

THE REACTIONS AND DECISIONS OF TRANSCAUCASIAN AND ARMENIAN PARTIES ON THE DECLARATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA¹

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Abstract

As a result of various military and political developments and upheavals, the 1917 Bolshevik revolution led to the declaration of independence of Transcaucasia, and the region was confronted with the emergence of independent republics. At the height of the Turkish invasion, particularly after the fall of Kars and Alexandrapol, Bolshevik Russia was hostile towards the fact of independence of Transcaucasia, especially the emergence of independent national republics. The difficult domestic situation in Russia, the ongoing uncompromising struggle for power and the consequent unleashing of civil war did not make the sovietization of Transcaucasia possible for the moment. The best proof of that is that the government of Lenin could not or “did not want” to help the Baku commune.

Keywords: A.Kulebyakin, B.Baykov, Hay HZhK (Armenian People’s party), HHD, Social-revolutionaries, Andranik, Leo, Irkutsk, Voronezh, Moscow

As a result of various military and political developments and upheavals, the 1917 Bolshevik revolution led to the declaration of independence of Transcaucasia, and the region was confronted with the emergence of independent republics. On May 28, 1918, the independence of the Republic of Armenia was declared.

That epoch-making event, which was not equivocally accepted, also had reactions discussed below.

In his analytical work “Armenia’s military problems” *A. Kulebyakin*, the famous pro-Armenian General of the Caucasian front, touched upon the issue of independence as well².

He approached the existing issue from the point of view of separating the desired from the possible. According to him, the answer to the desired was definitely “Yes”. The General mentioned: “If you ask a nation that has escaped from the bloody clutches of a centuries-old oppressor “Can you begin an independent existence?” they will definitely say - Yes, yes, yes! I can. I want to. I cannot do otherwise! I have been waiting for this opportunity for centuries. The Armenian people have just got to the threshold of their plundered homeland. And the Armenian people will say yes, I want to, because I have made many sacrifices for liberation. And I need help and protection only because I have

¹ This study has been carried out within the framework of the joint grant received from the State Committee of Science, Republic of Armenia and the Russian Foundation for Basic Research (grant N. 20RF-103).

² See NAA, f. 196, l. 1, f. 12, p. 1.

been deceived, I have lost a lot, I am surrounded by dangers, which I cannot overcome alone.

Is it desirable, is it permissible for other states, near and far (meaning Soviet Russia – V. M.)? And we will see that in this case the question is posed favorably. Turkey is against the Armenian independence, but Armenia was liberated from it in order to save the people. The issue of recognition of that independence by other states of the former German coalition is now automatically being pushed out...”³. First, it becomes clear that the undated material was written after the defeat of the Triple alliance. At the same time, it should be noted that, probably in the autumn of 1918, the pro-state, hence the pro-Armenian Russian General still viewed the reality of Armenia’s independence at least in the context of the achievements of the February Revolution. From this point of view, he probably did not want to see that Russia was no longer the same, that it had become Bolshevik. Moreover, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was a complete tragedy for the tsarist, patriotic Russian General. From the subtext of A. Kulebyakin’s ideas it can be assumed that Russia would never want to lose Transcaucasia and Armenia, so for now, Armenia’s “independence” did not pose a great threat to Russia’s future prospects.

We got acquainted with **Russian Cadet party figure B. Baykov’s** views on the occasion of the independence of Georgia and Azerbaijan.

Expressing the interests of the party of the Russian bourgeoisie - the Constitutional Democratic Party, B. Baykov unconditionally insisted that the peoples living in Transcaucasia had no grounds for national aspirations and expression of identity. As the first substantiation of his thesis, he mentioned the problem of the mixed population of Caucasian nations and he linked with it the issue of not establishing *zemstvos*⁴ (local self-government bodies – V. M.) in the region⁵.

He considered that the “self-determination” movement would nonetheless start in Russia only because that policy was dictated from the center, from those Russian political bodies that played a leading role during the revolution. He attributed the decisive and crucial role in that process to the Petrograd Soviet, which, proclaiming the principle of “self-determination of peoples”, hung it around its own neck and around the neck of the weaker Provisional Government. Hence, B. Baykov concluded that “taking into account the weakness of the central government the representatives of the political adventurism of different peoples of Transcaucasia felt more confident, since the establishment of new states was presented in the form of satisfying personal ambition. There was another reason to secede from Russia and end the previous connection - to keep the region and themselves from the consequences of Russia’s political collapse, Bolshevism, and the inevitable economic downturn by selfishly severing ties with Russia⁶.

³ See NAA, f. 196, l. 1, f. 12, p. 1.

⁴ See in detail Melikyan 2010: 125-145.

⁵ Baykov 1923: 190.

⁶ Baykov 1923: 191.

