

THE FORMATION OF THE MILITIA IN VAN PROVINCE (November 1915 - October 1916)

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Aram Manukyan

After liberation of Van and the great part of the province in May 1915, the Caucasian Army command formed an interim administration of Armenians headed by Aram Manukyan, a prominent figure in the Armenian liberation movement.¹ Together with other authorities, the judicial system, including militia, was organized. However, after July retreat of the Russian army, the Armenian government in Van was not restored. In October 1915, Russian officials were appointed: Governor General Pavel Voronov and Lieutenant Colonel Alfred Termen, Head of the District.²

Unlike the governor, the provincial head or district chief A. Termen, who held the post of police chief in the General Administration of Turkestan (Andijan) and Far East, in China (Mukden),³ had gained considerable experience working with locals, at the same time having been an author of two studies, realizing that it was impossible to work effectively without the help of locals.⁴

That was the reason why A. Termen primarily organized governing bodies from the Armenians: the municipality, the court,⁵ the economic body, the militia⁶ and the police. The members of the latter were called Yerkrpahs by the Armenians. They carried out a variety of operations specific to internal troops, that is, maintaining order,

¹ See in detail Sahakyan 2006; Sahakyan 2008a.

² Ashot Atanasyan, a farmer and public figure, described A. Termen as follows: "The new governor of Van (the head of the district – R. S.) is a 50-year-old person: tall, middle-aged, very polite and kind. His French ancestry put a stamp on him (the ancestors of Termen came to Russia in the 18th century – R. S.); an energetic, excited, dreamy and sincere man. He was fully occupied with the issues and concerns of his upcoming ministry and mission". see Mshak. 25. X. 1915. in October 1916 Termen was replaced by General VI. Burkovsky, see Ashkhatank. 15. X. 1916.

³ In 1900 Mukden (now Shenyang) was captured by Russian troops and a Russian regime was established there.

⁴ Termen 1912; 1914.

⁵ Unlike the Van Provincial Administration headed by A. Manukyan, the Van-Vaspurakan court, municipality, and police had no elaborate laws at the time under discussion. The court was headed by Aghabek Hambaryan, assisted by Hakob Smsaryan. Hambaryan's lawsuits were conducted "with Van's" traditions "and his conscience." See Mshak. 9. XII. 1915.

⁶ Judging from the press releases of the time, it follows that the city police was initially headed by Arsen Georg-Bekyan, replaced by Nshan Hakobyan, then Hrant Galikyan. He had a deputy and 25 police officers. The city was divided into four police stations; see Van-Tosp. 31. I. 1916, page 3, 29. XI. 1915, page 16, Mshak. 1 XII. 1915: H. Galikyan has served as Attorney General in the Van province, see Sahakyan 2006: 49.

securing the rights of returning Vaspurakan residents, Armenians, Assyrians and Yezidis, and, where necessary, conducting intelligence activities.

The initiative to organize the militia belongs to Termen.⁷ At a meeting with the members of the Armenian Reconstruction Commission,⁸ it was agreed that the militia would have received the weapons from the Russian command, and the entire cost of maintenance should have been taken over by the Armenian Reconstruction Commission.

Seven Armenian, Russian and American non-governmental organizations were operating in favorable conditions both in Van and in the province, enabling Armenians to gradually begin their economic recovery.⁹

Almost uninhabited and without police control, Van and the surrounding villages became a place of robbery. From the Caucasus to Vaspurakan, caravans of plunderers were being hurried out, bringing in the stolen goods in Vicegerency for the purpose of selling them. Police in Igdir seized 30 camels and 9 vans loaded with loot.¹⁰ The governor, while leaving for Van, ordered to arrest the carriages and vans loaded with stolen goods and stationed along the road, returning them to Van under the control of a police guard.¹¹

The base of the militia was formed by the American-Armenians, who arrived in the Caucasus from the United States in late August 1915 to join the volunteer movement. Their number was 52, headed by Captain Jim (Petros) Chankalyan, a member of the Armenian rebuilt Hunchak party.¹² According to the latter, his party friend, Petros Tepoyan, was informed about the formation of the militia. Jim Chankalyan met Termen in private, agreeing to be involved in the militia with his friends. It was planned to bring the number of members to 200,¹³ which was too small for the



Jim Chankalian

⁷ Termen formed a law enforcement body with his own responsibility, and that was one of the main reasons the Russian command and especially Governor Voronov did not consider the existence of the militia legal, but used the Armenian militia for their own purposes if necessary.

