

THE COURSE OF THE RESTORATION OF INTERSTATE RELATIONS BETWEEN ARMENIA AND GEORGIA AFTER THE DECEMBER 1918 WAR

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After the declaration of independence of the Republic of Armenia and Republic of Georgia in May 1918 the establishment of good-neighborly relations was not an easy task, which was due to the consequences of unsolved territorial-border disputes. Although at the beginning of June 1918 the two states undertook attempts to solve existing controversies by means of negotiations, their dialogue was never obtained. The problem was hampered due to the mistrust towards each other which exists among Armenian and Georgian leaders. The Georgians complain demanding to withdraw the Armenian government from Tbilisi, the Georgian capital. The tension temporarily faded after the departure of Armenian parliament and government to Yerevan in 17 July, 1918.

In autumn 1918 (on the eve of the defeat of the Quadruple alliance in World War I) the Ottoman government began to withdraw its military contingents from the Borchalu district of the Tbilisi province. This was followed by the entrance of Armenian forces to the Southern Lori district led by Drastamat Kanayan in October 1918. The Georgians were surprised which culminated in the diplomatic confrontation between Armenia and Georgia for about a month and a half, culminating in the war in December 13.¹ According to Hovhannes Kajaznuni, the first Armenian Prime minister, the main cause of the war was the blocking of Armenia by means of the capture of Lori and the closing of the railway.²

The representatives of Entente in Transcaucasia undertook measures in order to stop the military operations. Captain Edward Green of the staff of General William Thomson, commander of the Allies in Transcaucasia, while visiting Gharakilisa on his trip from Baku to Tiflis, suggested the confronting sides to become a mediator. In December 15 he submitted to Dro, the commander of Armenian forces in Lori his suggestions to be sent to the government of Armenia. According to them, it was offered to announce a 14 days ceasefire, the confronting sides are obliged to withdraw their forces from the disputed Lori and Akhalkalak, whose population should continue to live their, the railway communication restored and the representatives of both states to be sent to Sanahin in order to find solution to the problems, etc.³ Judging from the suggestions, for the British officer the restoration of communication and first of all that of railway, was of utmost importance.

¹ On the Georgian-Armenian diplomatic confrontation in Autumn 1918 and the December war see in detail Vrcayan 1993: 230-242; Hovhannisyan 2005: 99-127; Sardaryan 2002: 69-89; Melkonyan 2003: 295-303; Virabyan 2003: 137-191; Virabyan 2016: 142-510.

² Kajaznuni 1923: 39-40.

³ National Archive of Armenia (NAA), f. 200, l. 1, f. 16, p. 17 and rev.; Sardaryan 2002: 81-82.

Dro immediately sent the suggestions of E.Green to the government of Armenia. The parliament and government of Armenia accepted them with some reservations.⁴ After that, in December 17 E.Green submitted his suggestions also to the Georgian government.

For the discussion of conditions with E.Green and Georgian representatives regarding the ceasefire in December 19 the Armenian government sent its delegation to Gharakilisa. The delegation was headed by the well-known member of Dashnakcutyun (Armenian Revolutionary Federation, henceforth ARF) Martiros Harutyunyan, the members were - Smbat Khachatryan (ARF), Grigor Ter-Khachatryan (Armenian People's party), Arsham Khondkaryan (Social-revolutionary party), Stepan Mamikonyan (non-party), and the military advisor, general Gabriel Ghorghanyan (Korganov). All five delegates were members of Armenian parliament. Their main goal was to reach the ceasefire, to smooth the Armenian-Georgian confrontation and restore the railway communication; they were authorized to sign all necessary treaties on behalf of the Armenian government.⁵

Actually Martiros Harutyunyan was the leader of the ARF fraction of the parliament. Besides that, he was renowned in the Transcaucasian political circles as a balanced and peaceful politician. That is why exactly he was appointed as the leader of the Armenian delegation to Gharakilisa to deal with the war and restoration of railway communication. His knowledge of languages also was of some importance.

