

**THE ARMENIAN GENERAL BENEVOLENT UNION IN SOVIET ARMENIA
(1923-1937)**

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This monograph by Dr. Eduard Melkonian was published first in Armenian (Էդուարդ Լ. Մելքոնյան. Հայկական Բարեգործական Ընդհանուր Միությունը Խորհրդային Հայաստանում, 1923-1937թթ., Երեւան: Նոյյան Տապան, 1999, 202 էջ). It has drawn on the so far unpublished materials from different archives within Armenia as well as from the archive of the Central Board of Directors of AGBU.

Later as separate chapters it became part of Ed. Melkonian's two other monographs on the comprehensive history of the AGBU, published in Armenian (Էդուարդ Լ. Մելքոնյան. Հայկական Բարեգործական Ընդհանուր Միության պատմություն, Երեւան: Սուղի, 2005, 582 p.

<http://www.armeniandiaspora.am/images/menus/267/Melkonian.pdf>)

and in Russian (Эдуард Л. Мелконян, Армянский Всеобщий Благотворительный Союз. Неоконченная история, Ереван: Тигран Мец, 2010, 487 с.

<http://www.armeniandiaspora.am/images/menus/320/Melkonian.pdf>).

The book has been revised for the current edition but without any significant changes in the content. At one time, the book initiated by then the President of the AGBU Louse Manoogian Simon was translated into English by Artashes Emin, and this translation with the relevant changes is used in this edition.

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INTRODUCTION

The oldest and largest Armenian charitable organization - Armenian General Benevolent Union (Baregortsakan in Armenian, hereinafter referred to as AGBU, Benevolent Union, Union) was founded in 1906 in accordance with the document that has since become one of the important records in the contemporary history of the Armenian people, and especially the Armenian Diaspora.

"Today, April 15, 1906, on the first day of Holy Easter, the undersigned, gathered in Cairo at the mansion of His Excellency Boghos Pasha, organized a society under the name of Armenian General Benevolent Union, as per the condition and provisions of the above By-Laws bearing the present date and our signatures.

The first Board of Directors of the society is formed of the ten members stated in Article 10 of the By-Laws, and as of today the association is declared established.

Cairo, April 15, 1906

Boghos Nubar, Yacoub Artin Pasha, Yervand Aghathon, Megerdich Andranigian, Megerdich Margosoff, Garabed Sheridjian, Arakel Nubar, Nazaret DagHAVarian, Grigor Yeghiayan, Hovhannes Hagopian"

The purposes of the newly established organization were:

- a. «to assist in the intellectual and moral development of the Armenian people in the homeland;
- b. to strive to improve its economic standing;
- c. to promote any initiative or publication serving the above ends.»

«For the benefit of the Armenian people in the homeland the Armenian General Benevolent Union shall establish or subsidize schools, workshops, hospitals, dispensaries, orphanages and other institutions of the kind. It shall provide assistance to needy Armenians in the homeland without any prejudice, including religious faith. It shall assist the peasantry, providing them with land, seeds, animals and implements. It shall encourage the development of local crafts, disseminate knowledge in modern agriculture, create new jobs and establish industries. It shall extend immediate help to victims of famine, fire and any other disaster».¹

Who were these people, living far away from their homeland, who founded an organization that has been continuously operating for over a hundred years, faithful to its purposes and principles?

One of the Armenians holding high posts in the public administration of Egypt in the middle of the 19th century was Boghos Bey Youssoufian (1768-1844), who by the end of his life became the Minister of Foreign affairs and Trade. In 1843 he invited his sister's son, Nubar Nubarian, to become the secretary of staff of the ministry. He later became one of the foremost statesmen of the country and went down in history under the name of Nubar Pasha (1825-1899). Nubar Pasha "served as the Premier of Egypt for three terms and for a period acted as regent. Egypt owes him a great deal, among

¹ Haykakan Baregortsakan Endhanur Miutian Voskematian, 1906-1913 [AGBU's Golden Book, 1906-1913], 1913: 30.

other things, for its irrigation system and the establishment of mixed tribunals, which put an end to the practice of trying non-Muslims according to the Islamic law."²

His son, Boghos Nubar (1851-1930), was the founder and first President of the Armenian General Benevolent Union. Like his father he attended schools in France and Switzerland, and continued his education in the Ecole Centrale of Paris, receiving the qualification of an engineer. "Some years later he invented an automatic plough capable of breaking the hardest soil, which won the first prize at the Paris Exposition of 1900 and brought him the highest French order of Merit, the Grand Cross of the Legion d'Honneur, and the gold medal of the Milan Exposition of 1906, as well as the coveted "Oliver de Serres" medal, awarded by the Agricultural Society of France to the foremost agricultural inventor."³ Upon his return to Egypt he entered civil service and was the general director of the Railway Company of Egypt for seven years (1891-1899). During these years Egypt has effectively become a British colony and almost every sector of the economy was under the control of the English. Boghos Nubar did not want to succumb to and revolted against all forms of interference by them and submitted a letter of resignation. Even the request of Abbas pasha, the Khedive of Egypt, to withdraw the letter, did not shake his resolve, moreover, after that he never worked with a public agency again. Through the subsequent years Boghos Nubar successfully applied his skills of a financial expert, entrepreneur and organizer. For example he founded the Alexandria Streetcar Company and the Mengeleh land utilization company, was for many years the director and the biggest shareholder of the Cairo Water Company that was founded by his father and was of utmost importance for a country like Egypt. Together with the famous Belgian entrepreneur and industrialist Edouard Empain he founded the city of Heliopolis,⁴ as well as a number of major enterprises, he was also a board member of the biggest Egyptian banks and companies.

Although Boghos Nubar had pledged not to accept a civil service post ever again, his contribution to the progress of Egypt was so great and preponderant that he enjoyed the respect and trust of the Egyptian authorities till the end of his life. As with his father, he was also granted the title of "Pasha" by the Egyptian government, while Sultan Hussein the First in 1914 in Cairo and King Fuad the First in 1926 in Paris were his house guests, contrary to Oriental tradition, which is an exceptional honor for a host that holds no a state post.⁵

It is known that among ethnic minorities such characteristics (high position, wealth, public post etc) do not always imply service to the benefit of the compatriots. Armenian history is full of such examples, beginning with the Byzantine emperors of Armenian descent through members of the ruling elite of the Soviet Union, and it seemed to be so and Boghos Nubar. He received his schooling in Europe, did business with foreigners

² Norehad 1966: 4.

³ Ibid.

⁴ General baron Edouard Empain, the Belgian who built the Paris metro - <http://bit.ly/2RXw3RC>

⁵ Gartashian 1987: 176-187; Zertusht 1920: 29-35.

and pursued a purely European lifestyle. "He (Boghos Nubar - Ed. M.) is not in the least Oriental and even less Armenian. Perhaps this is not convenient from our national perspective, since the Pasha may sometimes be unable to penetrate a particular twist of our psyche, but, and this is unquestionably a bonus for the individual character, Boghos Pasha is the quintessential European, that is a Frenchman."⁶

The following fact that relates to his father, Nubar Pasha, is quite remarkable. In June and July, 1878, the Berlin Congress was called upon to review the San-Stefano treaty concluded in March of the same year between Russia and Turkey, since the European powers held that the treaty favoured the strengthening of Russian influence in the Balkans and in Asia Minor. As Article 16 of the San-Stefano treaty pertained to Armenia, this issue was also to be discussed in Berlin. For this reason an Armenian national delegation arrived in Berlin, headed by Megerdich Khrimian. The delegation met with Nubar Pasha in Paris and acquainted itself with the memorandum prepared for the summit. Nubar Pasha in his turn discusses it with the Chancellor of the First German Reich Otto Von Bismark and the famous Russian general and statesman Mikael Loris-Melikoff. "When the redoubtable diplomats Bismark, Loris-Melikoff and Nubar Pasha saw the loser plan prepared by the delegation, all three stated that the plan is simply illusory and that they would like to see a different plan..."⁷

The subsequent course of events is remembered by Megerdich Khrimian (by then already Catholicos of all Armenians Megerdich the First) in his letter to Nubar Pasha:

"May I remind you, honourable Sir, that 17 years ago I was in Paris with our interpreter Mr. Cheraz and, in the capacity of an Armenian delegate representing Patriarch Nerses, I submitted to the judgement of Your Honour a Memorandum that contained a new Armenian issue and was to be presented to the Berlin Congress... You kindly accepted the issue and agreed to consider it. Having read and analyzed the Memorandum, You found it unsuitable and excessive. Hence You drew up a new Memorandum, presenting the issue, with Your far-sighted wisdom, in a moderate and realistic manner... I forwarded the new temperate Memorandum to Patriarch Nerses in Constantinople. But, alas, he as well as his closest advisors insisted with all recalcitrance that the Memorandum remain intact and be presented to the Congress the way it was. When I received the cable with these instructions in Berlin, I felt profound sorrow and could not help but retreat to a secluded corner and weep like a boy, since I could clearly foresee the demise of the initiative... I can not forget the event. Had Your Honour been in Berlin at the time and submitted the Memorandum drafted by yourself to the Congress, I believe that the language of Article 61 would not be so weak and obscure but, rather, strong, resolute and practical."⁸

Nubar Pasha himself writes: "In 1878 I was in Paris. The four envoys sent by Patriarch Nerses had come to see me to seek advice and assistance. I told them to

⁶ Haykakan Baregortsakan Endhanur Miutian Voskematian 1913: 27.

⁷ Zardarian 1934: 26/64.

⁸ Gevorkian 1976; Theodik 1930: 308.

delegate the representation to me, and I would underwrite all the expenses and would undertake even more. Let me try, I said, get my moderate administrative programme accepted and implemented. The English delegates Lord Beaconsfield and Salisbury, Bismark and even the Russian delegates are my friends. I have dealt with them, they know me and like me, and I can have my moderate programme of judiciary reforms in six Armenian provinces approved, that is ensure equity before the law of Armenians and Muslims. I also undertake to implement those reforms. This will satisfy all our demands... The Armenian delegates were convinced, they liked the programme and left for Berlin, wherefrom they had to wire me without delay for me to join them. I waited for five days, then eight days. Two weeks later, instead of a cable, I received a letter signed by Minas Cheraç, the secretary to the delegation. It was laconic: The nation does not recognize you as its representative, we are its only delegates to the Berlin Congress."⁹

The states that organized the Berlin Congress did not admit the Armenian delegation to the sessions. The programme submitted by the latter was not discussed and Article 16 of the San-Stefano treaty was replaced by Article 61, with a vague reference to "improvements and reforms" in the Armenian-populated provinces of the Ottoman Empire. The Armenian Church that, through historical developments, has become the conduit for and a protector of the national-political interests of the Armenian people, lacked the knowledge and the experience necessary to implement such reforms. The participation in the Berlin Congress of a person of Nubar Pasha's calibre, a skilled diplomat enjoying the respect and friendship of top European statesmen could only have improved the Armenian chances at the Congress. But the Armenian patriarch of Constantinople turned down his services, perhaps on the basis of Nubar Pasha's prior non-involvement in Armenian national and political affairs. This position exemplifies saliently the way national and political expectations and obligations are perceived among ethnic minorities. It would at least not be realistic to expect from the high ranking Egyptian official to get directly and continuously involved in a programme that lacked clear planning or a recognized line of command. Whereas an international summit was something different, its participants were endowed with the necessary powers to effect changes in the standing of nations, this was a forum where Nubar Pasha could, or at least would try to make the best of his diplomatic experience, take advantage of his contacts to the benefit of the Armenian interests. This was an overwhelming objective that, given a positive resolution, would count towards the finest hour of Nubar Pasha as an Armenian. As for the esteem that Nubar Pasha enjoyed in those days, it is attested to by the fact that three months after the opening of the Berlin Congress he became the head of the Egyptian cabinet. Anyway, Nubar Pasha did not go to Berlin and until the last days of his life he "kept lingering deep in his soul the bitterness of that denial."

This event, quite interesting in itself, is characteristic of the prevailing style in Armenian politics of the time, and gains more significance in view of the fact that in 1878 Nubar Pasha's 27 year old son, Boghos Nubar, was hardly likely to feel happy

⁹ Gevorkian 1976.

with such a lack of trust towards his father. Nonetheless he did not identify individual compatriots or national organizations, however renowned these may have been, with the entire nation, the service to which has become the purpose of the foundation of the AGBU.

"The most respectable person in the AGBU's Central Board of Directors, if not the most dominant, is His Excellency Yacoub Artin Pasha, who, from the very first day of its inception, has followed with great ardour and care the progress of the Union, and with the doubled excellence and meticulousness of a lawyer and a scholar has ensured that the Union impeccably and unfailingly complies with its objectives and principal premises as laid out in the bylaws."¹⁰ According to Vahan Malezian he "was the quintessential Armenian nobleman... who generated reverence all around him."¹¹

Yacoub Artin (Hagop Artin Pasha Chrakian, the son of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Egypt Artin Bey Chrakian, 1842-1919) having received his Armenian education and upbringing in the Samuel-Murad school of the Mekhitarist brotherhood in Paris, continued his studies in European universities (France, Germany, England), specializing in history, literature and linguistics. In 1873 Yacoub Artin received an invitation to Egypt from Ismail Pasha and became the mentor of his sons (prince Mahmoud Fuad later to become the King of Egypt). This was followed by an appointment as the personal aide to Ismail Pasha. Since 1880s he held the highest posts in the public administration of the country (advisor to state, general manager of Egyptian Rail etc.), and in 1883 he became deputy minister of Education, holding this office for 23 years.

This post best suited his preferences and therefore it is no wonder that his work was most prolific in this area. In particular he "organizes the Egyptian elementary and secondary schools, he improves the educational level of high schools, he founds the State Pedagogical College of Cairo and reorganizes the Arts and Crafts Colleges of Cairo."¹² Along with all these his biggest passion remained science, which he spent all his free hours on. "His life was that of a sage, a devout and tireless scholar, spent mostly within his magnificent library, immersed in books and manuscripts..."¹³ The publications of Yacoub Artin, his communications at international academic conferences, as well as the fact that he had founded and directed several societies of oriental studies, earned him European recognition, in particular he received degrees of honorary doctor from the universities of Aberdeen and Saint Andrew (Scotland).

Yacoub Artin played an important role in the life of the Armenian community of Egypt. He organised the local Armenian Catholic community and drafted its constitution. He "was for the Armenian Catholic community what Boghos Nubar Pasha was for us (the Armenian Apostolic community - Ed. M.), a silently accepted and endorsed national

¹⁰ Haykakan Baregortsakan Endhanur Miutian Voskematian 1913: 40.

¹¹ Malezian 1954: 304.

¹² Gartashian 1986: 244.

¹³ Haykakan Baregortsakan Endhanur Miutian Voskematian 1913: 41.

leader."¹⁴ The inclusion of Yacoub Artin among the founders of the Union embodied the fundamental principle of the Union Bylaws, that stipulated: any Armenian may participate without prejudice, including that to his or her faith.

Yervant Aghaton was not only one of the founding fathers of the Union, participating in the development of the Bylaws, but also committed the rest of his life to serve the Union. Vahan Malezian, who was generally rather reserved in his opinions about colleagues, characterized Aghaton as follows: "Nobody, even Boghos Nubar, had so much 'blessed fire' inside, it ignited and flamed all the time with love towards the Baregortsakan. Truly he not only believed in it, he worshipped the Union, and it may be said without exaggeration it that he sometimes even favoured the Baregortsakan over his family."¹⁵

Yervant Aghaton's father, Grigor Aghaton, whom he lost at the age of eight, was a peasant's son, who nevertheless became the first Christian minister in the Ottoman Empire and one of the authors of the Armenian National Constitution of 1860. It is remarkable that Yervant Aghaton attended the Nubar-Shahnazarian school that was founded by Boghos Nubar's father. This was his first, so far indirect exposure to the Nubar family. After graduating from the Paris Grignon High School of agriculture he worked in France for one year before returning to Constantinople, where he assumed different posts: Inspector of Imperial Estates, member of the Board of the Agricultural Bank etc. In 1896, during the perpetration of massacre of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, Yervant Aghaton left for Paris, where he made the acquaintance of Boghos Nubar. Upon the latter's invitation he moved to Cairo in 1897, where for many years he acted as the Inspector Manager of the estates of Boghos Nubar and other wealthy Egyptian Armenians and Egyptian princes. This is what Yervant Aghaton himself writes about those years: "I was the only Armenian among the many foreign land experts in Egypt, that succeeded in establishing an association called the "Union of Egyptian Land Users"... Until my resettlement in Egypt the use of chemical pesticides was not practiced there, the concept itself was not known in the country. After performing a number of different experiments there, following a process of long and detailed research into the subject I was reassured about the usefulness of applying chemical agents and promoted their proliferation, and thus greatly contributed to the increase of the wealth of the nation..."¹⁶

During this period in his life Yervant Aghaton was so preoccupied with his profession that he essentially remained outside of the scope of national activities. A biography published to commemorate his 75th anniversary mentions: "His involvement with national affairs commences mostly in Egypt, in the capacity of a national representative and deputy alongside Boghos Nubar."¹⁷ It was through his efforts that a

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Malezian 1954: 307.

¹⁶ Aghaton 1934b: 197-298.

¹⁷ Aghaton 1934a: 3.

number of chapters of the Union were established in European countries and his fundraising efforts resulted in a number of substantial estates being bequeathed to the Union. Numerous books and pamphlets authored by Yervant Aghaton served the same purpose, where he highlighted in laymen's terms the purposes, aims, problems and accomplishments of the Union. He "confounded his patriotism, his love for the nation with the AGBU, he merged into it and was willing to see his nation and his homeland only through its prism. Of course he passionately loved his nation and his native land and he saw in the Union the best means, the most practical vehicle to be of use to them."¹⁸

Grigor Yeghiayan (1833-1911) was the most senior among the founders. His predominant occupation was diplomacy. He started out as an interpreter and in 1880 became the Vice-Consul of the Russian mission to Egypt. He was one of the most consummate diplomats of the time, which is attested to, among other things, by the state decorations he received from many countries, including Russia, Italy, Persia, Egypt and others. His authority contributed greatly to the successful operation of the Union, especially in channelling aid from the AGBU to the population of Western Armenia through the consulates of a number of countries.

After the death of Yeghiayan it became known that he bequeathed most of his significant estate to the Armenian Prelacy of Cairo, to the graduates of the Galustian school to pursue further studies in European universities, and a special endowment was allocated to build an Armenian church in Cairo - the St. Gregory the Illuminator Church was consecrated in 1927. After his death many people wondered why, being one of the founders of the AGBU, he did not leave anything to the Union. The famous Union activist Vahan Kurkjian had answered that question back in 1911, shedding light on a particular aspect of the Egyptian Armenian identity of Grigor Yeghiayan: "He was convinced that an Egyptian Armenian should not be generous for Armenians in other countries and that every city should take care of its own poor and orphans... His perception of charity was rather divergent from ours. He was an Egyptian, almost alien to Armenian language and press (although he enjoyed displaying the books he had acquired from the Armenian monastery in Venice), so he wanted the Armenian students in Egypt to benefit from his will, he had inherited his "Armenianness" from the church and so he wanted that church to live bright with his memory and to receive most of his estate."¹⁹

Garabed Sheridjian also had forty years of experience in the diplomatic service, he was consummate in official communications and contacts, their written and unwritten rules, and he added a refined touch and quality to the operation of the Union. This quality was in perfect harmony with the personality of Sheridjian: "He was predominantly a man of this world and, in the noble sense of the word, he liked to live in it, that is he pursued the art of living like the artists do, the grace of whose emotions

¹⁸ Malezian 1954: 308.

¹⁹ Kurkjian 1911: 770.

never falters or yields to selfish vulgarity, who cultivate "le culte du moi" loftily, seeking and spreading beauty and brightness around them."²⁰ It was quite logical that the lover of "letters and arts" Garabed Sheridjian voluntarily assumed the post of the librarian of the AGBU, donating to the library his precious and vast personal collection of books.

The character of lustrous individualities (that include the above founders of the Union) generally shuns administrative chores that always remain in the shade. It is nonetheless common knowledge that the existence of any institution implies the operation of an administrative section, the performance of which determines the efficiency of the institution. Boghos Nubar, as proven by subsequent developments, made a very good choice by entrusting the administrative management of the newly founded organization to Megerdich Antranigian, later succeeded by Vahan Malezian.

Megerdich Antranigian moved to Cairo from Constantinople in 1878, upon the invitation of Boghos Nubar, to assume the responsibilities of the financial and commercial manager of the latter. Through the years of service his professional aptitude was so remarkable, that Boghos Nubar found it necessary not only to involve him in the drafting of the Union Bylaws, but made him a founding member. "Every person, to this or that extent, has this coquetry, the striving to make himself more palatable, agreeable for the others who come into contact with him. The coquetry of Antranigian seems to have a negative twist. There is a way of saying "no" that softens the pain of refusal for the interlocutor, makes it somehow more bearable and acceptable. Empty words like "I am sorry, dear, very sorry, but I simply can not" make it easy to see off an applicant. But Antranigian's character shuns such conventional pretence. His "impossible" puts an abrupt and final period that leaves no room for ambiguity, and closes off all doors and horizons of hope for the favour seeker."²¹ The duties of Antranigian during the meetings of the Board of Directors were wide and diverse. Let us consult the "Vosgematian" one more time: "Without any exaggeration we may say that the role he has conscientiously played in the AGBU headquarters for the last seven years was of vital importance for this institution. Mr. Megerdich Antranigian is one member of the Board of Directors of the Baregortsakan who spends 365 days a year on its administrative matters. His name does not appear often in the acknowledgements of the Union's great deeds, he is not a man of gestures or tribute. But outside of the sumptuous atmosphere of meetings, receptions and galas, in the quiet isolation of the office, day after day, he is the one to make the wheels of the Union's intricate machinery turn."²²

Dr. Nazaret Daghararian was equally dedicated to serving his people, but he preferred a different approach. He was the only founding member of the Union whose candidacy was proposed not by Boghos Nubar, but by Yervant Aghaton, and he was also the only one well versed in the Western Armenian national scene; Daghararian was the first Director General of the Board of Directors. When the Ottoman Constitution

²⁰ Haykakan Baregortsakan Endhanur Miutian Voskematian 1913: 65.

²¹ Ibid, p. 55.

²² Ibid.

was proclaimed in 1908 and the ethnic minorities in the empire aspired to become equal members to the society, Daghavarian resigned from office and left for Constantinople, where he made important contributions to national and public affairs. During his field trips to Western Armenia, Cilicia and other Armenian-populated areas of the country he founded many new chapters of the Union, ensuring their cooperation with the Board of Directors. In 1915 he became one of the first victims of the Armenian Genocide master-minded by the Turkish government.

Megerdich Margosoff Bey (1849-1919) was Boghos Nubar's cousin. Having received university education in France with a qualification of an architect/surveyor, he moved to Cairo and found employment with the Ministry of Public Buildings as an architect/inspector. He was a member to the Board since the foundation of the Union and was among the first to become an Honorary Member of the AGBU. Between 1907-1912 Margosoff was also the chairman of the Cairo Association Care for the Poor.

The Union's youngest founding member was Boghos Nubar's 25 year-old son Arakel Nubar Bey, the first Treasurer of the Board of Directors. Hovhannes Hagopian was a high ranking official in the Staff of the Ministry of Interior Affairs of Egypt. He was also a member of the National Council of the Armenian community of Cairo. He was the only founding member who shortly thereafter resigned from the Board and never cooperated with the Union again.

These were the individuals that, under the leadership of Boghos Nubar, founded the Armenian General Benevolent Union. They were quite different in terms of age, their life experience, ideology and many other aspects. But certain important similarities may also be observed among them. First, they were all highly qualified professionals: financial and business managers, diplomats and scholars, medical doctors and experts in agriculture, these were professions that could earn one a good and safe living in any country and society. Then, having lived and studied in different European countries they were exposed to the history, culture and the current standing of better advanced countries, and this helped them clarify and perform a reality check on their perception of the developments desirable for the Armenian nation. At the time of its establishment none of the founders of the AGBU were members to any Armenian political organization (after a while some of them: Agaton, Antranigian and Daghavarian became members to the Constitutional Democratic Party). This ensured that their work was impartial and unbiased, thus to the benefit of the entire Armenian people

It is worth mentioning that some founders, for example, Yacoub Artin, Boghos Nubar, Grigor Yeghiayan, spoke little Armenian. But this embarrassing contemporaries (and not only them) circumstance served as yet another argument in favour of a situation, which in the case of ethnic minorities, knowledge of the mother tongue and national/ethnic identity and activity are not interdependent phenomena.

Before World War I the Armenian General Benevolent Union operated in Western Armenia, Cilicia and other Armenian-populated areas of the Ottoman Empire. It

maintained 41 educational institutions: the secondary school in Van, the Kelekian orphanage-school in Deort-Yol, the Central Upper Elementary school in Moufarzin, as well as 38 elementary schools, of which 27 were in Western Armenia and 11 in Cilicia. From 1912 onwards the AGBU commenced the publication of its official "Miutyun" (Union) monthly. By 1914 the AGBU had 142 chapters, of which 59 were on the territory of the Ottoman Empire (mostly in Western Armenia and Cilicia), 54 were in the USA and Argentina, 25 in Europe (France, England, Germany, Italy etc), 4 were in Africa and the total number of members was 8,533.²³

Since the beginning of the World War I, when the Ottoman authorities started the systematic implementation of the genocide and deportation of Armenians, and until the mid-1930s, the main task of the Union was to help exiles, especially orphans.

A tent settlement of refugees who escaped from Musaler was founded in the desert not far from Port Said (Egypt), where in October of 1915 the AGBU opened an elementary school called "Sisvan", that had 25 classes with the total of 1,222 students. The organization "Boy scouts of Sisvan", founded in 1917, later formed the nucleus of the Eastern (Armenian) Legion, which on September 19, 1918, defeated the Turkish regular troops at the battle of Arara. The AGBU also founded an orphanage and an asylum for widows in Port Said. Following the defeat of Turkey in World War I the AGBU transferred its institutions from Port Said to Cilicia, the orphanage settled in Mersin (there were 404 children in it in 1921), an asylum for widows was established in Adana (with 350 widows and girls), the Kelekian orphanage-school reopened in Deort-Yol, and a school was founded in each of six villages of Suetia (Cilicia), under the collective name of "Sisvan schools". Another orphanage opened in Hajin, all of the students of which, along with the rest of the town's population were slain in 1920 by the Turkish troops. By the end of 1921, when the withdrawing French troops handed Cilicia over to Turkey, the AGBU transferred its institutions to Beirut. The orphanages of Mersin and Deort-Yol were merged into the Kelekian (for boys) and Sisvan (for girls) orphanages/elementary schools. These were the biggest orphanages of the Union (with an annual capacity to care for around 350 children) and they operated until the end of 1932. In 1922 the AGBU assumed the responsibility for 800 orphans from the refugee settlement in Nahr El-Ummar (Mesopotamia, current territory of Iraq), closed down by the British administration. For this purpose two orphanages were established on the premises of St. John Church in Jerusalem, the Araratian (for boys) and the Vaspouragan (for girls). The students in all of the AGBU's orphanages not only received education, but were also taught specific crafts. During those years the AGBU also founded the Cilician orphanage/workshop, a women's asylum and refugee centre in Aleppo, women's workshops and clinics in Thessaloniki, Athens, Piraeus and Mitilini

²³ Voskematian Haykakan Baregortsakan Endhanur Miutian, Artsatia hobelian, 1906-1931 [Golden Book of AGBU, Silver Jubilee, 1906-1931], vol. I: 65-71.

(Greece), stations for adult orphan girls in Cairo and Alexandria, an asylum/workshop in Beirut etc.²⁴

During World War I, when, as a result of military action between Turkey and Russia, hundreds of thousands of Armenians fled in panic to Russia (i.e. Eastern Armenia), the AGBU, upon the initiative of Boghos Nubar and Yacoub Artin, organised a "General Fundraising to the Benefit of Caucasian Refugees", the first in the history of the Union. However, in the following years, due to the difficult military and political situation in the region, assistance to Armenian refugees became impossible. Only after the restoration of Armenian statehood and establishment of the First Republic of Armenia in 1918, and then the stabilization of the situation in Soviet Armenia AGBU took steps to start its activity in Armenia.

²⁴ Armenian General Benevolent Union. Historic outline, 1906-1946: 5-31; Melkonian 2005: 81-165.

CHAPTER 1

AGBU PROGRAMS IN SOVIET ARMENIA

The Armenians abroad and especially those in Europe were well aware of the situation in Russia after the Bolshevik revolution of 1917. Hundreds of thousands from among Russian nobility, intellectuals and officers have fled to Paris, Berlin, Prague and other European cities. They had witnessed the red terror, the policy of extermination of the so-called "counter-revolutionary elements." The Armenians abroad also knew of the fatal consequences of Bolshevik-ordered hasty withdrawal of the Russian troops from the Caucasian front. They were aware of the close partnership forged between Soviet Russia and Kemalist Turkey, they knew that the military and financial assistance of the former had greatly contributed towards the victory of the latter in the Greco-Turkish war, that for its own political gain Soviet Russia was prepared to accommodate many more requirements of Turkey, which was attested by the transfer of Kars under Turkish jurisdiction and handing over of Nakhijevan and Karabagh to the nascent Azerbaijani Republic. Along with all this it was nevertheless known that all attempts by foreign powers as well as by domestic opposition to overthrow the Bolshevik regime had failed and that Soviet power was gradually establishing itself throughout almost all of the former Russian Empire including, as of November, 1920, Armenia. Western powers refused to acknowledge and resented the ideology and policies of the Bolsheviks, but they nonetheless had to not only come to terms with the existence of the Soviet Russia and the Soviet Union, but also to recognize it and establish relations with it. All of the Diaspora organizations and their supporters were facing a similar dilemma: whether they should or should not recognize the new Bolshevik authorities of Armenia. This issue came to the forefront and had determined the relationships between the Armenian Diaspora and Soviet Armenia for the seven subsequent decades.²⁵ The AGBU also faced this inexorable challenge.

Permission to operate in Soviet Armenia, resettlement of orphans

The new order established in Armenia was undoubtedly alien to Boghos Nubar and his colleagues but, pragmatic people as they were, they well realized that in the situation that had emerged, especially following the 1923 Lausanne Conference, the only Armenian-populated parcel that remained of the homeland was Soviet Armenia, and that its existence was secured only within the framework of the Soviet Union. However, the acceptance of this fact and the consequent disposition to deal with Soviet Armenia were not enough, and the agreement of the Armenian authorities was asked for. From the very onset the Armenian communists, in line with the principles of class struggle already at work in Russia, not only banned the activity of Armenian national

²⁵ Dallakian 1994: 33-83.

parties within the country, but also embarked on a campaign against them and their affiliate organizations in the Diaspora. From the point of view of Armenian authorities the AGBU, however, somewhat stood aside from and was less objectionable than the other well-known major organizations operating abroad. First of all the Union possessed the "advantage" of essentially not having co-operated with the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaksoutiun) that governed during the brief existence of the First Armenian Republic. And although the governing bodies of the Union included, since 1921, several members of the Liberal-Democratic (Ramkavar) party, it nevertheless presented itself as an independent charity of a purely non-political nature. The fact that the AGBU was one of the most authoritative and financially sound organizations of the Diaspora was also quite important. In any case the first move in establishing relations with Soviet Armenia was left to the AGBU.

On August 30, 1921, the Board of Directors of the AGBU published a special statement entitled "The AGBU in Armenia":

"The Board of Directors of the AGBU, in response to calls addressed to it from official and other circles and in order to organize assistance also within the territory of the Armenian Republic, has agreed to expand the operations of the AGBU also into Armenia, where, as it is known, the people are subjected to starvation and misery.

"With this respect the Board of Directors has embarked on negotiations, upon the outcome of which it shall commence its efforts and promote the noble objectives of the Union in Armenia.

"At this point the Union is obliged to inform that it has adopted this important decision in spite of the fact that the current funds of the Union do not allow for new assignments, since it has already assumed the burden, especially in Cilicia, of a number of various institutions. Nevertheless it believes that the nation, in appreciation of the exceptional importance of this decision, shall in turn proceed to support it."²⁶

The implementation of this decision was impeded by the lack of relations between the parties as well as by the limited financial capacity of the Union. For this reason the Board of Directors had to mention: "Unfortunately the circumstances preclude an organized effort, it was just possible to arrange once through the Constantinople chapter and the Near East Relief a shipment of aid to the hungry in Armenia at the total value of 1,270 Egyptian Pounds..., 14 bales of capotes (227 packs), 28 bales and boxes of new clothing (woolen shirts, socks, shoes etc.) and 350 bags of flour. Needless to mention, we shall use any favorable opportunity to further expand our assistance to the unfortunate people of Armenia."²⁷ Several months later, in the Spring of 1922, the AGBU allocates its second aid package to Armenia to the amount of 1,000 pounds sterling to purchase and ship to Armenia seeds and medication.²⁸

²⁶ AGBU - 1920-1921: 95.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Miutyun, March-April, no. 86, 1922: 17.

