

**SOLUTION OF THE ARMENIAN QUESTION ACCORDING TO V. D. PLETNYEV
(On the eve of the World War I)**

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Abstract

On March, 1914 Professor of Petersburg's military-juridical academy, colonel, journalist, publicist, public figure Vladimir D. Pletnyev (1878–1954), arrives in Transcaucasus where in hall of the Tiflis Royal theatre he gave a lecture called “The Armenian Question and Europe”. He lectured on the same theme in Yerevan, Alexandropol, Kars, Batum and Baku, too.

According to the press reports V. Pletnyov had comprehensively studied the Armenian Question, the conditions of the Armenian land, the past and the present of the Armenian people. In accordance with it, he spoke about the Armenian Question, the phases of its development, the benefits and positions of Russia, England, Germany and Turkey connected with that question and then concluded, that only Russia and the Russian people can give a helping hand to the culture-creating people of Old East and save them from the massacre and extermination.

Keywords: *Vladimir D. Pletnyev, Armenian Question, Berlin Treaty, Israel Ori, six vilayets*

It is a well-known fact, that on January 26, 1914, a Russian-Turkish agreement was signed on the implementation of reforms in Western Armenia. Two months later, Vladimir D. Pletnyev, Professor at the St. Petersburg Military Law Academy, colonel and journalist, publicist, public figure, arrives in Transcaucasus to deliver lectures on the Armenian Question.¹ The press had announced that he had already left St. Petersburg

¹ V. D. Pletnyev (October 8, 1878 - June 22, 1954, Casablanca, buried in a local cemetery, Morocco). Graduated from the Military Law Academy, Associate Professor of the Petrograd University on criminal law. He delivered lectures at the Military Law Academy, at the Higher Schools of the Artillery Department. Professor, Chairman of the Society for Reasonable Entertainment of Employees of Commercial Enterprises, Scientific Secretary of the Slavic Society, He was the editor of the Petersburg Courier, Member of the World War on the Caucasian front, chief of staff of a special purpose brigade. With the beginning of the revolution, he entered the disposal of General L. G. Kornilov, wrote his first biography for distribution in the army. In 1919 he left for Yugoslavia at the invitation of the government. He was the first secretary of the Sovereign Commission for Russian Refugees, the founder and director of the male gymnasium, and then created the female gymnasium. He opened more than ten technical courses for Russian officers, a hospital for Russian tuberculosis children in Herzog Novi. Then he moved to Prague. From 1934 he lived in

and would arrive “directly to Tiflis”, to deliver lectures here, in Yerevan, Alexandropol, Batumi and Baku.²

During his visit to Tiflis, V. Pletnyev communicated with many representatives of the Armenian public. So, on March 20, he attended the regular 33rd meeting of the Caucasian Society of Armenian Writers. The evening was opened by the Chairman, H. Tumanyan, who, in his welcoming remarks, also greeted the honorable guest.³

V. Pletnyev’s lecture on the topic “Armenian Question and Europe” was delivered on March 25 in Tiflis, at the state theater.⁴ Before that, on March 22, V. Pletnyev delivered a lecture in Yerevan, on March 23 - in Alexandropol. Press reports indicated that he was one of the best experts on the Armenian Question and a supporter of its cardinal solution - the full implementation of the requirements of Article 61 of the Berlin Treaty of 1878. According to Pletnyev, this is possible if conditions and procedures are created in Armenia, which were established by England, Russia, France and Italy on Crete in 1897, after the island received full autonomy. V. Pletnyev, with his lectures, tried to convey the Armenian Question to the people of Russia and present the Russian public opinion with an irrefutable truth, a political axiom - the solution of this problem is fully in line with the interests of Russia.⁵ It was also reported that he will present this report on March 27 in Batumi, and on March 29 in Baku.⁶

The Armenian and Russian press of Tiflis widely covered V. Pletnyev’s lectures. The lecturer presented the following program:

1. Historical essay on the development of the Armenian Question and its connection with Russian politics until 1854;
2. The rivalry between Turkey and Russia for Armenia until 1854;
3. The vital need for reforms in the Armenian vilayets (provinces);
4. Intervention of Europe and the question of the implementation of reforms under the control of Europe after the Treaty of Paris;
5. Programs for the improvement of living conditions in Armenia before the Berlin Congress;
6. Futility of programs;
7. San Stefano agreement as a real basis for reforms in Armenia;

Casablanca. In 1939–1945, on an American order, he wrote a book about Roosevelt’s policy and its consequences.