In December 22, 1918, the Armenian delegation arrived in Gharakilisa where took place a meeting with E.Green. But the Georgian government did not send a delegation although, as E.Green told, he had sent his suggestion also to the Georgian government in December 17.⁶ Actually, the mission of E.Green ended with fiasco; after that he left for Baku. Anyway, M. Harutyunyan and his colleagues decided to wait the Georgians. And this in the situation when the military operations were favorable for Armenia. In the December 22 telegram addressed to V. Thomson M.Harutyunyan tells that the Armenian delegation is waiting for the arrival of Georgian delegation, according to the preliminary decision reached between Armenia and Georgia in regard to the regulation of the conflict.⁷ The mentioned above testifies in favor of the goodwill of Armenian government to regulate the existing problems between two states by means of negotiations.

Successful operations of Armenian army in the war gave rise to panic and anti-Armenian sentiments in Tiflis. The Georgian government applied to the command of the Allies in order to interfere.⁸ In his letter addressed to H.Kajaznuni from Tiflis in January 28, 1919, M.Harutyunyan, the leader of the Armenian conciliatory delegation informs. «...

⁴ Protocols of the sessions of the parliament of the Republic of Armenia. 1918-1920, Yerevan, 2009, p.128-136; Protocols of the sessions of the parliament of the Republic of Armenia. 1918-1920, Yerevan, 2014, p. 72-75.

⁵ NAA, f. 200, l. 1, f. 150, p. 24; Sukiassyan 2009: 186-187.

⁶ NAA, f. 200, l. 1, f. 16, p. 368.

⁷ Idem, f. 150, p. 93.

⁸ Hovhannisyan 2005: 119-124, 130-131; Virabyan 2016: 392-393.

some gentleman who talk to [W.] Thomson told that the Georgians had asked Englishmen to interfere and quit with the war».⁹ The representatives of the Allies in Tiflis, English general William Henry Rycroft, colonel Pierre-Auguste Chardigny, the head of the French military mission and the Georgian prime-minister Noy Zhordania, with the participation of Arshak Jamalyan, the representative of RA in Georgia (despite his opposition) in December 25, 1918, signed an agreement on ceasefire which considers to stop military operations immediately. Armenian forces in the province of Borchalu should be pulled out to the so-called Turkish line (until the borderline of October 1918, occupied by the Ottoman army), and the district of Akhalkalak should be put under the authority of Georgian administration. It was expected that the territorial-border conflicts between Armenia and Georgia had to be finally solved by the great powers in the conciliatory summit which was expected to hold in Paris, with the participation of the representatives of two states. H.Kajaznuni, the Armenian prime-minister was informed about this decision by telegram in December 26.¹⁰

In December 28 an international commission arrived in Gharakilisa consisting of English captain Herbert Henry Douglas-Withers, French captain Nicolas Gasfield, Georgian colonel Ivan Japaridze and English translator. A. Jamalyan was also with them. The commission brought the decision of W.-H. Rycroft and P.-A. Chardigny concerning the ceasefire. The conditions suggested to Armenians were unjust and one-sided. Therefore, until the opening of official session Armenian side had separate meeting with the European members of the commission. The members of the Armenian conciliatory delegation complained in regard to the suggested principles but agreed with the demand of the Allies to stop the war. The delegation informed the Armenian government about the situation. Taking into account the existing blockade of the country and difficult social-economic situation, the government suggested to sign the agreement but to demand to later revise some points in Tiflis with the participation of Armenian delegation.¹¹ The agreement was signed by M. Harutyunyan in December 29 on behalf of the Republic of Armenia. H.H. Douglas-Withers expressed his pleasure. He took with him to Tiflis M.Harutyunyan and general G.Ghorghanyan. Other members of the delegation had to leave for Tiflis when possible. Military operations between Armenia and Georgia stopped in December 31.