In those days it still remained to be seen whether the AGBU could get clearance to unfold its operations in Soviet Armenia and to what extent it would be granted. Provided such clearance was received, the issues of what terms and conditions would be attached, as well as the positions of its members and supporters towards such cooperation, were also quite unclear. A renowned politician of the time Avedis Terzibashian recalls a conversation with Boghos Nubar in Paris in 1923 as follows:

"...the Pasha immediately steered the conversation to the memorandum I had submitted to the Central Board of the Baregortsakan upon my return to Constantinople from Armenia in the beginning of 1923. I had suggested in the memorandum to resettle the orphans from Syria, Palestine and Greece to Armenia. Along with the willingness of the Government of Armenia to receive them, I had listed a number of other advantages in the memorandum: the price of food and the exchange rate differential, that would almost halve the appropriations for orphans from the Baregortsakan budget. When I further added in conversation that the orphans in Armenia shall grow up under better discipline, the Pasha retorted:

"Under this discipline of yours Armenian orphans shall all turn into Bolsheviks, won't they?"

"I can not exclude that."

"Will the Bolsheviks allow the Armenian orphans to learn their language, their history, religion?" carried on the Pasha.

"Language and history - yes, but not religion, and history at that not in the way we see it. This, of course, shall be an inconvenience."

"And you still insist on proposing it."

"As the lesser of two evils."

The Pasha held his chin in one hand, pressing the index finger against his forehead, pondered for a while and then, suddenly:

"I have to agree that compared to the desperate condition of the orphans this would be the least of evils."

Then added with a smile:

"Provided you have not been converted to Bolshevism."

And he laughed heartily over the joke."²⁹

Boghos Nubar quickly overcame his concerns over Armenian orphans turning into Bolsheviks, maybe he genuinely regarded this alternative as "the least of evils", since in the same year of 1923 in Spring the issue of resettling the orphans was discussed with the representative of Soviet Armenia at the Lyons Fair A. Piralov, who wrote in a report to the Council of the People's Commissars (the government) of Armenia:

"The issue of resettling orphanages from Syria has been put forth by the Benevolent Union of Egypt (this refers to the AGBU, since its headquarters then were still in Cairo - Ed. M.) in view of the deterioration of Franco-Turkish relations... Aghaton Bey (Yervant Aghaton - Ed. M.) maintains that the resettlement of orphans should

²⁹ Terzibashian 1939: 360-361.

commence immediately, so I had to explain to him that in view of the acute housing crisis it would be absolutely impossible at this point, unless the Union underwrites the construction of units to house the 1,300 orphans and remits to Armenia the funds necessary for their ongoing upkeep, since I find that in the present circumstances the possibility of encumbering the Armenian government with such expenditure is highly unlikely."³⁰

In the Summer of 1923 the envoys of the Union L. Bashalian and G. Assadour discussed with the government of Armenia issues pertaining to the transportation and accommodation of orphans, and in the Fall, when the Union was invited to Yerevan to participate in the 3rd Congress of the HOK (Relief Committee for Armenia), the negotiations were carried on by the representative of the Union Yessayee Garigian. Garigian was convinced that all of the Diaspora and the AGBU in particular should submit their entire financial potential to resolve the many vital issues of Armenia, and he conducted the negotiations in the same spirit.

On October 30, 1923, in a letter addressed to the People's Commissar (Minister) for Education of Armenia Askanaz Mravian, Garigian suggested that the government allocate the AGBU a land plot around Yeghvard and Dalma, to cultivate it and to settle the orphans in. Mravian replied that the government of Armenia, "in response to your proposal that aims at supporting a segment of our miserable army of orphans and ensuring a sustainable economic basis for their future, allows the AGBU to carry out its operations within the borders of Armenian SSR, pursuant to provisions outlined in the 22 Articles attached hereto."³¹ The "provisions outlined in 22 Articles" was signed in October, 1923, by A. Mravian and the People's Commissar for Agriculture Aramays Yerznkian. They pertained to the activities expected from the AGBU: cultivation of land, construction and rehabilitation of canals, construction of orphanages, education and employment for orphans etc. The most important among these was Article 1:

"The Council of People's Commissars of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic permits charitable activities of the Armenian General Benevolent Union in the territory of Soviet Armenia for the purpose of supporting the reconstruction of the country and the economic, physical, and cultural development of the people."³²

By virtue of this article, the AGBU became the only organization of the Diaspora that was granted permission to operate in Soviet Armenia during the next fourteen years. The Union's activity in Armenia were characterized by the fact that it did not establish a single chapter there. There were essentially two reasons for this. According to the Union's Bylaws the members of a chapter had to pay membership dues and part of the funds was to be put under the disposal of the Board of Directors. Understandably in the case of Armenia, in view of the extremely low standard of living this condition became senseless and impracticable. There was also another reason of a more political

³⁰ NAA, 113/ 43/ 150, p. 111.

³¹ Ibid. p. 56.

³² Ibid. p. 57.

nature. It was beyond doubt that the Armenian authorities would never tolerate for the citizens of the Soviet Union to enroll in a foreign, albeit Armenian, but still a "bourgeois" organization, as they would put it. On the other hand, even if it were possible, the very chapters thus established would have become levers in the hands of the ruling communist party, the bearers and conduits of its ideology. This was already something that the Union could hardly agree to.

In December, 1923, the issue of resettlement of orphans was raised by the Chairman of Council of People's Commissars of Armenia Sarkis Loukashin (Srapionian). In an address at the Third Congress of Workers, Peasants and Red Army Deputies he stated, with all certainty, the conditions that had to be met by all Diaspora organizations, including the AGBU, that wished to co-operate with Armenia. "For all foreign Armenian organizations that wish to practically contribute to the construction of the country there is no problem, the road is open provided, however, that no attempts are made to get involved in politics, since we have no concessions to make to them in the political domain and there is nothing to talk about here. We shall not talk not only about political issues, but also with any political organization since we do not know of such organizations. We do not know of any national delegation, its head or deputy head: they may deal with us and expect reciprocity only provided they come up as foreign benevolent organizations or individual representatives of such organizations." Subsequently, the head of the government mentions the AGBU as a possible partner. "Our country has an immense number of orphans, up to 30,000, of which about 25,000 are cared for by foreign benevolent organizations. We do want to accept and bring up in the spirit of our ideas all our orphans who are abroad, but we do not have financial means to do so. We have made it clear that if the Diasporan communities decide to temporarily ensure subsistence of these orphans within the country, we would take care of their lodging, land, etc. We have already reached a certain agreement over the issue with the Egyptian Benevolent Union (the head of the government refers to the AGBU - Ed. M.)".³³

Such warnings were redundant in the case of AGBU: Boghos Nubar had no intention to engage in political activity in Soviet Armenia. His main preoccupation was the future of Armenian refugees and especially the youth sheltered in many countries of the world. By the end of December, 1923, at the next annual general meeting of the AGBU, Boghos Nubar made a special reference to the issue of orphans.

"Of course, it is impossible to remove from our orphanages all the children that came of age. By doing so, we would expose them to numerous moral and financial challenges. On the other hand, it is unacceptable to go on keeping them beyond a certain age, since they would thus get used to leisurely and irresponsible life. In these circumstances, it would be extremely difficult for us to maintain the operation of our orphanages and keep them there for an unlimited time. The primary objective of our orphanages is the general and vocational education of young boys and girls, ... so that

³³ Loukashin (Srapionian) 1996: 163-164.

they are able to sustain their living after they leave us. ... the important issue is to find a job for the youth leaving the orphanage, and this becomes increasingly difficult, since the supply much exceeds the demand, especially in the areas where our orphanages are located and where preference is given to local youth over ours. At the same time, the Union cannot encourage them to move to other countries where difficulties are abundant, and where they would eventually have to surrender their national identity." After such sober and realistic assessment of the situation, Boghos Nubar proposed a solution that had a crucial impact on the relations between the AGBU and Soviet Armenia. "The Board of Directors proposed a solution that best answers our national aspirations and is consonant with our patriotic feelings: they suggest to resettle all 17 year-old orphans in Armenia, where they are sure to find a job in farming and crafts. They would earn their living and serve their country. Thus their dispersion over the world would diminish and the number of Armenians in the homeland would increase accordingly, something that is a great benefit in terms of our national future."³⁴

In January, 1924, the chairman of the Central Board of the HOK Aramays Yerznkian signed a document that was circulated to all communities of the Armenian Diaspora and that clarified the decisions previously taken by the HOK. Mentioning that "the HOK should only be involved in the rehabilitation of Armenia," that "...all the issues raised would be duly addressed by HOK as they emerge and certainly with the support of the Armenian communities," the circular note states in conclusion that "the Board appeals to you to exert all your efforts in helping us to resolve all pending issues in the most expeditious manner and thus contribute to operations aiming at taking the Armenian peasants out of the present dire economic straits."³⁵ (for an overview of relationships between the HOK and the AGBU, refer to chapter three).

In response to this appeal, the AGBU issued a "Circular of Hon. Boghos Nubar Pasha on aid to Armenia addressed to all chapters of the AGBU." Mentioning that the Union is extremely supportive of national undertakings by the government of Armenia, the President of AGBU qualified it as "...the utmost patriotic and humanitarian activity, ... to which we should render our immediate support." This circular was extremely important in that it clearly upheld the issue of immigration of all refugees to Armenia. "Indeed, all our efforts should target bringing and uniting the biggest possible number of Armenians scattered all over the world to this region which is Armenia, but it is also important," reads the circular, "that we help prepare and enable this country to receive them all, ensure that all measures are taken in advance to protect them from epidemics and other perils. This is really an important point since the increased number of people in Armenia to whom we contribute should live there in adequate health conditions, in a friendly environment for their activities, and should be able to obtain jobs to sustain their living, thus contributing to the overall prosperity of the country."³⁶ The proposal of the

³⁴ AGBU - 1922: 26-27.

³⁵ Miutyun, March-April, no. 98, 1924: 24.

³⁶ Ibid. p. 23.

Armenian authorities on supporting agricultural development of the country was in accord with the idea of Boghos Nubar that "...agricultural development should be an area where we may succeed most in ensuring the livelihood for our orphans so that they do not become a burden for the government of Armenia. This is exactly why we will try to find lands in Armenia suitable for cultivation, so that our orphans who establish residence there are able to earn their daily bread. This way, we anticipate the cooperation of the Yerevan authorities that undoubtedly will gladly accept our orphans."³⁷ The President of the AGBU was faithful to his principle "Not in word, but in deed." In his letter to Aramayis Yerznkian of December, 1923, he wrote: "In my cable of the last day of November I confirm the transfer of one thousand (1,000) British pounds from Lloyds & National Provincial Foreign Bank Limited (London) to the benefit of the agricultural development fund."³⁸

Such high appraisal of the operations of the government of Armenia and the willingness to co-operate did not prevent, however, the leaders of the AGBU from maintaining a reserved and practical approach towards the proposals of the government. On March 3, 1924, Boghos Nubar wrote two letters in reference to the exchange of correspondence between Yessayee Garigian and the People's Commissar for Education Askanaz Mravian. The first letter referred to the issue of allocation of a land parcel. "By this letter, you kindly inform us that the government agrees to allocate to the General Benevolent Union 10,000 *desyatinas* (one *desyatina* = 1.1 hectares - Ed. M.) of land so that parts of it are distributed to the orphans who can establish residence and families there. ...The Board of Directors would accept these ("conditions" - Ed. M.) provisionally. The final conditions should be endorsed unanimously after a technical mission is deployed to Armenia and an on-site assessment and a budget (*devis*) are prepared for the formulation of the final program. ...Indeed, it is necessary that the Union is confident that the cost of cultivation of the land provided does not exceed the allocated amounts and that we are able to meet our obligations..."³⁹

Boghos Nubar's second letter of March 3 refers to the issue of resettlement of orphans. "Mr. Yessayee Garigian shared with us the contents of your letter of November 3, 1923, where you inform that the Government of Armenian SSR is willing to accept 2,000 Armenian orphans 16 and more years of age, provided that the amount of 100 (hundred) dollars is paid for each of them to procure 1 year's food. The Board of Directors of the AGBU gratefully accepts your suggestion since we wholeheartedly wish that these Armenians are not forever lost for the motherland and would be able, under the auspices of the government of the Armenian SSR, establish residence, employment, and families and preserve their national identity. We are preparing to send over 150-200 orphans, the most senior ones, and would pay, as per our agreement, one hundred dollars for each of them."⁴⁰

³⁷ AGBU - 1922: 27-28.

³⁸ NAA, 113/ 43/ 150, p. 60.

³⁹ *Ibid.* p. 87.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p. 86.

The members of the AGBU and its leaders clearly perceived the responsibility they assumed by taking the decision to resettle their orphans in Armenia. The famine and epidemics that overwhelmed the country, tens of thousands of homeless refugees and unemployed were enough to put a big question mark over this decision.

As mentioned earlier, hundreds of thousands of Armenian refugees had to flee their homes during World War I and resettled in Eastern Armenia. By approximate estimates, during the existence of the First Armenian Republic there were more than 50,000 orphaned or homeless children registered, and the government had to establish a "National Department on Orphanages" to address their issues. The establishment of the Soviet regime did not have any significant impact on the general conditions of these children. The buildings of most public orphanages were dilapidated and not fit for dwelling; in most of them children had to share cots and plates. Due to lack of heaters hundreds of children fell sick and starvation drove many away. In 1925 one of the official bulletins of the Commissariat for Education mentioned that about 6% of the country's population were orphans and further described the conditions prevailing in the orphanages. "The conditions in the orphanages are deplorable. The majority of the buildings do not correspond to the requirements. Only 50% of the children have beds, and the rest sleep on the floor. The bed comprises a straw-filled mattress and a pillow. There are no bedclothes whatsoever. The heaters in the rooms are defunct, children often fall sick, at nights four to five children have to share beds to keep warm. It is not even worth discussing clothes and underwear... only 25% of the children are healthy..."⁴¹ A report by the orphanage department of the Commissariat for Education reads that 2,091 orphans from the Yerevan, Ashtarak, Nor Bayazet and Echmiadzin orphanages "during January - February, were deprived of 78.9% of their meagre food allocation. Obviously, there will be no colour on the orphans' cheeks, no sparkle in their eyes, the educational process has to slow down, and morbidity prevails."⁴² The future of the children was of great concern since they were not prepared for an independent life.

In Boghos Nubar's words, "We do realise the problems that hinder the comfortable accommodation of hundreds of orphans in Armenia and we share the preoccupation of the Board of Directors in relation to the future well-being of their children for whom they had cared for years."⁴³ Therefore, a lengthy process of negotiation commenced between the leaders of the Union and the authorities of Soviet Armenia with a purpose of finding the best options for transportation, accommodation and employment of the orphans. It is worth mentioning that the Armenian authorities, in spite of all problems, displayed great interest towards most expeditious transfer of the children to Armenia. At its October 20, 1924, session the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia (CPA) established a special commission in charge of transportation, receipt and accommodation of the AGBU's orphans, headed by the secretary of the Central

⁴¹ NAA, 122 /1/ 333, p 44.

⁴² Ibid., p. 104.

⁴³ AGBU - 1923: 26.

Committee of the Armenian Union of Communist Youth (Komsomol) Garegin Goumedin (Melik-Dadayan). Such an attitude on the part of the authorities could and should be explained by their perception of the importance of the issue for the national interests and by the fact that co-operation with one of the largest and most important organizations of the diaspora, the AGBU, in the matter of transfer to Armenia of orphan children, was an important propaganda coup contributing to the increased credibility of the Bolshevik regime. It can be said that this was the first manifestation of a unique phenomenon in Armenia, the intersection of national, political and ideological interests, something that the Armenian authorities would successfully revert to in the years to come.

On October 26, 1924, 250 children from the AGBU's orphanages boarded the Soviet steamer "Kerch" in the Palestinian port of Jaffa and sailed to Batumi, Georgia, where they took a train to Armenia. Of these 250 orphans, 158 were from the Jerusalem Araratian orphanage, 81 from the Aleppo Kilikian orphanage and 11 from the Beirut Kelekian-Sisvan orphanage. One hundred and ninety four orphans were between 15-17, and 56 between 18-20 years of age. In the orphanages they learned crafts (shoe-making, woodworking, tailoring, blacksmithing, typesetting, etc.) that became the safeguard of their independent life in Armenia. Apart from underwriting all transportation charges, the Union paid to the Government of Armenia one hundred US dollars per each orphan "as a compensation for their first year's subsistence expenses."⁴⁴ Moreover, "these orphaned craftsmen shall also carry on them to Armenia the small sums they had saved from their weekly wages and deposited with the Union." The Union seemed to have provided for everything to ensure the successful resettlement and placement of its protégés: "apart from the two officials who will monitor the transfer of the orphans, the latter shall be accompanied by a doctor... to this end an adequate supply of medications has been allocated as of today. The clothing needs of the orphans have been fully covered. They shall carry with them bedding, blankets, everyday winter clothing with spares, shoes, underwear etc. The food shall be prepared on board of the ship, for which the necessary supplies have been provided."⁴⁵ As a gift to Armenia the orphans also were taking with them 69 volumes of academic and architectural publications donated by architects G. Assadour, L. Ourakhian and H. Taffa.

Upon arrival in Armenia the boys should have recalled the message of the General Secretary of Near East Relief Charles Vickrey, delivered to them in the Union's Jerusalem orphanage during his visit there in 1923: "I have been visiting Armenia for four successive years now and I am glad to inform you that every time I find it improved over the preceding year... Armenia has everything it needs to progress, the natural resources are abundant, all it needs is hard work and peace, and with these two in place it will become a happy country. Therefore, from now on, instead of looking for employment in America, you should go to your own land, to work and build a country

⁴⁴ AGBU – 1924: 28.

⁴⁵ Miutyun, September-October, no. 101, 1924:66.

there. Maybe it would be premature to take you to Armenia right now, but you should work on your character and one day you will be able to return to your motherland with a sound character."⁴⁶

The first reference to orphans transported to the homeland is to be found in the 1925 information bulletin of the Orphanages Department, Commissariat for Education. "On the 15th of last November 250 orphan students aged between 15-20 have reached Yerevan from Jaffa through the port of Batumi. They had been living abroad in Jerusalem, Aleppo and Beirut. Most of these are craftsmen or apprentices. 60 of them were sent to learn crafts at the Central workshop/school..., 4 have assumed the post of drivers in the Sardarapat region, 24 were sent to the Vagharshapat Children's Commune to engage in agriculture. The placement of the remaining is underway."⁴⁷

Such a resettlement of children from the Union's orphanages to Soviet Armenia had no precedents. And the undertaking did not carry on into the subsequent years. This position of the Union can hardly be explained by the danger of the children being brought up in Armenia in the spirit of Bolshevism, since there were more serious considerations involved. Even assuming that Boghos Nubar, along with the leaders of the Union, was not aware of the numerous eyewitness accounts of the situation that prevailed in Soviet Armenia, they could not help learning of it following the resettlement of the orphans, after which subsequent transports of orphans to Armenia became impossible.

Nor Eudokia

Following the resettlement of the orphans, cooperation between the Union and Armenia steadily picked up momentum. Already the next year, in January, 1925, following lengthy negotiations, three agreements were signed between the representative of Soviet Armenia Aramayis Yerznkian, who came to Paris for that purpose, and the President of the AGBU Boghos Nubar, the Treasurer, Levon Gumushguerdan and the Director General Grigor Sinapian. One of these agreements, which provided for establishing an orphanage in Armenia, was not implemented for a number of reasons.

"An agreement on founding a village of Nor Eudokia (New Eudokia) in Armenia under the Meotemetian will" - this was the title of the second agreement between Soviet Armenia and the AGBU, that contained 8 articles.

"Article 1. The Benevolent Union allocates under the disposition of the Armenian Government the amount of 2,600 Egyptian pounds, with the purpose of founding a village in Armenia. The new village shall bear the name "New Eudokia", in accordance with the will of the heirs of the benefactor"

⁴⁶ Ibid., July-August, no. 94, 1923: 52-53.

⁴⁷ NAA, 122/1/333, p. 98.

"Article 2. The village shall be found in Evgilar where land parcels shall be disbursed out of the public land reserve to refugees from Eudokia that have come to Armenia.

"Article 3. Initially as many families shall settle in these lands as the amount of 2,600 Egyptian pounds may accommodate, provided a little house is built for each family, and each is appropriated a draft animal, agricultural implements, seeds, etc.

"Article 4. The annual proceeds from the Meotemetian trust following a 10% deduction for the Union's administrative expenses shall be used each year towards the expansion and improvement of the village of New Eudokia. First of all a school shall be built in New Eudokia with these funds that shall bear the name of the Meotemetian school...

"Article 5. Each household or individual settled in the village of New Eudokia shall return the funds given to them or spent on them. These payments shall be made annually in equal installments, free of interest for 10 years, beginning with the fifth year following the hand-over or expenditure of funds.

"Article 6. ... the amounts returned by the villagers shall be used towards the development of the village of New Eudokia.

"Article 7. The implementation of this Agreement, that is the selection of the villagers and their settlement, the appropriation of land parcels, the planning of the village, the allocation of funds to each homeowner for the construction of the house, the amount of implements to be given to each household, the procedure for paying back the funds received or spent has been delegated by the AGBU to the Relief Committee for Armenia (HOK), that shall coordinate the above issues with the Government of Armenia and the Supreme Technical Division..."⁴⁸

By the end of 1925 there were already 20 families of exiles from Tokat (Eudokia) living in the village of Nor Eudokia. Shortly thereafter, though, it became clear that the location of the village, from the point of view of the climate as well as that of the quantity of the lands posed almost insurmountable difficulties and inconveniences for the villagers. For this reason, they had to use the good offices of the Union to apply to the Armenian authorities with a request to relocate the village. Finally, by the middle of 1929, it was decided to relocate the village of Nor Eudokia to a place 4 km away from Echmiadzin, "a most convenient location on the road leaving from Echmiadzin to Mount Ararat, with 100-150 hectares of already cultivated fertile land. The preliminary works and the preparation of master plans have already commenced. Under present conditions the economic prosperity of Nor Eudokia may be deemed assured if the wealthy individuals of Tokat origin display interest in the fate of this village."⁴⁹ Naturally the relocation of Nor Eudokia was asking for additional unforeseen expenses, especially in view of the population growth, ever increasing with the influx of exiles from Tokat. The revenue from the Meotemetian trust that the Union was administering was no longer sufficient and the Union was rightfully expecting financial assistance from the wealthy Tokatsis living throughout the Diaspora. The assistance, though, was not hurried.

⁴⁸ Miutyun, January-February, no. 103, 1925:11-12.

⁴⁹ Ibid, June-July, no 132, 1929:178.

"Although it is lamentable that our brethren from Tokat and the Tokat Compatriotic Union remain deaf to the heartbreaking calls with respect to Nor Eudokia, we shall nevertheless spare no effort in ensuring the welfare of the population of the first settlement sponsored by the Union..."⁵⁰ These efforts yielded palpable results. In a 1934 memorandum addressed to the Union, the building committee of the village wrote: "We hereby have the honour to inform that Nor Eudokia is developed as planned, that is there are 11 beautiful houses, wide streets, electrical lighting, irrigation canals, beautiful gardens, there are parks and orchards next to the houses, wells have been dug with pumps for pure cold water. In other words, although with difficulty, but a beautiful settlement has been built for the inhabitants of Nor Eudokia with all cultured amenities, and a current population of 130 immigrants..."⁵¹

The last piece of information on Nor Eudokia, the first settlement founded in Soviet Armenia by the AGBU, which, incidentally, was also the first ever settlement of Armenian repatriates, pertains to the year of 1937. Only a few days were remaining until the decision by Soviet authorities to ban the operation of the Union in the country, whereas the latter was developing new programmes and was proudly reporting of its accomplishments: "Presently there are 135 people of Tokat origin living in 35 dwellings in the village of Nor Eudokia built by the Union in Armenia. The economic standing of the population of Nor Eudokia has improved significantly, it disposes of 11 hectares of gardens and 6 hectares of fruit trees, as well as 40 hectares of cultivable land. The allocation of additional 69 English pounds out of the proceeds from the Union's Meotemetian Fund shall be used towards the construction of another big cattle-shed. There is an immediate need for more housing in Nor Eudokia, especially in view of the forthcoming wave of fugitives, and in this connection it is expected that assistance from the Tokatsis abroad shall not be delinquent. We have also completed the construction of a kindergarten and a day nursery, which was paid for by the 1,000 dollars provided by the New York Tokat Educational Society and the generous grant (5,000 roubles) by the Government. The same Society has recently donated 600 dollars, which shall be used to build a shared community barn."⁵²

Hospitals

The second agreement concluded between Soviet Armenia and the AGBU in January, 1925, was called the "Agreement on establishing a Maternity Hospital in Armenia under the Tarouhi Hagopian testament", and it contained the following principal provisions:

"Article 1. The Benevolent Union...undertakes to allocate from the above fund (Tarouhi Hagopian Fund - Ed. M.) the amount of 7,110 pounds sterling towards the

⁵⁰ Ibid, November-December, no. 170, 1934:83.

⁵¹ Ibid, July-August, no. 168, 1934: 59.

⁵² Ibid, May-June, no. 185, 1937: 35.

construction in Yerevan of a Maternity Hospital and the organization therein of training courses to prepare obstetricians. The land necessary for the construction of such building shall be allotted free of charge and for eternity by the Government of the Armenian SSR.

“Article 2. The Armenian Government agrees to assume responsibility for the construction of the Maternity Hospital and the Obstetrics Training Centre...

“Article 3. If the construction expenses of the said Maternity Hospital exceed the amount of 7,110 pounds sterling, the balance shall be covered by the Armenian Government.

“Article 5. All upkeep and maintenance expenses of the Maternity Hospital, including furnishing, equipment, medications, food, laundry, power, heating, the faculty, administration and staff shall be borne by the Armenian Government. The Tarouhi Hagopian Fund shall only cover the expenses of the training of obstetricians, determined at the annual level of 800 pounds sterling...”⁵³

The opening ceremony of the Tarouhi Hagopian Maternity Hospital (Architect Alexander Tamanian, member of the Academy) took place on March 10, 1929, with the participation of the Deputy Chairman of the Council of the People's Commissars Askanaz Mravian, the People's Commissar for Health M. Kartashian and other officials, including the representative of the AGBU in Armenia since 1928 Haikaz Karageusian. From the very first day of its existence the Tarouhi Hagopian Maternity Hospital became one of the major and most important medical institutions of Armenia. It comprised three main departments: of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Postnatal care, that together on the average received annually 5,000 in-patients and there were even more people who visited for consultations. The hospital also had an "obstetrics vocational school" whose graduates (approximately 40 every year) went on to work in the Tarouhi Hagopian Maternity Hospital as well as in other clinics of Armenia. Another very important undertaking was the training course offered in the hospital 6 times a month on "...pregnancy, childbirth, postnatal medical care... infant conditions and care, consequences of abortion, the use of contraceptives..."⁵⁴ and other issues. On the background of the general development level of the population at large through those years the importance of the course cannot be overestimated.

The first director of the clinic was Professor Grigor Areshian, who had received professional education at the University of Kiev (the Ukraine) and had worked as an obstetrician-gynecologist in the hospitals of Kiev and Tbilisi. In 1923 he founded a chair of gynecology and obstetrics at the medical department of Yerevan State University (which later splintered into the Medical Institute), and headed it until 1957. Professor Areshian gathered around him at the Tarouhi Hagopian Maternity Hospital a group of talented specialists, including his assistants Ashot Aharonov (Aharonian) and Partev Markarian. Professor Aharonov was also a graduate of the University of Kiev, and he

⁵³ Ibid, January-February, no. 103, 1925: 10-11.

⁵⁴ Ibid, July-August, no. 162, 1933:59.

subsequently became one of the most renowned specialists in the field not only of Armenia, but of the entire Soviet Union. As for Professor Margarian, in 1937 he organised the municipal maternity Hospital of Yerevan and headed it until 1950; later he was the director of the Research Institute of Obstetrics and Gynecology between 1949-1973. Thus the formative period of Armenia's three most authoritative and outstanding obstetrician-gynecologists ties directly to the Tarouhi Hagopian Maternity Hospital. As of 1937 the clinic was no longer named after Tarouhi Hagopian.

Up Abovian street from this complex (today at 60/1 Abovian str.) there is another structure that still catches the eye today, the Marie Nubar Ophthalmological Clinic, built through a donation of Boghos Nubar in memory of his lamented wife. The construction of the Clinic (architect Leon Nafilian from Paris) was completed and it was officially transferred to the Government of Armenia on November 20, 1929. On this occasion the President of the Union Boghos Nubar addressed a special message to the Chairman of the Government of Armenia: "I request your forgiveness for my failure to attend the opening ceremony of the Eye Clinic in view of my advanced age and health condition. I would have considered myself privileged to hand it over to the Government in person, as my modest contribution towards rebuilding the motherland, an issue that you dauntlessly pursue."⁵⁵ The response of the Armenian Government, mentioned, among others, that: "The Government appreciates not only the assistance that You, through the construction of the Eye Clinic, render to the task of rebuilding Soviet Armenia, but also the fact that You are closely interested in the future fate of the country."⁵⁶

The Marie Nubar Clinic was also reserved an important role in the system of health care institutions of Armenia. On one hand a diversity of eye conditions proliferated in the country, especially trachoma and, on the other, there were no specialised clinics to treat them. During its first year of operation, 1930, the clinic "...treated 11,090 cases (of which trachoma accounted for 4,559), and performed 983 eye surgeries. 306 in-patients were treated, of which 250 were Armenian (only 16 were children under 15 years of age), which fact illustrates that children are far less susceptible to eye conditions."⁵⁷ In the 1930s the Marie Nubar Eye Clinic, concurrent with purely therapeutic applications, launched successful academic research programs, which brought it to the foreground of medical research and made it one of the leading centres in the Soviet Union. In this respect the endeavors of professor Babken Melik-Moussian were most noteworthy, he was one of the leading specialists of the clinic beginning with the 1930s and subsequently became its director. In 1937 the Eye Clinic too ceased to be named after Marie Nubar and only more than half a century later its initial name was reestablished.

Back in 1924 the leadership of the Union had reached an agreement with Aramayis Yerznkian in Paris about founding a village in Armenia with the donation by Vergineh Sarkiss of one thousand pounds sterling. Nevertheless it became obvious in

⁵⁵ Ibid, December, no. 135, 1929:232.

⁵⁶ AGBU – 1930:77.

⁵⁷ AGBU – 1931:59.

Yerevan that the stated amount was by no means sufficient for the purpose. Finally, upon the agreement of the parties, it was decided to build the Aved Sarkiss Pasteurization (Antirabic) Center in Yerevan, in memory of the late husband of the donor. It opened its doors in 1930. Despite the proliferation of rabies in Armenia in those years, transmitted by the thousands of stray dogs, the country lacked a dedicated specialized medical service to take care of it. In the initial stage of the operation of Aved Sarkiss Center the vaccine for rabies was imported from Tbilisi. In 1931 the Center, while preserving the name of Avet Sarkiss, was transferred to the new building of the Sanitary-hygienic Institute, where almost all conditions were in place for its full-scale operation. In November of the same year the Center, for the first time ever in Armenia, began to produce its own vaccine in the necessary quantities. Branches of the Aved Sarkis Antirabic Center were opened in Gharakilis and Leninakan (presently Vanadzor and Gyumri).

The AGBU, having founded the above medical institutions, was taking ongoing care of their diverse needs, in particular, it was providing most up-to-date equipment, medications etc. This is how the People's Commissariat for Health assessed the activities of the Benevolent Union in Armenia in 1933: "We received with gratitude the implements and equipment donated to the Tarouhi Hagopian Maternity Hospital. This is not the first time that the Paris Armenian Benevolent Society is displaying sensitive and regardful attitude towards the cultural undertakings of Soviet Armenia... you pay special attention to and spare no efforts to contribute with your means to equipping and ensuring the welfare of our medical institutions... The academic standing and the modern equipment of the Marie Nubar Clinic are the best safeguards of successful treatment of eye conditions, for which you never falter to do whatever may be necessary."⁵⁸

Scientific and Educational Programs, "AGBU House"

In one of his articles of 1928 Arshag Tchopanian emphasizes the exceptional importance of the Yerevan State University for the spiritual and intellectual development of the Armenian people, and states that: "It is unforgivable though, for the patriotic Armenians abroad, having rejoiced at recognizing this exhilarating reality, to consider their dues thus paid, or even to indulge in revealing and criticizing the shortcomings of this institution, some of which may be determined by the regime, but most are a result of downright poverty. We should contribute to the development and strengthening of this institution, we should take notice of its handicaps with an intention to try and help rectify them." This call by Arshag Tchopanian was by no way addressed to the Union, conversely, what the Union had already done to benefit the University "...should be highlighted so that our patriots abroad are urged to follow its example."⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Miutyun, September-October, no. 163, 1933: 67.

⁵⁹ Tchopanian 1928: 9.

