troops’ advance fell to the forces of the Baku Commune, the overwhelming majority of which consisted of Armenian national military units. The fall of Baku would have dire consequences for the Armenian population; for this reason, the ARF (Dashnaktsutyun), the primary force in Armenian political life, cooperated with the Baku Commune and the Bolsheviks. The Baku Committee of the SDHP also became actively involved in the defense of Baku.

After the February Revolution, the Baku branch of the Hunchakian Party emerged from the underground and elected a new committee of seven members (Sahak Muradyan, Mkrtich Manucharyan, Misak Hakobyan, Khurshud Melik-Aghamiryan, Sargis Sargsyan, Melkon Aslibekyan, and Vardges Geghamyan). On July 6, 1918, the publication of the branch’s organ, the newspaper “Mer Orer” (Our Days), began¹⁹. At the suggestion of St. Shahumyan, the Baku Hunchakian Committee organized the “Red 24th Battalion,” consisting of 700 men, in which Hunchakian Party members formed a significant number. Hunchakian figure Tigran Ghazanchyan was appointed commander of the battalion. By the decision of the SDHP Baku Committee, committee member Sargis Sargsyan was appointed as his deputy. T. Ghazanchyan appealed to the citizens through the Baku Commune’s newspaper “Izvestia”, calling on his party comrades to join the forming battalion (June 24, 1918)²⁰.

In June 1918, the famous Hunchakian military figure Vahagn Nalbandyan (Sebastatsi Vahagn) reached Baku along with Sepuh and Murad of Sebastia, who were rushing from the North Caucasus to aid the defenders of Baku²¹. The capture of Baku by the Turks on September 15, 1918, had grave consequences for the local Armenians. Those who remained in the city were massacred by the invaders. The Hunchakian organization of Baku also suffered heavy losses. The editorial office of the “Mer Orer” newspaper and the branch archives were destroyed. Sahak Muradyan, secretary of the Hunchakian Baku Committee, was killed along with his family²².

The Hunchakians condemned the conspiratorial murder of the 26 Baku Commissars. The article “St. Shahumyan and Comrades” was published in the party’s Tiflis branch periodical, where Shahumyan was highly praised both as an individual and as a practical leader²³.

In his memoirs, Kh. Aghamiryan writes that after the tragic events in Baku, the Hunchakian Party no longer had a structure in the city. After the establishment of Soviet rule in Azerbaijan, the party members—concluding that they had no fundamental

¹⁸ Stepanyan 2016: 497.

¹⁹ NAA, f. 1456, l. 2, g. 23, p. 15; etc.

²⁰ NAA, f. 1456, l. 2, g. 22, p. 64-65.

²¹ Djeredjian 2017: 163-164.

²² NAA, f. 1456, l. 2, g. 22, p. 69.

²³ Gortsavor (Worker), 1919, №1, March 24.

disagreements with the Bolsheviks—considered it unnecessary to restore the Hunchakian organizational structure in Baku and declared that they remained Bolshevik sympathizers²⁴.

The Hunchakian Vision of Independent Armenia

On the eve of the Entente's victory in World War I in the autumn of 1918, the Hunchakians began to widely discuss the theme of restoring Armenian statehood. They maintained that the Entente powers must recognize the "independence of the Araratian Armenian Republic," while simultaneously acknowledging that the greater part of the Armenians' historical homeland was still awaiting its salvation. For this reason, they argued, "until the final solution of the Armenian Question, we stand by their side and shed our blood"²⁵.

In discussing the restoration of Armenian statehood, the Hunchakians believed that at the future peace conference, the Armenian side should propose and defend the idea of separating the six Armenian vilayets and Cilicia from the Ottoman Empire to create an independent Armenian state together with the "Araratian Republic"²⁶.

As early as January 1918, the Central Executive of the Hunchakian Party had reached out to its branches regarding the convening of a general assembly of the party at the end of that year. However, that meeting did not take place because the party's overseas branches did not respond. Consequently, in late December 1918, the Hunchakian center in Tiflis issued a new circular announcing that it reserved for itself the right to determine the party's future course of action²⁷.

