

BUILDINGS AND EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT OF NERSISYAN SCHOOL IN TIFLIS

Edgar Hovhannisyan*

Abstract

Nerses Ashtaraketsi has played an important role in the social, spiritual, cultural life of the Armenians of the first half of the 19th century. As a clergyman and Catholicos of All Armenians (1843-1857), he has focused on education issues. At the latter's initiative and direct participation, in 1824, the famous Nersisyan School was founded in Tiflis. During the 100 years of its activities, it played a significant role in the life of Armenians. Every educational institution needs both qualified pedagogical staff and a favorable educational environment to carry out effective activities. Nerses Ashtaraketsi and later the representatives of the school's trusteeship did everything in that direction, providing an educational environment that meets the requirements of the time. The school was located in three main buildings. The first building was built at the direct initiative of Nerses Ashtaraketsi and in 1824 school operated directly in that building. The building was one of the most beautiful ones in Tiflis and was not inferior to similar European educational institutions of the time. In 1854 a new building was bought for the Nersisyan School, the building of the post office near the Alexandrian Park in Tiflis. In 1859-1912 the school mainly operated in that building. Some classes were also held in buildings located in different districts of Tiflis. The last building of Nersisyan School was built in 1909-1912 with the funding, allocated by a philanthropist Alexander Mantashyan. Built in an exclusively Armenian architectural style, the building was unique in its kind. It completely corresponded to modern educational institutions providing quality education. The article discusses the history of the creation of Nersisyan school's buildings and the conditions of education.

Keywords: Nersisyan School, Nerses Ashtaraketsi, Alexander Mantashyan, Tiflis, educational life, school buildings.

Introduction

The social, spiritual, and cultural life of the Eastern Armenians of the first half of the 19th century is impossible to imagine without the activities of Nerses Ashtaraketsi. It

*Dean of the Faculty of History and Social Science of ASPU, PhD, Associate Professor, hovhannisyanedgar@yahoo.com

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is no coincidence that A. Yeritsyan considers the latter to be the “most outstanding person”¹ among the Armenian clergy of the 19th century. As a clergyman and Catholicos of All Armenians (1843-1857), the latter’s focus was not only on the issues of Armenia’s liberation and the spiritual and religious life of the Armenians, but also on issues of education. On the direct initiative of Nerses Ashtaraketsi, a number of schools were opened in various Armenian-populated areas.² However, the latter always sought to establish a school that would meet the educational requirements of the time, which would be competitive and provide quality education.

Nerses Ashtaraketsi got the opportunity to realize his dream when, in 1814, at the age of 44, he was appointed Primate of the Armenian Diocese of Georgia and Imereti.³ The result of long-term persistent efforts was the establishment of the school that later bore his name in Tbilisi in 1824. During about one hundred years of activity, the Nersisyan School of Tbilisi left an indisputable trace on the lives of the Armenians, becoming a forge that trained clergymen, teachers, intellectuals, public and state figures. In the 19th and first decades of the 20th centuries, a significant part of the figures who carried out more or less significant activities in the Armenian socio-political, religious and cultural life and various other spheres were associated with the Nersisyan Theological School, either as its graduates⁴, or as teachers there, or simply as donors to that school.

The importance of the Nersisyan School in preserving the Armenian identity was also enormous. A. Yeritsyan testifies that at the beginning of the 19th century, although the main part of the Armenians of Tbilisi belonged to the Armenian Apostolic Church by faith, most of them had become Georgian-speaking. Nerses Ashtaraketsi also pursued a goal by founding his school: “...to make the Georgian-speaking Armenians of my country Armenian-speaking.”⁵ One of Nerses Ashtaraketsi’s biographers, H. Ter-Abrahamyan, writes on this occasion: “...for all his patriotic activities, Nerses was named Patriot by the order of the Synod of Etchmiadzin, first of all because, since the day of his activities, by opening church schools in Georgia and its surrounding areas, he made sixty thousand Armenians speak Armenian, who would usually speak Georgian before that...”⁶

¹ Yeritsyan 1898: 1.

² Ter-Abrahamyan 1881: 20, 37. Santrosyan 1981: 18-20.

³ Yeritsyan 1898: 29.

⁴ Agulyan *et al.* 1965 (eds) : 296.

⁵ Yeritsyan 1898: 270-271.

⁶ Ter-Abrahamyan 1881: 47-48.

The first building of the Nersisyan School

Every educational institution needs qualified pedagogical staff and an appropriate educational environment, a suitable building, furnishings, etc. During its operation, the Nersisyan School in Tbilisi was mainly located in three different buildings.

The first attempt by Ashtaraketsi to open a small school in Tbilisi took place in 1815, which was located in the northern cells of the Monastery Church. The sons of priests mainly studied here. The number of students did not exceed 20. However, this school was far from Ashtaraketsi's general ideas. The latter dreamed of building a "magnificent and lavish" building that would accommodate at least 800 students.

The first building of the Nersisyan School is being built at the expense of national donations and the funds of the Armenian Church. According to Ashtaraketsi's preliminary calculations, 30,000 rubles were needed for the construction of the school building. The latter planned to raise this amount through community donations and donations from wealthy individuals. The latter initially calculated that if at least every second family from the 12,000-person community of the Georgian-Armenian Diocese donated one ruble, 6,000 rubles would be collected for the beginning. When Ashtaraketsi presented to the community representatives that 30,000 rubles were needed for the needs of the school, the reaction of the Georgian-Armenian wealthy individuals was the following: "The archpriest wants to build a bank."⁷ However, Ashtaraketsi was not disappointed and consistently began to approach the construction of the school step by step. Already in 1816, Ashtaraketsi began to organize donations for the construction of the school building.⁸ It should be noted that the Nersisyan School throughout its existence has always received the support of benefactors, which has been one of the important means of maintaining the school, although through the efforts of Ashtaraketsi and later the school trustees, the school was also provided with its own income.

In addition to the school, Nerses Ashtaraketsi planned to carry out other construction works, such as renovating the buildings belonging to the diocese, constructing profitable buildings on the free lands belonging to the diocese, etc. On the latter's initiative, capital construction works began in July, 1818.⁹ H. Ter-Abrahamyan writes that the construction of the school building began in 1819: "...Understanding the current needs of the nation and the benefits of European enlightenment to the extent necessary, he worked with all his strength and efforts not only for the spiritual education of people under his patronage, but also for the future well-being of the nation as a whole, therefore, in 1819, with the help of the patriotic Haykazeants, the foundation of the current Nersisyan School's extensive campus began on the land of the Tiflis

⁷ Yeritsyan 1898: 34.

⁸ Nersisyan Armenian Theological Seminary 1861: 45.

⁹ Yeritsyan 1898: 40.