It is clear that the Cadet was speaking - the supporter of the centralized Russian state that had never tolerated the idea of self-determination of nations. At the same time, his analysis is pro-Armenian, as he considered Georgian social-democrat Mensheviks to be the pioneers in the process of secession of Transcaucasia from Russia⁷.

According to B. Baykov, during the whole course of the Russian revolution, Armenians did not hide their loyalty to Russia seeing in it the only natural defender that would save them from physical destruction. Referring to the March 1918 events in Baku, he concluded that the very instinct of self-defense was at the core of not opposing Russian Bolshevism, and sometimes of cooperating with it.

Baykov stated: ***“With the secession from Russia and with Azerbaijan declaring independence, small Armenia, having a small population of less than 2 million, encased by the Muslim world from all sides, had to declare its independence counting on the support from the Entente Powers and America”***⁸ (emphasis added by us - V. M.).

The Armenian Populist Party (APP) did not accept the proclamation of either Transcaucasia or independent states.

“It was a huge mistake, at least for us - Armenians, accepting the independence of Transcaucasia and its secession from Russia, and then it was a bigger mistake accepting the erasure of that independence and the division of Transcaucasia into three parts”⁹, – newspaper “Mshak” wrote.

In our opinion, the APP also shortsightedly clung to the prospect of the acceptance of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty and was not correctly assessing the factor of Bolshevik Russia’s intervention in Transcaucasia in the period of April-June, 1918. The whole blame was traditionally (starting from April 1917, when the APP was formed – V. M.) directed against the ARF Seim and the Armenian National Council. “Mshak” considered that “the management of the affairs of the Armenian people was and is in the hands of non-professionals: during the revolution (referring to the 1917 February Revolution – V. M.) we failed to produce political, prudent, and discreet figures; we destroyed our people and our future and we got a one-eyed, one-legged, barren and disabled country that will be called Armenia”¹⁰.

Comparing Armenia’s independence with the process in Georgia, the APP rightly singled out three essential features. **First:** since the eve of the World War the Georgian political field and figures without any partisan differences, had consistently pursued the ultimate goal of separating Georgia from Russia and achieving its independence. “Mshak” delicately noted that during the course of it, internationalist, socialist, Menshevik A. Chkhenkeli eventually became the speaker of the Georgian parliament.

⁷ Idem.

⁸ Idem.

⁹ See Mshak, June 25, 1918, issue 120.

¹⁰ Idem.

Second: Georgian politicians with their craft and skill were able “to drag after themselves both the Armenian alleged socialists (referring to ARF – V. M.) and the Turks”¹¹. **Third:** due to the fact that all the Transcaucasian state (Russian) institutions were concentrated in Tbilisi, Georgia was able to capture them all with their property, which, according to “Mshak”, reached “probably billions”¹². At the same time, the APP believed that “Georgia’s independence is not guaranteed at all yet”¹³.

The Armenian Revolutionary Federation - Dashnaktsutyun did not equivocally address the whole process, neither the issue of Armenia’s independence itself.

Listening to Kh. Karchikyan’s report on the situation and “examining the issue of organizing the government of independent Armenia”, the June 12 general meeting of the ARF Committee in Tbilisi adopted the following resolution: “... ARF – Dashnaktsutyun is the only competent party that should lead the Armenian life in the near future, before the elections to the Armenian Constituent Assembly”¹⁴. Moreover, the Dashnaktsutyun believed that **“there is no one among our parties and currents that has done a more positive job in the field of Armenian-Turkish solidarity and cooperation than the Dashnaktsutyun”**¹⁵ (emphasis added by us - V. M.).

By the way, organizational and structural changes took place within the party in the post-independence stage.

By the decision of the joint assembly of ARF Eastern Bureau, the Central Committee and the local Committee of Georgia, and on the initiative of the Central Committee, the Georgian ARF regional meeting was held in Tbilisi **on June 17-25**. According to the adopted decision and “Circular No. 1”, the Central Committees of Tbilisi and Batumi would be dissolved and an Interim Central Committee would be formed within the borders of the Republic of Georgia. This change of the previous organizational form of the ARF and the newly elected Central Committee had to get final approval from the general assembly, the ARF Supreme Body but taking into account “the political situation of Transcaucasia and in particular, of Armenian workers and finding that it is necessary to start the organization and socialist upbringing of Georgian-Armenian workers right now, the newly-elected Central Committee, receiving the consent and approval of the existing supreme body of the ARF, the Eastern Bureau, starts its work and will be called “Georgian ARF Central Committee”.

Let us introduce H. Qajaznuni’s opinion: “Should we have declared independence? Were we able to form and maintain our own state?”, - wrote the first Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia. “These are inessential questions. Such questions could not be asked in the last days of May, 1918. There was no room for holding elections. History had brought us to a certain line. We had to have the courage

¹¹ Idem.