The first major undertaking of the AGBU in the scientific and educational domain was immediately related to the unprecedented donation by Garabed and Grigor Melkonians, which was transferred to the AGBU in December, 1925, by the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople. The condition set forth by Garabed Melkonian, that is to sell the donated works and set up a trust fund was successfully fulfilled only by the end of 1927. The proceeds from the Melkonian Endowment Fund were used to establish the Melkonian Educational Institution in Nicosia, Cyprus, that functions until 2005. As well certain sums were allocated (and continue to be allocated) to the Patriarchates of Constantinople and Jerusalem, etc. Apart from all these, through the efforts of the AGBU, it was decided to annually allocate 3,000 Egyptian pounds to the Yerevan State University on the condition, that the funds be "...only and exclusively used for the establishment and operation of chairs of Armenian literature and history, or for the general purpose of Armenian studies."⁶⁰

Beginning with the 1930s the Executive Committee of the Melkonian Fund embarked on the publication of Armenological studies. The eight volumes of the "Etymological Dictionary of the Armenian Language" by Hrachia Ajarian, the "Weights and Measures in Ancient Armenian Sources" and "Casual Studies" by Hakop Manandian, "The Theory of the Armenian Language" by Manouk Abeghian, "Old Yerevan" and "Mikael Nalbandian's works" by Yervand Shahaziz, "Building Materials and their Use in Ancient Armenia" by Toros Toramanian, "The Analysis of Komitas' Works" by Spiridon Melikian, "The Culture of Ancient Armenia" by Khachik Samuelian, the two volumes of "Georgian Sources on Armenia and Armenians" by Levon Melikset-Bek, and others, adding up to approximately 30 valuable academic monographs that were published on the expense of the Melkonian Fund. The publication of these works played a very important role in promoting Armenological studies in the country, developing Armenian science in general and preparing young scholars in history, archaeology, linguistics, etc. The chairs of Armenian studies at the State University and the Pedagogical Institute also received funding, including that for the preparation of post-graduate students. In 1933 the Melkonian Fund provided post-graduate scholarships for, among others, Megerdich Mkrian (Armenian Literature), Hmayak Haroutiounian and Serob Poghossian (History of Armenia), who years later became renowned scholars.

Along with all this the Executive Committee of the Melkonian Fund had undertaken, with the assistance of the Government, to build the "Matenadaran" - the Public Library and the printhouse (architect Alexander Tamanian). The AGBU paid for the importation of typographic, bookbinding and other equipment, as well as of typefaces in different languages that were extremely necessary especially for academic publications. The printhouse opened in May, 1936, but "...for want of experienced and skilled management it was unable to operate at its full capacity."⁶¹ As for the

⁶⁰ Miutyun, February, no. 128, 1929:118.

⁶¹ AGBU-1936: 57.

construction of the library building, by the same year of 1936 "...the progress in construction is relatively satisfactory. The right wing of the Matenadaran building, that houses the printshop, has all three floors completed up to the roof. Concurrently a number of other works have been implemented, that is the sewage and plumbing, the heating pipes, reinforced concrete ceilings etc."⁶² In February, 1937, when a resolution of the Government transfers from the Executive Committee to the State University the administration of amounts received from the Melkonian Fund, a memorandum prepared with this respect mentions that the building of the library is completed by 60%, and that within the preceding four years the Melkonian Endowment Fund has allocated 1,369,650, while the Government 1,219,873 roubles towards its construction.⁶³ By the resolution of December 8, 1937, of the Armenian authorities (I shall reflect on this later) the operation of the Melkonian Endowment Fund in the country was banned.

Throughout its activities in Armenia the AGBU offered ongoing support to Yerevan State University and especially important were its contributions of most modern equipment, materials etc. One of the numerous examples follows. Between 1925-1928 the head of the physics laboratory of the University Haroutioun Anjour (Chebotarian) was sent to Paris, where he worked at the Marie Curie laboratory. The Board of Directors of the AGBU, having learnt from Anjour about the needs of the laboratory he was heading, allocated 45,000 French francs for the acquisition of modern instruments and equipment.⁶⁴ Back in Yerevan, H. Anjour wrote in his letter of gratitude:

"I have the honour to inform you that the electrical and radio equipment generously donated by you to the physics laboratory of the Yerevan State University have been most useful and instrumental in our present work. The radio apparatus that you donated allows us to tune in and to sometimes allow the masses of our students to listen to broadcasts from Paris, Toulouse, Vienna, Berlin and other European radio stations. We try to assemble various receivers from the radio components that you donated, and the students thus receive an opportunity to gain experience in making radios."⁶⁵ To put the content of this letter in proper context it should be noted that in Soviet Armenia "...in 1927 there were 65 radio receivers (21 in urban settlements) ... in order to expand the circle of listeners the radio station has been moved to the theatre, the conservatory, workers' clubs, houses of culture, the army club, loudspeakers have been installed in public areas. ... In 1929 the "RV-21" transmitter was inaugurated, named after Atarbekian, thanks to which the broadcasts from Tbilissi and Baku have also become accessible."⁶⁶

It was mentioned above that the allocations from the Melkonian Endowment Fund to Yerevan State University were made possible through the efforts of the AGBU. This

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ NAA, 113/3/1698, p. 3, 27.

⁶⁴ Miutyun, September-October, no. 119, 1927:78.

⁶⁵ Ibid., May, no. 140, 1930:312.

⁶⁶ Haykakan Sovetakan Hanragitaran [Armenian Soviet Encyclopedia], vol. 9: 569-570.

position of the Union and its President Boghos Nubar on the issue of preparing qualified specialists in Armenia was well-grounded. As early as December, 1924, in a letter addressed to the Government of Armenia, Boghos Nubar informed: "I have decided to donate 12,500 golden roubles to our Benevolent Union, instructing to allocate the annual income from this amount to Yerevan University for the exclusive purpose of awarding scholarships to the most deserving students, to encourage good learning." Boghos Nubar also stated that one of the recipients shall be sent to Europe each year to advance his knowledge for a year in one of the universities.⁶⁷ An attachment to the letter contained the "Bylaws for the Boghos Nubar University Awards", where all issues pertaining to studies in Europe were meticulously laid out, including the financial details.

The first income from this fund of Boghos Nubar, 120 pounds sterling, was generated in 1926 and was duly handed over to the State University. But the first granting of Nubarian Awards took place only in 1933, through the "Nubarian Awards Executive Committee" set up by the government specifically for that purpose. The AGBU can be proud even today of having granted the awards to such scholars, who later became famous, as members of the Soviet Union and Armenian Academies physiologist Ezras Hasratian, historian Abgar Hovhannissian, agrochemist Gagik Davtian.

It looked as though the successful implementation of the initiative of the Union's President was beyond questioning. Nevertheless here is what we learn from a letter addressed in March of 1937 to the Chairman of the Council of the People's Commissars of Armenia Abraham Gouloyan by the Director General of the Union Vahan Malezian: "...in 1924 our lamented Founding President Boghos Nubar handed over to the Union a private fund, the annual proceeds from which were meant to be granted as the Nubarian award to the successful graduates of the Yerevan University with a purpose of covering their travel expenses, since the winner of the award should also have received a scholarship from the Nubarian Students Institution in Brussels to pursue one year's advanced studies in Europe in his field.

It is truly unfortunate that to this day it has not been possible to execute the will of the Founder and that the funds (217.16 pounds sterling) transferred within the first two years were not fully utilized to serve their intended purpose, while the proceeds from subsequent years have accrued here with us. [...] In view of these circumstances the Board of Directors has no other choice than to amend the bylaws of the fund in question with the following clause, so as to make this fund over time immediately available for respective causes..." The proposed amendment read: "Every year, provided the Yerevan State University or the Institution appointed by the latter fail to declare the winners of the university award by the 31st day of July or propose another appropriation not compatible with the Founder's will, the net annual income disposable for the period shall be transferred to the Nubarian Students Institution..."⁶⁸ Two months later an

⁶⁷ NAA, 40//113/3/1745, p. 15.

⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 11.

answer is received in Paris, signed by the deputy chief of staff of the Council of the People's Commissars of Armenia: "...on instructions from comrade A. Gouloyan I have to inform you of the following: education offered nowadays in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics is on an extremely high level, therefore we find it expedient to allocate the entire amount of the Nubarian award to the Yerevan State University to grant, upon the latter's discretion, to students of excellence, as well as, if needed, to send them abroad. Based on the above we may not deem the amendment proposed by your Board acceptable."⁶⁹ As to how the parties were about to resolve this knot shall remain anybody's guesswork, since very little time was remaining until the month of December.

All these major undertakings by the AGBU were implemented in the capital city of Yerevan. At the same time, in line with its tradition of founding schools in Western Armenia and Armenian Cilicia prior to World War I, the AGBU embarked upon a similar initiative in the rural areas of Soviet Armenia. The Commissariat of Education wrote in its letter addressed to the Yerevan representative of the AGBU Haikaz Karageusian in July, 1928: "The Yervant Hagopian Fund (419 pounds sterling) and the Gayane Nishkian Fund (219 pounds sterling), allocated by the Benevolent Union for school construction... were used as assigned. School building in the Agarak, Blkher and Shirazala villages of the Echmiadzin province have already been built." Two years later, in February of 1930, the Kherian School of Apiculture officially opened, built with the funds of the AGBU.⁷⁰

A few years later on the most beautiful and busy street of Yerevan, Abovian, apart from the two clinics already mentioned, a residential building (today at 32 Abovian str.) was erected under the name of "Baregortsakani Toun" – "AGBU House" (architect Samvel Safarian), it became one of the best examples of modern architecture in the city. Its origin dates back to October of 1930, when a letter was addressed to the Director General of AGBU Vahan Malezian by the Chairman of the Armenian Red Cross Spandarat Kamsarakan and the representative of the Executive Committee of the Red Cross societies of the Soviet Union Karen Mikaelian, where they expressed their regret that "...the contribution of the Diaspora Armenians to the restoration of the homeland does not measure up to what could have been expected from them...", and concluded with the following proposal: "This circumstance prompted us to approach a number of foreign institutions so that the latter, to mark the occasion of the 10th anniversary of sovietization of Armenia [...] and the 10th anniversary of the Red Cross [...] perpetuate these dates with a major undertaking and thus attest their commitment to the restoration of the country. Among these institutions, Mr. Malezian, we have decided to use your good offices to approach the Armenian General Benevolent Union, for it to underwrite the construction of a building of its choice. We think that this could be a house along the

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 9.

⁷⁰ Miutyun, no. 124, 1928:56; AGBU -1930:78.

same lines as the "HOK building," intended for our intellectuals that are in great need of housing."⁷¹

This letter reached Paris after the death of Boghos Nubar, when his sons had allocated a certain sum to honour his memory with an undertaking beneficial for Armenians. The Board of Directors of the Union, chaired by the newly elected Calouste Gulbenkian, decided to take this opportunity and, following the example of the "Students' Home" built in Paris with a donation by Boghos Nubar, built a similar structure in Yerevan. As a result of rapidly progressing negotiations with the Government of Armenia a document was born called the "Agreement on the construction of the Yerevan Baregortsakani Toun". It was signed first in Paris in March, 1931, by the President of the Union Calouste Gulbenkian, the Treasurer Levon Gumushguerdan and the Director General Vahan Malezian and then in April of the same year in Yerevan by the People's Commissar for Education Artavazd Yeghiazarian. The following were the principal provisions of the agreement:

"Article 1. The heirs of the late Boghos Nubar Pasha have donated 4,000 pounds sterling to the AGBU with a view of this sum being used towards a publicly beneficial Armenian undertaking. One of the heirs, Zareh Bey Nubar, has added on his own behalf another 3,000 pounds sterling to be used for the same end...

"Article 2. The Board of Directors of the Union [...] upon deliberation over the best use of these funds and having reached an agreement with the heirs of Boghos Nubar and with Zareh Bey Nubar personally, has decided, on the occasion of the twenty fifth anniversary of the AGBU and as a tribute to Armenia, to allocate the funds towards building a house that shall comprise a part of the Yerevan University and shall house the Armenian professors of the University, as well as, within practicable limits, other Armenian scholars...

"Article 3. The Government [...] shall accept the donation and, in accordance with the mutually endorsed plan, shall build a house to serve the purpose mentioned above. The house shall bear the name "Baregortsakani Doun, Nubar Fund"...

"Article 4. Neither the Union, nor the donors and the creditor shall be under any obligation to ensure the subsequent upkeep and maintenance of the house. The Government shall be solely responsible for the administration of the house.

"Article 5. The Government shall allocate free of charge premises in the house for the Union's office and living quarters for the representatives of the Union...

"The Government agrees in advance that the Union shall withhold each year the amount of 150 pounds sterling as interest from the amounts sent in cash or transferred to the Government or any of its officials, in particular, from the annual allowance to the Yerevan University from the Melkonian donation."⁷²

In a letter dated January 30, 1936, and addressed to Vahan Malezian the representative of the Union in Yerevan Haikaz Karageusian informs that "the

⁷¹ AGBU CBDA.

⁷² Ibid.

construction of the AGBU House is almost finished and a few minor glitches only remain to be fixed. Apart from the basement, the building has five storeys and contains 20 apartments ... as well as four studios for painters."⁷³ By a special resolution of the Government the first residents of this most modern residential structure in Yerevan became authors Stepan Zorian, Zabel Yessayan, Vahan Totovents, painters Panos Terlemezian, Sedrak Arakelian, architect Mikael Mazmanian, the founder and director of the National Art Gallery of Armenia Rouben Drampian, composer Haro Stepanian, professors Grigor Ghapantsian, Arsen Terterian, Hambartsoum Kechek and others. An apartment was also allocated to Haikaz Karageusian, but the issue of an office for the Union remained unresolved. In November, 1936, Vahan Malezian, having learnt from Haikaz Karageusian that the Union has been assigned an office in the HOK building, wrote: "...we would like Article 5 of the Agreement to be respected, since it is of no great pleasure for us to pay rent and to submit in a way to the HOK, as grateful as we may feel to you for allocating us an office."⁷⁴ During almost two years Vahan Malezian continued to voice his disagreement with the decision of the authorities, although to no avail. His request to honour the agreement and affix a plaque on the building that would read "Baregortsakani Doun, Nubar Fund" also had no consequences.

Nubarashen

During a consultative meeting of the US chapters of the AGBU held in Philadelphia at the end of 1926 a decision was made to launch a special fundraising campaign to raise the amount of 250 thousand dollars within the next five years in commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the Union and as a tribute to President Boghos Nubar. Informing Boghos Nubar of the decision, the participants of the congress requested him to express his opinion on the possible use of the funds. The answer may have been apparent for many: the funds should be infused into the existing institutions of the Union (schools, orphanages, refugee asylums etc.) or used to establish new ones. But Boghos Nubar already then saw the only realistic and radical solution for the future of the refugees in their resettlement in Armenia. Nevertheless repatriation en masse gave birth to a host of different problems, not the least of which was the lack of housing, which is what the Armenian authorities have pointed out more than once. The experience of the past years proved that the Armenian Diaspora, for a number of economic and political reasons, was either unable or unwilling to finance housing construction in Armenia, maintaining that the existing funds had to be put at the service of community structures in different countries and cater to the Diaspora needs first. On the other hand, the AGBU's own means did not suffice to single-handedly pull off such a major project. On this background, having learnt of the "jubilee" fundraising effort, Boghos Nubar decided to steer all of the proceeds from it towards building a special town in Armenia, that was

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

to be populated by the exiles who were repatriated. At the same time, well aware of the many problems hindering such fundraising campaigns and wishing to encourage potential donors, Boghos Nubar made a pledge of personally matching another 100 thousand dollars, provided the funds collected by April 30, 1931, equalled or exceeded 250 thousand dollars. The members and friends of the Union acknowledged the offer of the President with great enthusiasm and decided to perpetuate his name and deeds by calling the future town "Nubarashen".

The launching of the campaign was very impressive and promising. The "Miutyun" journal, in one of its first issues of 1928, was recounting the ceremony of the official opening of the Nubarashen fundraising at the New York's Ambassador hotel. "...The enthusiastic audience gave keenly and 102,000 dollars were raised on the first night. The major donors were the Karageusians and the Gulbenkians, 20,000 each... Dickran Khan Kelekian, 6,250 and Mr. Levon Babayan 2,500 dollars."⁷⁵ A similar gathering in Chicago raised 25,000 dollars.

This initiative of the American Armenians generated wide response not only in the Diaspora, but among foreigners as well. In his address of April 15, 1929, Fridtjof Nansen wrote: "It gives me great pleasure to learn that there is a movement on foot among Armenians of American to build a town in Armenia for housing the refugees and to name it Nubarashen in honour of that eminent Armenian patriot and philanthropist, Boghos Nubar.

"Needless to say that I endorse the enterprise heartily. I have been endeavoring for the past four years to interest the League of Nations in a scheme of land improvement for Armenia as the best solution for the refugee problem. Whatever the outcome of my efforts may be I am sure that the devotion of the Armenians to their historic home, their courage, determination, and sacrifice in promoting the welfare of their suffering people and of the reconstruction of the brave little Republic of Erivan will command the admiration of the civilized world."⁷⁶

Despite its successful launch, the fundraising campaign did not carry on with the same momentum, the target sum was approached slowly and with difficulty. The principal reason for this was the Great Depression that plagued the USA around the same time, and many Armenian Americans were gravely affected by it. According to the information of the "Miutyun," the sums collected by the end of 1929 amounted to just 153 thousand dollars. This course of the campaign raised questions about the feasibility of the whole project.

Boghos Nubar neither wanted nor had the time to "whitewash" himself in front of the Soviet authorities, he felt the close arrival of the end and was trying to do everything in his power to expedite the building of Nubarashen. Which explains his profound disappointment with the slow progress and moderate success of the fundraising effort. Avedis Terzibashian recounts an incident that took place in May, 1930, about one

⁷⁵ Miutyun, March-April, no.122, 1928: 19.

⁷⁶ Ibid., May-June, no. 131, 1929: 166.

month before Boghos Nubar's death. "In the presence of Malezian and Hekimian (his personal aide - Ed. M.) the Pasha announced that since the Armenians of the Diaspora failed to meet the target of 300,000 dollars (should be 250,000 - Ed. M.), he has decided to withdraw his pledge... Malezian earnestly and stubbornly used his rhetoric skills to address the Pasha's reason, while Hekimian, with his intimate disarming smile, attacked his feelings. Both's labours were lost. The Pasha remained unshaken and informed the Baregortsakan of his decision in writing on the same day. Nevertheless it looked as though the words of Malezian and the smile of Hekimian had left a dent in Pasha's resolve, since on the next morning he suddenly summoned Hekimian and instructed him to draft two letters, one to the Swiss Lombard Odier bank requesting to remit 208,000 dollars from his account to that of the AGBU, and another to the AGBU, instructing to forward 100,000 dollars out of the Lombard Odier transfer of 208,000 to the Nubarashen Fund."⁷⁷

In April and May of the same year of 1930 the "Agreement on the Construction of the Model Town of Nubarashen"⁷⁸ was finally signed in Yerevan and in Paris between the Government of Soviet Armenia and the Board of Directors of the AGBU. This was followed by the first installment of 50,000 dollars by the Union. Already in the summer development began on the southern outskirts of Yerevan, the works were overseen by a special committee established for that purpose under the renowned architect, designer of the master plan Alexander Tamanian.

During the next six years the leaders as well as the rank and file of the Union especially closely monitored all issues that pertained to the construction of the town. Moreover, after the compatriotic unions were offered to participate in the construction of individual quarters in the town, where refugees from respective regions of Western Armenia could then settle, Nubarashen became the focal point of a much larger constituency. Beginning with 1930 the annual reports and other publications of the Union set aside substantial space to a diversity of issues dealing with Nubarashen. Browsing through these materials one may almost feel how the enthusiasm and hopes for a speedy completion of the project were gradually replaced by sober and reserved assessment of the situation.

The annual General Meeting of July, 1931, stated: "The preparatory works, the procurement and stockpiling of building materials, and especially the designs and blueprints are all done, and the construction, season allowing, has commenced with great ardor. Therefore this summer 100-120 dwellings will already be in place to receive working-class refugees probably from Greece and some other locations, who will proceed immediately to work there."⁷⁹ One year after, though, a report of the Union dated September, 1932, outlined the following picture: "Unfortunately our expectations of the preceding construction season fell short, despite our frequent appeals... The

⁷⁷ Terzipashian 1939: 371.

⁷⁸ NAA, 178/1/534, p. 7-8.

⁷⁹ AGBU - 1930: 74.

reorganized committee had hardly proceeded to build Nubarashen with renewed commitment when the disastrous consequences of the earthquake in Zangezour unexpectedly set new priorities for the Government. Shelter had to be ensured for the thousands of disaster victims and all attention was diverted in this direction." As a result instead of the 120-150 dwellings as planned there were "...twenty completed and eight more built halfway through, foundations were laid for many more structures, nevertheless there is not much palpable progress."⁸⁰

Nubarashen was being built slowly not only for the reasons mentioned. The development of a number of major industrial sites and wide-scale residential construction in Soviet Armenia on one hand, and, on the other, the shortage of skilled labour and building materials, along with several other circumstances substantially impeded with the construction of the town. There were also other factors involved, that I shall dwell upon below, in the last part of this book.

Since 1924 the Union was building hospitals, settlements, housing in Armenia, it embarked on the unprecedented project of the village of Nubarashen, it assisted the repatriation effort and, along with all this work, it carried on its operations in various other countries. Dozens of orphanages, asylums, workshops, hospitals and other institutions that it had founded especially for the exiles continued to operate in Aleppo, Beirut, Athens, Thessaloniki, Jerusalem, Cairo and other cities. It could be safely maintained that the operations of the Union in the 20s and the 30s in Armenia and throughout the Armenian Diaspora were unparalleled by their scope as well as significance. Despite all this during the same years, as was the case within the preceding period, the Union was constantly criticized by a variety of circles, organizations and individuals. In one of his articles of 1932 Yervant Aghathon writes: "Instead of encouraging in the spirit of forgiveness those who do work, instead of empowering the Baregortsakan, is it really better to snipe and to blemish it, to the extent of making the most innocent and useful of national services look unacceptable? It does not take much to destroy an institution, do we have many still standing? Are we, Armenians, going to follow the Turks and the Kurds in razing overnight what has taken years to build, just like the alien demolition men in Constantinople? [...] you think it is easy to build a new, more powerful and competent Baregortsakan, where is the Armenian that shall pay a broken penny to it once he sees its predecessor destroyed by those very Armenian hands? I dare you to find new Nubars, Yacoub Pashas, Melkonians, Karageusians, Gulbenkians, Hagopians, Kelekians etc. Before you proceed to break, be kind enough to establish a more powerful and adequate Union than the Baregortsakan, so that we may witness your deeds once you are done with the talking."⁸¹

⁸⁰ AGBU - 1931: 54.

⁸¹ Aghaton 1925: 7

These words of Aghathon rang especially true with respect to the Armenian operation of the Union, where there simply was no other alternative. It is therefore noteworthy that the ranks of the most ardent critics of the Union's activities included not only its traditional opponents and foes headed by the Dashnagksoutiun but also friendly organizations such as the Ramkavar party⁸², as well as individuals, including Yessayee Garigian whom we referred to earlier. The criticism of the Union addressed several issues. It was demanded that the Union use all of the trusts and donations under its disposal for the needs of Armenia.

The official "Miutyun" monthly wrote in this relation: "A will or a donation is made through a legal contract, in which the testator or the donor is the one dictating his terms, the recipient or the trustee is charged with the execution of those terms, whereas the beneficiary or the rightholder is left out of the picture, but may at any time assert his rights, demand his share or his benefit, as the contract may provide. Let us ask then, is there an administrator who, in violation of the Union's function and responsibility, may dare to trump the inexorable will of the testator or the benefactor and deny the inalienable right to the rightholding beneficiary?"

"We should finally accept that an association such as the Union, being a law-abiding entity and enjoying unreserved trust for that very reason, may not allow itself under whatever pressure to revert to illicit means and misappropriate a fund entrusted to it under the condition of inviolability or steer the income therefrom to an unspecified end. Such a deviation would constitute fraud that is severely punishable in any civilized society."⁸³

The Union was also blamed for not using the trusts earmarked for Armenia for their initial purpose. In reality the opposite was true. Soviet Armenia was not initially the target of the above-mentioned Tarouhi Hagopian, Grigor Meotemetian or Yervant Hagopian funds. Only through the efforts of the AGBU, after ironing out certain legal impediments, was it possible to redirect them to Armenia.

Another accusation thrown at the Union was that it did not use its principal to buy into the shares of the Agricultural Bank established in Armenia and in any other matter as well remained faithful to the principle of inviolability of its principal. The justification offered by the critics was that, similar to the situation wills and donations, such a deviation would have been excused by the compelling need to assist Armenia. The articles published to this effect by Yessayee Garigian, as opposed to other such criticism, have earned a response from Boghos Nubar. It should be noted that the President of the Union, be it before or after that, as a rule ignored all types of accusations, and the exception was apparently made in view of the past service record of Garigian. Here is an excerpt from a letter addressed to the latter by Boghos Nubar on March 4, 1925:

⁸² Dallakian 1999: 205-211.

⁸³ Miutyun, March-April, no.154, 1932: 26.

"...As for what you wrote on the principal of the Union, it is obvious that your perception of its financial administration is quite divergent from ours. These funds are not only inviolable, but the Board of Directors may use them only to buy securities that are classified, have a record of paying out dividends, are listed in the exchanges and possess a high degree of liquidity. From this perspective it is incontestable that the shares of the Armenian Agricultural Bank, for failure to subscribe to which you blame us, while by all means being respectable paper, nevertheless fail to meet the said requirements.

"...Had the Union's Directors, from the very onset and until now, failed to zealously guard the integrity of the principal by faithfully implementing the provisions of the bylaws and guided by purely fiscal considerations, as it befits the Board of Directors of any reputable financial institution, the Union would never have attained its current level of affluence and maybe even would not be in existence by now. It would have failed to gain the trust of our compatriots to the extent of raising considerable funds over its 19 years in existence, funds that have accounted for over 300,000 pounds sterling's worth of all types of aid and benefits distributed so far. It would have failed, since the war, to take care of the thousands of orphans, ... it would not be in a position today as the only Armenian association that operates wherever Armenians are present and where, hopefully, it may still be of service for the Armenian nation."⁸⁴

Despite all criticism and fault-finding, the AGBU carried on with its operations in Soviet Armenia. In summarizing the impact of these activities it is easy to notice that they mainly focused on or around two principal areas: health and scientific/educational. The broad assistance of the Union in the organization of repatriation was also extremely important.

⁸⁴ Hayastani Gochnag, April, no. 15, 1925: 467-468.

CHAPTER 2

IMMIGRATION IN 1920s AND 1930s

Here we need to make a digression on the term "repatriation", often used in the following statement. For the vast majority of Armenians-exiles - ordinary people and intellectual and political elite - the concept of homeland was naturally associated with Western Armenia and Armenian Cilicia and other regions of the Ottoman Empire. The definition of resettlement in Soviet, former Eastern Armenia as "repatriation" would be for them a recognition of the final loss of the homeland, a kind of betrayal of their ancestors, their past life. So they used to have an Armenian counterparts neutral term "immigration", "immigrant" - "nergaghd", "nergaghdogh". The same is observed in various official documents, adopted in Soviet Armenia. Even in 1945, the well-known decree of the Soviet government on the permission of new repatriation, said the creation of the Committee "... on the reception of Armenian immigrants." Only since the mid-1960s, first in Armenia and then in the Diaspora, the term "repatriation" comes to replace "immigration". This question, which goes beyond our topic, is discussed in my last monograph.⁸⁵

Immigration until 1934

The resettlement of 250 orphans undertaken by AGBU in 1924 caused significant excitement in the Diaspora. A considerable number of Armenians that had previously settled in Syria, Palestine, Greece and some other countries, despaired with their grave conditions, were ready to leave for Soviet Armenia immediately. This willingness, confirmed by numerous requests, including those addressed to the Union, was hardly commensurate with both the real capacity of the Armenian authorities and its policy of repatriation based on class ideology.

In January-February 1924, many Diaspora media published excerpts from the speech of Deputy Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of Transcaucasian Federation, former Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of Armenia Alexander Miasnikian, where he clearly formulated the main prerequisite for repatriation to Armenia.

"... Soviet Armenia tells the exiles: if you want to be happy and tie your destiny with this country, you should first change your political orientation, alienate yourselves from the Dashnaksoutiun and join the working masses of Soviet Armenia. We will help you, we will give you education, and if you adhere to the communist ideology, you will succeed."⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Melkonian 2017.

⁸⁶ Hayastani Gochnag, February 2, no.5, 1924: 151.

About one year after, in an interview given in Paris, the People's Commissar of Agriculture Aramays Yerznkian also noted that the main precondition for repatriation was political and ideological integrity. "The doors of Armenia are open to all those Armenians who want to go to Armenia to work but not to do politics. The Armenian people and Soviet Armenia require absolute peace and not political confrontation and clandestine interior political wars. For such people, the doors of Armenia are closed, and if any of them sneak in to disturb the internal peace of the country, we... will send them somewhere else."⁸⁷

This position of the Soviet authorities could be considered natural: the Dashnaksoutiun, their main political rival, continued to enjoy popularity in Armenia, which was enhanced by the Bolshevik authorities themselves through their policy of unbridled red terror. This is confirmed by the fact that during the popular upheaval of February 18, 1921, it took an intervention by the Red Army to restore Bolsheviks back to power in April. In trying to fully establish their rule in the country they, banning the activities of the national political parties and persecuting their members and affiliates, at the same time were not inclined at all to let into Armenia the repatriates who were in this or that way associated with the party in Armenia as well as in the Diaspora. It is remarkable that those willing to return to Armenia had to fill in advance special questionnaires that contained questions like "What is your political affiliation?," "Where were you and what did you do between 1913 and 1931?" and others.

Apart from political and ideological vetting, there was one more, economic obstacle for repatriation to Armenia. In his interview mentioned above, A.Yerznkian remarks in relation to this issue that "the conditions in Armenia are mostly not conducive for accept exiles. The country, small and poor, cannot accept caravans of exiles without providing the newcomers with land, shelter and basic means of survival. Therefore, one of the first and most important requirements of Armenia will be the draining of marshlands so that these lands are given to the newcomers. In case the newcomers have some subsistence of their own, in order to avoid internal economic turmoil, the Government will accept and settle them as possible." In view of the difficult economic situation of the country, A. Miasnikian proposed: "There are so many foreign funds, let them provide for the resettlement costs."⁸⁸

After the Union resettled 250 children from its orphanages, the Armenian authorities adopted a policy of organizing the repatriation whereby the Diaspora had to take care of all costs associated with the resettlement. This way, the Diaspora was becoming one of the two organizing parties and its financial support was viewed as an important prerequisite for repatriation. Obviously, this was an extremely serious responsibility for the Diaspora that was still in its nascent stage. At the same time, this responsibility could be assumed only by those national organizations that, with the support of their members and allies, could secure the required resources. The

⁸⁷ Ibid., February 21, no. 8, 1925: 232.

⁸⁸ Ibid., February 2, no. 5, 1924:151.

Hnchakian, the Dashnaktsoutiun and the Ramkavar parties, whose influence and role in the Diaspora in those years was significant, may have participated both in the organization and funding of repatriation, but they could not even if they wanted to. For the Armenian authorities any relations or cooperation with them were unacceptable in principle. The Armenian Apostolic Church was also an undesirable partner for the Soviet authorities, especially in view of their anti-religious and anti-church policy in Armenia. Under these circumstances, the Armenian authorities had no other alternative but to cooperate with the AGBU.

Since the Armenian exiles who had settled in Greece appeared in most difficult conditions during these years, the Union decided first to allocate funds for their resettlement in Armenia. Already in 1925, with the resources provided by the Union (5,000 English pounds) it became possible to organise the resettlement of some Armenians from Greece, as well as from Istanbul and Mesopotamia (3,119, 700 and 371 people respectively). "Most of these people, predominantly workers and craftsmen, at their own will moved to provinces and cities and started working, whereas 1,086 people (361 families), who were farmers, settled in the Arazdayan region, between four villages - Arazdayan, Armash, Arvash and Amo. These exiles had among them 80 tobacco growers and silkworm breeders who turned out to be so useful for Armenia, that in 1926 the Government decided to accept even more exiles."⁸⁹

In terms of organizing remittances for the repatriation, the role of the Union's USA chapter was particularly important, since this is where most of the necessary funds were raised. Even before World War I, about 60,000 Armenians lived in this country, and quite a few among the best-established were supporters and members of the AGBU. Just one action in "Support to Immigration to Armenia", organised in New York in 1926 resulted in raising almost 12 thousand English pounds, that in the same year were transferred to the Immigration Envoy of the Council of People's Commissars of Armenia in Paris Danoush Shahverdian and Secretary of the Plenipotentiary Mission of the Soviet Union in Paris Simonik Piroumian (Piroumov). Upon mutual agreement, this amount was to be provided to about 300 exiles resettling to Armenia from Greece, as well as Syria. However, in the same year of 1926 the Shirak earthquake struck Armenia and it not only rendered the repatriation of this group impossible, but also necessitated the organization of relief aid to the earthquake victims.