Cathedral,”¹⁰ the latter writes. According to other sources, excavation work for the foundation of the school building itself began in September 1821.¹¹

The official groundbreaking ceremony of the building took place on February 7, 1822. The school building was located in the square called “Soldatski Bazaar” (Soldier’s Market) in Tiflis. The building was designed by the architect F. Lelekul¹², who arrived from Petersburg by the invitation of Caucasus Governor Yermolov. The groundbreaking ceremony was attended by Caucasus Governor Yermolov, the mayor of Tiflis, and other high-ranking officials.¹³ It is known that Ashtaraketsi invited Armenian and Persian qualified craftsmen from Persia for the construction of the school building.¹⁴

Ashtaraketsi tried to approach the construction as frugally as possible, since the funds raised were not much. Even in order to make the construction materials cheaper, he was forced to open: “...his own factories”.¹⁵ In order to complete the construction of the school, as well as to provide the necessary income for its activities in the future, Ashtaraketsi built houses on the free territories belonging to the diocese, and 32 kiosks¹⁶ immediately adjacent to the school, which were leased out and later became known as the “caravansar”, which was intended primarily for Armenian merchants.¹⁷

Seeing Ashtaraketsi’s efforts, the prominent figures of the Georgian Armenian Diocese began a nationwide fundraiser to complete the construction of the school.¹⁸ Various wealthy Armenians from abroad also began to support the construction of the school, making large donations.¹⁹

It was planned that the school building should meet modern requirements. As mentioned, a nationwide fundraiser was held for the construction, which should be sufficient. However, “due to the expansion of the building, as well as the addition of private apartments, it was not enough.” So, Nerses Ashtaraketsi devoted almost all his financial means to the construction of the national school.²⁰ In other words, Nerses Ashtaraketsi also allocated his personal funds for the construction of the school building. However, it turns out that this was not enough to complete the building. The members of the Lazaryan family also allocated more than 7,000 rubles for the construction of the school, and Mahtesi Gaspar from Van allocated 4,600 rubles in silver

¹⁰ Ter-Abrahamyan 1881: 7. Grigoryan 1975: 17-18.

¹¹ Yeritsyan 1898: 68.

¹² NAA, fund 2, inv. 1, file 1, sheet 1.

¹³ Yeritsyan 1898: 69.

¹⁴ Yeritsyan 1898: 67-68.

¹⁵ Yeritsyan 1898: 40.

¹⁶ Yeritsyan 1898: 43-49.

¹⁷ Gamba 1826: 315-316.

¹⁸ Yeritsyan 1898: 50-55.

¹⁹ Yeritsyan 1898: 55-57.

²⁰ Ter-Abrahamyan 1881: 8.

to the school in his will.²¹ Khosrov-khan Samuelian-Ghaytmazian, who was captured from Tiflis during the time of Agha Mahmud Khan and moved to Persia, who was exiled and converted to Islam and reached an influential position in Persia during the reign of Baba Khan Shah, never lost his connection with the Armenians and, being in secret correspondence with Ashtaraketsi, sent the latter 4,000 rubles of silver for the construction of the school.²² However, the donations made were still not enough and Ashtaraketsi also included church funds for the construction of the building, as well as borrowing money from his close friends in individual cases. Later, there were also other donations for the school. Ashtaraketsi later noted in one of his letters that the costs of building the school amounted to about 40 thousand rubles. In 1826, when the school was already operating, the Georgian prince, General Otar Amilakhvari, impressed by the school's activities, donated the gardens of the village of Soghanlukh on the banks of the Kura River to the school, telling Nerses Ashtaraketsi: "You have lit a great lamp in my motherland."²³

According to sources, in 1824 the construction of the school building was already largely completed and Ashtaraketsi moved the small school in the Monastery to a new building and began recruiting students. The official opening of the school took place on December 1, 1824.²⁴ However, the final construction of the building continued for several more years. We also encounter different information regarding the completion of the school building. The main construction work continued until 1826, and the building was completed only in 1829.²⁵ A. Yeritsyan testifies that Nerses Ashtaraketsi left Tbilisi, that is, was sent to Bessarabia in 1828²⁶, "...almost without witnessing the final splendor and end of the school he had built."

The school was two-story, had a basement floor, and was designed for 800 students.²⁷ The school also had its own printing house. From the very first years of its operation, even in Russian state documents, the school began to be called the Nersisyan School or College²⁸ after the founder. Although in the documents we often read simply Tiflis Armenian College.²⁹

The first building of the Nersisyan School remained standing until 1905. In October of that year, during the revolutionary movements in Tiflis, the building was bombed and completely burned down along with the adjacent kiosks.³⁰

²¹ Ter-Abrahamyan 1881: 8.

²² Yeritsyan 1898: 57.

²³ Yeritsyan 1898: 61.

²⁴ NAA, fund 2, inv. 1, file 1, sheet 1.

²⁵ Yeritsyan 1898: 327. Santrosyan 1981: 21.

²⁶ Yeritsyan 1898: 75. NAA, fund 2, inv. 1, file 3, sheet 4-7.

²⁷ Yeritsyan 1898: 327.

²⁸ NAA, fund 2, inv. 1, file 1610, sheets 12-15.

²⁹ NAA fund 2, inv. 1, file 5, sheets 49, 51, 58.

³⁰ NAA, fund 2, inv. 1, file 1, sheet 1.

According to contemporaries, the first building of the school “was considered one of the important and most magnificent buildings in Tiflis... and was one of the luxurious buildings that adorned Tiflis.”³¹ Even various European travelers who arrived in Tiflis spoke with great admiration about the school and its infrastructure.³²

In 1830-1831, two American Protestant missionaries, Eli Smith and Harrison Gray Otis Dwight, traveled throughout Armenia and conducted research.³³ While in Tiflis, the latter visited the Nersisyan School. They highly appreciated the activities of Nerses Ashtaraketsi, especially his efforts in organizing education. According to the missionaries, in addition to the building conditions necessary for having a quality school, the issue of qualified specialists was extremely difficult. Nerses Ashtaraketsi managed to solve both problems.

During the missionaries’ visit, the school was closed due to the holidays, but the latter were impressed by the school building, which they considered Ashtaraketsi’s “proof of strong patriotism.”³⁴ According to the missionaries’ description, the school was two-story, brick-made, covered on both sides with colonnades and sculptures. The school hall looked especially impressive. According to the missionaries, 60-70 thousand rubles were spent on the construction of the school, part of which was allocated by Nerses Ashtaraketsi from his own resources.³⁵ In addition to the beautiful and comfortable building, the school was furnished in accordance with the educational requirements of the time. The missionaries testify that the classrooms they saw did not differ from European educational institutions, the classrooms were furnished with student benches and desks like those of European educational institutions.³⁶ According to the same missionaries, most of the Tiflis Armenians had poor knowledge of their native language, and the Nersisyan School was primarily aimed at preserving the national identity.

After the building was completed, Nerses Ashtaraketsi set about providing the newly built school with appropriately qualified personnel, which Ashtaraketsi also succeeded in doing.

As he notes in one of his letters: “The school was built by me with my own dedication, the beginning and completion of which were a surprise to all Armenian societies...”³⁷ Thus, through the initiative of Nerses Ashtaraketsi and thanks to his persistent efforts, it was possible to open an Armenian school in Tbilisi, which had a modern building and was provided with all the necessary educational conditions.

³¹ NAA, fund 2, inv. 1, file 1, sheet 1.

³² Gamba 1826: 315-316.

³³ Smith 1833.

³⁴ Smith 1833.

³⁵ Smith and Dwight 1834: 133.

³⁶ Smith and Dwight 1834: 134.

³⁷ Yeritsyan 1898: 327.

The second building of the Nersisyan School

For about thirty years, the school has been operating in its first building. The school's Board of Trustees has always focused on ensuring favorable conditions for education and continuous improvement. Over time, the building of the school began to fail to meet the existing requirements and there was a need to acquire a new building.