¹² Idem.

¹³ Idem.

¹⁴ Horizon, June 15, 1918, No 115.

¹⁵ Idem, June 19, No 118.

to cross it if we did not want to sink. We had to become masters of our Homeland, otherwise we would lose it - maybe irrevocably. If we hesitated, if we delayed our statement, Armenia would remain *res nullius* (something belonging to no one) and as such would be lost to the neighbors - Turks, Georgians, Azerbaijanis.

On May 28, late at night, the National Central Council decided to declare Armenia an independent republic and to declare itself the supreme authority of the Republic.

The Council had not received such authority from the National Assembly, but it did not stop in the face of this formal obstacle and later, no one thought to accuse it, since it was clear to everyone that there was no other way... This was a new era in the history of the Armenian people - a revival of the long-lost independent state life"¹⁶.

Simon Vratsyan considered that "having suffered a lot, on May 28, 1918, the Armenian people gave birth to the Republic of Armenia. ***The Republic of Armenia was a premature birth for independence. It was not prepared either with substantive conditions, or with subjective consciousness.*** The Armenian people had fought a long and persistent struggle for the freedom of Armenia in Turkey and by saying freedom they meant reforms or autonomy under the common roof of the Ottoman Empire, they did not even think of creating Armenia within the borders of Russia. And at the moment, the Republic of Armenia was being born in the Ararat Valley, on the land under Russian rule, and in impossible conditions. It was not surprising that the Armenian mind was confused and found it difficult to understand the situation and adopt a new political position... The Dashnaktsutyun faced an unprecedented responsibility to lay the foundations of the newborn state and to organize and run the Armenian state. The hesitation that reigned in the ranks of the Dashnaktsutyun is understandable. ***This hesitation also appeared during the declaration of Armenia's independence. Strangely, people who had dedicated their entire lives to the Armenian liberation war, voted against independence***"¹⁷ (emphasis added by us - V. M).

We do not share Vratsyan's main conclusion that the Republic of Armenia was "a premature birth for independence". In our opinion, independent national statehoods were not handed to the peoples on a silver platter. Certainly, S. Vratsyan's reasoning is understandable: he probably meant the losses suffered by the Armenian people during World War I, the Armenian Genocide, the upheavals of the Russian revolutions, the Turkish invasion, the anti-Armenian policy of the neighbors, etc. At the same time, the main guarantee of achieving independence is independent practice. What guarantees did the Finnish people have when, in December 1917, they "snatched" their independence from Lenin's newly established government only through a consistent, heroic struggle and assessment of the situation? We can bring dozens of examples. By the way, Georgia had no guarantees either; nor did the newly created Azerbaijan aspiring to Pan-Turkism.

¹⁶ Qajaznuni 1923: 30.

¹⁷ Vratsyan 1966: 12.

And there is a controversial theses belonging to **Ruben Ter-Minasyan** stating that **“the idea of creating Araratian Armenia was first dictated by the Turks”**¹⁸ (emphasis added by us – V. M.). In our opinion, this phrase is referred to by modern Turkish historiography, when it emphasizes the false thesis of giving us independence.

R. Ter-Minasyan states that this idea was first suggested by Bahaeddin Shakir, Omar Naji and Hilmi Bey, who were sent by Ittihat to Erzurum (Karin) as negotiators in late August 1914. They offered the ARF 9 committee formed there to unite some regions of Western Armenia and create Armenia with Ejmiatsin as its center.

“Practically, a united Armenia was offered by the Turks on the condition that we get tough with Russia and become the vanguard in Transcaucasia in the event of a Caucasian uprising and war”, - says Ruben. **“Without going back to those official talks, it is important to emphasize here that the offer of an independent and united Armenia was coming from the Turks”**¹⁹ (emphases added by us – V. M.).

Of course, it is difficult to be deeply sure of what Ruben meant. The proposal to create “United Armenia” in that context is not particularly understandable. Probably, it was meant that in case of Russia’s “defeat” in the World War, Russian Armenia and Turkish Armenia would be united. In any case, the Turks offered the ARF the same they offered Georgian politicians, i.e. in case of unleashing a war, they had to act against Russia, in other words, become a tool in the implementation of Pan-Turkism.

It is noteworthy that both in the reality of 1914 and in April-May 1918, the same Turkey promised independence to Transcaucasia and Armenia on the condition of anti-Russian attitude and struggle. The tsarist government promised almost the same thing, only promising autonomy to Armenia.

In general, we consider that Ruben’s statement fits into the series of “promises” of the Young Turks and nowadays it is used as a factor of “betrayal of Turkish-Armenians”, which, in their opinion, indirectly “justifies” the perpetration of the Armenian Genocide.