"... in the face of the new and terrible disaster that befell our people, I am confident," said Boghos Nubar at the annual general meeting of the Union, "that more than anything, you will wish to join me in expressing our condolences for the immense suffering of the victims of the earthquake that destroyed the barely restored and still blood-drained Armenia. I suggest that we send a telegram to the Yerevan Government on behalf of this assembly. Upon learning of the disaster, the Union found it necessary to extend its help to the victims. First, we provide all the funds available, and then undertake another fundraising effort in America, Egypt and Europe to transfer the

⁸⁹ AGBU - 1926: 16.

proceeds to the Government."⁹⁰ Such fundraising was organised in all communities of the Diaspora by all kinds of organizations. And, nonetheless, the contribution of the Union was the most significant and the 1926 report mentioned with fair pride that "According to the reports submitted by the Parliament of Armenia, "the total of about half a million roubles was raised abroad." Of this amount, more than 200,000 roubles came through the Union channels, and if we take into account that the contribution of Near East Relief was the largest among foreign donations, we see that the bulk of the assistance from the Armenians abroad was provided by the Benevolent Union."⁹¹

The repatriation, delayed as the consequence of Shirak earthquake, re-started by the end of 1927, when a new group of about 1,600 exiles from Greece and Istanbul moved to Armenia. These exiles, born in Atabazar, Pursa and Sebastia regions, were mostly craftsmen, silkworm breeders, etc., and from the very first day they engaged in their respective professions. However, the initial agreement did not fully come through. "It is lamentable that, against our intentions, it was impossible to move the exiles from Syria... For this group of immigrants, we had 7,427 dollars provided from America, a part of which we had to return."⁹²

On August 10, 1931, the Armenian authorities adopted a decision "On Permission of Mass Immigration of Working Armenians of Abroad to the Territory of Armenian SSR," where upon the repatriation received a new impetus. According to this decision, a special Commission on immigration headed by Aramayis Yerznkian was established under the auspices of the Council of People's Commissars, which was charged with addressing all kinds of issues related to the repatriation, i.e. the number of repatriates, time-frames for repatriation, settlement areas, etc.⁹³ During the same days, the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars Sahak Ter-Gabrielian specifically mentioned in his interview: "The class policy of Soviet authorities will definitely be applied in the course of the repatriation. Only truly working elements can come to Armenia, who in all honesty aspire to join the whole working class of the country, accept and apply the principle of socialist mode of production that dynamically proliferates throughout the country." And, on the contrary, "...there is no room in the homeland of the international working class for the enemies of the Armenian working class and the army of the international proletariat, for the mercenaries of bloodthirsty imperialism - the Dashnak scam."⁹⁴

It is noteworthy that, when speaking about the Diaspora organizations and the financial support expected from them, the chairman of the Armenian government mentions only the compatriotic unions and the HOK, but not the AGBU. Such an approach towards an organization that since 1924 provided all types of diverse

⁹⁰ AGBU - 1925: 12.

⁹¹ AGBU - 1926: 17.

⁹² AGBU - 1927: 34.

⁹³ Khorhrdayin Hayastan, August 20, 1931.

⁹⁴ Ibid., July 2, 1931.

assistance to the country was not accidental. From the viewpoint of the Armenian authorities, the Union did not fully justify their expectations related to the national and political stance and, moreover, it persistently tried to maintain its independence and repudiated any obtrusion of its activities. The AGBU and its management clearly saw the inadequate position of the Armenian authorities, but did not allow it to affect its activities aiming at the rehabilitation of the country.

One month after the adoption of the above decision by the Armenian authorities, S. Ter-Gabrielian paid a visit to Paris, that provided a positive impetus in terms of expediting the repatriation process. While the prime-minister did not even mention the name of the Benevolent Union in his Yerevan interview, upon arrival in Paris he immediately met with its President Calouste Gulbenkian, thus nominally accepting the supremacy of the Union over all other organizations. Besides, during the subsequent days Ter-Gabrielian visited the Union headquarters several times and held detailed discussions on issues related to the preparation of a new wave of repatriation. Assuring that the Government decided to accept 6,000 exiles from Greece and Bulgaria, for whom shelter and jobs were already secured, Ter-Gabrielian at the same time gave his consent to receive another 4,000 exiles, provided the Diaspora Armenians finance the construction of dwellings in Armenia. On his way home he sent a telegram from Berlin to Yerevan: "Undertake immediate measures for the receipt of 6,000 returnees and their settlement in Ghrer, Artik-Touff, Ani-Pemza and Dzorages. Also, send two persons for expediting and management of the repatriation efforts in Athens."⁹⁵

After these meetings, the Union adopted the repatriation to Armenia as the priority of the day and undertook active preparations. On September 30, 1931, Calouste Gulbenkian appealed to the Diaspora, saying:

"At this point in time when the world economic crisis heavily affects the subsistence of the Diaspora, the Government of Armenia with its benevolent decision opens wide the doors of the homeland for the destitute and bereft exiles. 10,000 poor and jobless exiles should move to Armenia in a matter of several months: the first caravan will be followed by other groups as the financial means allow. This is a historical event the importance of which should be realised by every Armenian. Needless to say, the AGBU is there to immediately address the issue of salvation of the thousands of exiled and uprooted compatriots from misery and neglect."

"Recently, an agreement was reached with Nansen's International Office for Refugees, functioning under the auspices of the League of Nations, to provide, until 1933, shelter to 15,000 Armenian refugees that remain homeless after the collapse of the dilapidated camps in Beirut and Aleppo, the AGBU pledging 10,000 pounds."

"These two large-scale emergency projects, called upon to save 25,000 exiles, will require considerable sacrifice... To rescue the 25,000 exiles, we are envisaging an amount of at least 75,000 dollars, of which we have managed to collect only one third, for the remainder we rely on the support of every Armenian: let everyone realise that it

⁹⁵ Ibid., September 26, 1931.

is their duty to make a sacrifice, no matter how small, to contribute to this important cause..."⁹⁶

In view of the fact that the main problem of repatriation was in the transportation - the Director General of the Union Vahan Malezian, accompanied by the secretary-general of the Central Committee for the refugees Levon Bashalian, who at the same time was the Union's envoy to international organizations in Geneva, went to Geneva to meet with the Prime Ministers of Bulgaria and Greece Alexander Malinov and Elefterios Venizelos, who pledged the support of their respective governments in providing steamboats free of charge. Negotiations were also held with Nansen's International Office, International League of the Red Cross and other benevolent organizations and, as a result, it became possible to solve several problems connected with the transportation of thousands of refugees.

In November, 1931, the plenipotentiary representative of the Government of Armenia Danoush Shahverdian arrived in Athens and, based on three types of questionnaires, started preparing new lists of prospective repatriates. This, as well as his negotiations with the Government of Greece and the embassy of the Soviet Union, resulted in the first caravan leaving Piraeus on December 30. According to the agreement the steamer, provided free of charge by the Greek government, took 1,923 exiles aboard, including 135 orphans who were former students in the Beirut, Nicosia and Jerusalem orphanages of the AGBU, as well as the exiles from Hapous, whose transportation costs were fully covered by the Union. "All funds for the transportation and feeding of the exiles were provided in advance," mentioned the AGBU report in 1932, "through the cooperation of the representative of Nansen's office M. Kotelnikoff and our representative Onnig Tadeossian, these two organizations covered all the costs."⁹⁷ Speaking of the logistics of the repatriation of this group, the "Miutyun" monthly specifically mentioned the kind cooperation of the Greek authorities. "The International League of the Red Cross, and especially the Hellenic Red Cross rendered invaluable cooperation by providing 6,239 items of used clothes for the children, 200 items of new clothes, 9 barrels of milk, and for the poorest exiles, 100 new coats and 500 blankets. The Soviet Ambassador Vladimir Potemkin and his wife, as well as the plenipotentiary representative of Armenia Shahverdian and assistant Kartashian, the representative of the Union Onnig Tadeossian, representatives of the Greek and foreign media, government and police authorities and numerous citizens came to bid farewell to the steamer."⁹⁸

The second group of immigrants, comprising 1,250 people, left on the same boat on February 23, 1932. "Like the first time, this caravan received all support in Piraeus. The International Red Cross distributed blankets and cans of condensed milk for the children. The exiles set off with great enthusiasm and cried out "Long live Greece, long

⁹⁶ Miutyun, November-December, no. 152, 1931: 164.

⁹⁷ AGBU - 1931: 55.

⁹⁸ Miutyun, March-April, no. 154, 1932: 21-22.

live Armenia!" from the gangway... Needless to say, from the first days of repatriation our Union did everything in its power and spared no moral or material effort," wrote the "Miutyun."⁹⁹

During 1932 two caravans left for Armenia, on April 25 with 1,662 and on April 17 with 1,550 exiles. The fifth and the last caravan of this first group left Piraeus on January 12, 1933, on the steamboat "Empress Heleni", this time rented by the AGBU for 600 English pounds. This boat, that also passed by Thessaloniki and Burgas, took 1,423 exiles to Armenia, including 96 from France, 350 from Greece and 967 from Bulgaria.¹⁰⁰ The "Miutyun" monthly, mentioning that the Armenians from Bulgaria took with them as a gift to Armenia "... twelve containers of timber, 150 boxes of nails and 6 automobiles..." wrote: "The modest community of Bulgaria taught a striking lesson to the more fortunate communities that continue to remain completely inert."¹⁰¹

Against all expectations, the financial support of the Diaspora to the repatriation of 1931-1933 was not big, mainly due to the economic crisis that was underway in Western countries. "Unfortunately, in material terms our Union remained the only national organization providing funds to ensure the success of this endeavor, although we expected contributions from other organizations as well."¹⁰²

Immigration of 1936

The repatriation started successfully, and from December, 1931, to January, 1933, it resulted in the return of about 8,000 repatriants, then it came to a halt. In response to the Union's appeals, the authorities of Armenia justified the cessation of the repatriation by the lack of required shelters and reminded one more time that "Only emergency foreign aid in the construction of shelters can enable the continuation of the immigration, otherwise it is not likely to continue this year."¹⁰³ Such a position of the Armenian authorities, though quite anticipated, was of great concern to the Diaspora. Tens of thousands of jobless, poor and homeless exiles were ready to immediately leave for Armenia, but alas...

Under the circumstances the Union, not relying on other national organizations and new fundraising campaigns, sent to the Government of Armenia 5,000 English pounds in 1933. "For the construction of apartments, to ensure repatriation of another 2,500 immigrants within the next six months... The AGBU took this step in confidence that the Government of Armenia will make a new and strong demonstration of its good

⁹⁹ Ibid, May-June, no. 155, 1932: 39-40.

¹⁰⁰ AGBU – 1932: 55-56.

¹⁰¹ Miutyun, January-February, no.159, 1933: 3.

¹⁰² AGBU – 1932: 56.

¹⁰³ AGBU – 1933: 53.

will by accepting several thousand exiles who have no other way to survive."¹⁰⁴ This move by the Union was followed by yet another letter of explanation by the Armenian Government, then another request by the Union to expedite the repatriation, and these exchanges carried on for months.

The fact that the government of Armenia approached the AGBU in particular with relation to the repatriation indicated that, in spite of all their reservations, the Soviet authorities nonetheless considered the Union as the only reputable Diaspora organization that, within its powers, contributed to the organization of the repatriation. The Union was perceived likewise in the Diaspora: thousands appealed to it with requests for repatriation, and addressed to it all their grievances, distressing as they were. One such case was registered in 1932 when "Overwhelmed with unemployment and poverty, the exiles and especially orphans rushed from Macedonia to Thessaloniki, against numerous published announcements that they should not move, and with their endless appeals made the situation of the National Board and the Union's chapter unbearable. Of these, a group of 140 "adult orphans" went to Athens to continue presenting their appeals in a more rigid manner, so that the national representatives in Thessaloniki and Athens, disgusted by the attacks, resigned from their posts. We hurried to send a telegram to our representatives in Athens recommending to extend temporary accommodation for the orphans on behalf of the Union."¹⁰⁵

Of more concern, however, were the events in Armenia, of which the Union was informed by Sahak Ter-Gabrielian's letter of September 4, 1933. "...certain elements from among the immigrants of 1932-33, who... have not yet managed or do not wish to settle down and adapt to the jobs offered to them, prefer to frequently change their work places and move from one settlement to another. These elements mostly represent the groups that were alienated from productive labour during the preceding years and engaged in retail trade... people that have fully embraced a dependant mentality." And, most importantly, "...several attempts to escape from Armenia abroad... made by similar people."¹⁰⁶ However, the real reasons behind these cases were different. In a monograph dedicated to the history of repatriation, historian H. Meliksetian specifically mentions the poor material and living conditions of the repatriates, the "careless, bureaucratic" attitude of the state institutions towards their needs, etc. The prevalence of such attitudes is confirmed by the fact that on September 21 of the same year of 1933 (i.e. about two weeks after Sahak Ter-Gabrielian's letter), the Secretariat of the Central Committee of CPA made the issue of "Conditions of Immigrants" a special item of its discussion agenda. The decisions adopted strongly criticized several republican and local government agencies for non-compliance with the decisions taken previously. A decision was made to establish a special committee to deal with the issues of repatriates, and the government was requested to "... expedite the construction of

¹⁰⁴ Miutyun, May-June, no. 161, 1933: 41.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., May-June, no. 155, 1933: 40.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., November-December, no. 164, 1933: 84.

residential areas for immigrants, to improve their medical service, support with clothing and footwear, enroll all children in schools...."¹⁰⁷

The authorities of Soviet Armenia were faced with an unexpected and rather inexplicable phenomenon. The people that voluntarily and with great enthusiasm repatriated, started after some time to voice their discontent with the living conditions. It was expected that the extremely difficult conditions in the host countries would impel them to at least conform with the situation in Armenia. However, the opposite was happening. A considerable part of the repatriates did not wish to comply with the system of social injustice, limitations on individual initiative, numerous obligations, restrictions and other similar constraints, that became if not natural then at least inevitable for the local population after about 10 years of the Soviet rule. Such moods and attitudes of the repatriates or the "newcomers" were undesirable for the authorities per se, but even more dangerous was their proliferation among the resident population that was fraught with political and social tension in the society. The authorities of Soviet Armenia obviously saw the danger, and the above-mentioned resolution and other similar decisions attest to that, however, they only pursued the objective of satisfying the most basic needs of the repatriates and nothing more. But even such trivial issues became unresolvable in view of the difficult economic situation of the country. Under the circumstances the Armenian authorities thought it reasonable to simply postpone the next influx of repatriates and limit their number.

The appeals of the Union to the government of Armenia on the resumption of repatriation did not cease, moreover, for this very purpose the Union established direct links with the members of the Soviet Delegation in Geneva. The report presented at the annual General Meeting of the Union in 1934 mentioned that "... it was informed that the Soviet delegation in Geneva announced that the central government of the Soviet Union agrees in principle to the immigration of Armenians to Soviet Armenia, but cannot provide them with adequate material support."¹⁰⁸ In December of the same year, the newly elected president of the AGBU, the son of the late Boghos Nubar, Zareh Nubar appealed to the Chairman of the Armenian government Sahak Ter-Gabrielian.

"I have the honour, he wrote, to comment with this letter on the lamentable conditions of the exile Armenian workers who, by virtue of their desperate labour, until recently managed to withstand the hardships of the international economic crisis, but the xenophobic laws of many countries and even France pose an additional and even heavier burden, and those without proper documents are expelled, and some of those with work permits are deprived of even basic labour rights." Then, highly estimating the good will of the government of Armenia in relation to the repatriation and mentioning that only the motherland can offer adequate conditions to the destitute, Zareh Nubar writes: "therefore, we earnestly request, dear Chairman, that in the first days of spring already, the doors of Soviet Armenia open for several thousand workers, and a

¹⁰⁷ Meliksetian 1985: 118.

¹⁰⁸ AGBU – 1934: 44.

corresponding positive decision of the Council of the People's Commissars is communicated to us, so that we undertake the preparatory activities and make corresponding appropriations." And then: "Noting that the issue of immigration is of national and even international importance, since the General Assembly of the League of Nations votes every year for a resolution in relation to the immigration of Armenians, upon our instructions our delegate in Geneva has held a meeting over this issue with the delegates of the Soviet Union, who promised to bring it to the attention of the authorities in Moscow and seek a definite solution therefrom."¹⁰⁹ At the beginning of 1935, Zareh Nubar applied with the same issue to the new chairman of the Council of the People's Commissars of Armenia Abraham Gouloyan, for the purpose of arranging the repatriation of French Armenians.

The Armenian authorities officially declared that they were ready to receive 1,200 unemployed Armenians from France, while the number of those interested was about 7,000. In these circumstances, Shahverdian decided to personally make the selection which resulted in preparation, with a considerable delay, of a list of 1,800 repatriates. Like in the previous repatriation cases, the Union also financially supported the repatriates, providing 2,000 English pounds. In addition, due to its high esteem, it secured high-level official support. Specifically, upon its request the president of Nansen's Geneva office Michael Hansson made two visits to Paris and discussed repatriation issues with Prime Minister Albert Sarraut. Thanks to the efforts of the Union, on April 17, upon the initiative of the French authorities, an agreement was signed between the Foreign Ministry of France, Nansen's Office and the AGBU. "On this day, in response to the question of the Chairman addressed to our Union, our Director General declared that the AGBU will underwrite the rental costs of a steamboat to take the unemployed immigrants to Marseilles, transportation of all the immigrants and their belongings to the steamboat, feeding and food supplies for all the immigrants during ten days aboard (including full subsistence for the children and the sick) ... We also took care of the costs of the transportation of Komitas vardapet's coffin, having decided to send the remains of the great composer to Armenia... In view of the poverty of some of the immigrants, the Union will provide personal subsidies, primarily to the intellectuals."¹¹⁰ On May 9, 1936, the "Sinaya" steamboat took off from Marseilles to Armenia with 1,801 repatriates from France.

The reception and accommodation of the repatriates of 1936 proceeded with the same difficulties as in the preceding years. In October the chairman of the HOK Arsen Yessayan wrote in his letter addressed to the new head of the Communist Party of Armenia Amatouni Amatouni: "Although a special government committee is set up for the employment of the 1,800 immigrants from France, the entire burden still falls on the HOK. Almost all immigrants have received jobs in various institutions. At present, some of them lost their jobs due to a variety of reasons and they appeal to the HOK again

¹⁰⁹ AGBU CBDA.

¹¹⁰ AGBU - 1936: 45-47.

requesting, sometimes even demanding, that jobs be provided to them ... In view of the prevalence of unemployment among immigrants and their unfamiliarity with our conditions, it is desirable that... some state agency or a professional organization provide its assistance for 3 to 4 months for them to find jobs."¹¹¹

When organizing the transportation of the remains of composer Komitas, the leaders of the AGBU could hardly imagine that this issue may become a subject of discussion among party and state bodies of the Soviet Union. The catch was that, in order to organise this transportation, the Armenian authorities had to receive approval by the Transcaucasian Regional Committee of the Party, especially that of its First Secretary Lavrentiy Beria. The leader of the Communist Party of Armenia Aghassi Khanjian, most likely anticipating a negative reaction of Beria, appealed to him only on May 10. Informing Beria that the steamboat with the repatriates had already left Marseilles with the coffin of Komitas aboard, Khanjian wrote, in order to avert a possible negative reaction: "... on the eve of the departure of the ship, we sent him (Danoush Shahverdian - Ed. M.) through HOK a telegram asking to postpone the issue for the time being. The ship will arrive in Batum between 17-19 May. Under the circumstances, the only feasible solution is to allow the organization of Komitas's funeral in Yerevan under the auspices of the Union of Soviet Composers of Armenia."¹¹² In these circumstances, Beria was forced to consent.

AGBU and HOK

The repatriation of the 1930s, apart from being an event of national significance, was also important for all the organizing parties both in terms of highlighting their true capacity, and in terms of clarification of their relations. In this context, the relations of the AGBU with the HOK (Relief Committee for Armenia) are of interest. The HOK was founded by the Soviet authorities of Armenia at the end of 1921 with the initial objective to ensure and organise the support of Armenians abroad to the starving population of Armenia and promote its general development. Very soon, however, the branches of the HOK abroad became the main leverage of the Communist Party of Armenia in implementing its policy in the Armenian Diaspora. Upon instructions received from Yerevan, they tried at all costs to spread communist ideas among the Diaspora and launched an uncompromising struggle against all important national organizations of the Diaspora. Enjoying the trust and support of the Armenian authorities and aspiring to maintain its privileged position, the HOK leaders were extremely intolerant towards contacts of these same authorities with other organizations and even individuals. Naturally, they took an especially intolerant stance towards the cooperation of the Armenian authorities with the AGBU which they called an "Armenian bourgeois"

¹¹¹ NAA, 1/16/77, p. 43.

¹¹² Ibid. 1/16/71, p. 39.

organization, tired to discredit through in their public statements and in the media, as well as in their discussions in Yerevan.

An interesting method of the HOK's campaign against the AGBU was the appropriation of programmes that the latter implemented in Armenia (and the overall support to Armenia). In one of its 1927 issues, the "Miutyun" monthly wrote, "The New York-based "Banvor", which is a publication of the Executive Board of HOK, published an article in its first issue, claiming that the Nor Eudokia community in Armenia is founded with HOK support." This statement is of surprise to us and we feel obliged to speak up. Out of mere sense of justice and gratitude, we cannot help mentioning the estate of the late Grigor Meotemetian bequeathed to the General Benevolent Union to enable the establishment of the village in Armenia... In the same issue, "Banvor" writes that "the HOK provided more than 25,000 dollars to the Government of Armenia to help in the draining of marshlands that cause malaria among the population," and that "several wills are administered by the HOK to the benefit of Armenia." We consider ourselves obliged to mention that 15,000 of these 25,000 dollars are the proceeds of a fundraising effort by the Benevolent Union, and the above wills were bequeathed to the Union and the Union transferred them to Armenia."¹¹³ It is worth mentioning that such appropriations by the HOK were subsequently legitimized in Soviet Armenian history. Thus, H. Meliksetian in his aforementioned book ascribes to the HOK, apart from the above mentioned village of Nor Eudokia, the construction of the Marie Nubar Eye Clinic, naturally without commenting on its name.¹¹⁴

The HOK pursued this modus operandi especially during the repatriation of the 30's when, on one hand, it accused the AGBU of not supporting and not assisting the repatriation, and on the other hand either ignored the activities of the Union or tried to ascribe them to itself. In December, 1932, Vahan Malezian wrote in his letter addressed to the Marseilles chapter of the Union, "It is our hope that all those immigrants for whom the AGBU pays the passport, visa, railway, and steamboat tickets and food costs, properly understand the fact that the HOK always tries to appropriate the contributions of the Union, therefore the immigrants upon departure are under the impression that the Union is not a financial support and it is the HOK that will take care of their costs, while it is an absolute fact that the HOK is not able to contribute anything and is only engaged in registration, examination and issuance of passes for the immigrants."¹¹⁵ This attitude of the HOK during the repatriation years, aiming at enhancing its credibility in the Diaspora at all costs, reached the point when the the AGBU leaders were forced to appeal to Yerevan. It is noteworthy that such dissatisfaction and complaints were mainly addressed to the Yerevan representative of the Union Haikaz Karageusian, and not directly to the Central Board of the HOK. As a rule the management of the Union seldom addressed the Armenian authorities directly, preferring to do it through its

¹¹³ Miutyun, November-December, no. 120, 1927: 84.

¹¹⁴ Meliksetian 1985: 160-161.

¹¹⁵ AGBU CBDA.

representative. In this case, however, this is probably explained by the position of the HOK leaders.

On June 4, 1934, in a letter addressed to Haikaz Karageusian, Vahan Malezian writes:

"It is high time that the Central Board of the HOK in Yerevan issue a serious warning to the heads of the HOK branches about the unbridled populism aimed against the AGBU, and about often nasty attacks by its outlets and newspapers (with the New York based "Banvor" magazine in the vanguard). They consider that by hitting left and right, and casting heavy blows on the AGBU, they will become pleasing to the ruling circles of Yerevan.

"In relation to this issue, we had several opportunities to visit citizen Vardanian (Chairman of the Central Board of the HOK - Ed. M) who kindly assured us that such incidents were over and an appropriate reprimand has already been sent to such a windbag, the language and course of which do not differ from a style and spirit of our and whole of Armenia enemies (a reference to the Dashnaksoutiun - Ed. M.)... they sow disappointment in our organization (HOK - Ed.M.) and among friends of Armenia in general."¹¹⁶ However, in reality the position of the Chairman of HOK towards the AGBU was completely different, and in the words of the the AGBU's representative in Armenia he "...did not do anything in relation to the Union... and as far as I know he was against the Union and aspired to turn the HOK into a leading organization abroad."¹¹⁷

In July, 1933, the Union accepted the proposal of the same Grigor Vardanian and jointly with the HOK founded "The Central Body of the Immigration Fund". The objective of the newly created body was to organise fundraising in the Diaspora to support residential construction in Soviet Armenia and thus expedite mass repatriation. Upon the receipt of this proposal, the AGBU faced a heavy dilemma. During the preceding years the HOK had become an organization conducting obviously pro-Communist and pro-Soviet propaganda and as such it was politically questionable for the authorities of almost all countries. The operation of the HOK branches was banned in Egypt, Greece, Syria, Argentina and several other countries. In Bulgaria, the former administrator/secretary of the HOK office Martiros Khachikian in one of his letters informing of the closure of the office, referred to the position of the Bulgarian government, according to which the HOK activity, "being a form of the communist movement, was not desirable for Bulgaria."¹¹⁸ The final discrediting of the HOK branches was due to the internal frictions that were caused by "a desire to be more red than the most sworn communist." It was not therefore accidental that as a consequence of its cooperation with the HOK in some countries, particularly in Syria and France, the Union appeared in the focus of unwelcome attention of the authorities. Another consequence was that, taking advantage of the opportunity, some national

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ NAA, 1191/4/174, p. 10.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 1/17/76, p. 22.

organizations, first of all the Dashnaksoutiun, accused the Union of cooperation with the Soviet authorities, and catering to the political orders of the latter. It is also known that for the majority of the Armenian Diaspora, and especially for its economically better-off segments that were mostly members and supporters of AGBU, the HOK was an alien and anti-national organization. For them, the agreement of the leadership of the Union on Vardanian's proposal for cooperation was particularly strange and unacceptable. At the same time, however, the Union had to take into account the fact that Vardanian represented not only the Central Board of the HOK, but rather the top officials of Soviet Armenia. Under these circumstances, by rejecting the latter's proposal for cooperation, the Union would jeopardize both its active involvement in the organization of repatriation, and successful implementation of its programs in Armenia, as well as the speedy resumption of the repatriation process. Placating itself about the temporary nature of cooperation with the HOK, the Union hoped that this way it would put an end to accusations of rivalry and that the HOK would at least be forced to put an end to antagonism towards the AGBU.

These hopes of the Union, however, did not come true. First, as it foresaw, the results of the fundraising were hardly satisfactory. The position of the HOK did not change either, on which Malezian wrote bitterly in several letters addressed to Yerevan. In a letter dated June 7, 1935, addressed to Haikaz Karageusian, he mentioned: "... they assure that in repatriation preference will be given to the HOK members. On this occasion, it is with pain we note that citizen Shahverdian made his selection in Greece and Bulgaria based on the nominations by the HOK, but it is not always the best elements that make the HOK ranks, and many join them just for the sake of using the name. This probably explains the disappointment that Government experienced seeing among the immigrants many unworthy people who were recommended as HOK members and friends of Armenia."¹¹⁹ In a letter dated May 15, 1936, addressed to Shahverdian, Malezian mentioned: "...There are quite a few justified complaints that requests for immigration remain unanswered, that the attitude of the local officials of the HOK is ungracious just because the applicants are not HOK members, and even when they enroll, they complain or withdraw, not being able, like others, to make a donation to HOK in order to repatriate. The prevailing impression is that the repatriation is arranged in such a way as if it were an HOK undertaking... many join the HOK hoping to obtain the right to repatriate, or are prompted to bring gifts to get a positive consideration... Undoubtedly such complaints would not have taken place if the immigration were organised as a national task...".¹²⁰

In another letter addressed to the newly appointed president of the Central Board of the HOK Arsen Yessayan, Malezian is more specific on the position of the Union: "... we shall never agree to view the immigration as an HOK undertaking rather than a national task, since we cannot accept that the immigration becomes propaganda

¹¹⁹ AGBU CBDA.

¹²⁰ NAA, 178/1/580, p. 46.

leverage for this or that organization, whereas it is a matter of justified pride for our beloved motherland, its people and its leaders. We have witnessed another painful manifestation of this sad state of affairs in a strange rally that took place upon the departure of "Sinaya" steamboat, when, along with the initially agreed and formulated messages, a message of gratitude was addressed exclusively to the French Executive Board of the HOK on behalf of the repatriates, signed by citizen Shahverdian, which at least could be interpreted as a public display of ungratefulness of the immigrants and insensitivity of the officials." At the end of the letter, speaking about the need to organise a new wave of repatriation, Malezian requests that the Union no more "...come up as the cashbox happy to pay for any costs."¹²¹

Arsen Yessayan, who assumed the presidency of the HOK Central Board in September of 1935, tried to somehow mend the relationship with the AGBU. More will be said about Yessayan further in the book, but his innovative approach to the stance of the foreign branches of the HOK to the AGBU is worth mentioning. In his letter of December 21, addressed to Malezian, Haikaz Karageusian wrote: "Comrade Yessayan did stress one more time that relevant instructions were provided to the delegates visiting Armenia and to all head offices of the HOK, so that once and for all an end be put to inappropriate expressions and statements exchanged between the HOK and the Union."¹²² Such position of the HOK chairman and his decisive steps in this direction were unanimously rejected by the heads of the foreign branches of HOK. While some considered these to be indications of invigorating the organization, rendering a new impetus to its patriotic activities, the majority voiced explicit disagreement, claiming that "Yessayan is not familiar with the conditions abroad, and hence his instructions cannot be followed."

Aghassi Khanjian and resignation of Calouste Gulbenkian

The repatriation of 1931-1933 was accompanied by dramatic events in the relationship of the AGBU with Armenia. Shortly after a publication by Sahak Ter-Gabrielian in a September, 1931 issue of "Khorhrdayin Hayastan" official daily, where he informed about the government decision on organizing the repatriation and his Paris meetings with the AGBU president Calouste Gulbenkian and its other leaders, the same newspaper published a statement by the first Secretary of the Communist Party of Armenia Aghassi Khanjian on October 16, 1931, where he specifically mentions: "The practical steps taken by the dashnaks on the establishment of a "national home" that, by the way, are directly supported by the Gulbenkians, affiliated with the Anglo-French imperialist clique, hinder our projects on immigration of workers to Soviet Armenia, and pursue an objective or creating a "counter-influence leverage " at the disposal of the French imperialism aiming at colonial exploitation of Syria and suppression of national

¹²¹ AGBU CBDA.

¹²² Ibid.

liberation movements, as well as to provide cheap labor to Gulbenkian's oil fields and oil pipelines. The main purpose of creating this "national home" is to supply cannon fodder for an imperialist intervention...."¹²³

The leaders of the AGBU, puzzled by this accusation, immediately contacted the Armenian authorities. On November 9 Vahan Malezian addressed a letter to Sahak Ter-Gabrielian where he writes, in particular, "It is with great pain that we take the serious accusation that is insulting and unfair towards Hon. Calouste Gulbenkian, connecting his name with the Dashnaktsoutiun and charging him with deeds he has never done." Subsequently, substantiating the absurdity and irrelevance of the accusations of the president of the Union (see further), Malezian concludes, that "... I do not think that it is right on the part of the Armenian ideologists, so dedicated to the cause of revival of Armenia, attack equally to their opponents and earnest and dedicated friends of same Armenia. This undesirable position has had and will continue to have grave consequences. And is it lamentable that a patriot and dedicated Armenian like Mr. Gulbenkian, at the moment when he spares no effort to be of assistance to Armenia, is insulted in his dearest feelings and witnesses irreconcilable contradictions between the previous encouragement and such relentless accusations made by a responsible and authoritative civil servant through your official newspaper."¹²⁴

According to established procedure, Malezian's letter had to be forwarded to the recipient, Sahak Ter-Gabrielian, by the Union's representative in Yerevan Haikaz Karageusian, but days, weeks, and even months passed and there was no response. From the messages sent by the latter to Paris it became clear that he handed the letter to Ter-Gabrielian only in February, 1932 in Tbilisi. Yerevan continued to maintain silence. On March 10, in a letter addressed to Karageusian, Malezian wrote:

"This painful issue that remains unaddressed for months, creates a truly depressing situation, and witnessing the distressed condition of our respectable president, I myself am completely demoralized. Bitterly disappointed after immigration-related initial enthusiasm, Mr. Gulbenkian is even considering resignation from the presidency of the Union, and we should spare no effort to prevent it.

"The Board of Directors and the whole AGBU cannot leave their beloved President alone in the face of the grave accusation that groundlessly and pointlessly presents him as an accomplice or an ally of the Dashnaktsoutiun in the creation of "national home" in Syria and as an enemy of Armenian workers who intends to exploit them in the oil fields. We should immediately refute these accusations in front of the whole world, if the words of truth find no response in Yerevan. We request, no matter how inconvenient this may be, that you convey these considerations personally and in writing to the distinguished Prime minister or his deputy."¹²⁵

¹²³ Khorhrdayin Hayastan, October 16, 1931.

¹²⁴ AGBU CBDA.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

Calouste Gulbenkian, once he became certain that the Communist leader of Armenia does not intend to amend his position, writes a letter of resignation to the Board of Directors of the Union on April 22, 1922, three days before the departure of the new group of repatriants:

"As you well remember, upon accepting the honour of the post of the president of the AGBU, my only condition was that I will resign the day I feel that I cannot be useful any more.

You also know how close to my heart, in spite of the limited personal time, I took this job and performed my duties, naturally with numerous difficulties, battling against useless complaints and demands, since there are those who consider the Benevolent Union a state, ready and able to address any issue, while the Union is a private institution established upon the initiative of lamented Boghos Nubar and very limited in its resources, especially of late.