One of the significant events in Armenian socio-political life was the Second Congress of Western Armenians held in Yerevan in early 1919 (February–March). Hunchakian figure A. Kitur served as one of the secretaries of the congress's organizing committee. He was also elected to the "Executive Body" responsible for implementing the decisions of the congress²⁸.

The "Gortsavor" (Worker) Newspaper

The Hunchakian perspective on socialism, the resolution of the national question, Armenian-Georgian and Armenian-Azerbaijani relations, and several other issues found expression in the weekly newspaper "Gortsavor", which began publication in Tiflis in March 1919. It was the organ of the party's Tiflis branch. The periodical was edited by

²⁴ NAA, f. 1456, l. 2, g. 22, p. 69.

²⁵ Yeritasard Hayastan, 1918, №37, September 7.

²⁶ Yeritasard Hayastan, 1918, №48, October 16.

²⁷ National Archives of Armenia (NAA), f. 1456, l. 1, g. 248, p. 1.

²⁸ Pan-Armenian Consultations (Hamahaykakan khorhrdaksutyunner) 2004: 296.

Simon Hovvyan (Tashir), a member of the SDHP Central Executive, and Bagrat Syunik, an alternate member of the board and a well-known publicist²⁹.

The editorial of the first issue, titled “Our Unswerving Path,” outlines the Hunchakian view on the path to resolving the Armenian Question—a matter of vital significance for the Armenian people. Essentially, the solution to this issue was linked, on one hand, to Soviet Russia and, on the other, to the policies pursued by the Entente powers. The author of the editorial (Tashir) expressed a fear that if the Armenian Question were not resolved then, it would be buried “finally and irretrievably”³⁰.

The author approached the issue from a class perspective, maintaining that regardless of what solution the Western powers might provide for the Armenian Question, from the viewpoint of socialist Hunchakians, it could not be considered “perfect liberation” for the exploited masses of the Armenian people. Concluding the article, the author noted that he saw the solution to this and other international political issues within the decisions of the Third International (Comintern) convened in Moscow in 1919.

It is necessary to emphasize that these so-called “left” (pro-Bolshevik) Hunchakians held an exaggerated view of the capabilities of the international socialist movement and the role it played in world politics. It should be noted that of the five members of the Tiflis Hunchakian center, only Tashir and Maro Nazarbek held such views. The other members of the center—Lazo (Hakob Ghazaryan), Mars (Vahan Ghukasyan), and Arshak Babyan—and the vast majority of Transcaucasian Hunchakians at this time were closer in their views to the Social-Democratic Mensheviks.

Another Hunchakian publicist, Bagrat Syunik, discussed the policies of the Great Powers, the political orientation of the Armenian people, Pan-Turkism, and the situation of Armenians in Azerbaijan in his articles. Syunik subjected these issues to critical analysis, viewing them within the context of international political events and arriving at conclusions that remain relevant today.

“Gortsavor” was published during the peak of the Paris Peace Conference. The Armenian delegates participating in its work, as representatives of a people who had made the greatest sacrifices in the war, expected the Entente powers to create an Armenian state separated from Turkish rule. Touching upon this issue in the article “The Victory of the Allied States and the Liberation of Small Nations,” Syunik wrote that from the very beginning of the war, the Entente states declared that their struggle against the Germans was not only defensive but was also for the “cause of the liberation of oppressed small nations”³¹.

The author emphasized that despotic Russia also responded to this declaration of the Entente, though Russia was “only endowed with the virtue of smothering the

²⁹ Museum of Literature and Art (GAT), S. Hovvyan fund, g. 144a, p. 11.

³⁰ Gortsavor, 1919, №1, March 24.

³¹ Gortsavor, 1919, №1, March 24.

national-liberation aspirations of its subject peoples and the liberal movements of the Russian people in blood”³². According to Syunik, with that declaration, Russia intended to prevent “probable uprisings and rebellions of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Finland, Ukraine, and Islamic tribes” in the event of German success³³.