M.Harutyunyan, the head of the Armenian conciliatory delegation and general G.Ghorghanyan, military advisor, arrived in Tiflis in December 30, 1918, in December 31. Other members of Armenian delegation reached Tiflis in January 3. It should be mentioned that one of the delegates, namely Grigor Khachatryan returned to Yerevan in January 22. After that the delegation acted with four members. Since general G.Ghorghanyan had to go to Paris, he was released from his duties and was replaced by General Mikael Areshyan in January 28.¹²

⁹ NAA, f. 200, l. 1, f. 16, p. 80 and rev. 81.

¹⁰ Ibid., f. 19 and rev., l. 2, f. 33, p. 1.

¹¹ Sukiassyan 2009: 188-189.

¹² NAA, f. 200, l. 1, f. 150, p. 30.

Until the arrival of other members of the delegation M. Harutyunyan paid a visit to the Georgian foreign minister Evgeniy Gegechkori, and G. Ghorghanyan – the military minister Grigol Gorgadze, in order to inform about their arrival and address. Then they initiated some preliminary organizational work in the case of the possible Armenian-Georgian conference. To the meeting called by that purpose, besides the members of the conciliatory delegation, participated also the members of the delegation which was going to leave for Paris - Avetis Aharonyan, Mikael Papajanyan, Levon Ghulyan (minister of supplies of RA), Rostom (Stepan Zoryan), one of the founders of ARF. During the meeting it was decided to compile and submit to the Allies a project regarding the administration of Lori, then to ask them to withdraw Georgian forces from all Armenian-populated localities, since they irritate people by their actions, thus frustrating them and becoming source for insurrection. It was decided also to ask to garrison English troops in the Turkish-speaking settlements of Sadakhlo district. Pursuing these goals in January 3, 1919, a letter including some necessary documents was sent to the command of the Allies¹³.

During the meetings with the military representatives of the Allies in Tiflis M. Harutyunyan and other delegates raised the next question: besides the signature of the agreement on ceasefire, in order to secure the long-termed peace between Armenia and Georgia pivotal problems should be solved. In response the Armenian delegation was requested to inform about such problems in order to organize Armenian-Georgian conference. In January 6 the Armenian delegation submitted to the Allies, besides the border problems, the list of Armenian-Georgian issues which remain unsolved – the use of the railway (railway was the only means of contact with the outer world), the division of the common Transcaucasian property (both military and civil), persecution of Armenians in Tiflis and other Armenian-populated regions of Georgia, expropriation of their belongings, obstacles regarding the activities of Armenian press in Georgia. These problems should have been solved as soon as possible since without their solution the Armenian-Georgian relations would «lack stable grounds».¹⁴

The sessions of Armenian-Georgian conference with the participation of the Allies began in January 9; English colonel Robert Stuart was the chairman. He was aided by translator (negotiations were held in Russian, which was translated into English, the French representative knows Russian) and English, and an English secretary. On behalf of the French mission captain Nicolas Gasfield participated in the sessions of the conference, sometimes also the French consul Duroy and Antoine Poidebard, the French military representative in the Republic of Armenia. The entire Armenian delegation took part in the conference. The translator of the Armenian delegation was Yervand Mirzoyants, and Vardges Aharonyan as a secretary. The Georgian side was represented by the Foreign minister Evgeniy Gegechkori, his assistant Constantin Sabakhtarashvili, Interior minister Noy Ramishvili, Minister of Finances Georgi Zhuruli, his assistant

¹³ Sukiassyan 2009: 190-191; NAA, f. 200, l. 1, f. 150, p. 98-101 and rev.

¹⁴ NAA, f. 200, l. 1, f. 16, p. 55, f. 150, p. 350 and rev.

Constantin Kandelaki, general Alexander Gedevanov, the assistant of the Military minister, colonel Ivan Japaridze, etc.