On top of all the problems, the peace of the Union was unexpectedly disturbed: the official representative of the Yerevan Government Mr. Khanjian made absurd allegations against my person, we waited in vain for the Armenian government to repudiate this absolutely groundless attack; hence I, as the President of AGBU, am ready to resign in view of the fact that the Union maintains relations with the Yerevan Government necessary for the implementation of our numerous benevolent programmes, and I cannot, with my name and signature and in my capacity of the President, have any relations with them under the current circumstances.

Therefore, in submitting my unconditional resignation, I retain my affection towards Armenia that is the sole consolation of the Nation, and maintain my sense of duty towards its prosperity."

Assuring my everlasting respect and consideration to the Benevolent Union,

22 April, 1932

"resigned President Calouste S. Gulbenkian."¹²⁶

The Board of Directors of the Union, discussing the crisis at its meetings of May 2 and 6, appealed to Calouste Gulbenkian with a request to stand back from the decision:

"... The Board of Directors has always been in agreement with you, and for the sake of this agreement, it first of all decided to address a complaint to the Chairman of the Council of the People's Commissars of Armenia citizen Sahak Ter-Gabrielian, in view of the groundless allegations made by the citizen Khanjian several months ago, and the appeals against which by our Director General have unfortunately remained unanswered...

"The meeting of the Board of Directors noted with satisfaction that there is no evidence whatsoever to confirm the doubts in relation to the Union or its Meeting as suggested in our letter. Furthermore, these insinuations are not to cast a shadow on your personality and feelings, and hence their significance for your resignation is not justified, and regardless of the unworthiness of accusations and claims continuously

¹²⁶ Miutyun, July-August, 1932, no. 156: 49-50.

made against the Union, your motion will not only be a blow to the Union and a loss for our nation, but would inevitably give room for faulty and disagreeable interpretations...

"In these circumstances, the Board of Directors is convinced that it is necessary to consider the complicated situation that prompted your resignation and the harmful consequences it will have for the Union, so that the choice made in accordance with the will of the Diaspora is not reversed as a result of a speech or a newspaper publication and the heavy impression it left on you, to the detriment of ultimate interests of the Union and the nation...."¹²⁷

But the decision of the President of the Union was final. On May 11 he sent a telegram from Algeria:

"I am immensely grateful for your letter of May 7. Please do not insist because my resignation is irreversible. Regardless of all personal considerations, I am convinced that this decision is in accordance with the interests of the AGBU. I made a final decision upon serious consideration, and there is no point in turning back to it again. With warmest regards, C. Gulbenkian."¹²⁸

However, on June 12, the leaders of the Union had a meeting with Gulbenkian upon his return to Paris. But the failure of this meeting was foreordained: in another article published in "Khorhrdayin Hayastan" on May 24, the authorities of Armenia reiterated their accusations against Gulbenkian and the AGBU. Finally, the Board of Directors at its session of June 15, 1932, accepted the resignation of Calouste Gulbenkian from the post of the President of the AGBU.

Calouste Gulbenkian assumed the post of the President of the AGBU in October, 1930, after the death of the founder and the first President of the Union Boghos Nubar. This fact was symbolic in view of the role of the Nubar family in Gulbenkian's life. Calouste Gulbenkian was born in Constantinople (Skutar) in 1869. After finishing the famous Robert college of Istanbul, Calouste Gulbenkian left for Marseilles to improve his French, and in 1884 he entered the famous King's College of London. "...In 1887, when he was still only nineteen and a half, he graduated as an Associate of King's College with a First Class in Civil Engineering and won medals in Science and Engineering. In 1952 he was elected an Honorary Fellow because he was the oldest surviving graduate of the Civil Engineering School - this was the only honour which he ever accepted."¹²⁹ Calouste Gulbenkian became known in the world in 1914, at the eve of World War I when, thanks to his mediation, the two largest oil companies of the time - the "Anglo-Persian Oil Company" and the "Royal Dutch-Shell" created a consortium that, with the consent of the government of Turkey, had to exploit oil fields in the Middle East. After lengthy discussions between the newly created company and Calouste Gulbenkian it was decided that "the companies each provide a 2 1/2 per cent share in

¹²⁷ Ibid.: 51-52.

¹²⁸ Ibid.: 54.

¹²⁹ Hewins 1957: 14

the company for the Gulbenkian interest,"¹³⁰ in other words, 5% of the oil produced in the Middle East. After this most profitable transaction in the world, Calouste Gulbenkian, one of the most famous and richest men of the world, became known as "Mr. Five Percent."

The life and work of Calouste Gulbenkian were always in the focus of general attention. In this case, however, of special relevance is the following event in his life. In 1896, during the massacres of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, the 27 year-old Gulbenkian, with his wife and the new-born baby, leave Turkey and travel to Europe, spending some months in Cairo on the way, where their friends and relatives lived. Among the latter was Nubar Pasha, the father of Boghos Nubar, who had resigned from the post of the prime minister the year before. He was the one who hosted the young couple. The son of Calouste Gulbenkian, Nubar Gulbenkian, quotes the memoirs of his mother, Nvard Essayan: "When my mother went driving with Nubar Pasha in a carriage and pair through the streets of Cairo the fellahin used to bow deeply and some even prostrated themselves as the Pasha's carriage passed. The horses were preceded by a runner, called a *sais*, who carried a stick with five horse's tails; the number of tails, one, three or five, was determined by the rank of Pasha; the Khedive himself warranted seven tails."¹³¹ Gulbenkian was very proud about his relationship with such a prominent man after whom he named his first son. In a book about Calouste Gulbenkian Ralph Hewins writes: "Through the family connection with Nubar Pasha, Gulbenkian obtained a new status... He was the friend, protege, and "nephew" of the world-famous statesman. When he needed introduction to Prince of Wales's multi-millionaire financial adviser, Sir Ernest Cassel, Calouste found Nubar Pasha a name to conjure with--the Prince and the Pasha had been friends since the Royal visit to Cairo... Through Sir Evelyn Baring, Nubar Pasha had long-standing links with Baring Brothers, the famous City of London merchant bankers. They were to play a vital role in the rise of Mr. Five Percent... Since the Pasha had been educated in France and French was his first language, he was able to introduce Calouste to the most influential people in Paris, including the Rothschilds... Long talks with the Pasha also seem to have matured Gulbenkian's precocious diplomatic talents."¹³² The same author mentions that in Cairo Calouste Gulbenkian "... met another prominent Armenian of the future--the Pasha's son, Boghos Nubar Pasha--then a well-known architect, busy developing Heliopolis for his father and uncle, Abraham Pasha."¹³³ Thirty-four years after these meetings, Calouste Gulbenkian succeeded Boghos Nubar in the post of the president of the AGBU, founded by the latter, and only a year and a half after he submitted his resignation.

¹³⁰ Ibid.: IX.

¹³¹ Gulbenkian 1965: 12.

¹³² Hewins 1957: 52-53.

¹³³ Ibid: 53.

As expected, this resignation had considerable reverberations in the Diaspora (as equally expected, there was no mention of it in Soviet Armenia): various organizations and prominent individuals expressed their views and assessments of the case. Both for his contemporaries as well as today, Gulbenkian's resignation raises two key questions. First, what was the cause and how justified was the accusation of Gulbenkian by Khanjian and, second, was Khanjian's accusation the true reason or the pretext for Gulbenkian's resignation from the post of the Union's President? In our days, the first of these issues became a matter of special consideration by historian Karlen Dallakian, whose monograph "On the Resignation of the President of the AGBU Calouste Gulbenkian" is of the few scholarly works on the history of the AGBU.

Analysing Khanjian's speech of October 14, 1932 in the broader context of the political events in the Soviet Union and abroad, Dallakian provides the following explanation. In the 1920's, the Turkish propaganda, wishing at any cost to prevent the concentration of refugee Armenians in Syria, i.e. along its southern territories, started skillfully exploiting the myth of an "Armenian home" in the region. In the interpretation of Turkey, the authors and perpetrators of this project were the imperialist countries of the West, first of all France, as well as its clients, Armenian political parties, and primarily the Dahsnaktsoutiun. At the same time the authorities of the Soviet Union, in the frenzy of the search for outside enemies, ceaselessly professed the forthcoming imperialistic intervention. The Armenian version of this propaganda ascribed an important role to the same "home." "The Dashnaks, with the "high" support of the French government", wrote "Khorhrdayin Hayastan" in one of its June issues, "tried at all costs to consolidate the required human material in the North-East of Syria. This "home," besides being a base of the French imperialism in its suppression of the national liberation movement in Syria, is at the same time a link between the "Kurdish theatre of operations" and the Mediterranean that could be used by the French imperialists at their discretion. This "home" will become one of the centres of preparation for the anti-Soviet war."¹³⁴ The Turkish and Soviet Armenian propaganda about the "Armenian home" in Syria reached its climax in 1931 when the League of Nations and Nansen's Office, in cooperation with AGBU, planned the transportation of unemployed and homeless Armenian exiles to Syria. In this situation, the Armenian authorities reverted to decisive measures. Dallakian writes: "The concoction of the "Armenian home" was perceived as an ultimate fact that caused immense anxiety, the Turkish propaganda and perhaps other services as well propped up the tension, possibly, instructions were received from the Soviet centre as well, and ultimately, a hasty decision was taken to organise the repatriation, as a counterbalance to "Armenian home", thus aborting the "imperialistic programe." In summary, the repatriation organised in 1931 served a clearly political purpose."¹³⁵ It is also worth mentioning that voluntary repatriation to the Soviet Union from a capitalist or any other country always had a clear political and ideological purpose and significance.

¹³⁴ Dallakian 1996: 78-79.

¹³⁵ Ibid.: 83.

It may be safely claimed that the political goals of the Soviet Union in the issue of repatriation unintentionally coincided with the ultimate interests of the Armenian people, and it remained for the authorities of Soviet Armenia to make the best of the opportunity, putting the Diaspora money to good use, and ensuring adequate living and working conditions for the repatriates.

However, continues Dallakian, it was not enough to satisfy the anxiety of Turkey: "the "Armenian home" had to be destroyed, since though it was a fiction from beginning to end, it nonetheless existed as an idea. The implementation of this idea was possible only upon the availability of financial resources, and the money was at the disposal of the President of the AGBU Calouste Gulbenkian. Gulbenkian's person was selected as the main target, hitting which the whole structure could be destroyed. Calouste Gulbenkian was also a convenient target especially in view of the fact that he was known as a big capitalist, and in the eyes of the Soviet propaganda he was also someone "with close ties with the international imperialist circles."¹³⁶

Dallakian's viewpoint appears convincing in its part pertaining to the repatriation, and the author brings up several facts to support it. However, the statement that beginning with 1931 the repatriation pursued exclusively political ends, since Armenia was not in a position to organise it for years itself, "and was especially unable to do it following the earthquake of April 27, 1931" requires some clarification. The reality is that Soviet Armenia was at the same level of its socio-economic development in 1931 as it was in 1925, 1927 and later in 1936 or 1946 - 48, therefore it was never really prepared for repatriation, hence the repatriation of 1931 was no different in these terms. On the other hand, it was already mentioned that following 1927 the AGBU and the authorities of Armenia continuously discussed the issue of the next wave of repatriation and Armenia, and for a number of different reasons, suspended but did not reject the implementation. Another factor is that this time, in determining the time-frames, the fact of the "Syrian home" was taken into account.

As for the explanation of the accusations brought against Gulbenkian, these require additional factual substantiation. First, what was the guarantee that following the speech of Khanjian Calouste Gulbenkian would refuse to support the transportation of exiles to Syria? If he really had such intentions, even without willing to openly confront the leader of Armenia, he could easily do that indirectly, not as the President of the Union and without having his name mentioned. The following fact is important from this perspective--this issue was no longer on the agenda anyway: in the first days of September, 1931, after a meeting between Ter-Gabrielian and Gulbenkian it was decided that the Armenian exiles in Greece should repatriate to Armenia. The fact of the change in the AGBU programmes was referred to in correspondence more than once, including that with Yerevan. "Naturally, the Syrian undertaking will now be dropped, since the doors of homeland are open for the exiles in Greece and indeed, within one

¹³⁶ Ibid.: 87.

year 27 persons only went to Syria, and did so by mistake."¹³⁷ There was no mention of transportation to Syria contained in Gulbenkian's above-mentioned appeal of September 30. Khanjian delivered his speech two weeks after the appeal, i.e. he was either unaware of it, which is not very likely, or for some reasons chose to ignore it.

In all this the visit of Ter-Gabrielian to Paris appears to be of utmost interest. Dallakian states that even before this visit the negotiations of the President of the AGBU with the High Commissioner of France in Syria and Nansen's Office were already common knowledge, and that "Khorhrdayin Hayastan" had already published its material against Calouste Gulbenkian, and follows up with a legitimate question: "... why, however, did Sahak Ter-Gabrielian go to Paris, risking and jeopardizing his position and undermining his credibility?"¹³⁸ The question, however, remains unanswered. Obviously, he did not go to make a statement on repatriation, neither did he go to meet with the French authorities on the issue, since the repatriation was from Greece and Bulgaria. It may be stated with a degree of certainty that the purpose of the meeting with the leaders of the Union was two-fold: first, to receive the advance consent of the Union to support the repatriation of the Armenian exiles from Greece and thus abort the programme of their transportation to Syria, and then to secure the necessary funding to implement repatriation to Armenia. The first problem was successfully resolved: repatriation to Armenia was in full conformity with the Union's original perception of national consolidation, and at the same time it had fewer complications than the preceding "Syrian" project.

It is worth mentioning that together with the problem of the Armenian exiles in Greece, the issue of numerous Armenians put up in the camps of Beirut and Aleppo was also pending. In view of the anti-hygienic conditions prevalent in the camps, the complaints of the owners of land where the camps were located, and several other reasons, the local authorities decided to demolish them without delay, which could result in about 15,000 Armenian exiles remaining completely homeless. The AGBU, in response to applications from the Nansen's Office, determined to finance within possible limits the construction of residential areas for the Armenians of Beirut and Aleppo. And while the Union readily let go of the project "From Greece to Syria," and substituted it with a project "From Greece to Armenia," it simply had to continue supporting it. In this connection, the Board of Directors of the AGBU wrote, "... the baseless accusation against Mr. Gulbenkian in a speech by citizen Aghassi Khanjian left a most bitter impression and caused immense grief to the Board of Directors. We have never even considered establishing a "national home" outside of the homeland, since any community, including the one in Syria, is merely a temporary settlement for the exiles. The brotherly support extended to the exiles abroad, without which these destitute splinters of our much suffered nation would be doomed to terrible perils and poverty, has no motivation other than indubitable humanitarian obligations.

¹³⁷ Miutyun, July-August, 1932, no. 156: 58, see also *Ibid*, October 1931, no. 151: 148.

¹³⁸ Dallakian 1996: 85.

Consequently, it is reprehensible that the support of the AGBU is denied until such time when our compatriots, uprooted from their motherland and deprived of any protection, are settled in their home locations, which will surely take a long time."¹³⁹ But even in these circumstances, according to the agreement with Nansen's Office, the Union had to "... provide only half of the previously pledged 10,000 pounds for the homeless exiles in Syria, so that the rest of the amount could be remitted to the immigration fund."¹⁴⁰ Thus, if the components of the imaginary plan of the "Armenian Home" were on one hand, the transportation of exiles from Greece to Syria and, on the other, the construction of shelters for homeless refugees in Beirut and Aleppo, then in September 1931, especially after Ter-Gabrielian's visit to Paris, the Union decided to support only the second component. And if the Turkish propaganda still considered it a threat to its national security then, even in view of possible political repercussions, it would be hard to imagine that the Armenian authorities, independently or upon instructions from Moscow, could demand that the AGBU hold back the already pledged support to the Armenian exiles in Beirut and Aleppo.

The second purpose of Ter-Gabrielian's visit to Paris, i.e. the issue of financing repatriation to Armenia, followed another development. This is what Malezian, the only leader of the Union to maintain close working and personal relations with Gulbenkian after his resignation, writes: "Since last month (Malezian refers to Khanjian's speech - Ed. M.) the prime minister of Armenia Sahak Ter-Gabrielian visited Paris, brought an official proposal on repatriation and requested that the president of the Union organise a fundraising to finance the transportation of the repatriates to Armenia. But Gulbenkian, duly receiving the distinguished guest, preferred, against my advice, to mention that he would rather wait for the results of the fundraising before making his contribution. Needless to say, the prime minister left in a very displeased mood, which was confirmed to me by Tahmizian and Avetik Issahakian (representatives of the HOK - Ed. M.)."¹⁴¹

Ter-Gabrielian's "displeased mood" was natural and understandable, however, judging from the subsequent events it may seem that he continued to cherish certain hopes with relation to the financial support of Gulbenkian. It is noteworthy that in an interview upon his return he specifically refers to his meeting with Gulbenkian without expressing any negative opinion about the AGBU. Later, in an article of October 10, discussing the idea of the "Armenian home", he does not say a word about the Union and its president. He continued to adhere to this position in the future as well. If we assume that Khanjian's accusations against Gulbenkian were inspired from the centre, whether from Moscow or Tbilisi (the headquarter of the Transcaucasian Federation), then such a behaviour of the prime minister of Armenia becomes extremely surprising if not unlikely.

¹³⁹ Miutyun, July-August, 1932, no. 156: 58-59.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.: 58.

¹⁴¹ Malezian 1960.

The behaviour of Ter-Gabrielian becomes explainable if we assume that Khanjian's accusations against the President of the Union were the result of his personal initiative. It is beyond doubt that the visit of the Chairman of the Council of the People's Commissars to Paris and his negotiations with millionaire Gulbenkian were possible only in the case of permission or at least consent by the first person of Armenia, Aghassi Khanjian himself. It is most likely that Ter-Gabrielian was almost sure of his success. But what about Khanjian? The answer to this difficult question can be found in the testimonies of Khanjian's wife, Rosa Vindzberg:

"... from 1930 until recently (1936) there has been almost no full accord or true joint action within the Central Committee of the CPA. After the appointment of Khanjian as the secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia, during the period of problems with the collectivization, Khanjian was accused of nationalism by H. Kostanian-Bannayan, M. Chalian, Mandalian, Atanes Akopov, Gourgen Kalashian and other groups. Amatouni, who at that time was the second secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, was very close to the group. On the other hand, he (Khanjian) was also confronted by the nationalistic group of the former chairman of the Central Executive Committee of Armenia Kassian.

"One of the specific features of Khanjian's character was his extraordinary trust in people, and I should say that for quite a while he could not believe that there was any resistance against him, even when he was presented with hard facts. With Kirov's participation, all members of the first group were removed from Armenia, Kassian was also dismissed and Amatouni was unveiled as a supporter of Lominadze and dismissed from his post.

"Until the beginning of 1933 there was no indication of serious opposition (at that time, it was called unscrupulous-group confrontation, and now it is clear that all this had a political bias). During this period the performance of Ter-Gabrielian was rather concerning. He (Khanjian) thought that Ter-Gabrielian adhered to a very strong nationalistic position... but since he was the chairman of the Council of the People's Commissars, Khanjian mentioned more than once that he could not ignore him, but make concessions to him, especially when it came to nominations for Soviet administration posts... In 1935 the tension in relations with Ter-Gabrielian escalated, and he was removed from Armenia..."¹⁴²

Such altercations at the top of the power pyramid, based on direct and implicit accusations of nationalism may explain the position of Khanjian. In the event of the successful outcome of negotiations between Gulbenkian and Ter-Gabrielian, the latter could present it as his political feat. It seems that Khanjian may not simply have doubted the successful outcome, but rather did not want it to take place. Upon learning of the details of Ter-Gabrielian's visit, he chose to ignore the agreements concluded and immediately came up with his notorious speech. While the accusations were targeting Gulbenkian, they ricocheted off to the prime minister who only a month prior enjoyed the

¹⁴² NAA., 1191/4/1666, p. 98-101.

hospitality of the same Gulbenkian, a person with "close ties to the international imperialist circles". In fact, with this speech Khanjian condemned, without mentioning the name, the visit of Ter-Gabrielian, questioning, in the words of Dallakian, "his position and credibility" and hence strengthened his own position at the top of the power. The reaction of Gulbenkian seemed to interest Khanjian least of all: any reaction beginning with financing the repatriation and through to the latter's resignation, could be presented as the victory of communist Khanjian over capitalist Gulbenkian.

In this connection it is worth mentioning that in this as well as in other cases, in attempting to explain Khanjian's behaviour in the capacity of the first person in Armenia, one tends to forget about his individual character, shaped in specific circumstances of his life. Aghassi Khanjian was born in 1901 in Van, his childhood coincided with World War I, the genocide, the exile, irretrievable loss of the paternal home, the next of kin, all of which inevitably left a negative impact on the Armenian people as a whole, and on the mental state of every Armenian who witnessed or participated in these events. Since 1917 he joined in the revolutionary activities and was since arrested twice. Following the establishment of the Soviet power in Armenia and until the anti-Bolshevik rebellion of 1921, Khanjian was the secretary of the Yerevan Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia. Thus, between 17 and 21 years of age, during formative years for a young individual, Khanjian lived in the midst of revolutionary times when, in the words of Talleyrand, "impudence was the sole asset and extremism was the sole virtue."¹⁴³ Many of his peers followed this path--it was natural for a country undergoing a revolution and in this aspect Khanjian's early biography is similar to that of his colleagues.

In 1921, upon a decision of the party, he goes to Moscow to study at the Communist University, and a year after to Leningrad (St. Petersburg) where six years he was a party worker. "In 1925, when Zinoviev was the boss of Leningrad," writes Mary Kilbourne Matossian, "Khanjian was one of the communists in that city who opposed Zinoviev and sided with Stalin. With the downfall of the Zinoviev-Kamenev-Trotsky opposition, Khanjian rose fast in the party. He became an intimate of Sergey Kirov, Stalin's right-hand man, who took over the Leningrad party organization on 1926. About this time he became personally known to Stalin. Entrenched in Stalin's confidence, he was transferred to Armenia in April, 1928."¹⁴⁴ During these seven consecutive years, Aghassi Khanjian was detached from the Armenian reality both by the nature of his work and in terms of his personal life, especially after the marriage to Rosa Vindzberg. At the same time, living and working in a foreign ethnic and cultural environment, he, like any other representative of a minority was continuously under pressure of self-assertion as a professional, an individual, and as an Armenian.

In 1928 Khanjian returned to Armenia to work for two years as the second secretary and, from 1930 till the end of his life, as the First Secretary of the Central

¹⁴³ Mémoires complets et authentiques de Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand 1967: 237.

¹⁴⁴ Kilbourne Matossian 1962: 119.

Committee of the Communist party of Armenia. Here again he is challenged with the problem of self-assertion, though this time as the leader of the smallest, but still a constituent republic of the Soviet Union. And while in this case he could somehow benefit from his connections in Moscow and Leningrad, the domestic situation in Armenia was totally different. Here he had to prove his abilities in a rather unfamiliar environment side by side with experienced, authoritative and respected figures such as Sarkis Kassian, Askanaz Mravian, Sahak Ter-Gabrielian, and Aramays Yerznkian. He had to find his way in the power struggle, to take important decisions not only on purely party issues, but also in relation to the social and economic development of Armenia. However, there was one more, probably the most difficult, issue--his relations with the immediate supervisors in the Transcaucasus, represented by Lavrentiy Beria, that evolved around the protection of the independent interests and rights of Armenia. A speedy and adequate solution of this and several other priority issues was a daunting task for Khanjian who, at 30-35 years of age, lacked the life experience and relevant professional skills to ensure easy success. In fact, he always acted single-handedly, not trusting Beria's protégés and at the same time having no stable allies in the traditional, "old" power elite of Armenia. It can be maintained that, especially during the last 5 to 6 years of his life, Khanjian was in a permanent state of nervous and physical (he suffered from tuberculosis) stress, which probably explains his sometimes inadequate and inconsistent behaviour.

As was mentioned earlier, the second issue connected with Gulbenkian was his abrupt reaction to Khanjian's speech. He explained his resignation by "absurd and ungrounded...accusations" and a "completely irrelevant attack" against his person by Khanjian and the government of Armenia, which made it impossible for him to cooperate, in the capacity of the president of the AGBU, with the authorities of Soviet Armenia. Admitting that there were other reasons as well (see below), it seems, however, that these points represented sufficient grounds for resignation. Khanjian and his colleagues were so different from Gulbenkian in their upbringing and education, level of intellectual development, life experience and professional capacities that, following the offending accusations Calouste Gulbenkian indeed could consider it undignified to continue however indirect, correspondent or purely official contacts with these people. In trying to reverse Gulbenkian's decision, his contemporaries often cited Boghos Nubar's example who used to ignore the occasional and equally groundless attacks from Yerevan. Gulbenkian was, however, quite different from Boghos Nubar. Being an extreme individualist in his professional as well as personal life, Gulbenkian could not and would not compromise his ego for any cause or lofty purpose.

With all these considerations, Khanjian's accusations were both the reason and the pretext for Gulbenkian's resignation. Assuming the post of the president of the AGBU after Boghos Nubar, a person of Calouste Gulbenkian's calibre could not be content with simply continuing the job he took over, and hence tackled two mega-issues. In Vahan Malezian's words, "His first job was to bring together all the trusts of

the Union and make one consolidated "National Trust" or a "Holding" where each contributor would have his share and the funds and revenues were identified for each share. He was excited about the idea and hoped that everyone, even the last Armenian, would try to have a share in this big Trust."¹⁴⁵ This project, however, failed in view of the impossibility at the time of the relevant financial transactions. "This upset him even more than it appeared because being used to success, he was extremely sensitive towards any kind of failure or surrender."¹⁴⁶

Calouste Gulbenkian's second priority was stated in his inaugural speech: the consolidation of the entire Diaspora and especially the Dashnaksoutiun around the Union. Vahan Malezian who was, incidentally, one of the founders of Ramkavar Party, wrote:

"He hoped to bring everyone together around the idea of the Union, and especially the Dashnaksoutiun, which until then had always tried to discredit and destroy him through its propaganda, although he did not view it as a serious impediment. He started making advances in this direction, if not personally, then through other people. But his call for consolidation was misinterpreted. He was relying mostly on Aharonian, Khatissian and Jamalian, to whom he had extended financial support. By way of moral compensation, he expected them to be willing to accept his idea and contribute to the success of his program. We did not comment to him about it, and were very cautious in our remarks so as not to create an impression that we were against this idea or did not believe in its success, although this was what we believed. In the course of the negotiations Gulbenkian understood that it was impossible to come to terms with the Dashnaksoutiun, and that they will set forth disproportional demands and unacceptable conditions against several minor concessions. One day when he visited my office as usual, he put an envelope on my desk and spoke bitterly. His disappointment increased further when he saw that the Dashnaksoutiun media intensified its attacks against the Union and even came up with serious accusations against his person, claiming that he did not implement the fundamental reformation of the Union he had promised, that he did not perform the necessary, in their opinion, cleansing of the membership, and when was he finally going to carry through the ambitious charity undertakings that had been announced in the past. I remember how upset he was, and I vainly tried to console him by referring to the example of Boghos Nubar. Pasha, I said, knew how to ignore such empty talk and retaliate with deeds. But he was very sensitive and would not tolerate such blows on part of his compatriots."¹⁴⁷

Calouste Gulbenkian's mental state is apparent in his statement of December, 1930: "Since the onset of my Presidency with the Armenian General Benevolent Union I directed all my moral and material capacity towards strengthening it, and it caused me immense pain to see that a part of our media is immersed in feuds and questions my

¹⁴⁵ AGBU CBDA.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

intentions with respect to the Union. I thought that this would end after my sincere and resolute statements where I explained that, being independent from any political party, I will try to make the Union a Home for all Armenians irrespective of their political or religious affiliation. In order for our Union to accomplish the tasks set forth by its founders, Armenians of all political convictions have to dedicate themselves to the Union... I consider it necessary to make this new statement, and if it does not reach its purpose, I will be grieved once and for all."¹⁴⁸

Another circumstance is also worth mentioning. During these same years, the devaluation of the English, American and other currencies in the context of the global financial crisis was accompanied by a fall in stocks that could have grave consequences for the overall financial situation of the AGBU. The bankruptcy of the Union, that was financially stable during the twenty-five years under Boghos Nubar's leadership, was naturally a highly undesirable prospect for Calouste Gulbenkian.

The combination of these factors has led to Gulbenkian's decision. For the world renowned financier and businessman who was used to success, it was difficult to accept failure in such a seemingly plain national area. And he hurried to take advantage of the situation that he had created himself. The last paragraph of his inaugural speech as the President of the AGBU read, "I will be very happy if I succeed, and should this be impossible, I will not hesitate to resign from this high post."¹⁴⁹

Unrealized donations

Three years after almost nothing had changed in the national-political arena, Aghassi Khanjian was still alive and on the scene, and there seemed to be no reason for the re-appearance of Calouste Gulbenkian in the focus of events. But in 1936 a letter by Malezian addressed to the Chairman of the Council of the People's Commissars of Armenia Abraham Gouloyan arrived in Yerevan:

"I am pleased to inform you of the good intentions that were recently expressed by the former President of the AGBU Calouste Gulbenkian, around which he had two personal meetings with the Soviet Ambassador in Turkey citizen Karakhan.

"Calouste Gulbenkian, formerly a Turkish citizen, left Turkey about 40 years ago and received British citizenship. Therefore the Turkish authorities recently declared that he finally relinquished Turkish citizenship.

"Our respected benefactor has valuable assets in Constantinople that are not subject to confiscation as abandoned property, since he is not a refugee of war, but had left the country earlier. The proceeds from his assets were received by his representative in Constantinople and gradually remitted as donations to benevolent institutions.

¹⁴⁸ Miutyun, December 1930, no. 145: 404.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., November 1930, no. 144: 391.

“According to this statement, Mr. Calouste Gulbenkian is obliged by law within a period of one year, i.e. until coming April, to settle all pending issues and dispose of the property. His main assets are the Selamet Caravan-saray in Istanbul, purchased at the time for 20,000 pounds sterling, with the proceeds decreased from 2000 to 700 pounds sterling as a result of the economic crisis, then first-class land in Pera, in the neighborhood of the German Embassy, that at the time was worth 8-10 thousand pounds sterling.

“Thus, Mr. Calouste Gulbenkian is in a position and is allowed to sell these assets, but he prefers to donate them to the Yerevan State University, reserving the right to further determine the details of the donation. However, as I said, the matter is extremely urgent since very little time is left, and the formalities for the transfer of the property should commence in one month at the latest so that the transaction is completed by April.

“In presenting this proposal for the consideration of the government of Soviet Armenia, we request you to inform us on your views at your earliest convenience, so that the matter is expedited. We also request to inform the Central Government in Moscow whose representative citizen Karakhan already wrote to Moscow and promised to undertake the issue upon his return to Ankara in 8 to 10 days.”¹⁵⁰

From Malezian's letter to Gouloyan of March 18 it becomes clear that thanks to the efforts of the Plenipotentiary Representative (Ambassador) of the Soviet Union in Turkey Lev Karakhan (Karakhanian), the issue of legal settlement with the Turkish authorities was resolved, and upon receiving the news, Gulbenkian sent to the ambassador his power of attorney and all documents on the title deeds. The same day, on March 18, in a letter addressed to Karakhan Gulbenkian wrote:

“... as I had the honour to inform you during your last visit to Paris, I donate to the Armenian government finally and irrevocably, our (his and his wife Nvard Essayan's - Ed. M) property that is presently in Turkey, consisting of land in Selamet Khan located in Bakhche Kapou... , and in Ayaz Pasha, Pera locality, all without exception, as real estate. It is my desire that the revenue from the assets or the proceeds from the sale thereof be put at the disposal of the Government of Armenia for the construction any University building... I have the honour to transmit herewith a power of attorney whereby I give you complete freedom of action for registration of documents and transfers. The documents confirming ownership will be sent to you in a couple of days... I have no words to express my gratitude for your immense service... by which you facilitate the fulfillment of my cherished dream of being of help to the Armenian people whose revival brings honour to the central authorities of the Soviet Union and the Yerevan government.”¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ NAA, 178/1/518, p. 5-6. The official Russian translation of the letter is kept in the Armenian National Archives.

¹⁵¹ NAA, 113//3/1759, p. 44. A non-precise Russian translation of the letter done in Paris is kept in the Armenian National Archives. Vahan Malezian had forwarded it to Yerevan some time later.

The power of attorney mentioned in the letter is a meticulously formulated document that after the description of the property of Calouste Gulbenkian and his wife located in Istanbul and Smyrna regions, minutely lists all the rights and powers that are entrusted to Lev Karakhan. It seems that the success of the undertaking is ensured: there is the consent of Moscow, willingness of Karakhan's agreement with the Turkish authorities, as well as all the necessary documents. In this spirit of confidence, Vahan Malezian wrote to Haikaz Karageusian on April 27, expressing a hope that Karakhan had already successfully completed paperwork for Gulbenkian's property, and enthusiastically presenting the latter's proposal on the construction, with the proceeds generated from the sale, of a museum-library to which, according to Malezian, he would possibly donate a part of his famous collection.