(see: <http://www.dommuseum.ru/index.php?m=dist&pid=9641&PHPSESSID=da6e293f80df7744931d451004f6ae4b>; <http://www.photoarchive.spb.ru/showChildObjects.do?object=2510517612&language=1>)

² Mshak, 15. III. 1914, 18. III. 1914, Horizon, 18. III. 1914

³ Horizon, 22. III. 1914

⁴ The newspaper "Kavkaz" (25. III. 1914) reported that the topic of the report would be: “The Armenian Question in Turkey (The Armenian Question and Europe in connection with the issues of Russia in the East)”

⁵ Horizon, 25. III. 1914

⁶ Mshak, 18. III. 1914

8. Berlin Congress: the attitude of England and Russia towards the Armenian reforms and the theoretical elimination of Turkish domination;
9. Council of Cyprus of 1878 as a broad development of the idea of reforms in Turkey;
10. Reform programs of 1880 and 1895 and their infertility;
11. Mass *pogroms* as a result of European programs - 1822 in Chios, 1850 in Kurdistan, 1860 in Lebanon and Damascus, 1876 in Bulgaria, 1895–1896 in Armenia and Sasun, 1908 in Adana and the constant extermination of Armenians from 1909 to the present day;
12. The reasons for the impossibility of the actual implementation of all programs are presented in the political, economic and legal life of Turkey;
13. The Balkan War as a New Period in the Implementation of Armenian Reforms: Russia's New Tasks and Germany's Intervention;
14. The Russian reform program of 1912 and the rivalry around it between the Alliance and the Entente;
15. The position of Germany in connection with the problem of the Baghdad railway and its difference from the Russian approaches and standpoints;
16. The Potsdam Agreement and its negative impact on the political and military position of Russia on the borders with Persia and Turkey;
17. The strategic importance of the Armenian Highlands for ensuring the security of Russia in case of a German attack;
18. Armenian Question - Russian Question;
19. The reforms to be implemented in Armenia will remove the harm caused by the Potsdam Agreement;
20. Armenian reforms seem to be a natural condition for Turkey's independence;
21. Only the immediate implementation of fundamental reforms can finally save the Armenians of Asia Minor from complete annihilation.⁷

According to the press, at the beginning of the lecture, V. Pletnyev explained his goal: "The lecture should show that a favorable solution to the Armenian question is important not only for the Armenians, but also for the Russian government and for the Russian people".⁸ Moving on to the essence of the problem, the lecturer presented in details the stages of development of the Armenian Question. Let us note that the history of the Armenian Question is generally well-known, but since the solution of this problem is still relevant today, we consider it necessary to present the point of view of a prominent Russian officer-journalist and publicist.

According to Pletnyev, the Armenian Question has a 200-year history and attracts the attention of Russia and Europe. Back at the end of the 17th century, the Armenians, unable to endure the oppression of the Turks and Persians, sent a delegation headed by Israel Ori to Europe with a request for help. After appealing to the European states,

⁷ Horizon, 25. III. 1914, Mshak, 25. III. 1914. By the way, in Horizon, the 10th point was omitted.

⁸ Horizon, 27. III. 1914.

envisaging their intervention with favorable consequences for the Armenians, Ori, on the advice of the German Kaiser, turns to Russia, because only with the help of this state could anything be done for the Armenians. Peter the Great receives the Armenians and promises to show support. Ori went to Persia as a Russian ambassador, being sure that it is through the efforts of Russia that the liberation of the Armenians will be realized. After the end of the Northern War (1700-1721), Russian troops in 1723 were sent against Persia and captured Baku, from where they intended to move along the coast of the Caspian Sea and conquer the Armenian-populated provinces under the rule of Turkey and Persia.