In 1854, while Nerses Ashtaraketsi was still alive, a new building was purchased for the Nersisyan School - the old building of the royal post station near the Alexander Garden in Tbilisi.³⁸ By the decision of the school's Board of Trustees, the building was expanded on three sides, renovation work was carried out. The old school building was also renovated, and the printing house was moved here.³⁹ Some parts of the old building with the adjacent kiosks were rented out, which provided some income for the school's activities.⁴⁰ New kiosks were also built later on the square adjacent to the old building.⁴¹ Already in January 1859, the school moved to a new building.⁴²

The Nersisyan School had a library, which was regularly replenished with new materials, as well as a number of museums of physics and natural sciences, including the "Armenian Museum", which was replenished with Armenian ethnographic material.⁴³ In other words, everything was done to create an effective educational environment and teach students practical knowledge and skills in addition to theoretical knowledge.

At the beginning of the 20th century, with the expansion of the Nersisyan School and the increase in the number of students, there was a need for new buildings. In the 1906-1907 academic year, the school was located in several buildings. 638 students studied in the main building, 258 students studied in the section located in the courtyard of the Red Gospel Church in Havlabar, and the school's highest 7th professional class with 60 students was located in one of the buildings purchased in the Sololaki district of Tbilisi.⁴⁴

There was a need to have a new building that would accommodate all the students of the school and meet the educational requirements of the time.

The Mantashyan Building of the Nersisyan School

The issue of building a new, comfortable building that would meet the current requirements for the Nersisyan School continued to be on the agenda. According to archival documents, since the late 1870s, the school Board of Trustees has been

³⁸ NAA, fund 2, inv. 1, file 1, sheet 1.

³⁹ Nersisyan Armenian Theological Seminary 1861: 23.

⁴⁰ Speeches and Report 1870: 6-8.

⁴¹ NAA, fund 2, inv. 1, file 446.

⁴² Grigoryan 1975: 58.

⁴³ NAA, fund 2, inv. 1, file 730, file 777, sheets 1-11.

⁴⁴ Grigoryan 1975: 58.

discussing the issue of a new building. The issue was discussed again in the late 1880s, and it was even decided that the building should be built near the old school building. An attempt was made to prepare projects.⁴⁵ However, due to the lack of funds, no practical steps were taken. In the 1890s, the school Board of Trustees even created a construction committee, but the issue was not resolved again.⁴⁶ In 1903, during the confiscation of Armenian Church property, the Nersisyan School estates were also confiscated, and in this case, the issue of construction of a new building was postponed again.⁴⁷

After the return of the church estates in 1905, the issue of a new building again was on the agenda. The Board of Trustees again created a committee for this purpose. It was decided that the new building should be built on the school estates in Tbilisi, part of which was donated by the late Mrs. Nadiryan, and the remaining part, about 24 dessiatines (measure of length), was purchased from the same lady by the school.⁴⁸

The school Board of Trustees decided to apply to the famous benefactor Alexander Mantashyan for the construction of a new building. In May 1908, a delegation was created with the participation of the diocesan leader and chairman of the school Board of Trustees, Archbishop Garegin Satunyan, and the school superintendent Av. Aharonyan, who were to travel to Petersburg to present the proposal to Mantashyan on behalf of the Board of Trustees and ask him to "...donate" for the construction of a new building for the Nersisyan school.⁴⁹

The great benefactor A. Mantashyan, who has always emphasized the role of education and has provided his support for its development, "willingly" agreed to undertake the construction of a new building and promised to allocate 150-200 thousand rubles for this purpose.⁵⁰

On May 21, 1908, the school's Board of Trustees heard the representatives of the delegation who had returned from Petersburg at its regular session and decided to address a letter of gratitude to Mantashyan, proposing at the same time: "1. To have the inscription engraved on the facade of the new building: "Built at the expense of Alexander Mantashyan." 2. To engrave the same on a copper plate and bury it in the foundation of the building. 3. To permanently keep two students in the school named after Mantashyan, from the poorest students."⁵¹ Mantashyan replied to that letter as follows: "It has long been one of my greatest desires to undertake the construction of a new building for the Nersisyan School, and I am pleased that, despite being condemned

⁴⁵ NAA, fund 2, inv. 1, file 789, sheets 1-3.

⁴⁶ NAA, fund 2, inv. 1, file 1, sheet 1.

⁴⁷ NAA, fund 2, inv. 1, file 1, sheet 2.

⁴⁸ NAA, fund 2, inv. 1, file 1, sheet 2.

⁴⁹ NAA, fund 2, inv. 1, file 1, sheet 2.

⁵⁰ NAA, fund 2, inv. 1, file 1, sheet 3.

⁵¹ NAA, fund 2, inv. 1, file 1, sheet 3.

to live in exile due to circumstances, it will be my turn to carry out this task...”⁵² The great benefactor was once again at his peak.

The preparatory work begins. It was vital that a number of important principles be established from the very beginning, on the basis of which the building was to be built. It had to: “...in all respects comply with all health and pedagogical requirements, and at the same time satisfy the instructions of the Armenian architectural style, as well as the location of the school’s land surface and other special conditions.”⁵³

As a result of the discussions, it was decided to announce an all-Russian competition and send the detailed conditions of the competition to the Imperial Society of Architects of Petersburg. A commission was elected for this purpose. At the same time, another commission created by the school’s pedagogical council studied the famous educational institutions of Tbilisi and submitted a proposal on what conditions the future building should have from a pedagogical point of view. In addition to a number of important conditions, it was proposed that the school should have chemistry and physics cabinets, art and music classrooms, a gymnasium, a geographical and historical museum, a banquet hall, etc.⁵⁴ In other words, the new building should fully comply with the requirements of modern education and the Nersisyan School should continue to maintain its advanced status. According to the project prepared by the commission, the cost of the school building was to be 250 thousand rubles, but taking into consideration that Mantashyan had promised 150-200 thousand rubles, some changes were made to the project, bringing the cost of construction to around 190 thousand rubles. Av. Aharonyan leaves for Paris and presents the new estimate to Mantashyan. The latter again agrees to cover all the expenses.⁵⁵

In October 1908, the Board of Trustees also formed a Construction Committee headed by Hovsep Mkrtychyan-Khununts. This committee also includes authoritative members of the community, representatives of the Board of Trustees, and architects.⁵⁶ This committee was to supervise and coordinate the entire process of construction. The Construction Committee decided to invite a chief architect, for whom a salary of 4 percent of the actual cost of the building was set, but not more than 8 thousand rubles. At a meeting held on March 8, 1909, architects Poghos Zurabyants and Mikhail Neprintsev were selected from a number of candidates, under whose patronage the construction of the new building of the Nersisyan School was later completed.⁵⁷ In order to ensure that the responsibilities of the school Board of Trustees and the construction committee are clear and that misunderstandings do not arise that could affect the

⁵² NAA, fund 2, inv. 1, file 1, sheet 3.

⁵³ NAA, fund 2, inv. 1, file 1, sheet 3.

⁵⁴ NAA, fund 2, inv. 1, file 1, sheet 4.

⁵⁵ NAA, fund 2, inv. 1, file 1, sheet 4.

⁵⁶ NAA, fund 2, inv. 1, file 1, sheet 5.