But after another fourteen months, in May, 1937, Malezian again has to appeal to Gouloyan: "Months passed, and we have no information about this case, neither from Ankara nor from the Embassy there... Until today all the requests made both by the Benefactor and our Union to Constantinople and Yerevan remained unanswered, and we do not know what is the status of affairs... Our renowned friend personally wrote to Karakhan. It would seem to us that if he was unable to do the job, he should return the documents since it is not right to suspend such an important job in this uncertain condition."¹⁵²

This and subsequent letters of Vahan Malezian remained unanswered. In the history of the Soviet Union, the year of 1937 was a notorious period of mass political repressions, whose first victims were state and party leaders. In Armenia, all the officials that dealt with the Diaspora were declared enemies of the people, anti-revolutionaries and nationalists. In these circumstances, when any contact abroad, regardless of its form and nature, was indeed lethal for Soviet Armenians, contacts with Vahan Malezian were officially maintained by Haikaz Karageusian. Malezian, anxiously sharing his "assumption that there was no positive development, and therefore no hopes should be cherished about the successful outcome of the issue," wrote in one of his last letters to the Chairman of the government Abraham Gouloyan:

"We should sincerely admit that it is beyond our comprehension: Karakhan's silence and indifference result in our dear University losing an important contribution, and probably in the confiscation of the property of our benefactor as that of a foreign citizen. So I have to once again turn to You as a person with great authority, deign to raise this question again before Moscow and Ankara and sharing with us any definitive information so that we are at least aware of what is the current status of affairs."¹⁵³

And Gouloyan really applied to Moscow: the Armenian Government, as an interested party, wanted to know the reason why the issue had not been resolved for so long. On August 19, 1937, he wrote to the People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union Maxim Litvinov:

¹⁵² Ibid. p. 43.

¹⁵³ Ibid. p. 42.

"In response to your query ...in March of last year in relation to the possibility of acceptance of a donation by citizen Gulbenkian consisting of buildings located in Turkey and other assets, we gave our agreement in principle. We are not aware of further developments on the issue.

"Recently, we received several letters from the Armenian General Benevolent Union in Paris where they informed us that the power of attorney of Gulbenkian on the right of acceptance and sale of the property was transferred, as an attachment to Gulbenkian's letter of March 18, 1936, to the former Plenipotentiary Representative of the USSR in Ankara L. Karakhan. In its letter of July 8, 1937, the Armenian General Benevolent Union writes that neither the Union, nor Gulbenkian have no information on the progress of this case. However, according to the data they have, a Plenipotentiary Representative of USSR in Ankara allegedly did nothing.

"The documents at our disposal and particularly the power of attorney sent by Gulbenkian to Karakhan which is attached, indicate that the property is of considerable amount and therefore I would consider it feasible to undertake necessary measures in the direction of receipt and disposal of Gulbenkian's property.

"The Council of the People's Commissars of Armenia requests your corresponding instruction to the Plenipotentiary Representative of the USSR in Ankara in relation to the acceptance and sale of Gulbenkian's property in favour of the State University of Armenia. We request that you keep us informed of your further instructions."¹⁵⁴

This unrealized donation by Calouste Gulbenkian raises many questions. How realistic was it for a senior official of the Soviet Union, and its ambassador in Turkey, to personally represent the interests of an Armenian millionaire and English citizen in relation to the sale of his assets in Turkey and the use of the proceeds to the benefit of the University of Yerevan? The question becomes even more relevant in view of Calouste Gulbenkian's qualification as "the direct sponsor" of "anti-Soviet imperialist intervention", that was made only 3 to 4 years before that. For anyone familiar with the history of the Soviet Union the answer to the question would be negative. But in this case, what was the purpose of the leadership of the Soviet Union in granting its unprecedented permission for Lev Karakhan to defend Calouste Gulbenkian's interests? And wasn't the unlimited trust of Gulbenkian towards Lev Karakhan explained by his desire to not only pull the donation through, but also to restore his relations with the Soviet authorities?

Anyway, Gouloyan's letter to Litvinov, as it could be expected, remained unanswered. And Lev Karakhan himself was summoned to Moscow earlier and, like other well-know diplomats, shot in 1938.

At the end of World War II, the Soviet Union restored ties with Armenian Diaspora to achieve its geopolitical goals. Among the elements in this new policy were, for example, the organization of a new wave of repatriation of 1946-1948. The majority of the Armenian Diaspora, inspired in its turn with the perspective opened up in view of the

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 38.

new policy of the Soviet Union, tried to support it within the limits of its capacity and at the same time take an advantage of the new opportunities. Specifically, the AGBU's leaders found it feasible to return to the issue of Calouste Gulbenkian's donation, most likely referring to his 16,000 dollar worth contribution to the repatriation fundraising. The "Miutyun" magazine, reminding that ten years ago Gulbenkian "... provided his valuable assets in Turkey (with the current value of 200,000 English pounds) to the Yerevan State University", informed that "For the accomplishment of this important contribution, new appeals were made by the AGBU, in order to present this issue to the attention of the Central Government in Moscow and the Council of the People's Commissars of Armenia, the deputy President of the Union Mr. Levon Guerdan and Director General Mr. Vahan Malezian personally visited Washington to meet with the Soviet Ambassador M. Novikov and present a memorandum to His Excellency and requesting the strengthening of relations between Soviet Armenia and the AGBU."¹⁵⁵ And again, uncertain, but basically negative reactions, this time from a different authority. "Upon return of the documents related to the donation of Mr. Calouste Gulbenkian's property in Turkey", wrote Chief of Staff of the Council of Ministers of Armenia in his letter of December, 1947, addressed to Vahan Malezian, "as we informed you in our letter of 21 April of this year, the relevant instructions were duly issued at the time. However, since these documents, as indicated in your letter, were not yet returned to Mr. Gulbenkian, we once more sent a reminder to the corresponding bodies requesting to expedite the dispatch of the documents to the AGBU or to Mr. Gulbenkian's address in Lisbon."¹⁵⁶

However, the main issue discussed in this letter was different and referred to the funding of restoration of the Echmiadzin Cathedral by the same Calouste Gulbenkian. The negotiations between Gulbenkian and the Government of Armenia were mediated by the AGBU and stumbled on Gulbenkian's proposal to conclude an agreement with the government. The Government of Armenia rejected it on the following grounds: "...signing of an agreement for the restoration of the Cathedral by the government would mean violation of the sovereignty of the Armenian Church."¹⁵⁷ The essence of the issue becomes clear from Calouste Gulbenkian's letter to Catholicos Gevorg VI:

"Driven by a spontaneous feeling, I proposed to contribute to the restoration of the Holy See with a donation of 100,000 dollars, with a condition however that my name should not be mentioned until the project materializes. Then, realizing that this amount may not suffice, I gladly added another 50,000 dollars so that all the work planned by the architects is completed without the need for additional resources.

"Subsequently, I realised that these 150,000 dollars that I put at the immediate disposal of Your Holiness, would not suffice for the planned fundamental restoration unless the Government of Armenia kindly agrees to offer its public authority in undertaking the management of this daunting and costly task. Fortunately, during the

¹⁵⁵ Miutyun, February, 1947, no. 204: 17.

¹⁵⁶ AGBU CBDA.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

last year, the Yerevan Government officially informed New York that the conditions proposed are fully acceptable, and immediately thereafter, after discussions with my friends A. Karageusian (Arshak Karageusian, the President of the AGBU between 1942-1953 - Ed. M.) and Vahan Malezian, I signed an agreement that stipulates the important points to which the Government kindly consented. Further, however, the latter considered it inconvenient to sign the agreement on its behalf, thus leaving the issue uncertain... and as Your Holiness stated, "in the present situation, 150,000 dollars cannot be considered sufficient" if, in my understanding, not complemented by the government resources, that is if the dollars are not exchanged at a convenient rate." In conclusion, the letter reads: "I am concerned that the current troubled state of the world as such does not create favourable conditions for the successful accomplishment of such a gigantic task, and that probably it may be feasible to postpone it for a while and wait for better times when the circumstances become more enabling."¹⁵⁸

Gulbenkian's prophesy came true: the "iron curtain" had already begun to fall. Anyway, in 1955 after Gulbenkian's death it became known that he bequeathed about half a million dollars for the restoration of the Cathedral of St.Echmiadzin.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

CHAPTER 3

AGBU IN THE MAELSTROM OF INTERNAL POLITICAL STRUGGLE

In the mid-1930s the Soviet Union passed a new stage of the struggle for the power. Stalin, who had previously successfully coped with many of his real and imaginary political opponents, began their final elimination. This brutal repressive campaign, later called the Great Purge or Great Terror of 1936-1938, ended in the death of most of the state's leading elite. Starting in Moscow, the repressions continued in all republics of the country, already under banner of the struggle against nationalism. In Soviet Armenia, the victims of political terror were not only practically all the leaders of the Republic, but also the relations with the Armenian Diaspora themselves.

Yessayan accuses

The agenda of the Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia (CPA) for August 26, 1935, included the activities of the Immigration Committee. This agenda item, seemingly of little significance (no. 22 of the agenda), provoked a general debate, during which Arsen Yessayan, People's Commissar of Local Industry, strongly criticized the activities of the Immigration Committee chaired by Abraham Gouloyan, Chairman of the Council of the People's Commissars. Since then, A. Yessayan became one of the key players in the subsequent events. Taken by surprise, the members of the Bureau decided to "Invite comrade Yessayan to offer written clarifications with regard to his statement made during the session of the Bureau of the Central Committee of the CPA."¹⁵⁹ The contents of the statement are reiterated in Yessayan's letter dated September 2, 1935, addressed to Stepan Akopov, Second Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia and to Lavrentiy Beria, First Secretary of the Transcaucasian regional committee of the Communist Party of the USSR (Zakkraykom, with headquarters in Tbilisi).

The letter, inter alia, stated: "The Immigration Committee was established three years ago in order to coordinate the activities related to the admission and accommodation of Armenian immigrants. However, the activities of the Committee had little to do with the immigrants' problems. The Immigration Committee is just another commercial organization, headed by the Chairman of the Council of the People's Commissars. The Committee abuses the USSR's favorable attitude towards immigrants to receive scarce and highly critical commodities, in particular construction materials, beyond the limits imposed by the state plan, imports them to Armenia and sells to different enterprises, while the immigrants get next to nothing... They act only as a curtain for the commercial activities of the Committee... The Committee is not a part of the Soviet administrative structure. The activities of the Committee and its rather large

¹⁵⁹ NAA, 1/15/11, p. 104.

(by the Armenian scale) transactions are not included in the national-economic plan of Armenia or its import quotas... No audit has been carried out during the 3-year activity of the Committee. The Committee does not report to anyone except its Chairman. Thanks to such profiteering, the Committee has generated significant revenues - about 3 million roubles in 1934, on an overall transactions value of 6 millions, and about the same amount this year - which the Council of the People's Commissars spends over and beyond the budget and the state plan..."

Arsen Yessayan concluded his letter with the following: "The Immigration Committee is apparently a profiteering organization. The Committee ignores and violates Soviet legislation regulating the operation of Soviet enterprises. All its activities are based on the evasion of legislation, and fraud against the Soviet Government. The policy adopted by the leadership of the Committee (I am not referring to most of the staff of the Committee, who most probably are unaware of the activities within the Committee) is not the policy adopted by our party. This policy does not lead to the consolidation of the foundations of the Socialist State, it leads to bourgeois deformations."¹⁶⁰

Yessayan was, of course, fully cognizant of the responsibility he was assuming when making such political allegations against not only the Prime Minister of Armenia in his capacity of the Chairman of the Immigration Committee, but, through him, against the Armenian party leader Aghassi Khanjian. Yessayan's actions – both the statement at the Bureau and the letter addressed to Beria and Akopov – can be explained by the following extract from the testimony of Aghassi Khanjian's wife, Rosa Vindzberg: "In late 1933 Stepan Akopov and Georgi Tsaturov were transferred from Tiflis to Yerevan, to assume the positions of, accordingly, Second Secretary of the Central Committee of CPA and the head of the organizational department... In the fall of 1933 (Aghassi Khanjian) was seriously ill and until June, 1934, was recovering from pulmonar surgery. During his absence, Akopov, without informing Khanjian (just before his return) performed a major personnel reshuffle, under the pretext of the difficulties in the mountain regions. Besides, Arsen Yessayan, Moushegh Danielian, and some others were appointed to various party posts. He was especially dissatisfied by the appointment of Arsen Yessayan, removed from work in Armenia in 1930..."¹⁶¹ In Tbilisi Yessayan, who was then the Deputy Chairman of the Council of the People's Commissars of the Transcaucasian Federation, had worked under the immediate supervision of Beria and most probably still had certain illusions about him. He was aware that Khanjian had informed the Transcaucasian regional committee that he considered Yessayan's appointment inexpedient, but to no avail.

Yessayan's letter was a very good pretext for the Transcaucasian committee, and Beria himself, to focus their attention not only on the activities of the Immigration Committee or repatriation issues but also the Armenia-Diaspora relations. Subsequent

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 178/1/535, p. 32-35.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 1191/4/1661, p.100-101.

developments were speedy. On September 18, a commission from Tbilisi headed by the Secretary of Transcaucasian committee Sergey Kudryavtsev participated in the session of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia. The only item on the agenda was deliberations over the statements made by Aramayis Yerznkian and Arsen Yessayan. The point was that before Yessayan's statement, the First deputy Chairman of the Council of the People's Commissars of Armenia A. Yerznkian had also appealed to Stalin and Beria and, in Kudryavtsev's words: "made serious allegations against the leadership of the Communist party of Armenia, namely, Khanjian and Gouloyan."¹⁶² Kudryavtsev also informed that apart from that statement, Yessayan had also sent a letter to Beria, raising a wider range of issues related not only to the activities of the Immigration Committee. After hearing the strictly negative views of the members of the Bureau regarding the two appeals and investigating the issue, the commission returned to Tbilisi. Five days later, the Transcaucasian committee heard Kudryavtsev's report and adopted a resolution "On the activities of the party organization in Armenia." Five more days later, on September 28, 1935, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia, acting upon instructions received from the Transcaucasian committee, released Yerznkian from his position of Deputy Chairman of the Council of the People's Commissars of Armenia and appointed Yessayan Chairman of the Central Board of HOK and Chairman of the Immigration Committee.

The big stir, if not to tell the shock caused by Yerznkian's and Yessayan's appeals ended on October 4-5, at the joint session of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia and Yerevan City Committee of the Communist Party. The delegates at the session, who spared no efforts to criticize Yerznkian and express their loyalty to Khanjian, were taken aback by the latter's proposal to elect Yerznkian a candidate for membership to the Bureau of the Central Committee of CPA. It turned out that it was not Khanjian's but Beria's initiative, another way of keeping Yerznkian under permanent control. "We are not going to throw you out of Armenia," quotes Beria's words Khanjian, "moreover, we will keep you in the Bureau and will force you to implement the decision of the Transcaucasian committee, and if you fail to do so, we will remove you from the Bureau and expel from the Party itself. But today we will not touch you."¹⁶³

The case with Yessayan seemed different. His new appointment was well-known, but different allegations were also made against him. In his latest statement, Yessayan criticized Yerznkian's appeal, and assured that he will be guided by Beria's instructions and described his own statement as a "politically hazardous step." However, the absence of debate on issues related to immigrants probably means that Yessayan's criticism was to the point and convincing enough. Khanjian had to point out that: "...we were wrong to view this portion of our work as something not related to us, our party activity... We were not dealing with the issue of immigration in the way we dealt with the

¹⁶² Ibid., 1/15/3, p. 25.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 1/15/4, p. 62.

Soviet construction, the kolkhozes... Comrades, the commission visited the immigrant settlements. And what did they see? That some of those settlements are in very bad shape... But those living in such settlements are not underdeveloped, with regard to culture and other aspects. They have brought some new crops to Armenia, like tobacco. By adopting correct approaches, we can achieve a situation whereupon the immigrant settlements will become models for the others and we will be proud of them, and will show both our friends and enemies what Armenia does for the victims of the ignoble policy of imperialists and their agents, the Dashnaks and nationalists. We have spent significant amounts but it appears that we do not have much to demonstrate..."¹⁶⁴

Very remarkable are the words of Kahanjian about Yerznkian, "He was planning a real conspiracy and, wearing a different mask, to act as a fighter against nationalism, to find nationalism in the activities of the Central Committee in order to fulfil the main social order of our enemies, the social order of the Dashnaks, to discredit the activities of the CPA and the party leadership."¹⁶⁵ This and similar statements and characteristics prove that the contradictions and divergence within the Armenian leadership were entering a stage of political, inter-partite struggle. In fact, the developments in Yerevan were following, albeit somewhat late, those which had commenced earlier and were underway in the centre of the Soviet Union, in Moscow. Probably with the only major difference being that the winners of such struggle in Armenia (and in all other republics) were not the participants themselves. The winners were the all-Union or the Transcaucasian leadership in Moscow and Tbilisi, while the only thing the immediate participants, whether individuals or groups, could do was to join the winning side. This behaviour would eventually have a boomerang effect on them. Khanjian, making statements about the "conspiracy" and "dashnak orders," would very soon face such allegations himself, and those making the allegations against him (even after his death), were the people who were his "loyal allies", and these, in their turn, would shortly join the ranks of the "enemies of the people." As long as the main goal was the neutralization (though not yet physical) of party's old elite -- Sarkis Kassian, Sahak Ter-Gabrielian, Aramays Yerznkian, Beria was using and protecting Khanjian. At the same time Yessayan, whom Beria needed for the next stage of his struggle, against Khanjian himself, not only was not punished but was appointed to a new post.

On October 19 the Central Committee adopted a resolution on the future activities of the HOK and the Immigration Committee. The resolution contained instructions for the admission and allocation of immigrants, construction of their settlements, and other matters. There were special provisions referring to Nubarashen. The resolution contained a paragraph on recommencing the construction of the Nubarashen-Yerevan highway, acceleration of the power supply for Nubarashen, construction of the public bath and other facilities, baking and sale of bread. The most important however, was the fact that, quoting a delay in the construction of a water supply system, the resolution

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 44.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 17.

did not recommend to begin any new construction in Nubarashen within the coming two years.¹⁶⁶

The Government had on different occasions referred to the construction of Nubarashen earlier, but this was the first case when they were admitting, although not publicly and rather indirectly, the lack of basic living facilities in the settlements. But this was just the beginning, since Yessayan also intended to disclose the amounts of money received from the organizations and individuals in the Diaspora, and the way these were spent. He was assisted in this investigation by the AGBU's Armenian representative Haikaz Karageusian, who submitted all the documentation on the Union's activities in Armenia. It should be noted here that Yessayan met with Boghos Nubar and the members of the Board of Directors of AGBU back in 1928, during a business trip to Paris.¹⁶⁷

In January, 1936, A. Yessayan, already as a Chairman of HOK, in his letter to Vahan Malezian, informing about his own program for the development of Nubarashen, which he was sure would facilitate the construction of the settlements and its infrastructure. Malezian, who was probably already tired and desperate of the endless and vain promises, responded to Yessayan's communication and while restricting his comments to Yessayan's program with cautious optimism, openly stated the views of the AGBU regarding the issue itself.

"We do not know," he wrote, "is there's a a one-piece story of six-year construction of Nubarashen before you, story full of obstacles and confusion, when, because of contradictory actions, constantly changing construction commissions, architects and managers, day after day were subjected to endless changes in building plans, preliminary calculations and programs..."

"Of course, you know that this settlement was not viable and will remain as such until the highway provides the necessary link with Yerevan, until the drinking water is supplied to the centre of the district, and especially until the irrigation infrastructure is brought to its fields, which are otherwise doomed to remain empty and deserted. If from very beginning there were no guarantee of using the canal waters...we, of course, would not agreed to this piece of land, although it is fertile and picturesque. But since it remains untreated due to lack of water, its population is doomed to miserable conditions and material constaint..."

With regard to the issue of the additional 400 thousand dollars' financing for the construction, which was referred to in Yessayan's communication, Malezian wrote, "Donations for Nubarashen would not stop had efficiency and accuracy been witnessed. ... Unfortunately, it is too late now to believe the beautiful words and promises, because the program has generated a lot of skepticism, and people want to see things done..."

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 1/15/12, p. 44.

¹⁶⁷ Miutyun, January, 1929, no. 127: 99-100.

Under such conditions, let me be frank, it is unfair to demand from us any monetary obligation, regardless of their size, for the construction of new houses..."¹⁶⁸

In January of the same year, 1936, Yessayan took active part in the drafting of three papers. Since the contents of the three papers are almost identical, below is one of them which gives a comprehensive introduction to the issue.

"Classified, personally

"Comrade Amatouni

"Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist (Bolshevik) Party of the Armenian SSR

"Memorandum

"In addition to the detailed oral report regarding the spending of the funds received from abroad, I report the following:

"1. Within the recent years a number of different organizations, namely, the Council of the People's Commissars of Armenia, the HOK, some compatriotic organizations and others, have received financial or in-kind donations in foreign currency or foreign goods, for this or that special purpose. These contributions and assistance have never been consolidated within a single state institution, and similarly there were no centralised inventory or reporting practices, which makes it difficult to estimate the real amount of the assistance received.

"The information at my disposal allows to calculate that the foreign currency received during the last 5 years amounts to about 2,100,000 golden roubles, of which about 1,500,000 was transferred directly to the Council of the People's Commissars.

"Financially this assistance is not of much interest (? – Ed. M.), more important is its moral and political significance, since those amounts, with the exception of several major donations received from individual capitalists, were raised among the wide masses of the people, and demonstrate their sympathy towards the Soviet state.

"Almost all donations are earmarked for the construction of immigrant settlements, dwellings and facilities in their settlements, namely, hospitals, schools, kindergartens, nurseries, theaters, clubs, etc.

"Below are some examples of the targeted donations:

400 thousand dollars for the construction of Nubarashen,

100 thousand dollars for the construction of Nor Arabkir,

50 thousand dollars for the construction of Nor Malatia,

5,000 for the "Soviet Armenia" air squadron fund,

17,000 pounds sterling for the construction of a hospital through the Tarouhi Hagopian fund,

10,000 pounds sterling for the construction of an Eye Clinic through the Marie Nubar fund,

7,000 pounds sterling for the construction of the house for scientists through the Zareh Nubar fund,

¹⁶⁸ NAA, 1/16/77, p. 7-10.

4,500 pounds sterling for the construction of a school in Talin,
5,000 pounds sterling for the construction of an electro-mechanical college through the Raphael Margossian fund,
30,000 pounds sterling through the Melkonian Endowment fund.

“2. These amount were, as a rule, received following negotiations between the Board of Directors of the Armenian General Benevolent Union and the Council of the People's Commissars of Armenia and the Council had submitted a resolution or special communication of commitment - to perform relevant work, and for each object projects were drawn up and sent abroad

“Most of the promises that the Council of the People's Commissars had made to the Benevolent Union or individuals and organizations were never fulfilled. The construction of the sites mentioned in those commitments either was not completed (frozen) or even had never begun, for example:

- a. 702 pounds sterling for a crafts school in Nubarashen through the Minas Cherez fund;
- b. 533 pounds sterling for a hospital in Nubarashen through the Tirair Margarian Fund;
- c. 390 pounds sterling for a kindergarten in Nubarashen through the Samvelian fund;
- d. 150 pounds sterling for a nursery in Nubarashen through the Setian fund;
- e. 560 pounds sterling for a kindergarten in Nor Caesaria through the Sarian fund;
- f. 460 pounds sterling for a kindergarten in Nor Sebastia through the Palian fund;
- g. 2,000 pounds sterling for a theater in Nubarashen through the Sarkissian fund;
- h. 366 pound sterling for a school in Tigranakert from the Tigranakert Compatriotic Union (USA);
- i. 342 pounds sterling for a school in Martuni through the Hagopian fund;
- j. 296 pounds sterling for a nursery in Nor Eudokia from the Eudokians
- k. 3000 pounds sterling for school in Nor Kharperd from the former Kharperd residents.

“Formal commitments have been made for all the above sites, layouts designed and sent abroad and the funds received. However, construction had begun only in Kharperd, stopped after the completion of a portion of one of the blocks. The appropriations received from the Hagopian fund have been used to build a one-storied school, while the layout sent abroad was for a two-storied building.

“Now, the Benevolent Union is demanding the photos of the sites as promised, and, for apparent reasons, I am not in a position to satisfy that demand. The Benevolent Union has even sent 3,000 meters of film for those pictures. The film has been duly received but used for other purposes.

‘3. A total of USD 400,000 was received for the constructions in Nubarashen. The Armenian Benevolent Union has completed its side of the agreement signed with the Council of the People's Commissars, while the latter has failed to fulfil most of its commitments under that agreement. Now the Benevolent Union, in a letter addressed to

me and its representative, demands a concrete information about the contracts and their performance, which we are unable to provide.

“The Council of the People's Commissars has received and expensed most of the mentioned amounts as well as other funds. In reality the balance remaining at the time of transfer from the Council was 12,000 golden roubles. Since there are no complete financial reports for the amounts spent by the Council, the report on expenditures is hard to obtain...

“...If during this year we fail to fulfil our promises to foreign organizations, particularly the Benevolent Union, we will inevitably end up with an enormous scandal. Even if the Benevolent Union does not wish to sue us, individuals and organization which have trusted the Benevolent Union with their money will not keep silent and will sue the AGBU. In one of its communications the Benevolent Union informs us that several compatriotic organizations are demanding their money back, since the Benevolent Union has failed to fulfil its commitments.

“Apparently, the Dashnaks are already skilfully using all this against us and in the future, if we repudiate our commitments and worsen the relations with the Benevolent Union, the Dashnaks and other anti-Soviet forces will grasp this opportunity to fiercely campaign against us and to discredit the Soviet government...

“In order to avoid such a scandal, I recommend to fully approve the draft presented by the Commission of the Central Committee Chaired by comrade Shakhsovvarov, to allocate (for that purpose) all the revenues which the Immigration Committee has used for purposes other than the donation had specified, and the revenues from the sale of the goods received from abroad, taking those amounts from the state budget of Armenia, or to allocate for that purpose additional revenues from the state budget. In the event when those amounts cannot be withdrawn from the state budget or if they are insufficient, the issue should be raised before the Transcaucasian Regional Committee, since the emerging scandal is disgraceful not only for the Council of the People's Commissars of Armenia but for the all-Soviet government.

Arsen Yessayan

Chairman of the Relief Committee for Armenia - HOK."¹⁶⁹

The significance of this document can hardly be overestimated. For many years numerous communications signed by various, sometimes very high-ranking, officials, were sent to Paris to assure the AGBU that the construction of all sites was approaching a successful end. For many years the Government and the Communist Party of Armenia were adopting various resolutions related to the construction. But this was for the first time that a state institution in Yerevan, particularly the HOK, prepared a document that clearly and distinctly exposed the real picture. It was not the case that in Paris they were not aware of the real state of affairs. As seen from Malezian's letter, the leadership of the AGBU, though perhaps not in full detail, was nonetheless aware that

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 178/1/284, p. 7-12.

the actions of the Armenian authorities were divergent with their promises. Yessayan's report contained nothing that would make big news for the latter. Yet, for the first time, the facts known to everybody were stated in an official document, and to ignore this would be next to impossible.

Beria's appearance

The content of those documents clearly demonstrate that their preparation was closely related to Beria's enhanced attention towards Armenia's relations with the Diaspora. Concurrent with the drafting of those papers Vahan Yeremian, the People's Commissar for Finance of the Transcaucasian Council of the People's Commissars was carrying out an independent audit in Yerevan. The report on the results of the audit, dated January 13, 1936, was addressed to Beria, the Chairman of the Transcaucasian Council of the People's Commissars Gazanfar Musabekov, and Aghassi Khanjian.

"The results of the audit prove that as early as in 1933, the Immigration Committee was involved in commercial contracts through the Supply and Sale administration of Armenia. Beginning with January 1, 1934, by the resolution of the Council of the People's Commissars of Armenia, the Immigration Committee acted independently, although it is not registered either with the state or with the fiscal authorities and has no corresponding statute. Its balance sheet was submitted directly to the Council of the People's Commissars and discussed in violation of the existing legislation... I consider it proven that:

"1. The Council of the People's Commissars of Armenia has sold, through the Immigration Committee, timber and construction materials at extremely high prices, which raised the price of construction in Armenia although the instructions of the all-Union Government and the Communist Party demanded the reduction of construction prices;

"2. The Council of the People's Commissars fixed a special price for the sale of timber through the supply and trade authority and has thus unlawfully accrued significant funds, which it disposed of at its own discretion, whereas these by definition were trade markups and should have been remitted to the USSR budget. I would like to request you to consider the issue of holding them responsible for such actions pursuant to Soviet legislation, and to demand that the Council of the People's Commissars of Armenia transfer the illegally held amounts to the USSR budget for 1936--at the expense of the budget of Armenia."¹⁷⁰ Both A. Yessayan and V. Yeremian suggested that the "illegally" accrued funds be refunded from the Armenian budget, but while Yessayan thought that these amounts should be used to fulfil the commitments before the Diaspora, Yeremian held that they should be paid to the USSR budget, totally ignoring the previous issue.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 113/3/1672, p. 8.

Under these circumstances the Armenian authorities were deprived of room for independent action and had to follow the decisions of the superior, the Transcaucasian bodies. The latter acted with remarkable speed. On January 15, only two days after Yeremian submitted his report, the Transcaucasian Council of the People's Commissars held a session chaired by P. Agniashvili, and having considered the illegal activities of the Immigration Committee, resolved to refer to the Government of Armenia the issue of bringing those responsible to justice.¹⁷¹ In accordance with that decision, by its resolution of February 1, 1936, the Council of the People's Commissars of Armenia expressed its concord with the facts stated in Yeremian's report and, listing the officials liable to administrative penalties, pointed out in a separate paragraph that "Taking into consideration the fact that most of the funds accrued through years by the Immigration Committee have been used to accommodate the immigrants, provide them with basic and cultural services, as well as for construction, hereby order the Transcaucasian Council of the People's Commissars to forbid the Transcaucasian People's Commissariat of Finance to withdraw funds from the budget of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic in connection with the activities of the Immigration Committee."¹⁷²

But while the Armenian authorities were trying to ease the financial sanctions, the Transcaucasian Committee of the Party, under Beria's leadership, initiated more serious political sanctions. On April 26, 1936, the Bureau of the Transcaucasian Committee heard Khanjian's report on the HOK. Given the list of participants--Lavrentiy Beria, Philip Makharadze, Useyn Rahmanov, Grigoriy Aroutinov (candidate for membership at the Bureau of the Transcaucasian Committee of the Party, since 1937, the leader of the Communist Party of Armenia), Amatouni Amatouni, and Arsen Yessayan, the outcome of the session was easy to foresee. In paragraph one of the resolution, signed by Beria, requested the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR to consider the future activities of the HOK. In paragraph two the resolution dissolved the Committee on Immigration of the Council of the People's Commissars of Armenia and entitled the HOK to coordinate all the activities related to the construction of the settlements for immigrants, their admission and accommodation.¹⁷³

By dissolving the Immigration Committee, the leadership of the Transcaucasian Federation seemed to express their non-confidence in both the state and the party leadership of Armenia. At the same time, all the activities related to Diaspora and the immigrants were transferred to the HOK, which was not even a government structure and whose future was also vague. As subsequent events demonstrated, the Transcaucasian authorities through such actions were preparing the grounds for their future decisions.

Upon their return to Yerevan, at the May 4 session of the Bureau of the Central Committee of the CPA, the Armenian leaders, in accordance with existing tradition,

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁷² Ibid., p. 3.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 178/1/254, p. 31.

were forced to approve the above resolution of the Transcaucasian Committee of the Party. However, the Armenian authorities could not agree with the decisions on financial issues, which were most probably discussed and made in Tbilisi. The proof is the letter of May 26, which Khanjian and Gouloyan sent to Vyacheslav Molotov, the Chairman of the Council of the People's Commissars of the Soviet Union.

The aim of this smartly phrased letter was to ensure that the opportunities for continuing immigration were maintained. That was the reason for the deliberate exaggeration of the role of the HOK, which, following the dissolution of the Immigration Committee, was coordinating all activities related to the accommodation of the immigrants and the prospects of the very existence of which remained unclear. The most significant fact here is that for the first and probably the last time, the Armenian authorities were admitting in writing (albeit with the "classified" stamp) that the central authorities of the Soviet Union were not financing Armenian repatriation:

"Taking into consideration that the admission and accommodation of the immigrants, construction of settlements, cultivation and irrigation of their lands have not and are not being financed from the state budget (! - Ed. M.) but are only made possible with foreign donations, to allow the HOK to use the donated amounts to purchase equipment and other commodities, to partially sell them to state institutions, under the condition that the revenues will be used only for construction for the immigrants."¹⁷⁴

Being itself of great interest, this fact explains some of the above mentioned points. The authors of the communication clearly stated that the Armenian government had only been able to admission and accomodation of the repatriants thanks to the financial assistance of the Diaspora. In this respect it is significant that Khanjian and Gouloyan mentioned that the resources were generated from Diaspora donations, "partly from the annual income of the moneys bequeathed for the purpose of cultural development of Soviet Armenia." In other words, the Armenian authorities were using the funds (or portions thereof) provided by the Diaspora for the construction of living quarters, cultural, social and other facilities for the repatriants in Armenia, for the purpose of organizing and promoting repatriation itself. The funds being used as described above, the planned construction was either delayed or even frozen, which, in turn, created new difficulties for the authorities both with regard to their relations with the Diaspora organizations as well as with the immigrants. On the other hand, the government, when signing agreements with these organizations, had most probably made certain commitments which were hard to fulfil under the existing financial and economic conditions. At its session of April 27, 1934, the Armenian Government, having considered the issue of construction in Nubarashen, decided: "Taking into consideration that the funds raised by the AGBU are not sufficient to finish the construction of the buildings in accordance with the layouts, and following the requests of the benefactors, it would be necessary to allocate from the funds of the Council of the People's Commissars additional 541,000 roubles to finish the construction."¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 113/3/1672, p.13.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 1/16/77, p. 11.