A totally different viewpoint was held by the newspaper “Ashkhatank”, an organ of the ARF in Yerevan, which was affected by the views of the Yerevan National Council and Aram Manukyan.

On May 16 (29), in an article entitled “With Faith In Victory”, speaking about the victories of Sardarapat and Greater Gharakilisa, the newspaper noted: “However, let us not become inebriated by our first victories, nor let our future defeats and casualties suppress our spirit of resistance. On the contrary, **realizing that the enemy was able to get from Yerznka to Alexandropol in a short time with very little force only because of our surrender**, let us redouble our efforts and prepare for new battles and new victories... **Henceforth our blows must be sharp and lethal, so that the enemy is completely shattered and steps back**”²⁰ (emphasis added by us – V. M.).

¹⁸ Ruben 1982: 127.

¹⁹ Idem.

²⁰ See Ashkhatanq, Yerevan, May 29, 1918, issue 3.

Parallel with this approach, in its July 11 editorial “Horizon” gave an alarming assessment of the future of the already established republic. “The ghost of the Armenian Genocide is so close”, - the editorial stated, - “it is enough, in fact, it is so eloquent, the past is so clear, and the future so obvious that, unfortunately, there is no need to hesitate. One of the two. If the Republic of Armenia was established to create a more or less prosperous life for our nation to a minimal degree and within the minimum limits, let that country be like a country and let the people stop being a wanderer at least for a while. ***And if that republic has been created by the strongest of the world with the intention of temporarily hiding its devilish plans, make sure that the martyred people and their country know all that***”²¹ (emphasis added by us – V. M.).

These questions make the existence of disagreements and tactical differences within the ARF fully obvious. Thus, A. Manukyan’s wing was against the negotiation process only and was in favor of organizing resolute resistance.

The Armenian Social Democrat mensheviks criticized the Seim and its ARF faction for backing the Trabzon - Brest-Litovsk - Batumi course of the Turkish foreign policy accusing them of the process of secession from Russia and describing it as “assurances of peace and goodwill”²².

Gevorg Gharajyan (S.T. Arkomed – V. M.), theorist of Armenian Menshevism, considered the political line of the leaders of Georgian Menshevism - N. Zhordania, A. Chkhenkeli, I. Tsereteli, to be nationalistic, which in practice had actually completely deviated from the policy of social democracy in the national issue.

Not being absolutely against independence, he considered that “the transformation of our country into independent states creates new complications, opens the door to new disasters for our peoples”²³, besides, he added that this independence would not take place without the “dictation and pressure of external and internal reactionary forces”²⁴ without taking into account the self-determination of nations. G. Gharajyan considered that independence “could not definitely take place. The vast majority of the votes of Georgians and Armenians, as well as a considerable part of the Turks would not vote for the political contingent and condition that was created in our country after April 9 and May 26 of last 1918”²⁵.

The position of the ***Armenian organization of the Socialist Revolutionary Party (the SR – V. M.)*** towards Transcaucasia and the emergence of independent national states was negative, however, as SR Arsham Khondkaryan mentioned: “our party had to come to terms with this new situation”²⁶. He noted: “Our opposition and criticism is most of all and strongly against the April 9 (22) act, ***and least of all against the***

²¹ Horizon, July 11, 1918, issue 135.

²² Gharajyan (Arkomed) 1919: 51.

²³ Idem.

²⁴ Idem.

²⁵ Gharajyan (Arkomed) 1919: 52.

²⁶ Khondkaryan 1933: 79.

Statement of the Armenian National Council dated May 30 and published on May 31²⁷ (emphasis added by us – V. M.).

He believed that it was no secret for the SRs that the issue of independence of Transcaucasia had been resolved by the elite of the Seim factions and that their ordinary members, especially the non-partisan masses, were against the act, and as far as the ARF was concerned, Khondkaryan considered that the Dashnaktsutyun “acted in this matter not out of conscience, but out of compulsion”²⁸.

In the reality of May 26, preferring the Georgian position, because of which “they separated from Transcaucasia and established themselves within their borders”, the outstanding Armenian SR figure saw a difference between the acts of April 9 and May 26 and concluded: “What was the attitude of our party members, Armenian or Russian, towards this new independence? **Negative**”²⁹. He weighed on the moral side of the issue, which in our opinion was mostly military and political. He justified the SR criticism of Georgian Menshevism by “the inhuman behavior of occupying a dominant position in the Transcaucasian government, acting on its fate almost autocratically and bringing this country to the brink of ruin, they considered it their right to abandon their associates at the most difficult moment and went to build their own home and think only about the salvation of their people”³⁰.

According to the Armenian SR, the statement of the Armenian National Council (ANC) not of May 30, but of May 31 “**was certainly not a declaration of Armenia’s independence**”³¹ (emphasis added by us – V. M.). It was also clear that the responsibility for the step taken did not fall on the ANC, as this step became inevitable after the decisions of the Georgians and Tatars, so the Armenian SRs had nothing else to say against that act.