One characteristic phenomenon of the period was the Civil War in Russia, the outcome of which would determine the future of not only the Russians but also the constituent peoples of Russia. In the article “Lenin or Denikin,” Abgar Payazat wrote that thanks to the impulses of the revolution, the peoples of Russia had “dived so deep into their self-determination that no matter how much they might avoid Bolshevism, in a choice between Lenin and Denikin, they would choose Lenin, because he gives these nations not only the minimum of their desires, but even the maximum”³⁴. The author believed that “the Russian people have moved too far from the possibility of understanding Denikin, and Denikin’s efforts will be in vain”³⁵.

Speaking on this issue, Stepan Sapah-Gulian considered it a mistake of Armenian diplomacy to send representatives to the governments created by Tsarist generals Kolchak, Denikin, and Yudenich: “A step that could create unkind feelings among the Bolsheviks, leading them to assume that we, too, were in agreement with the Kolchaks and Denikins”³⁶.

We believe that Sapah-Gulian’s view on this matter should be approached with reservation. The fact is that during the peak of the Civil War in Russia in 1919–1920, when the aforementioned generals had achieved great military successes, the government of the Republic of Armenia could not yet be certain of a Soviet victory. Therefore, having Armenian representation in the governments created by those generals could not be considered a diplomatic-political error. In this context, referring to Georgia and Azerbaijan, the Hunchakian theorist believed that Armenia could not ally with those states because “we can gain no advantage other than harm”³⁷.

After the creation of the independent democratic republics of Transcaucasia, inter-ethnic relations and issues took on a new character. The Hunchakians were bewildered and outraged that the Social Democratic Menshevik Party—which had fought alongside them against Tsarism and shared the same ideological platform—essentially abandoned the principles of Social Democracy upon coming to power in Georgia.

“Intoxicated by the success of national independence, the ruling party of the Georgian people has chosen a path diametrically opposed to that which a Social-Democratic faction should have adopted. Internationalist principles have been replaced by nationalist, chauvinist thoughts and slogans... Such an extraordinary transformation

³² Gortsavor, 1919, №1, March 24.

³³ Gortsavor, 1919, №1, March 24.

³⁴ Gortsavor, 1919, №1, March 24.

³⁵ Gortsavor, 1919, №1, March 24.

³⁶ Yeritasard Hayastan, 1920, №90, March 13.

³⁷ Yeritasard Hayastan, 1920, №81, February 11.

of a party is unprecedented in revolutionary history,” we read in the editorial article “The Constituent Assembly of Georgia”³⁸. It is noted that in the Georgian Constituent Assembly, there was no representation for the various nationalities making up one-third of that country, nor for any other political party. “The Georgian government developed such restrictive electoral rules that as a result, all 130 deputies were exclusively Georgians”³⁹.

Addressing the territorial dispute between Armenia and Georgia in “Gortsavor”, Bagrat Syunik writes: “Regarding the land disagreements with Georgia, the similar historical past, present, and most importantly, future interests of Armenia and Georgia necessitate and make a close rapprochement a commanding requirement, which is possible by taking the path of mutual concessions”⁴⁰. This approach by the Hunchakian theorist was undoubtedly realistic and in harmony with the interests of these countries.

The topic of inter-ethnic relations also resonates today, as explored in B. Syunik’s article “Pan-Turkism and Karabakh.” The author writes that the Republic of Azerbaijan, encouraged by the prospect of Pan-Turkism and trampling the principle of national self-determination, seeks to crush the will of the Armenians of Karabakh by force of arms and incites inter-ethnic clashes everywhere. The author emphasizes that “struggling Karabakh was not discouraged at all by its brilliant heroic battle; instead, knowing well the inner meaning of the treacherous Ottoman promises, it remained clung to its weapons until the end”⁴¹. The author presents the grim prospect that could result from the implementation of the reactionary political program of Pan-Turkism. According to him, “The victory of Turanism in the world meant death for Armenia, threatened the national-political ideals of the Arabs and Greeks with grave danger, and menaced the independence of Iran”⁴². Syunik considered it a success that “the victory of the allies (the Entente countries) halted the development of Pan-Turkism with a sharp blow”⁴³.