⁵⁷ NAA, fund 2, inv. 1, file 1, sheet 5.

progress of the building's construction, a special instruction is being developed that defines the responsibilities of that committee.⁵⁸

The conditions of the competition announced for the construction of the building were defined, which show that the conference had taken a rather serious approach to the issue. The task was to create a modern educational institution for 1000 students; the building should have at least 25 classrooms, each designed for 30-40 students.⁵⁹

In November 1908, the Petersburg Association of Architects announced the competition, and in January of the following year, the Board of Trustees of the Nersisyan School was informed that 33 projects had been submitted.⁶⁰ The Board of Trustees had its representatives in the competition committee, Associate Professor of Petersburg University David Zavryan and Member of the State Council P. Ghukasyan.⁶¹

In early February, the results of the competition were summarized, and the projects that took the first three places were determined⁶². However, committee member Zavryan wrote to the Board of Trustees, informing them that he was not satisfied with the results of the competition. The latter also reported that he liked the project of architect Schretter, who did not win, the most, and suggested purchasing that project. Soon, the four projects that had been selected were also sent to the Board of Trustees from Petersburg.⁶³

At a mixed session of the school Board of Trustees, teachers, and the construction committee on April 8, 1909, the projects were discussed. It was decided to choose the version named "Kelma" designed by civil engineer S. Moravitsky, who won first place. However, it needed certain changes, especially "...to give its exterior, as much as possible, a style corresponding to Armenian architecture."⁶⁴

Members of the construction committee, architects Zurabyants and Neprintsev, began to work on changing the project. As mentioned, one of the main tasks was to bring the building into line with the style of Armenian architecture. There is information that the latter used the motifs of the Sanahin Monastery in the exterior of the building.⁶⁵ Zurabyants and Neprintsev presented the newly revised project and estimate on May 29, 1909, which amounted to 280 thousand rubles. Since this amount exceeded the amount promised by Mantashyan, the Board of Trustees decided to send him another letter describing the process of the competition and attaching a picture of the project. In the letter, they also informed Mantashyan that they wanted to move the school to a new building in September 1910, and, in order not to waste time, they laid the foundation of

⁵⁸ NAA, fund 2, inv. 1, file 1, sheets 5-8.

⁵⁹ NAA, fund 2, inv. 1, file 1, sheet 8.

⁶⁰ NAA, fund 2, inv. 1, file 1867, sheets 8-14.

⁶¹ NAA, fund 2, inv. 1, file 1, sheet 9.

⁶² NAA, fund 2, inv. 1, file 1867, sheet 7.

⁶³ NAA, fund 2, inv. 1, file 1, sheets 10-12.

⁶⁴ NAA, fund 2, inv. 1, file 1, sheet 12.

⁶⁵ Skhirtladze 2023: 39-40.

the construction on June 20, 1909, in the presence and with the blessing of Catholicos Matevos II Izmirlian.⁶⁶

It is interesting that in the reply letter, Mantashyan criticizes the increase in the construction budget by such a large amount and reports that “current circumstances do not allow” him to allocate that amount, offering to stay within the previously promised amount.⁶⁷ At one point, there was discussion of reducing the budget, but this could have affected both the appearance and conditions of the school. However, in early 1910, Mantashyan, who was in Tiflis, met with the delegation representing the Nersisyan School, and Mantashyan again agreed to provide 250 thousand rubles.⁶⁸

For the construction of the school, it was also necessary to solve two important issues: first, the issue of the road, since the territory of the new school building was located above the railway line, at the foot of the hill called “Makhati” in a high position and was devoid of any roads. The second issue was the issue of water. A special commission was formed; five road construction projects were prepared and presented to the Tbilisi City Council. The mayor of Tbilisi at that time was Al. Khatisyan. The Tbilisi city authorities approved the most suitable of the submitted projects. The costs of the road construction were to be covered by the trusteeship. Since construction work had begun and there was a need to quickly have a new road, it was built in the northern part of the school, which passed through the estates of General Mikhail Dolukhanyan. This road was different from the approved project mentioned above. It should be noted that Mikhail Dolukhanyan, according to the trusteeship application, had allocated a corresponding plot of land from his estates for the school road. The construction of the road was completed in December 1909.⁶⁹ The school Board of Trustees appealed to the city authorities to plant trees along the edges of the paved street and to name it. The street was soon named after Catholicos of All Armenians Matevos II Izmirlian. According to testimonies, the “Izmirlian” road leading to the school, although well-maintained, was quite long to connect to the city, and students and teachers often used a short downhill road to reach the school, until a shorter road crossing the railway line was built.⁷⁰ A canal was also built at the expense of the Board of Trustees, and by April 1909 the school area was provided with permanent water supply.⁷¹

In fact, everything was ready for the construction of the new Nersisyan School building.

It has already been mentioned that the official foundation stone of the school was laid on June 20, 1909, by the Catholicos of All Armenians Matevos II Izmirlian⁷². A

⁶⁶ NAA, fund 2, inv. 1, file 1, sheet 13.

⁶⁷ NAA, fund 2, inv. 1, file 1, sheet 14.

⁶⁸ NAA, fund 2, inv. 1, file 1, sheet 14.

⁶⁹ NAA, fund 2, inv. 1, file 1777, sheets 50, 82.

⁷⁰ NAA, fund 2, inv. 1, file 1, sheets 15-17.

⁷¹ NAA, fund 2, inv. 1, file 1, sheet 17.

⁷² NAA, fund 2, inv. 1, file 1777, sheet 221.

copper plate with a corresponding inscription on the construction of the school building was placed at the base of the building. The first stone of the building was laid by the Catholicos. The ceremony was attended by the governor of Tbilisi, other high-ranking officials and clergy, as well as many people.⁷³ The construction process began to progress at a rapid pace. Alexander Mantashyan visited twice the construction site to see the progress of the work. However, unfortunately, the latter was not lucky enough to see the finally built school building.

The costs of construction were increasing due to unexpected expenses, as well as the construction of a canal and a road. Mantashyan's son, Levon Mantashyan, continuing his father's work, allocated another 80 thousand rubles for the construction of the school, and then 42 thousand rubles. Thus, the cost of the entire Nersisyan School building is 372 thousand rubles⁷⁴, which, in fact, is entirely provided by the Mantashyans.

The construction was completed in the summer of 1912, and the school started its activities in the new academic year in a new building. Levon Mantashyan "spontaneously, in his own way, expressed his desire" to provide another 20 thousand rubles for the furnishing of the school⁷⁵, with which the new school building was completely furnished in accordance with modern requirements. The school had a large garden and a spacious yard, where "...various instruments for physical education games"⁷⁶ were also available. In addition to classrooms and offices, the school had a library, an indoor gymnasium, a cafeteria, a theater hall with a stage for student performances, a workshop, a bathroom, locker rooms, furnished chemistry and physics cabinets and laboratories, history and geography cabinets, special classrooms for drawing and music, and toilets in accordance with sanitary conditions. The "ornament" of the building was considered the school's large hall. The school had wide corridors that ensured efficient movement and ventilation. The rooms were covered with parquet, not ordinary boards. The school's 25 classrooms were also spacious and bright. Fire safety rules were also taken into consideration. The classrooms were furnished in accordance with contemporary requirements, the teacher's desk was placed at a low height, the classrooms had a blackboard, inkwells were attached to the students' desks so that the students did not have to bring them with them, each classroom had its own cupboard in the wall for books and other supplies. The entire building had central heating and ventilation systems, which were designed by one of the well-known organizations in this field.⁷⁷ Thus, the school took into consideration: "all the necessary pedagogical and health conditions."⁷⁸

⁷³ Kavkaz, 20 June, 1909, N 140.