At the same time, A. Khondkaryan clearly shows the difference between the acts of independence.

We will return to this issue in a separate section.

The position of the **Constituent Democratic Party**, according to our sources, was expressed at the May 21 session of the Central Council of Compatriotic Unions in Tbilisi.

Discussing the issue of the ANC perspective, Artak Darbinyan directly stated: “**There can be no talk of independence**”³². He considered that the **ANC should base its policy on the policy of adaptation, avoiding aggressive behavior and having no state authority**³³.

²⁷ Khondkaryan 1933: 81.

²⁸ Idem.

²⁹ Khondkaryan 1933: 84.

³⁰ Khondkaryan 1933: 84-85.

³¹ Khondkaryan 1933: 86.

³² See NAA, f. 244, l.1, f. 9, p. 18.

³³ Idem.

Gharabekyan considered that the ANC was the body that developed and conducted the foreign policy of the Armenian people³⁴.

Gharibi, a Georgian Menshevik author known for his extremist and anti-Armenian views, brought up the fable by Krylov in the context of the unification of the three nations in the Transcaucasian United Republic and the further course of the independences, noting that “when Tsereteli, the white swan of the Russian revolution, was taking the newly created Republic upwards, the Armenian crab was dragging it either towards the anarchy through the Bolsheviks, or towards self-governance through Denikin, and the Azerbaijani pikes dragged everyone to the Muslim ocean in order to drown there the Republic and all the nationalities”³⁵.

On May 31, 1918, **the Social-Democrat Hunchakian Party** in view of the call of the central board “Citizens-Armenians”, demanded that the National Council 1. relinquish all its powers and responsibilities that had been appropriated arbitrarily; 2. immediately form a new Provisional National Council from an equal number of representatives of all political, revolutionary and socialist organizations³⁶.

In the context of the re-election of the Armenian National Council, in other words, its dissolution, on May 31, the Social-Democrat Hunchakian Party in fact did not recognize Armenia’s independence.

The Central Board of the Hunchakians in Tbilisi headed by Arshak Babayan (A. the Iron) had spoken out against the secession of Armenia from Russia as well, i.e. the declaration of independence of Transcaucasia³⁷.

The central board of the Hunchakians announced its decision that it did not want to see the fate of Armenians separated from Bolshevik Russia. At the same time, G. Yeghikyan noted: “Everywhere outside Tbilisi the Hunchakians welcomed Armenia’s independence with joy and enthusiasm”³⁸. This circumstance once again testifies to the split between the two branches of the Social-Democrat Hunchakian party, the local and foreign national and socialist, and now the Bolshevik. It turns out that the Hunchakians’ national branch outside Transcaucasia recognized the independence of the Republic of Armenia.

By the way, in “My Memories” **A-Do** (Hovhannes Ter-Martirosyan) dated the ANC statement to May 31³⁹.

One of the assessments of **General Andranik** to the question of how the Republic of Armenia was formed, was the following: “It was literally a deception by the Turks and the Germans. Their goal was to leave Turkish Armenia altogether, to erase the case of Turkish Armenia from the agenda of European diplomacy and to create an Armenia

³⁴ Idem.

³⁵ Karibi 1920: 171-172.

³⁶ NAA, f. 4045, l. 1, f. 221, p. 1.

³⁷ Yeghikyan 1939: 142.

³⁸ Yeghikyan 1939: 143.

³⁹ A-Do 2015: 413.

within Russian Armenia. If Turkey and Germany had been victorious, they would have drowned the Republic in Lake Sevan. Otherwise, they knew very well that the fate of the Armenia they established would be decided by the Russian state”⁴⁰. Andranik certainly meant that Soviet Russia would not give up Transcaucasia, and would sooner or later recapture it.

Leo’s (Arakel Babakhanyan) opinion was as follows: “Why don’t we declare that we are part of the state that has signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (referring to Soviet Russia – V. M.)? Let that state fulfill the obligation it has signed, and we can be sure that the Turks will take only Batumi and Kars and will not dare to put their hands on Alexandropol, Yerevan and Tbilisi as well”⁴¹.

At first glance, on the legal basis of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, it should have been like that, if, of course, the Armenian parties and the National Council recognized Soviet Russia, and vice versa. Neither the Armenian side, nor Russia recognized the Transcaucasian authorities after the Bolshevik coup. It’s quite another thing, if at least in April 1918, a political agreement were reached when there was a victorious position in Baku and if St. Shahumyan’s program of sovietization of Transcaucasia and strengthening of the Armenian factor were realized.

In this regard, we consider it necessary to dwell on a complete archival package of the most important original document.