In order to fund the construction beyond the state budget, the Armenian Government was forced to identify additional sources of financing. This explained the above-mentioned commercial transactions of the Immigration Committee which, if desired, could have been presented as profiteering. This also explained why the Armenian Government remained so calm when it came to the dissolution of the Immigration Committee, since its operations, and first of all economic functions, were also transferred to the HOK. However, when the next step taken by the Transcaucasian authorities banned the economic activity of the latter, thus endangering the completion of immigration programs, the Armenian leadership was forced to appeal to the Chairman of the Soviet Union Government.

Thus, the situation in 1936 was as follows: the Transcaucasian committee of the Party and Beria personally directly supervised Armenia's relations with the Diaspora and consistently strived, on one hand, to discredit the Armenian authorities and gain more leverage to suppress them and, on the other hand, their resolutions, which were binding for the Armenian leadership, were questioning the relationship with the Diaspora as a whole. The most notable results of such policy were the dissolution of the Immigration Committee, the discussion of the need for further activities of HOK, the proposals to impose financial sanctions, and allegations against high level officials.

One more factor should not be ignored when examining Beria's position: the leaders of the neighbouring republics, Soviet Georgia and Soviet Azerbaijan, were naturally jealous towards Armenia for its ties, unprecedented under the Soviet regime, with the Diaspora Armenians. And no matter how limited these connections were, their positive impact was obvious-- the mechanical increase of the Armenian population, financial assistance to development programs in Armenia, etc. Georgian and Azerbaijani leaders could not easily put up with such "unplanned" advantage, especially in view of the old and new ethno-political and territorial wrinkles between the three republics. In this respect the Transcaucasian state and party institutions under Beria's leadership offered a very convenient means to eliminate Armenia's advantage.

The situation within the Armenian political leadership, the lack of internal consolidation, the constant underground struggle between the various coalitions, including Beria's cadre sent over from Tbilisi and other factors made any joint effort to defend and promote Armenia's interests impossible. In this respect Rosa Vindzberg's testimony about Aghassi Khanjian is remarkable: "he was very concerned and kept saying that he is probably unable to be a leader, since not a single year passes without internal bickering, that he may be the reason for it and he has to leave Armenia, that he feels isolated, that he cannot have anything resolved, that the "Troika" (Amatouni, Akopov, Gouloyan) has everything decided in advance and presents him with it post factum."¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 1191/4/1661, p. 101.

The Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and Soviet Government of July 21, 1936

This was the situation in the middle of 1936, when an event took place that was, in fact, contradictory to the logic of the developments. On July 21, 1936, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, through its Secretary Joseph Stalin, and the Soviet Government, through its Chairman Vyacheslav Molotov, adopted an unprecedented resolution "On measures to accommodate the Armenian immigrants in the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic." The document began by assessing the Armenian Government's "established practice of...not fulfilling the obligations assumed before foreign organizations and individual benefactors" as "wrongful and unacceptable."¹⁷⁷ Further it listed the measures which the Soviet Union leaders deemed appropriate in order to correct the "grave mistakes" of the Armenian Government and the CPA: 50 per cent of the construction had to be completed by January 1, 1937, and the remaining 50 per cent by July 1 of the same year, the Soviet Union and republic institutions received precise instructions on the financing and supply for the construction, the immigrant artisan co-operatives were to be supplied with raw materials, the rural immigrants were exempted either of all or 50 per cent of their taxes for 3 to 4 years and, finally, it determined the procedures for the receipt and disposition of the equipment and goods received from foreign Armenians.

A special point was made on the issue of financing: the total spending for the construction was estimated at 3,200 thousand roubles, of which the USSR People's Commissariat for Finance was instructed to allocate 1.5 million in 1936, to be returned from the Armenian budget to the Soviet Union, while the remaining 1.7 million was to be appropriated by the Armenian Council of the People's Commissars from its budget of 1937, and the Soviet Union Commissariat for Finance would include that amount in the 1937 budget for the capital construction in Armenia. A special annex to the resolution contained a list of 12 sites--seven of them in Nubarashen--which the Armenian Government had committed to construct. This document is impressive both in its contents and its significance, especially taking into consideration the signatures by Stalin and Molotov. It was the first resolution of the Soviet authorities on the Armenian repatriants, although different numbers of Armenians had begun to repatriate to Armenia as early as in 1921.

The tradition in the Soviet Union was such that even the resolutions of its leaders were hard to implement, particularly because the lower levels of administration interpreted the decisions in their own way. This was also the case with the resolution on Armenian immigrants. Already in late 1936, upon the receipt from Moscow of the draft budget for the next year, the Armenian government was forced to once again appeal to Molotov.¹⁷⁸ Another problem issue, aside from the construction, was that of the water

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 178/1/263, p. 1.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 1/16/70, p. 72.

supply system, to be commissioned on July 1, 1937. However, at its session of July 13, the Bureau of the Central Committee of the CPA had to point that "The construction of the water supply system has not been completed as scheduled." The Bureau then requested the Chairman of the Armenian government Gouloyan "to once more raise before the Soviet Union authorities the issue of the insufficient supply of pipes for the construction."¹⁷⁹ It should be stressed that, despite these and other difficulties and shortcomings, the resolution of July 21 had a significant impact since it greatly accelerated the construction and development of Nubarashen as well as of other repatriant settlements and contributed to the improvement of the living conditions for their residents. "...The Nubarashen construction plan for 1937 is almost completed. The school, the nursery, the kindergarten, the theater, the public bath and apartment buildings are all completed... Only the construction of the hospital is still underway."¹⁸⁰ By the middle of 1937 about 1,000 Armenian repatriants were accommodated in the more than one hundred new apartments in Nubarashen.

The adoption of the resolution can be explained by the logic of previous events:

1. The authorities of Soviet Union, while striving to promote Armenian repatriation, at the same time, did not finance the repatriation, construction of settlements, etc;
2. In order to find necessary finances, the leadership of Armenia was forced to use part of funds received from Diaspora, not for its intended purpose, but for commercial operations, and to direct the profits to the mentioned goals. As a result, the commitments made by the government to repatriation persons were not fulfilled in time for years;
3. This, in turn, strengthened in the Armenian diaspora and among the repatriants a negative opinion not only about the leadership of Armenia, but also - which was especially unacceptable for Moscow - about the Soviet Union, about the Soviet power in general;
4. With this a mind, the top leadership of Soviet Union went to drastic measures and adopted a special resolution.

However, with similar and essentially correct conclusions and explanations, the important role of other factors, including individuals, remains in the shadow.

About ten months prior to the adoption of the resolution, at the meeting of the Bureau of the Central Committee of the CPA, A. Yessayan had accused the Armenian authorities of failure to complete the construction in immigrant settlements, mainly, Nubarashen. Disappointed with the local authorities he hurried to appeal to Beria, under whose supervision he had worked in Tbilisi and whom he considered, or wanted to consider, as someone acting exclusively in the best state interests. However, after he assumed the position of the Chairman of the HOK and the Immigration Committee, Yessayan very soon realized that Beria had very little, if any, concern for the solution of numerous problems of repatriants, and he only viewed them as a means to discredit

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 1/17/46, p. 110.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 178/1/653, p. 4.

and suppress the leadership of Armenia. One of his contemporaries states that "...Yessayan was asking his associates (supposedly Hakop Taronatsi, Tigran Zaven, the representative of the Benevolent Union in Armenia Karageusian, the representative of the Melkonian Fund in Armenia professor Hakopian) and the delegations and individual members of the HOK, coming to Armenia as tourists, to tell the Armenian communities abroad to directly apply to Joseph Stalin, to all-Union bodies with this and other issues relevant for Armenia, since the problems of Armenian communities abroad were "lost" in the Transcaucasian Committee of the Communist Party..."¹⁸¹

The disappointment in the Transcaucasian committee and in Beria did not change Yessayan's negative opinion about his Armenian colleagues, especially Aghassi Khanjian, whom he considered a weak and even cowardly leader, without sufficient background, unable to promote Armenia's interests in Tbilisi and Moscow.¹⁸² If Yessayan was going to press for the solution of the problem he himself had raised and thus was his responsibility, the only remaining option was to apply directly to the central authorities in Moscow. The question was--how? According to indelible hierarchic tradition any issue had to be raised first before the authorities of Armenia, then the Transcaucasus and only after that, under certain circumstances, would he have the right to apply to Moscow. It was, however, obvious, that if he followed this arrangement he would never achieve his goal. With this and other factors considered, Yessayan took an unusual step.

On January 11, 1937, the Armenian People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) summoned for questioning, so far as a witness, the representative of the AGBU in Armenia Haikaz Karageusian. After a few questions about his background and activities, the investigator asked a question that, as the subsequent questions demonstrate, was the core one. Below is an excerpt from the transcript of the interrogation.

Q. When was the last time you travelled to Moscow?

A. In June-July 1936. The former Chairman of the HOK Arsen Yessayan invited me to take the trip, the formal reason for which was the need to transport 7 cars brought from the US through the Melkonian Fund and detained at the Leningrad customs. The cars had been ordered by the former Commissar for Education Arto Yegiazarian, I do not know for who...

Q. Arsen Yessayan had no affiliation to the Melkonian Fund, so why did he interfere?

A. Right, Arsen Yessayan had no affiliation with the Melkonian Fund, but he interfered upon the request from A. Yegiazarian.

Q. Who else travelled with you and Yessayan to Moscow on the issue of cars?

A. Prof. Hakopian and Tigran Zaven,

Q. Was it necessary for four people to travel for such a trivial issue and what did you, the representative of the Benevolent Union, have to do with the cars?

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 1191/4/174/ p.37; Manoukian 1996.

¹⁸² NAA., 1191/4/174/, p. 125.

- A. Tigran Zaven, Arsen Yessayan, and myself had nothing to do with the cars. Prof. Hakopian was the only one concerned. Yessayan invited me with him to make the delegation more impressive, since I am the representative of the Benevolent Union, and en route he told me that he was going to raise the issue of construction and improvement of the Nubarashen settlement before the Central authorities in Moscow... On the second day of arrival in Moscow Arsen Yessayan suggested to discuss the ways to the appeal to the USSR Council of the People's Commissars on the issue of Nubarashen and proposed to draft an appeal addressed to Mezhlauk, the Deputy Chairman of the Council. A member of the delegation Prof. Hakopian drafted the appeal in English. I presume the only issue raised in the appeal was that of the Nubarashen construction. At least, that is what I was explained, since I was unable to read the English draft. The appeal was signed by Prof. Hakopian on behalf of the Melkonian Fund and myself on behalf of the Benevolent Union.
- Q. Why was the appeal written in English?
- A. Before we drafted the appeal, we consulted an official of the State Planning Committee Gagik Parzian, who recommended that we draft the appeal in English since comrade Mezhlauk knew the language... Prof. Hakopian is an expert of English and he volunteered to draft it, to avoid distortions during translation... Two days after we submitted the appeal, Hakopian, Tigran Zaven, and myself had a meeting with Mezhlauk. When we entered his office Arsen Yessayan and the member of the Soviet State Control Commission Veinbaum were already sitting there...
- Q. Had the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia approved the trip of the delegation?
- A. I am not sure. But we received passes from the Council of the People's Commissars of Armenia to enable us to stay at a hotel...
- Q. How did Yessayan explain the fact of his direct appeal to the Soviet Union authorities over the issue of immigrant settlements, bypassing the Transcaucasian organizations?
- A. He never explained it. We were informed about his intention on our way to Moscow."¹⁸³

Eleven days earlier, on December 31, 1936, another member of the delegation, Hovhannes Hakopian, was also summoned for questioning as a witness. Back in 1910, on behalf of the United Armenian Society Hakopian agreed with Poghos Nubar to establish schools in Western Armenia and Cilicia. After the World War I, he published in Cairo newspaper "Arev". In 1927, he repatriated to Armenia, engaged to historical research, taught English and was Secretary to the Executive Commission of the Melkonian fund. In this case the investigator's attention was also focused on the

¹⁸³ Ibid., p. 11-13.

meeting with Mezhlauk, particularly on the fact that the appeal had been submitted in English.

A. Yessayan told me to draft an appeal to the Deputy Chairman of the USSR Council of the People's Commissars, Chairman of the State Planning Committee comrade Mezhlauk, requesting his assistance in the issue of Nubarashen and asserting that the Armenian government is wrongfully spending the funds donated for that purpose. Yessayan, Karageusian, and Tigran Zaven drafted the appeal in Armenian... I translated and edited it...

Q. Why exactly were you addressing a Soviet official in English?

A. To make him believe that, being the representatives of foreign organizations, we ourselves were foreigners.

Q. What did you discuss during the meeting with Mezhlauk?

A. On July 8, Karageusian, Tigran Zaven and myself had a meeting with Mezhlauk... I spoke English and, following Arsen Yessayan's instructions, asked the Soviet Government to assist the immigrant settlements, stressing that the Armenian Government was not using the funds received from foreign organizations for the direct purposes of the donation. I also raised the issue of new immigration, pointing out that between 600 to 700 thousand foreign Armenians, mostly workers, are willing to move to Soviet Armenia. In my discussion with Mezhlauk, I strictly followed Yessayan's instructions, with the only exception that he wanted it to sound as a complaint, in particular against the government of the Soviet Armenia... while I presented a wider picture, linking the issue with the history of the Armenian emigration, describing them as victims of an imperialist war, and asked him to support their desire to immigrate to Armenia."¹⁸⁴

Arsen Yessayan himself was arrested in November, 1936, and Karageusian and Hakopian were summoned to the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs for questioning in relation to the investigation of his case. When asked about his appeal to Vladimir Mezhlauk during an interrogation, Yessayan had testified: "The appeal submitted to the USSR Council of the People's Commissars described the grave situation of the Nubarashen settlement, the lack of water supply, which was the result of the Armenian Government's failure to fulfill the commitments assumed before the Baregortsakan to build a canal. The aim of the appeal was to request that funds be allocated for the construction of the water pipeline and the allocation be included in the target indicators for 1937 (in other words, the construction had to be completed in 1937 - Ed. M.)." In response to the investigator's next question he said: "...I plead guilty for having submitted an appeal that contained allegations against the Council of the People's Commissars of Armenia without notifying the Central Committee of the CPA and against its will..."¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 43-44.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 50, 51.

In fact, Yessayan had used the transportation of the American cars as a pretext to form a delegation and travel to Moscow. The basic purpose of the trip was to inform the Government of the USSR about the grave situation with regard to the construction of immigrant settlements, Nubarashen in particular, and try to obtain a resolution by the Soviet authorities for the solution of all issues related to immigration. However, we should first examine one more issue: was it only due to Arsen Yessayan's delegation that the Communist Party of the USSR and the Soviet Government adopted the resolution on Nubarashen? An affirmative response would stretch the truth. In July 1936 in Moscow was not reason to curtail relations with Armenian Diaspora. It will appear very soon and while the country's leadership has not showed down their concern for the immigrants, correctly hoping to make a good impression on the Armenians of the Diaspora. But not only that. Following his acquittal in 1954 Artavazd Yeghiazarian delivered the following testimony: "On one occasion, among a circle of the Bureau members, the then Chairman of the Council of the People's Commissars Sahak Ter-Gabrielian told us that Moscow had approved the receipt of rails for Yerevan streetcars through the AGBU, and transmitted Stalin's response to those who were questioning the possibility of accepting assistance from the Armenian bourgeoisie loyal to Soviet Armenia: "If the Armenian capitalists are stupid enough to help the Armenian communists build socialism, the Armenian communists will be even more stupid if they refuse such assistance."¹⁸⁶

In discussing Yessayan's trip to Moscow we as well should keep in mind the traditional reverence of the Russian establishment towards everything Western or European that Soviet authorities inherited despite ideological contradictions. Arsen Yessayan, most probably took this factor into consideration, when he masterfully formed a delegation from the representatives of foreign organizations, insisted on appeal in English as well as English conversation with Mezhlauk. In the Soviet context this was the most efficient way to solve many problems even in those years, but especially later, and Yessayan was probably one of the first to implement it. All these factors combined into favourable conditions already in place in Moscow, and Yessayan's delegation played the role of a catalyst without which the opportunity at hand would have been lost.

The leadership of the AGBU was one of the first to learn about the resolution of the Communist Party and the Government of the Soviet Union. On July 25, four days after the adoption of the resolution, Yessayan, who had stayed in Moscow to wait for the results of his meeting with Mezhlauk, sent an urgent telegram to Paris which was published in the "Miutyun" magazine, entitled "The state adopts a resolution on Nubarashen. Moscow will provide wide support." Yessayan wrote, "I have the pleasure to inform you that the Central Committee of the Communist party and the Government of the Soviet Union have given a thorough consideration to all the problems pertaining to Armenian immigration, including the pending construction at Nubarashen... I received the building materials and the loans necessary to continue construction... You may rest

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 1191/4/174, p. 84.

assured that all measures are taken to secure the implementation of the decisions, which means that in 1937 Nubarashen will have both drinking and irrigation water and will be ready to accommodate another 100 Armenian families..."¹⁸⁷

Some time later, the Director General of the AGBU sent a letter of gratitude to Vyacheslav Molotov: "It is with deep gratitude that we received the news of the support and assistance that your Council is extending to the Armenian immigrants, as well as the Nubarashen settlement at the outskirts of Yerevan which is allocated for the immigrant settlements constructed with the donations from our Union.

"The latest fraternal gesture of your Government--the allocation of 3,200,000 roubles for the construction of the water supply system in Nubarashen is yet more proof of our friendly disposition towards Soviet Armenia as a whole and the immigrants in particular." Taking this unique opportunity to address the Soviet Premier, Vahan Malezian once again raised the issue of further immigration: "Thanks to your exceptional care Soviet Armenia has embarked on the route of prosperity well-being which allows us to hope that, with you noble support, it will be able to accommodate larger numbers of Armenian refugees."¹⁸⁸

However, Yessayan's initiative, its purpose notwithstanding, was circumventing the authorities in Armenia and Transcaucasus, and as such could not go unpunished. The leadership of Armenia, first of all Khanjian and Gouloyan, and before, but especially since the Autumn of 1935, for obvious reasons, did not hide its, to put it mildly, hostility to Yessayan.

In accordance with the new procedure approved at the session of the Bureau of the Central Committee of the CPA, the HOK and the Melkonian fund were allowed to spend their funds abroad only upon the approval of the Central Committee. On July 5, when Yessayan was already in Moscow, the Bureau adopted a decision that was potentially dangerous for him -- the State and Party Control Commission of the Central Committee was requested to carry out an audit of the expenditures made by the Central Board of the HOK (payroll spending, cost estimates, etc.) and to submit proposals on better organization of the work. Possibly that was one of the last Bureau resolutions bearing Khanjian's signature, because three days later, on July 8, he left for Tbilisi.

Death of Khanjian, repressions in Armenia

At the July 9 meeting of the Transcaucasian Committee of the Party Bureau Khanjian was strictly criticized for nationalism, tolerance towards rightist Trotskism, for protection of the former director of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism Nersik Stepanian, accused of links with the latter, and for other similar "crimes". At the same day, according to the official version, he committed suicide. Was it suicide or he was shot by Beria or his henchman - this question still has no definite answer. According to Amatuni

¹⁸⁷ Miutyun, July-August, no. 180, 1936: 53.

¹⁸⁸ NAA, 178/1/580, p. 1.

Virabyan, Director of National Archives of Armenia: "...it is too early to put an end to this matter. There are many more closed archives in Russia."¹⁸⁹

On July 12, 1936, the day of Khanjian's funeral, a meeting of the CPA activists was held in Yerevan to unilaterally condemn Khanjian's "suicide". "Who but the comrades present here see the real reasons that forced Khanjian to revert to that shameful act. And today, in the light of that treacherous shot, do we not see that Khanjian's numerous mistakes, well known to the activists of the Communist Party of Armenia, were not accidental, that they reflected the influence of the hostile nationalist elements on Khanjian, that he was hypocritical with the party, abusing its high trust. Eventually, stuck to the ears in his mistakes... Khanjian realized that he had to be held responsible before the party and to confess. And, true to himself, he committed suicide, giving a hand to our most vigorous enemies."¹⁹⁰

All speakers at the meeting eagerly repeated the allegations against their late leader, made by Second Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia Amatouni Amatouni. One of the most zealous statements was, as expected, by the Secretary of the Transcaucasian committee of the Party Sergey Kudryavtsev who, obviously striving to impress Armenian communists with the scope of his knowledge, made a rather specific comparison: "There is an ancient way of vengeance in China: a hara-kiri on the doorstep of the offender. Khanjian, to put it figuratively, committed hara-kiri at the doorstep of the Bureau of the Transcaucasian Committee. The only question is who and what he was avenging."¹⁹¹ A very impressive comparison indeed. Especially considering that the tradition of hara-kiri belongs to the Japanese samurai and not the Chinese.

As for nationalism, such allegations against "certain elements" and the leadership of Armenia sounded like political derision. During the 16 years of Soviet rule, Armenia and Armenians were the ones to suffer most from the nationalist policy of the authorities both in Moscow as well as in Georgia and Azerbaijan. The most salient and fatal manifestation of such policy was the transfer of Nagorno Karabagh and Nakhijevan to Azerbaijan against the will of the Armenians, who make up the majority of the population in these regions. The nationalism of the Georgian authorities was of a different type. Nersik Stepanian, who was arrested at the beginning of 1936, wrote in his notes that: "The rotten party bureaucracy of the Communist Party of Georgia is engaged in a dual feverish activity, on one hand it consolidates the national position, albeit through falsifications of history and, on the other, hinders any attempt of enquiry into their criminal activity... In the near future we can anticipate an open offensive against the Armenians, Russians and others, aiming to suppress ethnic minorities... The erratic national policy in Georgia has resulted in a situation where all the "dirty" work is done by non-Georgians (tailors, shoemakers, cleaners...), so is half of the

¹⁸⁹ Virabian 1988; see also <https://zaveng.livejournal.com/11198.html>

¹⁹⁰ NAA, 1/16/60, p.3.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p. 10.

industrial proletariat, while the bureaucrats are all Georgian. What are the arguments used to prove the necessity of such criminal national policy? Why is the non-Georgian proletariat ...taking care of the bureaucracy? ...All Armenians are forced out from Tiflis, they are fired from administrative positions, keeping only the most wretched and the most corrupt Armenians."¹⁹²

Arsen Yessayan was not present at that meeting and we can only guess if he would join those who condemned the "self-shot" enemy of the people Khanjian. On that day, many probably remembered the irreconcilable animosity of the two, which under the new circumstances could positively affect Yessayan's fate. Beria, though, adhered to the opposite view. While holding the post of the political leader of the Transcaucasian Federation, comprising Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan, Beria conducted a policy which, both with regard to its aims and its means was a carbon copy of the policy implemented by Stalin all over the Soviet Union. In striving to secure unrestrained autocratic rule, and following the example of the central authorities in Moscow, he never missed a chance to discredit and physically annihilate unwanted party and state leaders in the three Transcaucasian republics. At the same time, in order to consolidate his influence in Armenia and to establish permanent control over the local leaders, Beria skillfully manipulated all Armenians available at different positions within the Transcaucasian administration. As mentioned above, from time to time he transferred small teams of such officials to Yerevan and had them appointed to various positions in administration where he would thus have loyal people in place. The most famous among Beria's "Tiflis" team were the Secretaries of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia Amatouni Amatouni and Stepan Akopov, the People's Commissar for Internal Affairs Khachik Moughdousi, his deputy Ivan Kevorkov, Georgiy Tsaturov and others. In 1934 Arsen Yessayan was posted back to Yerevan in the same manner.

While in Moscow the eminent state and party figures were convicted as the "enemies of the people, anti-revolutionaries, Trotskists," in the republics these allegations were aggravated by the "nationalist" label. In the case of Armenia, particularly, Beria was planning to also exploit the relationship with the Diaspora and, on one hand, the contacts and the co-operation of the authorities with the Armenian residents of "bourgeois" and "imperialist" states, while on the other hand, their failure to fulfil the commitments before the latter, the discontent of the immigrants, etc. Yessayan was, willingly or not, to become the key player in Beria's game. In the beginning he seemed to fulfil Beria's expectations: his statement regarding the Immigration Committee, made at the session of the Bureau of the Communist Party of Armenia, his appeal to Beria, followed by the audit of the Immigration Committee and the operation of the Armenian Government as a whole. However, Yessayan's sudden shift which culminated in his meeting with Mezhlauk was a true challenge to Beria, and it had to be answered.

¹⁹² Ibid., p. 5.

On July 28, a week after the resolution was adopted by Stalin and Molotov, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union distributed a document among the republican and other major party organizations entitled "Closed letter regarding the terrorist activities of the Trotskyist-Zinoviev anti-Soviet block," which, after enumerating the "crimes" committed by the block, demanded to consolidate the local struggle against all anti-Soviet elements, reveal the enemies still disguised among the state and party institutions.¹⁹³ The Armenian authorities were quick to react. In an "Information memorandum" addressed to Moscow and Tbilisi contained a detailed description of the measures taken in Armenia to reveal the "enemies of the nation" and listed those already discovered.¹⁹⁴ The memo, though, was not impressive enough—only three among the arrested enemies were high level officials: Nersik Stepanian (Director of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism), Drastamat Ter-Simonian (Director of the Arts Department of the Council of the People's Commissars), and Aghassi Galoyan (Secretary of the Central Control Commission of the Central Committee of the CPA). But the greatest failure was in the fact that not a single hostile group, block, center or any other entity has been revealed in Armenia.

Therefore the Armenian authorities, guided by their Transcaucasian counterparts, initiated the creation of a mythical organization. They acted in a rather considerate manner, first of all turning to those already arrested and forcing them to testify about the activities and membership of a non-existent organization. Simultaneously, repressions were launched against different layers of society, especially the state and party officials and intellectuals. Subjected to inhuman tortures they would testify, against their will and conscience, incriminating themselves as well as others in "Anti-revolutionary, Trotskyist, nationalist, terrorist spying" and other actions. This mechanism of self-reproduction of the "enemies of the people" enabled the creation in a very short period of a "Trotskyist-nationalist" group, which included Nersik Stepanian, Sahak Ter-Gabrielian, Aramayis Yerznkian, Arsen Yessayan, Danoush Shahverdian, Artavazd Yeghiazarian and others. The choice of these people was thought out. Being devoted communists, prominent state and party figures, they, at the same time, enthusiastically pursued Armenia's national and state interests, each in his field of activity, and within his authority and powers. Individuals of such mentality and actions could not tolerate the principles and the enforcement of Stalin's policy in the Soviet Union, and Beria's in the Transcaucasus. And they naturally became the first target of party terrorism.

The fabrication of the group and the arrest of its "members" were carried out in phases. The first to go were Arsen Yessayan and Artavazd Yeghiazarian. Lavrentiy Beria and his puppets in Yerevan seized the chance to punish the recalcitrant. By the resolution of Bureau of the Communist Party of Armenia of November 17, 1936, the Chairman of the HOK Yessayan and the Director of the Arts Administration of the Council of the People's Commissars, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the

¹⁹³ Ibid., 1/16/68, p. 1-7.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 9.

Melkonian fund at the Yerevan State University Yeghiazarian were charged with anti-revolutionary, nationalist activities, relieved from their posts and arrested.

Only a year and two months had passed after Yessayan's famous letter to Beria and his appointment as the Chairman of the HOK and the Immigration Committee. Remarkably, his first interrogation, unlike those of the others, took place only seven months later, in June 1937. And he was never interrogated again until his execution more than a year later: his fate seemed to be decided from the very beginning. But during that time something was happening that was later highlighted in his acquittal hearings: "...The incarcerated Armenian leaders were severely beaten and exposed to other means of coercion by the officers of the Commissariat of Interior. The torture resulted in the death or mutilation of some of the inmates... in particular, that torture had driven Arsen Yessayan mad."¹⁹⁵

Ten days after the arrest of Yessayan and Yeghiazarian, one of the founders of Armenia's relationship with Diaspora Aramays Yerznkian was arrested on the same charges. A former official of the Commissariat for Interior testified that the People's Commissar for Interior Moughdousi had ordered to put Yerznkian in such conditions in which he would not survive, "Yerznkian was laced in the worst cell, although they knew that he was already unwell. Yerznkian could not survive such conditions and died a few days after detention."¹⁹⁶

The position of the Chairman of the HOK had become really deadly. Arsen Yessayan was replaced by Danoush Shahverdian, one of the immediate organizers of repatriation of the preceding years. The authorities were quick to fix their "blunder". Very soon he was arrested and shot. After him, his successor, the last Chairman of the HOK, Aram Manoucharian was also shot.

These successive arrests of the Chairmen of the HOK, combined with the general atmosphere of political repression had paralyzed the operation of the organization. Even maintaining relations with the local offices of the HOK abroad had become dangerous. In its correspondence of April and May 1937, the Consulate General of the Soviet Union in New York, while stressing the importance of the activities of the HOK branch in the USA, recommended that the Armenian HOK restored its link with the branch and urgently responded to all business correspondence.¹⁹⁷ But these appeals were in vain: national interests were once more to be sacrificed to the consolidation of Stalin's authoritarian rule.

In the meantime, the formation of the "Trotskyist-nationalist" center/group in Armenia entered its final stage. All its "members" residing in Armenia were already under arrest, but one of the key players, Sahak Ter-Gabrielian, was still in Moscow. In his memo of June 1937, addressed to the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Armenia A. Amatouni, the People's Commissar for Interior Khachik Moughdousi wrote:

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 1191/4/174, p. 128.

¹⁹⁶ Manoukian 1996.

¹⁹⁷ NAA, 1/17/76, p. 32.

"In 1931, S. M. Ter-Gabrielian, together with Yerznkian, Yessayan, Ter-Simonian and others established a Trotskyist-nationalist Armenian centre. The core members and key leaders were 14 persons, 10 of them former members of the Central Committee of the CPA." According to Moughdousi the main directions of the activities of the anti-Soviet center were "...anti-Soviet, nationalist activities among the Armenian communities abroad, as well as ties with the Armenian capitalists, bourgeois Ramkavar and Dashnak parties. Systematically and consistently conceding from political positions, they raised funds for Armenia ... By suppressing the struggle against the Dashnaks inside the country and by putting an end to the struggle against Ramgakars both inside and outside the country, they declared them friends of the Armenian people."¹⁹⁸

In the meantime the developments in Ter-Gabrielian's case were proceeding in such a direction that neither its authors Amatouni or Moughdousi, nor their "godfather" in Tiflis could ever have predicted. Ter-Gabrielian, who was arrested in Moscow and transported to Yerevan, jumped out or was thrown out of the window on the third floor of the Commissariat of Interior during an interrogation session. The leadership of Soviet Armenia decided "...not to inform Moscow about the incident, but Stalin soon about out, and on September 8 member of the Politbureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Anastas Mikoyan and the head of the department of party bodies of the Central Committee Georgiy Malenkov delivered Stalin's letter addressed to the Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia."¹⁹⁹

Stalin's letter opened with strict criticism of the Armenian leadership: "Recent events in connection with Ter-Gabrielian "suicide" reflect us the facing of the whole maximum of decay and decomposition, which sum up the state of Party and Soviet organizations in Armenia. It is hard to imagine that Ter-Gabrielian jumped out the window, it is completely incompatible with his timid and prudent kind. Most likely - they threw him out and close his throat so that he could not expose the enemies of the Soviet authority. It is rather strange that leadership of Armenia did not consider it necessary to inform the Central Committee of the Communist (Bolshevik) Party and the Council of the People's Commissars of the Soviet Union about it." And most importantly - "Central Committee of the Communist (Bolshevik) Party and the Council of the People's Commissars of the Soviet Union cannot allow the patrons of the enemies of the Armenian people to hide from people the ulcers of the leadership and to hide these ulcers – to give the murder of enemy of the people, who undertook to expose the remaining enemies of the people, for "suicide."²⁰⁰

Through this skillful presentation of the incident not only Ter-Gabrielian, but also the current leaders of Armenia were declared enemies of the people, and they of course

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 1/17/83, p. 1, 2.

¹⁹⁹ Mravian, Virabian 1988.

²⁰⁰ Ibid. The letter of Joseph Stalin was for the first time published in Armenian translation in this article by Youri Mravian and Amatouni Virabian, for the first publication of the Russian language original see Mravian 1991.

had to be punished. Stalin himself named the first two, informing in his letter about the arrest of the Commissar for Interior Moughdousi and Chairman of the Council of the People's Commissars Gouloyan. At the Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia with Mikoyan's and Malenkov's participation, after discussing Stalin's letter, Amatouni and Akopov, Secretaries of the Communist Party of Armenia, along with a number of other party and state leaders were expelled from the party. These individuals immediately appeared in the prison of the Commissariat for Interior.