⁷⁴ NAA, fund 2, inv. 1, file 1, sheet 18.

⁷⁵ NAA, fund 2, inv. 1, file 1, sheet 19.

⁷⁶ NAA, fund 2, inv. 1, file 1, sheet 19.

⁷⁷ NAA, fund 2, inv. 1, file 1, sheets 19-22, file 1886, sheets 13-23.

⁷⁸ NAA, fund 2, inv. 1, file 1, sheet 21, file 1777, sheet 27.

The school housed two busts of Nerses Ashtaraketsi and the benefactor Alexander Mantashyan⁷⁹, whose further fate is currently unknown.

The land plots adjacent to the school were divided and sold as housing estates, with the goal of forming a “small town” around the school and thereby connecting it to the city itself. As a result of all this, a densely populated district was formed in the area surrounding the school.

The three-story school building was one of the “most distinguished and magnificent” buildings in Tbilisi. The stones of the school’s exterior facade were brought from the quarries of the villages of Karahunj and Tsater in Lori, and in its appearance it resembled: “...the Armenian architectural structures of our historical places.”⁸⁰ In general, the entire building bears the stamp of Armenian architecture.

From the 1912-1913 academic year, the Nersisyan School moved to a newly constructed building. However, unfortunately, due to the outbreak of World War I, the new school building was turned into a military hospital, and then into a barracks.⁸¹ Classes were temporarily held in the buildings of the Hovnanian and Gayanian girls’ schools in Tbilisi.⁸² During the First World War, the activities of the Nersisyan School were significantly disrupted although the trustees did everything they could to prevent this. When the military personnel stationed in the school left, there was a need to carry out renovation work there, for which the school trustees applied to the relevant bodies. However, Russian refugees were soon accommodated in the building. The school management suggested to the relevant bodies to return the new building to the school, and to accommodate the refugees in the old building. In the last years of its existence, the Nersisyan School was again located in the Mantashyan building. However, unfortunately, in 1924 the school was finally closed.

Conclusion

During its approximately century-long existence, the Nersisyan School of Tbilisi played an exceptional role in the educational life of the Armenians. During its existence, the school was located in several buildings, two of which were built specifically for that purpose with the funds of the Armenians. In order to ensure quality education, it is important not only to have a qualified teaching staff and educational programs but also to have an educational environment. All the buildings of the Nersisyan School, with their respective conditions, were structures providing a progressive and modern educational environment for their time, which significantly contributed to the increase in the quality and efficiency of education. As an example, let us note that the last Mantashyan building of the Nersisyan School was designed for 1,000 students, while the Caucasus

⁷⁹ NAA, fund 2, inv. 1, file 1, sheet 20.

⁸⁰ NAA, fund 2, inv. 1, file 1, sheet 19.

⁸¹ NAA, fund 2, inv. 1, file 2343, sheet 1.

⁸² NAA, fund 2, inv. 1, file 2343, sheets 1, 9. Grigoryan 1975: 105.

University, currently located in the same building, has about 8,000 students. Thus, the presence of the appropriate buildings of the school was a definite factor contributing to the reputation of the Nersisyan School and the quality of education.

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THE PROBLEM OF ARMENIAN STATEHOOD AND HUNCHAKYAN POLITICAL PARTY (1918-1921)

Gegham Hovhannisyan*

Abstract

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, during the rise of the national liberation movement of the Armenian people, the restoration of national statehood became one of the priority issues of the Armenian social and political thought. There were fundamental conditions for this. During the First World War, the overthrow of the Russian autocracy and the collapse of the empire, the defeat of Ottoman Turkey and the creation of the First Republic of Armenia made possible to restore the lost Armenian statehood in the territory of historical Armenia and the solution of the Armenian Question more realistic. In that period, each of the Armenian national-political circles had its own point of view regarding the political orientation of the Armenian people, the structure, character, and territory of the national state.

The article presents the Hunchakyan party's approach to the issue. The influence of the international-political events of the time on the fate of the Armenian people and the evolution of the Hunchakyan's views on the issues of Armenian statehood are presented. The above-mentioned was most completely and consistently expressed in the "Young Armenia" periodical, the press organ of the American branch of the Social Democratic Hunchakyan Party (hereafter SDHP).¹ In the context of the problem, the issues related to the mandate of Armenia, the policies adopted by Azerbaijan and Georgia towards the First Republic of Armenia, threats to Armenian statehood are discussed. Chronologically, the article covers the period between 1918 and 1921. In order to avoid the political mistakes made in the recent period of our history, to get rid of romantic delusions, and at the same time, in terms of developing the right strategy for the development of national statehood, the article can have a scientific-cognitive and guiding significance. The relevance of the topic lies in the fact that Armenian statehood faced challenges that have many similarities with the political problems of more than a century ago.

Keywords: Armenian statehood, "Young Armenia", Stepan Sapah-Gyulyan, Republic of Armenia, Paris Assembly, Russia, Hunchakyan Party, Soviet Armenia.

* Senior researcher at the Institute of History, NAS RA PhD in Historical Sciences, Associate Professor e-mail: gegham.hovhannisian@mail.ru

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¹ In Armenian historiography, the question was addressed by A. Kitur (Kitur 1962), R. Khurshudyan (Khurshudyan 1979), G. Hovhannisyan (Hovhannisyan 2014).

Establishment of the Republic of Armenia. The Armenian Question at the Paris Assembly and the Hunchakyan Party

In the last period of the First World War, 1917-1918, the imminent victory of the Entente over the German-Turkish alliance became evident. Under these conditions, the problem of restoring national statehood was gaining more and more resonance in the Armenian socio-political circles. The revolutions in Russia in 1917 gave it new momentum. However, after the Bolshevik coup, Western Armenia was occupied by Russia and the masses of Western Armenians in both Western and Eastern Armenia once again found themselves in a difficult situation. The invaluable achievement of the February Revolution was endangered, that is, the hopeful process of the establishment of national civil power in Western Armenia and the work of reconstruction.²

Transcaucasian political forces not recognizing the power of the Bolsheviks formed in Russia after the October Revolution, created a new body of local government in November 1917, the Transcaucasian Commissariat, which was replaced by the Transcaucasian Seim in February 1918. On April 9, 1918, the anti-Russian policy of the Georgian and Azerbaijani deputies of the Seim led to the secession of Transcaucasia from Russia. Infuriated by the decision of the Seim, the central administration of the Soviet Union in Tiflis published a leaflet in Armenian and Russian on April 11, 1918, in which it condemned the decision of the Seim to separate Transcaucasia from Russia, considering it a “great betrayal towards Russian revolution”. The leaflet accuses the counter-revolutionary nationalists and false socialists of the Transcaucasia, who united and severed ties with the Russian Democratic Republic, and by declaring the Transcaucasia an independent republic, adopted the “Turkish-German orientation” as the basis of its state-legal international status.³

This short-sighted policy of the Seim had disastrous consequences for the Armenian people. After secession from Russia, the Turks did not sign the promised peace agreement with the delegation of the Seim and, continuing the advance of their troops, recaptured Western Armenia and created a serious threat to the existence of the Transcaucasian Armenians.