In early 1918 the Armenian Revolutionary Committee of the North Caucasus was formed in Armavir. On April 20, when the Baku Commune had already been formed, Sirak Grigoryan, the military commissar of the Committee turned to the Armenian Committee of Moscow⁴². The main task of the latter at that stage was to present a number of essential details related to the support of Baku from the North Caucasus and to the possible sovietization of Transcaucasia.

First, it turned out that S. Grigoryan and H. Ohanjanyan were in Rostov-on-Don, then in Armavir, and three days later H. Ohanjanyan returned to Tbilisi and military commissar S. Grigoryan - to Baku. In Rostov they had organized several consultations with S. Orjonikidze, Commissar Extraordinary of the Council of People’s Commissars.

Hence, it turned out that S. Orjonikidze organized Bolshevik military units in South Russia, of course, against anti-Bolshevik forces, and in particular, to protect Baku from external danger. S. Grigoryan considered that S. Orjonikidze “is unfamiliar with the developments in the Caucasus, but he is personally very supportive of us (the Armenian Military Union, the ARF – V. M.) and promises every support. **Due to the fact that in Baku our people fought with the Bolsheviks against the Turks, and a very close activity has started between us, Shahumyan and the Bolsheviks, that circumstance has made them more confident in us.** Work there with Teryan,

⁴⁰ Mihranyan 1921: 10.

⁴¹ Leo 2009: 368.

⁴² NAA, f. 321, l. 1, f. 1, p. 51.

Hovhannisyan (referring to Vahan Teryan and Ashot Hovhannisyan – V. M.) and Karakhan to help us and instruct Orjonikidze.

In these two months we were able to establish good relations with the Bolsheviks in the North Caucasus: they support sending our echelons... In Baku, our people (referring to the ARF and Armenians in general – V. M.), ***together with the Bolsheviks have defeated the Turks; and now there is Soviet rule there. We must support that Baku get help from Astrakhan***⁴³ (emphasis added by us – V. M.).

Later, the Armenian National Committee of Armavir addressed the ANC, noting that they had purchased a significant amount of wheat, which was forbidden to be sent through Tuapse according to St. Shahumyan's order, so they requested the mediation of the Armenian National Council so that Shahumyan cancelled his order by telegram. It becomes clear that Sirak Grigoryan was already in Moscow and his goal was to get the money, clothes and cars promised by the Council of People's Commissars. It was once again emphasized that the relations of the Armenian National Committee of Armavir "with the Bolsheviks are good and are getting better: here they are dissatisfied with Transcaucasia, where their delegates and representatives are allegedly arrested". At the end of the telegram, the same question about the arrests of the Bolsheviks was repeated: another important fact became known that "one week ago Bekzadyan left Mineralnye Vody for Tsaritsin (Volgograd – V. M.) to transport bread to Baku... The connection with Petrovsk has been cut off"⁴⁴.

It can be assumed that if T. Bekzadyan was trying to provide Baku with bread, St. Shahumyan's ban on bread import to Transcaucasia through Tuapse is explained by the fact that the chairman of the Baku Commune was concerned that the wheat sent to Transcaucasia would not reach Armenians, but would be confiscated by the Seim, the Georgian Mensheviks.

And this is not just one episode of that cooperation. During April-July, 1918 in different regions of Russia, from Kharkov to Irkutsk, the branches of the Armenian National Council and the Armenian Military Union, the Moscow Committee for the Defense of Armenia carried out huge organizational work, mainly in sending the Armenian Armed Forces to Baku and Armenia.

Let us mention some of them: on May 3, 1918 Abraham Gyulkhandanyan, Chairman of the Armenian National Council of Baku, addressed the Armenian National Committee in Moscow informing that: "a group of Armenian volunteer soldiers (45 people), joining the Hashtarkhan (modern Astrakhan – V.M.) group (8 people), arrived in Baku in late April led by G. Mazmanyanyan"⁴⁵. We especially emphasize the following consideration: "We hope that in a short time the roads will open, and ***we will have the opportunity to move our military units to the west***"⁴⁶.

⁴³ NAA, f. 321, l. 1, f. 1, p. 52-53.

⁴⁴ NAA, f. 201, l. 1, f. 36, p. 117-118.

⁴⁵ NAA, f. 321, l. 1, f. 1, p. 30.

⁴⁶ Idem.

S. Gyulkhandanyan was referring to the realization of St. Shahumyan's plan to direct the Armenian military units of the victorious Baku to the province of Yerevan, and from there to Western Armenia. In this regard, of great importance is Rostom's letter from Baku addressed to "Tbilisi, Palace, to Karcikyan"⁴⁷.

In view of the ceasefire in Alexandropol and the Turkish ultimatum, Rostom presented the scenario of possible developments, focusing on a number of notable emphases.