The next sessions of the conference took place in January, 10, 11, 13, 15 and 16. During the conference work in parallel the military (from the Armenian side - general G.Ghorghanyan), administrative (from the Armenian side - M.Harutyunyan and A. Khondkaryan) and financial (from the Armenian side - S. Mamikonyan) commissions. The decisions of the conference were prepared and signed in three languages – Russian, French and English. After the conference was concluded every side had received the Russian and French copies.¹⁵

At the opening of the conference R.Stuart, according to the agreement with Y. Gegechkori, denied the economic part of the agenda suggested by the Armenian delegation. The main discussions were focused on the status of Borchalu and Akhalkalak. Stuart turned down also the suggestion made by general Ghorghanyan to leave the problem of the border to the military commission. Also was rejected another Armenian initiative which requires to solve the borders of the neutral zone as to the December 25, 1918 ceasefire.¹⁶ The military commission (A.Gedevanov, G.Ghorghanyan and I.Japaridze), in January 10 submitted to the conference a project regarding the northern and southern borders of the Lori neutral zone, borderlines of Armenian and Georgian troops to be held and their numbers.

The Armenian-Georgian peace conference was completed in January 16; under the pressure of the Allies it temporarily «arranged» the territorial disputes between Armenia and Georgia in regard to Borchalu and Akhalkalak. It was decided to move Akhalkalak into the Georgian jurisdiction, and the town Lori liberated by Armenian forces into the neutral section, under control of the Allies, despite the fact that Armenia was successful in the war. Over 40 villages in the liberated Lori were included in the Neutral zone which was divided into three sections – Alaverdi, Uzunlar (modern Odzun), and Voroncovka (modern Tashir). As the northern border of Borchalu neutral zone was decided to be the line occupied by Georgian forces at 24⁰⁰ of December 31, 1918 Armenian-Georgian ceasefire. As to the southern border, as such was established the line which until their defeat at the end of World War I was occupied by the Ottoman army.¹⁷ The resolution of the conference was signed in January 22.

Although after the conclusion of the January 1919 conference it would seem that the relations between Armenia and Georgia were regulated, in reality the disputed problems remain unsolved for several weeks. The Armenian delegation stayed in Tiflis in order to discuss with the Georgian representatives all current issues. Their regulation (including the restoration of diplomatic relations) lasted until March 1919.

During the January 1919 conference and after it for the Armenian delegation among the interstate problems diplomatic relations between Armenia and Georgia were of utmost priority. From the letters of M.Harutyunyan sent to Yerevan becomes clear that the efforts

¹⁵ Sukiassyan 2009: 191-192.

¹⁶ Kharatyan 2001: 100; Melkonyan 2003: 305-307.

¹⁷ Galoyan and Ghazakhetsyan 2000: 82-83, Melkonyan 2003: 308.

of his delegation were not successful. The problem is that the representatives of the Georgian government use different motivations to delaying the solution of the issue.

In the January 17, 1919 letter sent to Yerevan M. Harutyunyan stresses the next circumstance: during the conference and in the course of private meetings Armenian delegates state that the war is over and in order to show the two peoples that the peace is final, it is necessary to restore normal diplomatic relations. The arguments of Georgians mostly are based on their position regarding the war; for Georgians war was not over yet but only a ceasefire was established. They think that at first the initiator of the war should be revealed and only then one might speak of the restoration of diplomatic relations.¹⁸ During the Georgian-Armenian diplomatic confrontation and especially the war the Menshevik government had succeeded to propagate anti-Armenian attitude among the Georgian population, thus it was not easy to change its policy abruptly. Especially if one takes into account that in the upcoming February 14-16 elections of the Constitutional assembly (it was summoned in March 12, 1919) this action could have been used by the opposing national-democratic party. In his February 2 report addressed to the Armenian government M. Harutyunyan concludes figuratively: «to that chauvinism s[ocial]-d[emocrac]y had helped considerably [in] the process during the conflict. Now S[ocial]-d[emocrac]y could not deal with evil spirits released by himself». ¹⁹ Georgian foreign minister Y. Gegechkori and other Georgian officials brought similar arguments during the conference. In his letters M. Harutyunyan on many occasions testify that Georgians were opposing the opening of Armenian diplomatic mission in Tiflis, with the same motivation. In the January 21 letter he wrote that Y. Gegechkori had suggested him to hand over the defence of rights of Armenian citizens on the territory of Georgia to the Persian consul in Tiflis, like during the Georgian-Armenian war.²⁰

After the arrival of the Armenian conciliatory delegation in Tiflis local Armenians were addressing to it their problems. The latter send them to the Georgian government or to the British mission in Tiflis.²¹ In their turn, the British mission accepts the applications concerning Armenians only through the Armenian delegation. In fact, the delegation exercises diplomatic functions.