Continuing this theme in another article, Bagrat Syunik concludes that “no matter how the Entente acts, we must remain firm in our standpoint without hesitation. Driven by the supreme interests of its freedom and historical-individual existence, the Armenian people must defend its just and legal demand to unite Karabakh with the Araratian Republic at the cost of the heaviest sacrifices, if it does not want to put its freedom and existence under the fatal Turkish threat should the political horizon in the Near East redden”⁴⁴.

Syunik’s view is further strengthened by the argument that “The Musavatists, carried away by the obsession of creating a ‘Great Azerbaijan,’ made encroachments

³⁸ Gortsavor, 1919, №3, April 7.

³⁹ Gortsavor, 1919, №3, April 7.

⁴⁰ Gortsavor, 1919, №8, May 19.

⁴¹ Gortsavor, 1919, №3, April 7.

⁴² Gortsavor, 1919, №3, April 7.

⁴³ Gortsavor, 1919, №3, April 7.

⁴⁴ Gortsavor, 1919, №8, May 19.

not only on the core Armenian territories of Transcaucasia but also on Persian Azerbaijan⁴⁵. On the path to realizing their goals, the Musavatists were guided by the national-religious slogans of Pan-Turkism⁴⁶.

Publications regarding the state structure and the policies pursued by Armenia also occupy a significant place in "Gortsavor". Being in opposition to the ARF (Dashnaktsutyun), the Hunchakians had a different view regarding the vision of a United and Independent Armenia. On one hand, they welcomed the creation of the Republic of Armenia—which they characterized as the "Araratian Republic"—but on the other hand, they viewed it as only one part of a future United Armenia. This contradiction was largely due to the disagreements between the two Armenian delegations in Paris. In this context, Hrayr Vanyan's article "The Yerevan Parliament and the Turkish-Armenians" notes: "The governing bodies of the political life of the Russian-Armenians clearly strive to transfer the weight of the Armenian Case to Yerevan by all possible means, aiming to strengthen their position in the resolution of the Armenian Cause"⁴⁷.

Questions regarding the state structure and form of government of Armenia are discussed in A. Babyan's article, "The Future State Structure of United Armenia." The article presents the political and economic challenges facing the republic. Babyan argues that the successful implementation of the construction of the future democratic republic is beyond the strength of a single party, and it is necessary to solve the issue of cooperation between revolutionary-socialist parties. The author expresses hope that "common points of mutual contact will be found among us" to resolve this issue⁴⁸.

The fact that the Hunchakians were in the opposition did not mean that they criticized every action of the Armenian government. Regarding interstate relations with Armenia's neighbors, the Hunchakians also supported and approved the steps taken by the authorities. In this regard, the following report from "Gortsavor" is characteristic: At a conference of representatives of the Transcaucasian republics convened in Tiflis, the Georgians and Azerbaijanis demanded that issues regarding disputed territorial regions be decided by a majority vote. This would have meant losing on the issues of Armenian Lori, Akhalkalaki, and Karabakh, conceding due to being in the voting minority.

Furthermore, the Armenians at the conference were asked to sign an alliance between the Transcaucasian republics for the protection of their independence. "Against whom would this alliance be directed—Lenin, Denikin, the Entente, or Turkey?" the periodical raises as a rhetorical question, concluding that it was correct that "the delegates of the Araratian Republic rejected those proposals"⁴⁹.

The ideological direction of "Gortsavor" and its bold, critical articles turned the Georgian Mensheviks against the publication. Their newspaper, "Borba" (Struggle),

⁴⁵ Galoyan 1999: 112.

⁴⁶ Non-proletarian Parties of Russia, 1984: 312.

⁴⁷ Gortsavor, 1919, №3, April 7.