In his opinion, the Turks might not violate the ceasefire yet, securing their western border by occupying Batumi, Kars, Ardahan and they might wait for the occupation of the Tabriz-Rasht-Batumi-Tbilisi-Baku-Rostov-Petrovsk line. After the entire Transcaucasia appeared in a blockade, every violation of the ceasefire, the introduction of new demands made it impossible to restore order in the Caucasus and establish a strong power. "The condition of non-interference is in itself the first step of intervention", - Rostom wrote⁴⁸. He believed that it would lead to a new fratricidal war, would weaken the fighting parties and relying on one of them would establish its dominance, as it happened in Finland, Ukraine, Rostov and other places. **"In the current situation the unification of the entire democracy of the Caucasus is an urgent need"**, - Rostom concluded⁴⁹ (emphasis added by us - V. M.). Then followed Rostom's practical suggestions. He requested to immediately send a delegation of the Seim to Baku and addressed a question to Kh. Karcikyan: "Is it possible to restore the railway communication for Armenians with your resources?"⁵⁰. Expressing full confidence and sympathy for the Soviet government, and obviously for St. Shahumyan, Rostom mentioned the following as fruits of the March victory: "Quba, Derbent, Petrovsk, Temirkhan-Shura, Lankaran and Salyan have been occupied by the Soviet troops. There is hope that the railway communication in the north will be restored soon"⁵¹, i.e. a connection will be established with the Soviet power in the North Caucasus.

Alexander Baghiryanyan, President of the Armenian Military Union of Kharkov, informed the head of the Moscow branch of the AMU that about 600 Armenian soldiers from Kharkov and surrounding villages had been sent to Armenia and arrived in Tbilisi and **"some of their outfit and weapons have been received from the Soviet authorities"**⁵² (emphasis added by us - V. M.). Money and Armenian soldiers provided with weapons were going to be sent from Rostov, Yekaterinoslav as well.

Bogdan Avanesov, the Armenian military commissar of Voronezh, reported that according to the April 19 order of the Moscow Council of Defense of Armenia, a mandatory general conscription of Armenians aged 18-32 was announced. They were

⁴⁷ Idem.

⁴⁸ Idem.

⁴⁹ Idem.

⁵⁰ Idem.

⁵¹ Idem.

⁵² NAA, f. 321, l. 1, f. 1, p.24.

to enlist on May 14 and 15, and those who did not show up would be considered deserters and would be held accountable⁵³. And on May 31 he informed that **“none of the local Armenians showed up”** (emphasis added by us - V. M.) and only a detachment consisting of 12 people was formed and sent in the direction of Voronezh-Gryazi-Tsaritsin-Astrakhan-Baku-Tbilisi⁵⁴.

And on June 2, that very B. Avanesov informed Meburnutov, the Armenian military commissar of Moscow that the Persian-Armenians of Voronezh had declared their non-conscription⁵⁵.

On May 4, V. Janlatyan, the Chairman of the Armenian National Council of Irkutsk asked the Armenian National Committee of Moscow to report news on the defense of the Caucasus, especially Armenia⁵⁶.

He reported that the National Council, formed in Irkutsk on January 20, 1918, had sent two detachments to Tbilisi at the disposal of the AMU. The first group mainly consisted of Western Armenian prisoners of war that were in Siberia and Irkutsk military district, and the second group consisted of 50 volunteers that had come to Irkutsk from the Far East. The third detachment was in the process of formation. On behalf of the National Council V. Janlatyan asked for permission to send the detachment to Moscow or directly to Tbilisi at the disposal of the AMU⁵⁷.

Similar messages were sent by Mkrtych Melikyan, I. Khudinyan, Mandelyan – the heads of the Armenian National Councils of Kharkov⁵⁸, Nizhny Novgorod⁵⁹ and Syzran⁶⁰.

On May 13, Tonoyants, commissar of the Armenian Commissariat of Ukraine, Crimea and Moldova and Chief of Staff Ter-Danielyants turned to the Defense Council of Armenia in Moscow. The Commissariat, organized in early January 1918, united the territories of South-Western Romanian fronts and the military personnel, the respective republics, besides; it had branches in Iasi, Chisinau, Zhmerinis, Berdychiv, Simferopol, and Kharkov.

They reported that by working together with the Georgian Commissariat, the Armenian Commissariat had been able to gain the trust of the central Ukrainian government “despite the frequent changes in the latter and political upheavals”⁶¹. Before the Germans entered Kiev, the Armenian soldiers were being sent to Transcaucasia in full outfit. During four months (January-May) 5000 Armenian militants were sent and 4000 people were conscripted⁶².

⁵³ NAA, f. 321, l. 1, f. 1, p. 25.

⁵⁴ NAA, f. 321, l. 1, f. 1, p. 28.