But Peter the Great was not able to complete the work he had begun, and his successors rather mediocly continued the initiatives of their talented predecessor. According to the lecturer, since the time of Nicholas I, Russian interests in the countries bordering Persia and Turkey have become so clear that there is an urgent need to resolve the Armenian Question. In the 18th century, England became Russia's rival on this issue - the interests of the latter dictated London the need to protect Turkey from other European states. Until the middle of the 19th century, only Russia was considered a country that raised the Armenian Question. In 1855, Russia received heavy blows; doubts arose as to whether it would rise again: the Armenian Question started to be observed as a matter of concern to all of Europe. And according to the Paris Treaty,⁹ it was decided that Turkey, as an independent state, should implement reforms in the country, in particular, in the Armenian vilayets, itself, moreover, under the control of Europe. Turkey accepts this proposal and until 1866 several times promises to implement reforms. However, it does not fulfill the promises, moreover, harassment and pogroms are intensifying. Turkey was sure that the European states would not be able to demand the implementation of reforms.

V. Pletnyev notes that in 1866 there was an uprising on the island of Crete, which was brutally suppressed by Turkey. European states are beginning to understand that reforms under the auspices of Europe will not be carried out in the Armenian vilayets. It becomes clear that only through Russia can pressure be exerted on Turkey. The European states, as it were, silently agreed to entrust the solution of the Armenian question to Russia, however, on the condition that the power of the Sultan and the independence of Turkey remain unshakable.

During the Russian-Turkish war of 1877–1878, Russians reached San Stefano: trapped, the Turks were forced to agree to carry out the promised reforms under Russian control. But England was very attentive towards the situation, the strengthening of Russia and the concluded treaty threatened her interests. And through the efforts of England, in 1878, the Berlin Congress was convened, at which Russia's right to control the implementation of reforms was canceled - it was transferred to all of Europe. Turkey again promises to organize the process of reforms and in 1880 and 1895 presents a

⁹ The Paris Peace Treaty (Paris Treaty) is an international treaty signed on March 18 (30), 1856 at the Paris Congress.

broad program. Reforms remain only on a paper - Turkey continues its previous policy, playing on the interests of Russia and England, until Germany appears on the political arena. After that, the knot becomes even more tangled.¹⁰

In 1888, Germany received a concession for the construction of a 300-kilometer railway in Anatolia, and then for its continuation. When the Baghdad Railway turned south towards the Persian Gulf, England started to realize that this was very harmful to its interests. The Armenian *pogroms* of 1895-1896 begin, and the European powers again turn their attention to the need for reforms. England once more determines for itself that only Russia is able to force Turkey to put an end to the pogroms and carry out reforms. However, this would hurt British interests. Germany realized how beneficial it is friendship with Turkey.

During a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, Kaiser Wilhelm writes to the Sultan that he will always remain a friend of Turkey. Germany understood that the preservation of the integrity of Turkey was very beneficial, and for this reason Germany was the main rival of Russia. In July 1913, during the meeting of the ambassadors of European states held in Constantinople, during the discussion of the program of reforms proposed by Russia, Germany came out as an ardent opponent of any reforms in Armenia. Russia drew up an extensive reform program, through which it sought to create a sphere of influence in Turkey where it could protect its economic and political interests. Considering that the power of the Sultan should in no case be infringed upon, Germany did not accept proposals to appoint general inspectors in the vilayets where reforms had to be realized, to streamline the land and economic issue, and other important proposals. As a result, the program proposed by Russia changed and turned into a document, the implementation of which, in the lecturer's opinion, will not lead to significant changes in the Armenian populated vilayets.

According to the newspaper "Kavkaz", V. Pletnyev, among other things, expressed the following approaches to the issue: "After the Balkan War, the question of dividing the Turkish possessions in Asia Minor between the great powers became too relevant and vital. England used to be Russia's rival in this region. From the time Germany received the concession for the construction of railways in Anatolia, Russia began to be threatened by the German danger on our Transcaucasian frontier. Back in the time of Abdul-Hamid, Germany had in mind to populate the entire strip along the railways with Germans and replace the indigenous Armenian population in Armenia with Ottoman Turks from western Anatolia, thus destroying the ethnic barrier, which is the six Turkish settlements bordering the Transcaucasus inhabited by Armenians. In case of complications in the west, Germany, having carried out its plans, could organize sabotage in the regions bordering on the Transcaucasus, throwing Ottomans led by its officers at us. Hence the importance for Russia of the strategic position of Armenia is clear. True, at the present political moment there are no grounds for assuming that

¹⁰ Horizon, 27. III. 1914, Mshak, 27. III. 1914.