⁴⁸ Gortsavor, 1919, №1, March 24.

⁴⁹ Gortsavor, 1919, №10, June 2.

demanded that the Georgian government close it down, labeling it a “Bolshevik paper.” Eventually, the publication of “Gortsavor” was discontinued after 21 issues had been released⁵⁰.

The Sovietization of Azerbaijan on April 28, 1920, generated great enthusiasm among Armenian Bolsheviks. Ignoring the actual balance of power, they resorted to open rebellion in May 1920 with the aim of seizing power in Armenia. Discussing this issue, Hunchakian theorist A. Kitur writes that “the Tiflis Hunchakian center had already made a decision to overthrow the May 28 regime and Sovietize Armenia”⁵¹. In reality, the Hunchakian center made no such decision, and Kitur does not support his statement with any documentation. There is another circumstance: M. Nazarbek, one of the members of the Hunchakian center, used her great authority within the party to try in every way to increase Bolshevik influence over the Hunchakian Party. Maro Nazarbek herself did not hide this. In her memoirs, she writes that when she returned from exile after the February Revolution of 1917 and met Lenin, Trotsky, and Shahumyan in Petrograd, she remained in the ranks of the Hunchakian Party on their advice to propagate Bolshevik ideas among the Armenians⁵².

We believe that the report of the SDHP Central Executive addressed to the Central Executive Committee of the RSFSR on September 10, 1920, regarding the situation of the Republic of Armenia, is more reliable. While emphasizing the friendly disposition of the Armenian people toward Soviet Russia, they nevertheless considered the May uprising of the Armenian Bolsheviks to be “untimely and extremely inconsistent with the objective conditions of life”⁵³. This document is also valuable in another sense. Undoubtedly, the Tiflis Hunchakian center was aware of the anti-Armenian decisions adopted at the Congress of the Peoples of the East held in Baku in early September 1920 and sensed the danger threatening Armenia. For that reason, in the aforementioned report, they attempted to demonstrate to Lenin’s government—justifying it with arguments—that the Republic of Armenia was not a threat to the Russian revolution, but rather that its existence fully corresponded to the interests of Soviet Russia, and that Armenia could only play a positive role in Russia’s policy in the Near East.

The Fall of the Republic of Armenia and the Hunchakians

On September 28, 1920, Kemalist Turkey attacked the Republic of Armenia. The Armenian army suffered a defeat. In the occupied territories, the Turks implemented their policy of Armenian extermination.

⁵⁰ National Archives of Armenia (NAA), f. 1456, l. 2, g. 21, p. 91.

⁵¹ Kitur 1962: 488.

⁵² NAA, f. 1456, l. 2, g. 31, p. 19.

⁵³ NAA, f. 1456, l. 1, g. 241, p. 17.

In late October 1920, during the height of the Armenian-Turkish war, the inter-party body of Armenia's political parties published a call addressed to the citizens of Armenia. The document exposed the genocidal goals of the Kemalists and announced a mobilization of all citizens capable of bearing arms⁵⁴. As Mustafa Kemal later admitted, Turkey's goal in that war was to destroy the Armenian state and subsequently annex Azerbaijan to Turkey; in other words, the policy of Pan-Turkism was being put into action⁵⁵.

In this alarming situation for Armenia, a conference of the Georgia branch of the SDHP was held in Tiflis in November 1920. After examining "Armenia's present alarming and desperate situation" over several sessions, a resolution was adopted on November 11. It concluded that the only way to save the Armenian people from final destruction and to protect their physical existence and independence was the "overthrow of the reigning regime and the establishment of a workers' and peasants' Soviet government"⁵⁶.

Taking advantage of the Republic of Armenia's dire military-political situation, Soviet Russia consistently pushed forward its plan for the Sovietization of Armenia. Ultimately, the last government of Armenia, standing on the brink of collapse, entered into negotiations with Russian representatives. By an agreement signed in Yerevan on December 2, 1920, power was ceded to the Military Revolutionary Committee, which had entered Armenia with the 11th Army of Soviet Russia. Under the Yerevan Agreement, Soviet Russia and Armenia became allied states. A legal basis was prepared for the deployment of Soviet Russian Red Army units on Armenian territory. The latter was a significant factor in preventing the possible further advancement of the Turkish army and creating a powerful barrier on the road to "Great Turan"⁵⁷.