After the fall of Kars and Alexandropol, on May 16, 1918, the Central Administration of the SDHP appeals to the Armenian people to put aside all contradictions, unite and fight “against the enemy invading the country”. It is said in the call that it is better to die with a weapon in hand for the achievements of the people and the revolution, “than to fall as a slave before the enemy’s sword and bullet”⁴. In the spring of 1918, the advance of the Turks in Transcaucasia further deepened the existing disagreements within the Seim, which ultimately led to its collapse and the creation of the republics of Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia.

² Melikyan 2019: 6.

³ NAA, fund 1456, inv. 1, list 216, sheet 2.

⁴ NAA, fund 1456, inv. 1, list 219, sheet 1.

On May 30, 1918, the Armenian National Council of Tiflis declared itself the supreme authority of the Armenian provinces of Transcaucasia. In this regard, the position of the Tiflis Hunchakyan Center is noteworthy, which in its call-leaflet of May 31 protests against that statement and demands the National Council to renounce all its powers. The Hunchakians propose to form “a new temporary National Council from an equal number of representatives of all political, revolutionary and socialist organizations”.⁵ The reason for the dissatisfaction of the Hunchakyan center was that the Armenian Revolutionary Federation members had a great influence in the Armenian National Council of Tiflis, for this reason it proposed forming a new National Council in which the Hunchakians would have an equal number of representatives with other Armenian political parties. Even on the eve of the First World War, Hunchakyan theorist S.Sapah-Gyulyan justified the idea of an autonomous Armenia. He believed that the great European powers “individually and collectively acquired the historical right to intervene and on that basis intervened in Turkey’s internal affairs.” According to him, in the process of its liberation, the Armenian nation has expectations from England, France, and Russia, which, at the behest of their political interests, have finally united to destroy the Ottoman state⁶. Historian Yeznik Cheredjian believes that it was during this period, especially in the 7th meeting of deputies of the SDHP held in Constanta in 1913, that the Hunchakyan party adopted the plan of creating an autonomous Armenia apart from Ottoman Turkey.⁷

According to the Hunchakians, the creation of the Republic of Armenia was only the first step for the Armenian statehood to become full-fledged. It is no coincidence that Hunchakians, like the Ramkavar Party and reorganized Hunchakians, put forward the term “The Ararat Republic”. The prominent Hunchakyan theorist S. Sapah-Gyulyan in his article “Recognition of the Ararat Republic” considered that the Entente states should recognize the “independence of the Ararat Armenian Republic while acknowledging that most of our historical motherland is still endangered”. The article cites the examples of Poland, Finland, Ukraine, whose independence was recognized by the Entente, not leaving the solution of the issue to the upcoming peace congress.⁸

In the autumn of 1918, on the eve of the victory of the Entente in the First World War, “Young Armenia”, the press organ of the American branch of the Hunchak Party, began to discuss extensively the issue of the restoration of Armenian statehood during the future peace assembly. It was emphasized the fact that the demands of the Armenian side should come down to the question of secession and independence of six vilayets and Cilicia from the Ottoman Empire⁹.

⁵ NAA, fund 1456, inv. 1, list 221, sheet 1.

⁶ Sapah-Gyulyan 1915: 64.

⁷ Djeredjian 2021: 384.

⁸ Yeritasard Hayastan, 1918, N 37, September 7.

⁹ Yeritasard Hayastan, 1918, N 48, October 16.

During the Paris Assembly, disagreements arose between Hunchakians and the National Delegation led by Poghos Nubar over the Cilicia issue. The Hunchakians, like the Ramkavars and the reorganized Hunchakians, supported the idea of including Cilicia in the United Armenian State.¹⁰ They severely criticized Poghos Nubar for leaving aside the original approach and, having reached an agreement with the delegation of the Republic of Armenia, refused to include Cilicia in the list of Armenian demands.¹¹ In the context of the discussed problem, Hunchakians also touched on the issue of Armenia's mandate. S. Sapah-Gyulyan believed that, regardless of the circumstances, of which state will take over the mandate (patronage) of Armenia, the colonial nature of the foreign policy of those states will not change, it will be the same as towards Armenia's "neighboring and distant states" and the politics of Armenia "will always be subject to the politics of the foreigner."¹²

The columnist of "Young Armenia" S. Shahen considers the policy receiving the patronage of any state for Armenia as an unforgivable mistake of the Armenian national delegation. According to him, the "sacred traditions" of the people of that country will be endangered under patronage, and the sponsoring state "will take all the riches of the motherland in its grip".¹³ Speaking about the issue of mandate, Sapah-Gyulyan's publications outline the mentality according to which the security and humanitarian justifications for taking small states under patronage by the powers are only the apparent side of the problem, and the deep goal was to create a coalition of small states against Russia. In this matter, the approach of the Georgian historian Menteshashvili who wrote that "according to the plans of the Entente, the Transcaucasian republics would act as a buffer between the RSFSR and the other countries of the East" is consistent with Sapah-Gyulyan's point of view.¹⁴

The question of the political orientation of the Armenian state, which was discussed by the Hunchakians, is an integral part of the discussed problem. For example, Sapah-Gyulyan believed that Armenia cannot become a tool in the hands of England and France and "enter into a coalition diametrically opposed to the permanent interests of the Armenian state, which would be against Bolshevik Russia".¹⁵ Hunchakian theoretician believed that if it is in the interests of Romania, Poland, Ukraine and other countries to join such a coalition, then the interests of Armenians are against it. According to him, the national interest requires that Armenians stay away from joining anti-Russian coalitions and, that Armenian soldiers should never take up arms against Russia at the instigation of a foreigner. Sapah-Gyulyan contrasted

¹⁰ NAA, fund 430, inv. 1, list 303, sheet 13.

¹¹ Yeritasard Hayastan, 1920, N 79, February 4.

¹² Yeritasard Hayastan, 1920, N 97, April 7.

¹³ Yeritasard Hayastan, 1919, N 11, June 7.

¹⁴ Menteshashvili 1996: 133.

¹⁵ Yeritasard Hayastan, 1920, N 97, April 7.

Bolshevik Russia with large capitalist states, which are in constant search for new markets loyal to their policies and new peoples and states that serve their interests.¹⁶

In the spring of 1920, Sapah-Gyulyan, who still had high expectations from the Paris Peace Assembly a year ago, wrote with deep disappointment: “The half-hearted decisions of the Congress of Versailles remained unfulfilled” and new conflicts arose.

Hence the conclusion that the principles of self-determination, justice, and freedom of the nations, so much repeated by the delegates of the European states at the Paris Assembly, were actually a cover for their hidden “imperialist interests, to mutilate and rob each other.” Speaking about the relationship between Armenia and the Entente, the famous leader of the White Movement, General Denikin, writes in his book “Essays on the Russian Time of Troubles” the following: “Armenian officials, who were not experienced in the political intrigues of international diplomacy, did not understand that none of the Entente countries was ready to shed blood for Armenians and that Colonel Haskell, who was appointed as the High Commissioner of the Entente in Armenia, had a pre-approved decision according to which no American soldiers would be sent to Armenia.”¹⁷ Denikin believed that the political course of the Armenians was “beneficial to the Pan-Turkish movement”.¹⁸

The fact that the Turks took advantage of this situation did not escape Sapah-Gyulyan’s attention. He believed that the Kemalist movement was directed equally against England, France, Italy and their allied countries, all of whom would suffer if they did not put aside their conflicts and defeat Turkish nationalism with joint forces. Realizing the threat posed to the Armenian people by the Kemal movement, the publicist wrote that “in this dangerous period, we will place our hopes exclusively on ourselves.”¹⁹ According to him, in order to fulfill this necessary condition, “the immediate duty of every Armenian will be to support the Republic of Armenia without paying attention to party affiliation”.²⁰ Sapah-Gyulyan was afraid that if the allies see a serious force on the side of the Turks, they will “remain silent” in case of their offensive actions²¹. Time has shown that approach was realistic.