In Yerevan, as one would expect, they acted according to Moscow scenarios when the party and state leaders were accused of collaboration with certain foreign powers, and the agents of special services of bourgeois states. In the Armenian version, these latter were usually replaced by political organizations of the Diaspora. This was the reason why the People's Commissariat for Interior came up with the myth of a Dashnak-Ramkavar center, acting in cooperation with Trotskist-nationalist groups in Armenia. The only thing to be done was to forge testimony and eyewitness evidence from the arrested. The latter, unable to endure physical violence, psychological pressure and other means of coercion, were inventing new "facts" about the center itself, the anti-Soviet activities of different Diaspora organizations, claiming that their prominent leaders were the agents of special services, and that eminent Armenian intellectuals, state and party leaders acted in collaboration with those agents. But in addition, it was necessary to find out who and how maintained ties between these two centers - in Armenia and the Diaspora. In the context of the topic under study, the answer to this question was a particular importance.

Prohibition of the AGBU's activity

On November 13, the Bureau of the Central Committee passed the following resolution:

"The Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia notes that the Relief Committee for Armenia (HOK) established by the 1921 decision of the Council of the People's Commissars of Armenia to "bring relief to the starving population of Armenia" (quotation from the resolution of the Council of the People's Commissars) is, in essence, an anti-revolutionary Dashnak provocation against the Soviet power and the workers of Armenia.

"The unveiled enemies of the people - Khanjian, Ter-Gabrielian, Amatouni and Gouloyan, who held the highest offices in the Communist Party and the Soviet Government of Armenia, have transferred huge funds to the HOK. These amounts were provided by the Soviet Union Government for the accommodation of immigrant Armenians. On behalf of the HOK constructed settlements, schools, water pipelines and other facilities, which were named after anti-revolutionary Dashnak leaders and Armenian capitalists (Nubar pasha, Melkonian, Garabed Sarian, and others).

"The HOK and its foreign branches have become the organization of the Dashnak and Ramkavar anti-revolutionary parties, though which a connection was maintained with the Dashnak and other nationalist elements within Soviet Armenia, foreign emissaries and agents were sent to Armenia under the guise of the representatives of the HOK and of compatriotic associations to carry out anti-revolutionary activities.

"Taking the above into account, the Bureau of the Central Committee of the CPA resolves:

1. To recommend to the Council of the People's Commissars of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic to dissolve the HOK and the representations of all compatriotic associations, as well as the "Baregortsakan" (AGBU- Ed.M.) and Melkonian fund.

2. To instruct the Central Executive Committee of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic to rename the settlements, schools, hospitals, and other institutions which bear the names of the leaders of anti-revolutionary parties and Armenian capitalists.

3. To request the Council of the People's Commissars of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic to allow the local residents to occupy the vacant apartments as well as apartments under construction in the immigrant settlements.

4. To expel Aram Manoucharian, Chairman of the HOK from the Communist (Bolshevik) Party and submit the documentation on his anti-revolutionary connections to the Commissariat for Interior.

5. To submit the proposal to dissolve the HOK for the approval of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union."²⁰¹

Strangely enough, this document contains no political or any other allegations against the AGBU. Neither is there any mention of its activities in Armenia, to be more precise the operations of the AGBU are in fact ascribed to the HOK. This is explained by the fact that shortly after Arsen Yessayan's appointment as Chairman of the HOK and the dissolution of the Immigration Committee, all relations with the Diaspora were regulated by the Central Board of the HOK, which was the superior for both the representative of the AGBU in Armenia and the Executive Commission of the Melkonian Fund. Naturally, he was accountable before the government for the activities of those two organizations.

We should note here that, like the preceding and the following ones, this resolution of the Party was never published, thus the general public in Armenia and especially in the Diaspora was never exposed to the developments. One can only imagine what a surprise it was for the public to read the brief official statement published in the "Khorhrdayin Hayastan" daily on December 8, 1937: "The Council of the People's Commissars of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic resolved to dissolve the Relief Committee for Armenia (HOK), the Baregortsakan" and "The Melkonian fund."

A special government Commission has been established to regulate the formalities of dissolution."

²⁰¹ NAA, 1/17/53, p. 89-90.

But that was not the end. On the same day another commission, to investigate the financial and commercial operations of the HOK, finished its work. In a memorandum submitted to the newly appointed First Secretary of the Communist Party of Armenia Grigor Haroutiounian (it was already noted that earlier, while working in Tbilisi, he bore the name Grigoriy Aroutinov), the commission which, by the way, was chaired by a representative of the Commissariat for Interior, reiterated the same allegations against the HOK and concluded: "The commission holds that the following individuals from the HOK administration have to be criminally prosecuted for the actions stated above, Grigor Vardanian, Danush Shahverdian, Arsen Yessayan, Aram Manoucharian, Vardoush Tarakhchian, Tigran Zaven, Haikaz Karageusian, Tsolak Parzian... The commission also deems necessary to hold to criminal responsibility Moughdusi, Amatouni, Shahsouvarian, Gouloyan, Kevorkov for the abuse of power, manifested in arbitrary withdrawal of imported goods from the HOK warehouses..."²⁰²

All these people were already in prison. Gouloyan and Yessayan were even cell-mates. Those two had been opponents for many months, are now like-minded people. Another inmate in the same cell (a former officer of the Commissariat for Interior) testified during an interrogation that Gouloyan, Yessayan and Shahsouvarov pursued fervent anti-revolutionary activity in the prison, that Yessayan said that Beria imprisoned and annihilated all his comrades and the best Bolsheviks in Georgia and that under the Musavatists in Baku he had served in secret police, whereas Gouloyan in his turn, insisted that the Trotskyist-nationalist center was contrived by the officers of the Commissariat for Interior from Moscow. When asked by a cell-mate what did the Moscow officers have to do with it "...since the organization had already existed under the enemy of the people Khanjian, which you, Gouloyan, have claimed yourself more than once when still free", his response was negative and he tried to assure that there never has been an anti-revolutionary centre in Armenia..."²⁰³ Other former accusers: Amatouni, Moughdousi, and others, could claim the same, but it was too late.

As soon as the resolution of the Soviet leadership became known abroad, the Armenian governmental institutions received numerous letters of protest from, first of all, HOK branches and compatriotic associations affiliated with it. The decision seemed especially strange and unfair to the members of the HOK who had for years, despite numerous difficulties and obstacles, been among the few loyal friends of the Soviet Union, the advocates of its ideology and policies. As one could presume, shortly after the dissolution of the Central Board of the HOK in Yerevan, all its foreign branches disintegrated or were dissolved.

In March, 1938, the Chairman of the Council of the People's Commissars of Armenia received a letter from the Director General of the AGBU Vahan Malezian:

"We were informed from the December 8 issue of "Khorhrdayin Hayastan" that, pursuant to a resolution of the Council of the People's Commissars, our Union and the

²⁰² Ibid., 1/17/76, p. 131.

²⁰³ Ibid., 1191/8/4029, p. 140.

Melkonian Endowment Fund were dissolved alongside the HOK and that a special commission was established to regulate the dissolution formalities.

"Since we had not been officially informed of such intention and had not received any information about the substance of the issue and its consequences, we have now the honour to kindly request you to inform us about the conditions of the dissolution and any future regulations...

"We have sent numerous communications to the Chairman of the Council of the People's Commissars, the Vice President of the University, the Central Board of the HOK and particularly to our representative-administrator Haikaz Karageusian, but never received any response to those urgent inquiries. We, therefore, request to process those inquiries regarding the projects and loans of the Union. We would be grateful if you could point us to a department or an individual whom we could contact on issues related to the Union."²⁰⁴

This communication was left unanswered and the Union sent new letters: in April to the Ambassador of the Soviet Union in France, in June to the Secretary of the Communist Party of Armenia, in August again to the Chairman of the Council of the People's Commissars. The latter stated in particular:

"We are confident that, in view of our accountability, you will fully appreciate the goal of our repeated appeal and will kindly follow up on our requests. Otherwise, our Board of Directors will be obliged to decide on how most appropriately utilize the remaining loans and projects designed for Armenia, for the philanthropic organizations and institutions abroad."²⁰⁵ All these communications were in vain: they were never answered.

Under these circumstances the Board of Directors of the AGBU, after long deliberations, unanimously adopted a resolution, which however, was to be implemented only 60 days after it was sent to the Council of the People's Commissars and the Soviet Embassy in Paris. The resolution stressed "the ... deplorable situation of more than a year, which was a result of the termination of any relationships with Soviet Armenia", listed all the unanswered communications and the contracts signed and implemented. The Board of Directors maintained:

"...taking into consideration that the Government in Yerevan has failed to answer the repeated appeals of the Union, we consider such attitude to be a denial of our requests, and this undoubtedly constitutes a violation of the agreement between the two parties, one of which is the benefactor who makes donations in accordance with the provisions of the contract and the other refuses to accept such donations following the signed contract and mutual agreements." The Board of Directors then announced its decision:

"Desiring to fulfill its obligation not to abort the execution of the will of testators and donors, and fully aware of the ultimate responsibility which befell it as the consequence

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 113/3/1808, p. 35.

²⁰⁵ AGBU - 1938: 39.

of this unanticipated default, the Board of Directors considers its duty to adopt the following decision:

“- The Board of Directors has decided unanimously that, as a result of the suspension of our activities in Armenia and the termination of relations with Yerevan, the amounts payable to Soviet Armenia, including annual proceeds, the utilization of which has become impossible since last year, should temporarily-until such time when the Government of Armenia is willing to implement the existing agreements or conclude new ones-be used for similar projects aimed at assisting the Armenian exiles dispersed in different countries, on the condition that such projects are in conformity with the initial goal of each fund and the funds will be spend in accordance with the will of the benefactors.”²⁰⁶

This communication also remained unanswered. Under such circumstances the AGBU could no longer afford to freeze the funds established for Armenia, especially in view of the many needs of the Diaspora itself. And beginning with 1939, the AGBU started to use the funds donated for Soviet Armenia to finance its projects in the Diaspora. The implementation of the decision during the first year went as follows:

1. 1,000 pounds sterling from the balance of the Yerevan University account were used to publish national, historical and literary works of value through the Melkonian Publishing House;
2. 1,103 pounds sterling from the same account were donated to the Melkonian School in Nicosia;
3. 125 pounds sterling from the same account were used for the purchase of the Zardarian library and "Commemoration Book" collection;
4. 800 pounds sterling from the Nubarean Awards fund of Yerevan University were donated to the Nubarean Scholarship Fund...
5. 150 pounds sterling from the same fund were used for the establishment of an award fund for gifted authors and students;
6. 170 pounds sterling from the same fund were donated to the Nubarean School in Heliopolis;
7. 800 pounds sterling from the account of the Yerevan Tarouhi Hakopian Maternity Hospital were donated for the construction of Tarouhi Hakopian Girls school in Beirut;
8. 400 pounds sterling from the same fund were donated to the orphaned girls and the purpose of education of gifted Armenian girls;
9. 868 pounds sterling from different funds were used for the Union sponsored schools and another 350 for youth organizations under the auspices of the Union;
10. 50 pounds sterling from the education funds were allocated to the Mekhitarian School in Beirut and 100 pounds to the Armenian Patriarchate in Constantinople;

²⁰⁶ Ibid.: 40-41.

11. 3,000 pounds sterling from the balance of amounts earmarked for Nubarashen were used in two even installments for the accommodation of the homeless impoverished refugees in Athens, Beirut and Aleppo;
12. 1,000 pounds sterling from the same fund were used for the establishment of an agricultural enterprise in Antioch-Suetia region or an appropriate area in Lebanon. The 450 pounds sterling donated by the Honorary Member Megerdich Palian were also used for this purpose;
13. 20,000 francs from the same fund were transferred to the Armenian Patriarchate in Constantinople for the accommodation of the refugees and orphans from the provinces and another 5,000 francs for the accommodation needs of the farmer immigrants from Turkey to Aleppo.²⁰⁷

Such a long list could be perceived in different ways: on one side, it provided a clear picture of what the people of Armenia have lost within the many coming years because of the policy of the Soviet Armenia and, on the other hand, what important projects went on and were initiated with the same amounts in different Diaspora communities. One thing is certain: the AGBU continued to serve the Armenian people, though only one part of it - the Armenian Diaspora.

Representative of the AGBU - victim of the repression

One of the persons to be indicted under criminal charges pursuant to the December 8, 1937 report of the audit commission, established to investigate the financial and commercial operations of the HOK, was the representative of the Union in Armenia Haikaz Karageusian. During the events described above he, like all the others mentioned in the report, had been in prison for several months already. In those years, when eminent state and party leaders, intellectuals were jailed, exiled or executed one after another, the fate of Haikaz Karageusian was somewhat left out from the focus of interest of his contemporaries, not to speak of the coming generations. Yet he has his rightful place in the history of the AGBU because of his activities as well as his personality. By the irony of fate, the main resource for the story of the Haikaz Karageusian's life and deeds is his 1937 file in the Commissariat for Interior.

Haikaz Karageusian was born in 1882 in Trapezund to the family of a wealthy merchant Ignatius Karageusian, and, like his father, was engaged in the tobacco trade. Before World War I, Karageusian settled in Odessa (Russia), where in 1917 he was elected a member of the board of the newly established AGBU branch. There he met and married Sofia Yeghiazarian, who had come there from Yerevan to study. In 1923 Karageusian, his wife and two children moved to Armenia. Years later, in response to a question by an investigator, he would say that he decided to move to Armenia "... to be among Armenians, in my motherland... I did not speak Russian and was having a hard

²⁰⁷ AGBU - 1939: 16-17.

time living there."²⁰⁸ He also said that an important factor in his decision to move to Yerevan had been his wife's desire to return home to her family and friends.

In 1926 he frequently met with a prominent member of the AGBU Yessayee Garigian and Dr. Khosrov Hekimian, whom he had known from Trapezund. Two years later, in 1928, when the Union decided to have a permanent representative in Armenia, those two recommended Haikaz Karageusian's candidacy. In 1928 Karageusian assumed the post of the representative of the AGBU to Armenia and held it throughout the period of the Union's operations in the country. The activities of the Union, as a Diaspora organization in Soviet Armenia, were unique and unprecedented and so was Karageusian's job. Given the mentality and the political environment of those years, one can easily imagine how tough the position of a person like Karageusian would be: a Western Armenian coming from a well-off family, a merchant who had immigrated to Armenia in 1923, not a member of the Communist party and, on top of all this, a representative of an bourgeois foreign Armenian organization in Soviet Armenia. And a man with such a dubitable, in Soviet terms, curriculum vitae, was authorized to "... be a mediator between them (the AGBU - Ed. M.) and the Armenian Government on issues related to the economic and construction operations of the Union. I also had to coordinate the initiatives of the Union with the Armenian Government, receive the financing and transfer it for the needs of construction, monitor the implementation of the projects."²⁰⁹ One does not need too vivid an imagination to grasp the various challenges he had to face while carrying out his duties in the social, political, and economic environment of the time. Despite all the impediments he had to secure the solution to all the problems--that was the demand of the AGBU leadership.

Karageusian was, of course, aware of the danger he was facing as the representative of a foreign organization in a country that was hunting the "enemies of the people." His suspicions were affirmed in November, 1936, after the arrest of Arsen Yessayan and Artavazd Yeghiazarian. Karageusian's turn came just two month later: on January 11, 1937, he was invited to the Commissariat for Interior and interrogated, so far as a witness. The extract from a verbatim record of the interrogation regarding the details of the Moscow trip of Arsen Yessayan's delegation, which included, among others, Haikaz Karageusian, has already been quoted above. His responses to questions on the leaders of the HOK are very significant to make us better understand his personality. When asked about Aramayis Yerznkian, he answered: "I maintained business contacts on issues pertaining to the Benevolent Union with Aramayis Yerznkian in his capacity as the Deputy Chairman of the Council of the People's Commissars. Besides, we were also friends over a card table. We often played cards, mostly at his place, sometimes at mine." About Arsen Yessayan: "My only contacts with him were of business nature, and started after the Benevolent Union was transferred under the supervision of the HOK. Yessayan treated me very well, supported the Union

²⁰⁸ NAA, 1191/4/174, p. 9.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 10.

in its construction works in Armenia."²¹⁰ To fully appreciate these responses one has to bear in mind that both Yessayan and Yerznkian had been arrested already in November 1936. And despite that, Karageusian honestly described his friendly relations with them, their good disposition towards himself. What was that - courage, naivety, or trust in the fairness of the authorities?

Even after his January interrogation, Karageusian continued to work with the same enthusiasm and diligence, as if ignoring the threat. In this context the following incident is remarkable. Just two weeks after the interrogation, on January 25, 1937, he sent a letter to the First Secretary of the CPA Amatouni to inform him that "The Paris Board of Directors of the Armenian General Benevolent Union informs in its letter of November 9, 1936, that in view of the forthcoming conclusion of the construction of the Yerevan-Nubarashen highway and to facilitate the commuting of the Nubarashen residents, the Union has decided to make an exclusive donation (outside of the funds raised for Armenia) of a bus with 20-25 seats." Pointing to the existing legal restrictions, Karageusian asked Amatouni to request the Soviet Government to lift those restrictions, extending special privileges for the transportation of the bus. Amatouni forwarded the letter to Moughdousi, People's Commissar for Interior with an inscription in Russian: "Arrest the author and throw him out." Moughdousi, in his turn, added an instruction in Armenian, "The resolution of the Government should be implemented without contesting." There could be no other reaction: as already mentioned Amatouni and Mughdusi were the organizers of the new wave of repressions of the Armenian state and party leadership. Nationalism, cooperation with the Armenian bourgeois organizations abroad, particularly the AGBU, have become the most important accusations. Under these circumstances it would be at least naive to think that the topmost leader of Armenia would address the Central Government in Moscow with such a request, especially that the name of the author of the letter was already included in the list of the "enemies of the people."

On June 25, 1937, a lieutenant of the National Security Kirakozov submitted a report on Haikaz Karageusian to his supervisor captain Vahram Chitouni. The report concluded: "Karageusian was engaged in systematic anti-revolutionary propaganda and should be indicted by Article 67 of the Penal Code of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic." The report was approved the same day by the People's Commissar for Interior Major Moughdousi and thus the decision to arrest Haikaz Karageusian and incarcerate him in the Interior Commissariat prison was endorsed by the signatures of the three mentioned individuals. This was the beginning of the final and most tragic stage of Haikaz Karageusian's life. On the following day his apartment in the AGBU House (Baregortsakani Doun) was searched and two typewriters, a radio, a fountain pen, his personal correspondence and other items were confiscated. Here is a quote from a letter by the People's Artiste of Armenia, sculptor Ara Sarkissian, addressed to the Committee for State Security (KGB) in 1955: "Haikaz Karageusian led a very

²¹⁰ Ibid.

modest life. I have been at his place several times and I have seen the modest furnishing and the simple lifestyle of the family. And it was the time when a representative of the Benevolent Union, had he not been an honest and straightforward person, was in a position to abuse the fortune of the Union for his personal needs. In the case of Karageusian it was the other way around. The routine life of his family proved how simple, straightforward and honest Haikaz Karageusian was."²¹¹

Karageusian was interrogated only twice, on June 29 and October 13, 1937, and those two interrogations were very different from the one in January when he had to testify as a witness. On June 29, three days after his arrest, he makes a "confession" in his letter addressed to People's Commissar Moughdousi: "When, after my arrest, investigator comrade Kirakossian (a.k.a. Kirakozov – Ed. M.) asked what were my crimes against the Soviet government I decided to be frank and tell him the truth. I testify that beginning with 1932, I have been a French spy and was involved in operations against the Soviet authorities..."²¹² We can only imagine what questions and in which manner the "investigator comrade Kirakossian" had asked, however, judging from the style of the letter and his correspondence before the arrest, we can say with a great deal of confidence that Karageusian was writing under the dictation of Kirakossian-Kirakozov (this was the only sheet in the investigation file written in Armenian, and only because Karageusian himself did not know Russian). During a brief interrogation on the same day he repeated his testimony and added that he was recruited as a spy by Levon Gumushguerdan (member of the Board of Directors of the AGBU - Ed. M.) who had arrived in Yerevan to participate in the election of the Catholicos, and that during those days he had given Gumushguerdan and Arshag Chopanian detailed information about the economic and political situation in Armenia. Karageusian was not the only "spy", he had some prominent accomplices. The torture techniques used by the investigators of the Commissariat for Interior had forced similar testimony from writers Zabel Yessayan and Vahan Totovents, translator and literary critic Petros Makintsian and others, who were recruited by French "agents" Hrach Yervant and Arshag Tchopanian.²¹³

The second and final interrogation, on October 19, started with the investigator's threat: "During the whole process of investigation you have been stubbornly concealing your anti-revolutionary activities as a missionary (? - the investigator probably did not know the difference between "missionary" and "emissary" - Ed. M.) of the Dashnak-Ramkavar center in Armenia. We would suggest you to stop refusing to testify and give a comprehensive account of your anti-revolutionary activities."²¹⁴ The investigator's statement demonstrated the scenario for Karageusian's case and the role ascribed to him. As opposed to the January interrogation, the investigator did not ask a single

²¹¹ Ibid. p. 203.

²¹² Ibid. p. 20.

²¹³ Gasparian 1994: 84, 90, 106, 107, 129.

²¹⁴ NAA, 1191/4/174, p. 23.

question about Arsen Yessayan's trip to Moscow, it obviously could not serve a basis for a serious political indictment. The false allegations on the existence of a Dashnak-Ramkavar center and a Trotskyist-nationalist group in Armenia and their collaboration could, however, become a basis for an indictment on attempted dissolution of the Soviet Union and Armenia's secession from the Union. Karageusian's post did not merit his inclusion in the group, but even the modest role assigned to him was fatal.

The logic of the investigation was clear and simple: given the existence of two anti-Soviet centers, one in Armenia and another abroad, and given their common aims and cooperation, there should be a person who acted as a liaison between the two and that person had to be found. The easy answer was--the AGBU and Karageusian, its representative in Armenia. Now it was not difficult all those who came to Armenia through the AGBU - namely, Mikael Papajanian, Arshag Chopanian, Levon Gumushguerdan, Hrach Yervant, Maksoud Mihatian-- to make representatives of the Dashnak-Ramkavar center, and their meetings with Sahak Ter-Gabrielian, Aghassi Khanjian, Aramayis Yerznkian, Arsen Yessayan, arranged by Haikaz Karageusian, as the collaboration of the two centers. It becomes easy also to expose the AGBU itself as a political organization, established by Ramkavars to inject loyalty towards Armenian bourgeoisie among the Diaspora Armenians, expose Nubarashen, the hospitals and other construction sites of the AGBU as means of popularization of the bourgeoisie and promoting its positive image among the Soviet Armenians. How useful was Haikaz Karageusian's testimony for all that? We have to admit that the investigators were masterly abusing Haikaz Karageusian's nature. Most probably, having promised a favourable outcome of the trial, they got a handwritten Armenian confession about being a French spy. According to established practice, the verbatim record of the testimony was made in Russian, but since Haikaz Karageusian did not know the language they translated the protocol for him and asked him to sign it (the same procedure was used for the interrogation of writer, repatriate Zabel Yessayan, who also did not know Russian). Even if his replies were not distorted they could always be placed in a different, even exactly opposite context. For example, Karageusian had told the investigator that according to Papajanian, Ter-Gabrielian had promised full support to the construction of Nubarashen, and had especially stressed the importance of increased financial assistance from the bourgeoisie to Armenia, pointing that "The Armenian bourgeoisie has to realize that its Motherland is Armenia and not Syria." It is easy to imagine the anti-Soviet slant that could be given to Ter-Gabrielian's words, in order to present him an agent of the Armenian bourgeoisie.

In any case, Karageusian's temper and lack of knowledge of Russian had facilitated the work of the investigator and we may assume that he was not subjected to physical abuse. Mikael Mazmanian, a prominent architect who had shared the cell with Karageusian for 4 months - September 27, 1937, through January 20, 1938 -- did not mention any signs of physical abuse towards Karageusian. The following is an extract from Mazmanian's testimony of 1955: "He gave me general overview of his case, told

that the investigator knows the entire truth and fully understands his personality and knows he is not guilty... He was modest, waited patiently for a positive outcome of his trial, certain that he was not guilty and was to be released."²¹⁵

By that time the investigation of Karageusian's case was already over, and on November 20, 1937, investigator Kirakozov charged him under 3 additional articles of the Penal Code. It was not until seven months later, on June 17, 1938, that the Deputy People's Commissar for Interior Nikolay Kondakov and assistant to the Military Prosecutor General Mikhail Schultz-Ann approved the indictment which stated in particular that, "the Dashnak-Ramkavar centre and the big Armenian bourgeoisie carried out their work through their representatives sent to Armenia under the guise of representatives of the HOK and the Benevolent Union. The accused Karageusian supplied them with espionage information, as well as connected them with members of the right-Trotskyist organization in Armenia."²¹⁶

Given the charges, Karageusian's case was submitted to the Military Panel of the Supreme Court of the Soviet Union. A month later, on July 17, the latter in a preliminary hearing decided "To hear the case in camera, in the absence of a defense counsel or prosecutor and without summoning witnesses, pursuant to the resolution of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR of December 1, 1934."²¹⁷

A day later, on July 18, the Military Panel of the Supreme Court of the Soviet Union held an in camera session in Yerevan. The members of the court were: Division military lawyer Orlov (Chairman), military lawyers Kolpakov and Stelmakhovich, military lawyer of the 3rd rank Kozlov (Secretary of the Court). Also participating was Schultz-Ann.

"The meeting was called to order at 17.25... The Chairman briefed the defendant on the essence of the charges against him and asked if he pleaded guilty. The defendant pleaded guilty partially. He had not been a member of the Dashnak center. He had moved to Russia in 1914. He met Yerznkian in the USSR. Since 1928 has been affiliated with the "Mutual Assistance Committee" (? - this was probably how the Russian members of the tribunal translated the "Benevolent Union" - Ed. M.) and had held negotiations with the Soviet Government. He has never been an agent of the British Intelligence. His written statement about his crimes was untruthful. He knew Ter-Simonian.

Ter-Simonian's statement was then introduced.

Defendant: he has never held political discussions with Ter-Simonian, and cannot explain why he does the latter testify on this matter. His own views were nationalist because he had been brought up in Turkey.

Court is adjourned.

²¹⁵ Ibid. p. 200.

²¹⁶ Ibid. p. 61.

²¹⁷ Ibid. p. 64.

In his last word, the defendant asks the court for leniency, since he had worked honestly for ten years and his only guilt was in adhering to nationalist views.

Court retires to meeting.

Upon returning from the meeting, the chairman reads the verdict.

The session was closed at 17:45."

Court verdict, July 18, 1938.

The preliminary investigation and the court inquest proved that since 1928 Haikaz Karageusian has been a representative of the Dashnak-Ramkavar center in Armenia and acted as a liaison between the center and counter-revolutionary nationalist terrorist organization operating in Armenia in a bloc with the anti-Soviet right-Trotskyist terrorist organization aimed at the armed overthrow of the Soviet power, Armenia's secession from the Soviet Union, and creation of the so-called "independent" Armenian state under the protectorate of one of the capitalist countries. Besides, Karageusian was a spy of a foreign intelligence and transferred state secrets of the Soviet Union to them.

The above facts prove Karageusian's guilt under Articles 59, 63, 65, 68 of the Penal Code of the Armenian SSR.

Pursuant to Articles 297 and 298 of the Code of Criminal Procedure of the Armenian SSR, the Military Panel of the Supreme Court of the Soviet Union sentences Haikaz Karageusian to capital punishment through a firing squad with a confiscation of his personal assets.

The verdict was final and was executed immediately, in accordance with resolution of December 1, 1934, of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR."²¹⁸

The last document in the file stated: "The verdict of capital punishment for Haikaz Karageusian was executed on July 18, 1938."²¹⁹

Arsen Yessayan and Hovhannes Hakopian were also executed on the same day, and the last member of the delegation, Tigran Zaven, was executed on October 4. Almost all state and party leaders mentioned in this book were executed during 1938, including Viktor Mezhlauk and Lev Karakhan in Moscow.

Years later, after the death of Stalin and the execution of Beria, the Soviet Union began to gradually shed the nightmares of the past. The most important manifestation of this was the acquittal of tens of thousands of the repressed. In November, 1954, Haikaz Karageusian's son Levon (who was then already member of the Writers Union of the USSR) appealed to Georgiy Badamiants, Chairman of the State Security Committee (KGB) of the Council of Ministers of Armenia, to reconsider his father's case.

The acquittal of those repressed under the Stalin regime was a time consuming exercise that took a lot of efforts, it was not and could not be done through a single decree or resolution, since there were actually guilty persons among the numerous innocent ones. In fact, a new file had to be opened for each case and the innocence of

²¹⁸ Ibid. p. 66-67.

²¹⁹ Ibid. p. 68.

every person had to be legally proved beyond reasonable doubt. But the witnesses of those years were also annihilated, they were no longer available to renounce their testimony delivered under physical coercion. The initiators and perpetrators of unprecedented violence were annihilated or gone into hiding, moreover, some of them continued to occupy high public and party posts and, most importantly, the new leaders of the Soviet Union had not publicly condemned the policies of the Stalin regime against its own people. Khrushchev's statement at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956 was still pending.

Those were also the challenges facing Haikaz Karageusian's acquittal. However, it became gradually apparent and proven that a right-Trotskyist center has never existed in Armenia. Neither did a Dashnak-Ramkavar centre exist abroad, it was proven that the AGBU members Gumushguerdan, Chopanian, Papajanian, Hrach Yervant and others were neither representatives of such a centre nor agents of foreign intelligence services, and that Haikaz Karageusian and others had testified under physical and moral coercion. Artavazd Yeghiazarian, the former Chief Administrator of the Council of the People's Commissars of Armenia Armenak Tokmajian, the former Chair of the Armenian and later Transcaucasian Central Executive Committee Sergey (Sergo) Martikian, sculptor Ara Sarkissian, and architect Mikael Mazmanian upon their return from exile also confirmed Karageusian's innocence.

Finally, on March 7, 1956, the Captain of National security Kostandian closed Karageusian's acquittal case: "... Haikaz Karageusian was arrested and charged in 1937 without basis for prosecution." Several months later the Military Panel of the Supreme Court of the USSR resolved: "To reverse the decision of the Military Panel of the Supreme Court of July 18, 1937, on Karageusian..., and to drop the case in the absence of corpus delicti."²²⁰

But before that there was a point when the activities of the AGBU and Karageusian himself in Soviet Armenia seemed nothing but a mystification. In July, 1955, in connection with Karageusian's acquittal, the Deputy Chairman of the KGB requested the Chief Administrator of the Council of Ministers to provide the following information on the AGBU, "1. When did it exist, what were its aims, what assistance has been provided; 2. What information is available on Haikaz Karageusian, representative of the organization in Armenia, who and when had appointed him, what was his activity and the purpose of such activity?"²²¹ One month later, the head of the Archives department of the Interior Ministry forwarded to the Head of the investigation department of the KGB a communication received from the Director of State Archives, regarding... the "Caucasian Benevolent Union." The communication revealed that the Union had existed in 1881-1924 and that "Haikaz Karageusian was not found among its personnel."²²² This astonishing information, however, did not set back the officers of

²²⁰ Ibid. p. 251.

²²¹ Ibid. p. 172.

²²² Ibid. p. 176.

National Security, and they addressed a query to the Head of the Archives of the Ministry of Interior one more time. The language of this request was different: "...provide information as to which governmental institution had authorized the operation of the "Armenian Benevolent Union"/"The Baregortsakan" in Armenia between the years of 1935-1937." The response was received on September 9, 1955, "The Department of Archives of the Ministry of Interior informs that the "Armenian Benevolent Union"/"the Baregortsakan" has not existed in Armenia during the Soviet period. The most recent information pertaining to the Union dates back to February-March, 1921, the period of the Dashnak vagary."²²³

This reminds us of Lord Bolingbroke's words: "We have been long coming to this point of depravation: and the progress from confirmed habits of evil is much more slow than the progress to them."²²⁴

EPILOGUE

The Soviet authorities remembered about the AGBU right after World War II. As was the case in the 20s and 30s, the Union became the main Diaspora source of funding for the repatriation of the 1946-1948, donating more than 1, 5 million dollars through a special fundraising effort. Later the Union was ranked among the Diaspora organizations with which contacts and, in some cases, even cooperation was allowed. But nothing more: like all other Diaspora organizations that the Soviet authorities considered "progressive and patriotic," the Union was never allowed to function in Armenia. This made the operation of the Union in 1923-1937 a unique and exceptional phenomenon in the history of relations of Soviet Armenia and the Armenian Diaspora.

The devastating earthquake of 1988, and the concurrent political developments in the Soviet Union which lead to its rapid collapse, brought about a new phase in the activity of the Union in Armenia, which became especially salient after the proclamation of the Third Armenian Republic in 1991.

²²³ Ibid. p. 177-178.

²²⁴ Henry St. John Bolingbroke. The Idea of a Patriot King. Introduction. <http://bit.ly/2LEc1dU>

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*At the time of writing, in the late 1990s, the documents cited by me were stored in the Central National Archives of Modern History and the Central National Archives of the documents of non-governmental and political organizations of the Republic of Armenia. Subsequently, these two archives were included in the unified National Archives of Armenia. Personal files of the repressed in 1930s were also transferred to the National Archives from the archives of the Ministry of National Security. The first digit indicates the fund number, the second the list number, and the third the file number.

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