⁵⁵ NAA, f. 321, l. 1, f. 1, p. 26.

⁵⁶ NAA, f. 321, l. 1, f. 1, p. 33.

⁵⁷ NAA, f. 321, l. 1, f. 1, p. 34-35.

⁵⁸ NAA, f. 321, l. 1, f. 1, p. 39, 61.

⁵⁹ NAA, f. 321, l. 1, f. 1, p. 41.

⁶⁰ NAA, f. 321, l. 1, f. 1, p. 27.

⁶¹ NAA, f. 321, l. 1, f. 1, p. 38.

⁶² Idem.

The example of this Commissariat reveals the functions of other Armenian national bodies as well. The Armenian Commissariat in Kiev solved not only strategic, but also political and national issues; it had undertaken to protect the interests and property of the Armenian population living in Ukraine. It is noteworthy that after the German occupation of Ukraine, the Armenian Commissariat operated “exclusively under the national flag”⁶³.

The National Committee of the Armenians of Petrograd, addressing the Defense Council of Armenia on April 25, announced its initiative to establish a medical and sanitary department for the Armenians wounded in the war. The head of the initiative was doctor **Levon Orbeli**, who petitioned the Northern Front and the All-Russian Zemstvo Council to provide medicine, disinfectants, linen, etc. on preferential terms⁶⁴.

On June 2, the Executive Committee of the Kislovodsk Armenian Compatriotic Union, under the chairmanship of A. Asribekyan turned to the ANC. They considered that at a historical, crucial stage, being mainly unaware of the situation in the Caucasus and Armenia, they “could make dangerous mistakes, so we ask you to regularly share information on the current political and historical developments, at the same time giving an idea of the main points of national policy in case of every important change in your policy. It is necessary to send a messenger for this purpose once a week”⁶⁵.

Then probably the most important thing came to light that the Armenian National Council “was immediately transferred to: **150.000 rubles – Levon Mantashyan, 25.000 rubles – Vladimir Mandinyan, 83.000 rubles transferred to Armavir for the needs of migrants. We have also received reliable bills of 1 million rubles from some of the persons subject to the National Tax that we will transport to you**”⁶⁶ (emphasis added by us - V. M.).

Finally, returning to our main topic, i.e. the issue of the possible support of the Soviet government in the anti-Turkish struggle, let us dwell on the telephone conversation between the National Councils in Tbilisi and Armavir and the issues raised there.

Secretary Ter-Harutyunyan spoke on behalf of the Armenian National Council. Speaking about the possible destruction threatening Armenia after the capture of Alexandropol, Ter-Harutyunyan was trying to find out from the Armavir National Council what the Soviet government was thinking: **“All of the Armenians have directed their gaze at the North”**. The answer from Armavir was that “only now, with the help of the Soviet power, we have broken the neck of our bourgeoisie and we think of helping the National Council soon”. The justification for the declaration of independence by the ANC is also noteworthy: “Our government (meaning the Seim – V. M.) consists mostly of Muslim beys and khans and Georgian nationalists. In Batumi the latter were persuaded

⁶³ Idem.

⁶⁴ NAA, f. 321, l. 1, f. 1, p. 31.

⁶⁵ NAA, f. 201, l. 1, f. 36, p. 113.

⁶⁶ Idem.

that ***Georgians would gain political autonomy if they introduced Turkish orientation in Transcaucasia. If the Armenian representatives joined that government it was only done not to provoke Armenian-Georgian conflicts***⁶⁷ (emphasis added by us - V. M.).

We managed to find out the person representing Armavir. Since he was representing the party and its central committee, we can conclude that it was the local Bolshevik revolutionary organization - the Armenian Revolutionary Committee of the North Caucasus and its leader, Sirak Grigoryan. This is confirmed by the connection between S. Grigoryan and H. Ohanjanyan as well. By the way, at the end of the conversation, he was inviting H. Ohanjanyan to join a call the next day for the purpose of resolving a number of issues and informed that he would leave for Moscow in two days⁶⁸.

Thus, the totality of the facts leads us to the conclusion that at the height of the Turkish invasion, particularly after the fall of Kars and Alexandropol, in a series of new political orientations besides the Turkish and German, the ANC and a part of the ARF were trying to use the possibility of support by Soviet Russia in the context of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. It is difficult to unequivocally assess the possibility of its positive result, despite the above-mentioned steps. However, one thing is clear that Bolshevik Russia was hostile towards the fact of independence of Transcaucasia, especially the emergence of independent national republics. The difficult domestic situation in Russia, the ongoing uncompromising struggle for power and the consequent unleashing of civil war did not make the sovietization of Transcaucasia possible for the moment. The best proof of that is that the government of Lenin could not or “did not want” to help the Baku commune.

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