The agreement of December 2 closed the final page of the First Republic of Armenia. Armenia entered the Soviet period of its history. Upon coming to power, on December 9, 1920, the Armenian Revolutionary Committee (Heghkom) reached out to the Yerevan branch of the Hunchakian Party, asking it to express its attitude toward the change of power in Armenia and the foreign policy of Soviet Russia. In a written response on December 11, the SDHP Yerevan branch announced that it welcomed "the coup d'état in Armenia and the established Soviet government," as it had created a workers' and peasants' government and brought freedom to the Armenian working class. Regarding their position on Soviet Russia's foreign policy, the Hunchakians stated that since the goals of Soviet Russia were in harmony with those of the Social-Democratic Hunchakians, they supported Soviet Russia's foreign policy⁵⁸.

⁵⁴ National Archives of Armenia (NAA), f. 1456, l. 1, g. 243, p. 1.

⁵⁵ Khachatryan 2007: 30.

⁵⁶ NAA, f. 1456, l. 1, g. 244, p. 1.

⁵⁷ Avetisyan 1997: 353.

⁵⁸ NAA, f. 1456, l. 1, g. 245, p. 1.

The letter noted that after the establishment of Soviet rule in Armenia, “there is no longer any reason for the troops of Mustafa Kemal—who declares himself a friend of Soviet Russia—to remain in the territories of Soviet Armenia, an ally of Russia. No danger threatens him from Soviet Armenia because, by overthrowing the previous government, Soviet Armenia has no imperialist aspirations; meanwhile, the withdrawal of his (Kemal’s) troops from the borders of Armenia should allow the displaced population of the occupied areas to return to their settlements”⁵⁹. The document was sealed and signed by Geghuni, chairman of the SDHP Yerevan board.

The repressions initiated by the Revolutionary Committee against non-Bolshevik parties in Armenia forced the Hunchakians to be cautious. This is evidenced by the minutes regarding the internal political situation of Armenia from the SDHP Yerevan branch on December 19, 1920. It instructed all Hunchakians in Armenia that until they were informed of the real intentions of the Armenian government and the SDHP Central Executive, they should “be extremely careful and reserved, and give no word or express a decisive opinion regarding either Bolshevism or the Entente”⁶⁰.

It can be said with certainty that “the attitude of the Hunchakians toward Soviet Armenia was never hostile. Regardless of the political regime, they continued to perceive the Armenian SSR as a fatherland, and in terms of status, as an autonomous state entity within the Soviet Union”⁶¹.

Conclusion

In 1918–1920, Transcaucasia became the primary center of the Hunchakian Party’s activities. During the period under discussion, the Hunchakian Party maintained its oppositional position toward Bolshevik ideology. From a theoretical and ideological perspective, the Hunchakian Party possessed a national-socialist character, and in terms of its program, it shared close ties with the Menshevik Party. In 1918–1920, the Hunchakians actively participated in the socio-political processes of Transcaucasia.

Despite ideological disagreements with the ARF (Dashnaktsutyun), the Hunchakians stood unhesitatingly in defense of the Armenian people and the First Republic of Armenia during moments of existential crisis. Following the establishment of Soviet rule in Armenia, while maintaining their ideological differences with the ruling regime, they continued to regard the Republic of Armenia as the homeland of all Armenians and expressed their readiness to cooperate with the Soviet authorities for the benefit of Armenian statehood and the Armenian people.

⁵⁹ NAA, f. 1456, l. 1, g. 245, p. 2.

⁶⁰ NAA, f. 1456, l. 1, g. 246, p. 1.

⁶¹ Melkonyan 2022: 61-97.

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Translated from Armenian by Gevorg Harutyunyan