At that time, “Young Armenia” discussed issues related to the state-political structure of United Armenia. The article “Armenian State Life” rejected the federal structure of the state and put forward the idea of “association of nations” (confederation - G.H.) as the correct form of interrelationship between nations.²²

The Hunchakyan periodical criticized those Armenian socialists who rejected the existence of the independent Republic of Armenia and sought to “reunite that part of our

¹⁶ Yeritasard Hayastan, 1920, N 97, April 7.

¹⁷ Nor Zhamanak, 2014, July 3.

¹⁸ Nor Zhamanak, 2014, July 3.

¹⁹ Yeritasard Hayastan, 1920, N 95, March 31.

²⁰ Yeritasard Hayastan, 1920, N 95, March 31.

²¹ Yeritasard Hayastan, 1920, N 95, March 31.

²² Yeritasard Hayastan, 1920, N 95, March 31.

liberated Motherland with Russia, which it called a retrogressive wish.” According to the periodical, “it was not necessary to boycott, but to give all support to its strengthening and prosperity”.²³

Hunchakians regarding threats to Armenian statehood

Hunchak periodicals also discussed the topic of threats to Armenian statehood. “Young Armenia” stated that the foreign policy of states is changeable and “does not have an eternal course. This is what the history of diplomacy has shown in general.”²⁴ The idea was emphasized that the small states should beware of the imperialist aspirations of the big states, which always use the small ones for their “internal, dark, long-term interests”²⁵.

Speaking about this issue, Sapah-Gyulyan considered that from the point of view of the interests of the Armenian state, “Bolshevik Russia is a thousand times better than Tsarist or Cadet Russia.” In the editorial article “Towards the Coming Storm”, Sapah-Gyulyan considered the White Movement a serious threat not only to “democratic Russia” but also to the “states emerging from the ruins” of the Russian Empire.²⁶ Sapah-Gyulyan wrote: “Bolsheviks, according to the right of peoples to self-determination, support the emergence of national states from the fragments of former Russia. The danger was coming to us and may come in the future from the Kolchaks, Denikins, Yudenichs and such people.”²⁷ Sapah-Gyulyan also did not trust the constitutional-democratic (Cadet) party, which, guided by the idea of “united and indivisible Russia”, after coming to power, would strive to “unite the former fragments” of Russia and re-establish the borders of Tsarist Russia.²⁸

The issue is also discussed in the “The Laborer” newspaper published in Tiflis by Hunchakians. In March 1919, when the White Movement was still on the rise, an article “Lenin and Denikin” put forward the idea that Denikin would not be able to unite “divided Russia” with his volunteer army, because the ideology he was guided by lacks vitality, therefore it cannot unite the peoples of Russia around it. Contrary to that, the “socialist world view” by Lenin has taken deep roots among the people of Russia. According to the article’s author (Abgar Payazat - G.H.), although the constituent peoples of Russia “deepened their aspirations towards self-determination” thanks to the revolution, they avoid Bolshevism, however, in case of a choice between Lenin and Denikin, they will

²³ Yeritasard Hayastan, 1920, N 90, March 13.

²⁴ Yeritasard Hayastan, 1920, N 90, March 13.

²⁵ Yeritasard Hayastan, 1920, N 90, March 13.

²⁶ Yeritasard Hayastan, 1919, N 18, July 2.

²⁷ Yeritasard Hayastan, 1920, N 90, March 13.

²⁸ Yeritasard Hayastan, 1920, N 90, March 13.

choose Lenin, because they see his ideas as the implementation tool for their national aspirations.²⁹

Referring to Georgia and Azerbaijan in the context of the discussed question, Hunchakyan theorist Sapah-Gyulyan considered that Armenia cannot ally with these states, because, according to him, “we cannot gain any advantage except for damage”³⁰. The article entitled “From the Slaughterhouse of Azerbaijan”, published in “The Laborer”, shows with a number of examples the cruelties and discriminatory treatment of the authorities of Musavat Azerbaijan towards Armenians³¹. Speaking about Azerbaijan, Sapah-Gyulyan writes that this republic is the “provincial base” of the Turkish-Tatar power, with which the Turkish world has high hopes “from the point of view of sinking the Armenian state.”³²

“Constituent Assembly of Georgia” editorial shows the violation of the rights of citizens of non-Georgian nationality by the Georgian authorities.³³

The article signed by Dr. Gnuni in “Young Armenia” shows that the Georgian authorities discriminate against Armenians and “subject the country to nationalization”.³⁴

The question of the relationship between Armenia and Soviet Russia and the Hunchakyan Party

In 1920, when the armies of Soviet Russia were getting closer and closer to the borders of the Transcaucasian republics, the relations between Russia and the Republic of Armenia, cooperation between Russia and Kemalist Turkey, and the political orientation of the Armenian state became urgent issue for Hunchakyan theorists. Sapah-Gyulyan saw no danger in the advance of Soviet Russia in the Caucasus. He wrote that the fact of Soviet Russia’s “being close to our borders, all will be more secure for us”³⁵. He naively believed that by accepting the right of nations to self-determination, the “friendly arm” of Soviet Russia would help to restore the borders of the “Armenian National State, which starts from the Caspian Sea and extends to the Mediterranean, from the Black Sea to Mesopotamia.”³⁶

Addressing the issue of rapprochement between Soviet Russia and Kemalist Turkey, Sapah-Gyulyan showed that there is no ideological agreement there. “The problem is essentially a political compromise,” he wrote, “and that rapprochement was made on the basis of the hostility that both sides have towards the Entente (G.H.)

²⁹ Ashkhatavor, 1919, N1, March 24.

³⁰ Yeritasard Hayastan, 1920, N 81, February 11.

³¹ Ashkhatavor, 1919, N1, March 24.

³² Yeritasard Hayastan, 1919, N 26, July 30.

³³ Ashkhatavor, 1919, N1, March 24.

³⁴ Yeritasard Hayastan, 1920, N 81, February 11.

³⁵ Yeritasard Hayastan, 1920, N 99, April 14.

³⁶ Yeritasard Hayastan, 1920, N 99, April 14.

states, each from its own point of view.”³⁷ The Hunchakyan theoretician was far from the idea that by approaching the Bolsheviks, the Kemalists aimed to establish the Soviet order in their country with their help, and rightly believed that the Turkish nationalists only wanted to use the forces of Soviet Russia to advance their nationalist goals. Having this circumstance in front of his eyes, the Hunchakyan figure emphasized that by reaching an agreement with the Kemalists, “Soviet Russia lost a lot of its credit and charm... it was a mistake and that mistake will be felt even more tomorrow.”³⁸

On this and a number of other issues, Alexander Myasnikyan waged an ideological struggle against the Armenian national parties, particularly Hunchakians. According to Myasnikyan, Hunchakians could not understand “why it is necessary to help the awakening Tajkistan now”³⁹.