Turkey, even under the influence of Berlin friends, could embark on an adventure that is risky for it. But the situation may change, and then Armenia may play the role of a natural barrier for Russia".¹¹

V. Pletnyev believes that the recently adopted reform program in Turkey will bring almost nothing to the Armenians. Control over their implementation remained in the hands of the European powers, which led to the preservation of the former situation. The lecturer believed that in order for the proposed reforms to have the desired result, control over their implementation should be transferred to one authorized state. This state could only be Russia, because, as a neighboring power, it would not allow pogroms and oppression on its borders - this would cause great harm to its economic and political interests. For this reason, Russia would have to take drastic measures for the quick implementation of reforms.

Further, V. Pletnyev notes that until now he has been focusing on the benefits of a positive solution to the Armenian Question both for Armenians and for Russia. But besides the benefit, the lecturer emphasizes, there is also a conscience. It is impossible to remain silent when talented people, who have great culture, are subjected to pogroms and sufferings. And Russia, the Russian people must "work" in this direction. V. Pletnyev recalls the Russian-Persian, Russian-Turkish wars, when the Armenians with great enthusiasm supported Russian troops. The speaker concludes that the Russian people should help the suffering Armenians. A talented people is dying: "Let these interests not exist, let Russia, the entire Russian people, in the name of universal culture, in the name of conscience, save the perishing people".¹² "If," said V. Pletnyev, "state policy is based at the present historical moment on the so-called real interests in which there is no place for sentimentality, then it does not follow from this that the feeling has been etched out of the hearts of ordinary citizens, members of Russian society. The people who make up this society cannot and must not remain indifferent to the horrors that the unfortunate Armenian population has experienced and is experiencing in their neighborhood. Russian society must go hand in hand with the Russian government and achieve real guarantees of the inviolability of the life and property of Armenians in the Turkish provinces. On January 26, 1914, Russia, on behalf of the powers, concluded a formal agreement with Turkey regarding the implementation of reforms in Armenia. But the final resolution of the Armenian Question is still in the future; its fate depends entirely on the international situation around Russia".¹³

According to the press, the lecture lasted about four hours. The overcrowded theater hall rewards V. Pletnyev with prolonged, stormy applause.¹⁴

¹¹ Kavkaz, 27.III. 1914.

¹² Horizon, 28. III. 1914, See also Mshak, 27. III. 1914.

¹³ Kavkaz, 27.III. 1914.

¹⁴ Mshak reports that Colonel Pletnyev, after completing the lecture, at 12 o'clock in the morning went to Kars to make the report. He will also deliver lectures in Alexandropol, and on March 30 in Baku (see Mshak, 27.III.1914).

From the above mentioned material, we can conclude that the Russian government, on the threshold of the First World War, not only tried to probe the moods of the Armenian people, but also tried in every possible way to inspire the Armenians with the idea that only Russia could be their savior.¹⁵

By the way, V. D. Pletnyev addressed the Armenian Question in January 1917, too. According to the newspaper "Petrogradskiye Vedomosti", he, in the society of Slavic Scientific Unity, chaired by a member of the State Council A. V. Vasiliev, made a report on the Armenian Question.

Having familiarized the meeting with the Armenian Question comprehensively, starting with the memorandum of 1895 and ending with the Tsargrad (Constantinople – A.Z.) meeting of 1913, the speaker, having considered the projects for the liberation of Armenia (1) of only six vilayets: Van, Bitlis, Sivas, Harput, Mush, Diyarbekir, (2) six vilayets with the addition to them Trebizond with Trebizond and 3 and the mentioned vilayets with the addition of Cilicia (with the harbor of Alexandretta), spoke out for the protectorate of Russia over the whole of Armenia with access to the Mediterranean Sea and against the new division of the Armenian territories after the world war".¹⁶

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¹⁵ By the way, on the same days in Moscow, "during the merchants' meeting", a member of the State Duma P. N. Milyukov made a report on the Armenian Question, emphasizing the same ideas (Mshak, 22. III, 1914, 26. III. 1914, Horizon, 22. III. 1914, Kavkaz, 27. III. 1914).

¹⁶ Armenian Herald, N 5, January 29, 1917, p. 20.