This situation was not favorable also for the English mission. In a letter dated with January 23 addressed to the prime-minister H. Kajaznuni, M. Harutyunyan conditions the will of the British command to open Armenian diplomatic mission in Tiflis due to the facts mentioned above and numerous applications from Armenian citizens in Georgia. During the January 22 meeting with the members of Armenian delegation George Forestier-Walker, the commander-in-chief of British forces in Western Transcaucasia, says that diplomatic relations between Armenia and Georgia should be restored, and that a peace

¹⁸ NAA, f. 200, l. 1, l. 16, p. 66 and rev.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 90 and rev.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 70 and rev.

²¹ Examples of such documents see in *The Losses of the Armenian People in the Years of the First World War* (collection of documents and materials of the "Bureau of Establishing the Losses of the Armenians during the World War") (compiled by A. Zakaryan), Yerevan, 2005: 98-99, 103-104, 106.

but not ceasefire was established.²² Besides that, in February 15 Walker asserts to the members of the Georgian government that it is not authorized to block the activities of Armenian mission. These actions had positive impact.²³

For M. Harutyunyan the presence of his delegation in Tiflis was necessary until the re-opening of Armenian diplomatic mission in Georgia. In the February 17 letter addressed to Sirakan Tigranyan, Armenian foreign minister he wrote: «We think that if the mission is going to be re-opened, Mik. Tumanyan could deal with it for a while until the appointment of the representative. Then perhaps the delegation will be free and return back»²⁴ It should be mentioned that the delegation reached the solution of such an important goal.

In order to discuss the problems which remain unsolved during the conference, in January 29 a special Armenian-Georgian meeting was held where the sides reached a consensus regarding the restoration of railway communication between the two republics.²⁵ After a prolonged non-official debates the next sessions of the meeting took place in February 28 and March 3, where the remaining issues of the Armenian-Georgian relations were discussed. Armenian politicians call these negotiations also second Armenian-Georgian conference (as distinct from the January joint sessions where also participate the Allies).

The Georgian side agreed to re-open the Armenian diplomatic mission in Tiflis and was ready to receive the Armenian diplomatic representative, return the Republic of Armenia the confiscated equipment belonging to Armenian corpus (except weaponry), and the documents related to the state institutions on the territory of Armenia as well. An agreement has been reached to implement the convention regarding postal and telegraph service, elimination of laissez-passer free transit, and mutual recognition of the independence as well. The decisions were signed by the Armenian delegates in March 11, and by Georgians in March 17.²⁶

After the conclusion of the work M. Harutyunyan informed by separate letters in March 14 and 15 Levon Evangulyan, the diplomatic representative of the Republic of Armenia in Georgia, about the solved and unsolved issues of Armenian-Georgian negotiations. And already in March 19 M. Harutyunyan handed over the current affairs of the delegation to the mission including copies of reports and applications²⁷ In March 26 he returned to Yerevan.

The restoration of diplomatic relations between Armenia and Georgia was not an easy task. During the following months the governments of Armenia and Georgia express their readiness to solve the existing problems by means of negotiations, not by force, which was an important achievement for two peoples. Anyway, in regard to existing

²² NAA, f. 200, l. 1, f. 16, p. 77.

²³ Sukiassyan 2009: 199; Sardaryan 2002: 103.

²⁴ NAA, f. 200, l. 1, f. 16, p. 84.

²⁵ Sukiassyan 2009: 192.

²⁶ NAA, f. 200, l. 1, f. 16, p. 115-120 and rev., 125-126 and rev.; Sukiassyan 2009: 193.

²⁷ NAA, f. 200, l. 1, f. 150, p. 515-516 and rev.; Sukiassyan 2009: 204.

disputes, mostly territorial, between Armenian and Georgian politicians was never achieved visible progress.

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