Speaking about the Armenian-Russian relations, Sapah-Gyulyan was based on the belief that Armenia is one of the “external bases” of Soviet Russia, if not today, it will be such tomorrow⁴⁰. The bulletin of the Central Executive Committee of the CPSU of September 10, 1920 addressed to Lenin, the Central Executive Committee of the RSFSR, and the Comintern fits into this logic. Here, the difficult military-political situation of the Republic of Armenia, the threats it faces, and the friendly disposition of the Armenian people towards Soviet Russia are presented. In this situation, the Hunchakyan party considers it necessary in the bulletin “in order for Armenia not to appear in the camp of British imperialism, not to join the anti-Soviet coalitions in the East”:

- a) recognition of the independence of the Republic of Armenia by Soviet Russia,
- b) recognition of Karabakh and Zangezur as inseparable parts of the Republic of Armenia.

If, for various reasons, Soviet Russia does not consider its implementation possible, then to give these provinces autonomy under the direct control of Russia, until the final solution of the issue of reunification with Armenia. It is noted that in any case, Karabakh and Zangezur should never be included in the composition of Azerbaijan, because it contradicts the will of the local working population, which has repeatedly expressed its desire for reunification with Armenia.

For the fair solution of the Armenian Question, the Hunchakyan party believed that Soviet Russia would take steps to “connect Turkish Armenia to the Ararat Republic, providing access to the Black Sea. Independent Armenia can survive, develop economically and politically only in such territorial conditions, otherwise, the enclosure in the Yerevan-Alexandrapol-Kars triangle will condemn the country to destruction.”⁴¹

³⁷ Yeritasard Hayastan, 1920, N 55, October 22.

³⁸ Yeritasard Hayastan, 1920, N 55, October 22.

³⁹ Martuni 1924: 109.

⁴⁰ Yeritasard Hayastan, 1920, N 55, October 22.

⁴¹ NAA, fund 1456, inv. 1, list 241, sheet18.

In the autumn of 1920, on the one hand, the defeat in the Armenian-Turkish war, on the other hand, the diplomatic pressure of Soviet Russia put Armenian republic in a desperate situation. Under these conditions, in November 1920, the conference of the Georgian branch of the Hunchakyan Party was held in Tiflis. Examining the current alarming and desperate situation of Armenia, the assembly adopted a resolution at the November 11 session, according to which the only way out to save the Armenian people from final destruction, to protect their physical existence and independence was considered to be the “overthrow of the regime in Armenia and the establishment of the worker-peasant Soviet government”.⁴²

After the establishment of the Soviet rule in Armenia, on December 9, 1920, the Armenian Legislative Committee appealed to the Yerevan branch of the SDHP to clarify the position of the Hunchakyan party regarding the change of power in Armenia and the international situation of Soviet Russia. On December 11, in a reply letter addressed to the Armenian Legislative Committee, the Hunchakyan declare that they welcome the “coup carried out in Armenia and the established Soviet government”⁴³. In this article, the Yerevan branch of the SDHP also addresses the problems of the Soviet government in Armenia and gives priority to the issues of Armenia’s external situation, particularly Turkish-Armenian relations. The Hunchakyan note that after the establishment of Soviet rule in Armenia, “there is no longer any reason for the troops of Mustafa Kemal, who declares himself a friend of Soviet Russia, to remain in the neighborhoods of Russia’s ally Soviet Armenia. There is no danger to him from the side of Soviet Armenia, because Soviet Armenia, having overthrown the previous government, has no imperialist aspirations, while the withdrawal of his (Kemal’s - G.H.) troops from the borders of Armenia will enable the national population who migrated from the occupied places to return to their place of residence”⁴⁴. At the end of the letter, the Hunchakyan express their hope that “the proletariat of the Caucasus, with the support of Russia, will unite under the same flag, which will give everyone the opportunity to dedicate themselves to peaceful and constructive work.”⁴⁵

Speaking about the Soviet regime, Sapah-Gyulyan admitted that this regime is not free from flaws and should be criticized “with the view of creating the best”⁴⁶. He emphasized the idea that it is necessary to protect and support the socialist government of Armenia. Even on the eve of the February 1921 uprising, the unstable internal situation in Armenia leads the publicist to the correct conclusion that avoiding civil strife should be one of the priority tasks of the Armenian state. Sapah-Gyulyan tries to strengthen the idea of “historical necessity” of the Armenian people in the “Muslim-

⁴² NAA, fund 1456, inv. 1, list 244, sheet 1.

⁴³ NAA, fund 1456, inv.1, list 245, sheet 1.

⁴⁴ NAA, fund 1456, inv.1, list 245, sheet 1.

⁴⁵ NAA, fund 1456, inv.1, list 245, sheet 1.

⁴⁶ Yeritasard Hayastan, 1920, N 81, February 11.

Turan Ocean” to be with the Russian state⁴⁷. After 1921, the view of supporting Soviet Armenia is getting stronger among Hunchakians⁴⁸. Speaking about this issue, Ashot Melkonyan writes: “The attitude of Hunchakians towards Soviet Armenia was never hostile. Regardless of the political regime, they continued to perceive the Armenian SSR as a motherland, and in terms of status as an autonomous state entity within the Soviet Union.”⁴⁹

Conclusion

The victory of the Entente in the First World War, as well as the collapse of the Ottoman and Russian empires, made the possibility of the restoration of Armenian statehood more realistic, on which the Hunchakian party had its own point of view. They considered the First Republic of Armenia, established in 1918, to be the first step on the way to the creation of the United Armenian State. During the Paris Assembly, Hunchakians supported the idea of six Armenian vilayets and Cilicia separating from the Ottoman Empire and creating an independent state. They had a cautious approach to Armenia’s mandate. The Entente countries were considered to be self-serving and sought to form a coalition of small states against Bolshevik Russia. Hunchakian theorists believed that if it was in the interests of Ukraine, Poland, and Romania to join such a coalition, then it was harmful to the interests of Armenia and the Armenian people should stay away from joining anti-Russian coalitions.

On the way to the restoration of Armenian statehood, Hunchakians saw a great danger in the Kemalist movement and believed that the Entente countries would not take military action against Turkey.

The Hunchakians put forward the idea of confederation as the right form of people’s relationship. They criticized the Armenian socialists, who, rejecting the idea of Armenia’s independent existence, sought to unite the Republic of Armenia with Russia.

The Hunchakians also touched on the issue of threats our statehood faced. They considered Azerbaijan’s anti-Armenian policy a threat to Armenia. In addition, Hunchakian theorists saw a real danger in the White Movement of Russia and the political forces supporting it, which sought to restore a “united and indivisible” Russia.

The Hunchakians correctly understood the reasons for the Kemal-Bolshevik rapprochement and emphasized that the goals of Turkey were not to establish Soviet order in Turkey, but to achieve their political goals with the help of Soviet Russia.

Speaking about Karabakh, Hunchakians stressed that this territory should be an integral part of the Armenian state.

⁴⁷ Yeritasard Hayastan, 1920, N 81, February 11.

⁴⁸ NAA, fund 1456, inv. 1, list 254, sheet 1, list 272, sheet 1; Ardzaganq Parizi, 1924, N 3, April 27.

⁴⁹ Melkonyan 2022.

After the establishment of the Soviet rule in Armenia, the Hunchakians criticized the new government of Armenia in some issues, but generally supported it, because they saw the realization of their socialist ideals in the Soviet order.

Some views of Hunchakians regarding Armenian statehood in 1918-1920, the political orientations of the Armenian people and threats to Armenia have modern repercussions today.

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