⁸ The committee was chaired by David Khan Avan-Yuzbashyan; Vice-Presidents were Hambardzum Arakelyan, Doctor Bagrat Navasardyan, treasurer - Alexander Melik-Azaryan, members - Michael Aramyants, Michael Atabekyan, Avetik Yezekyan, Stepan Malkhasyan (secretary), Michael Minassyan, Khachatur Khachatryan; see Mshak. 5. XI.0 1915.

⁹ Manukyan 1937: 59.

¹⁰ Mshak. 3. XI. 1915.

¹¹ Mshak.18. XI. 1915.

¹² Horizon. 21. I X.1916. Jim (Petros) Chankalian (1879-1947) was captain of the US Army. He participated in the American-Spanish War (1898) and came from the United States to participate in the Armenian Volunteer Movement, but was informed that the Russian Command had decided to disband the volunteer groups. He gone out with his friends to serve in the Van Militia. Chankalian fought against Turkish troops in French or Armenian Legion at a later date (1917-1918).

¹³ Sahakyan 2008b: 26.

state not only to control the operative situation, but also to conduct intelligence and local battles against various hostile forces.¹⁴ It was necessary to bear in mind that a considerable number of Kurdish detachments remained in the mountains. They did not miss the opportunity to attack the Armenian settlements. In addition, some Kurdish tribesmen were "subjugated" to the Russians and returned to their villages, but used every chance to attack the Vaspurakan people.

Lieutenant Colonel Termen, accompanied by a Cossack and American-Armenian guard, moved to Van in late October 1915.

In December 1915, it was reported that as soon as he entered Van, the militia immediately took over the city's buildings, as well as the newly formed orphanage.¹⁵ Studying the difficult situation of local refugees, Armenak Ekaryan turned to the Catholicos asking him to allocate some money to improve their situation to some extent. On November 11, 1915, by the order of Gevorg V, 4.000 roubles were sent in the name of Termen,¹⁶ which was to be used for the abovementioned purpose.

At the beginning of February 1916, on the basis of Termen's order, the police in Van province carried out population statistics, aimed at finding out the real number of peasants, in order to effectively organize the aid.¹⁷

A prominent figure of the Armenian Liberation Movement, A. Ekaryan, was appointed as commander of the militia. Such an armed force was needed to protect the 15,000 Armenians in the province and the city.¹⁸ The experience of the Armenian police under the former governor Manukyan demonstrated clearly that the Kurds, seeing a small subdivision of armed Armenians, preferred not to fight them. This proved again and again what an important role the Armenian militia could play in Van if the law enforcement agencies were to be empowered, expanded, and increased in number. Unfortunately, the Russian command had no intention of organizing and financing the newly organized Armenian Armed Forces instead of colonizing the occupied territories and imposing various barriers on returning Armenians to their homelands.

Thus, by the order of Nikolay Peshkov, the Governor-General of Turkish Armenia (Western Armenia) and other regions, occupied by the right of war in Turkey, dated with July 24, 1916, it was allowed only the return of persons, having exclusively his signature and seal. N. Peshkov informed of his decision to the head of the district of Archesh through a telegram.¹⁹

¹⁴ Mshak. 17. XI. 1916.

¹⁵ Van-Tosp. 6. XII. 1916: 14.

¹⁶ National Archives of Armenia (henceforth NAA), stock 57, list 2, case 1289, p. 22.

¹⁷ Van-Tosp. 28. II. 1916: 14.

¹⁸ Horizon. 7. IX. 1916. According to the district chief Termen, there were only about 5,000 people in Van alone; see NAA, s. 57, l. 2, c. 1979, p. 3. On March 22, 1915, the spiritual representative of Van, Hovhannes Hyusyan, reported to Gevorg V, "We have been able to find a building for the Prelacy, but in order for the local Prelacy to play its role and support the people and others, it is necessary to have a suitable scribe and, if possible, one who knows Russian well, in order to avoid difficulties in our official relations." NAA, s. 57, l. 2, c. 1979, p. 17.

¹⁸ NAA, s. 654, l. 4, c. 16, p. 1.

¹⁹ Idem.

In addition, the Caucasus authorities, in the face of Viceroy Nikolai Romanov,²⁰ had vague hopes that it would be possible to establish "friendly" relations with the leaders of various Kurdish tribes and use them for their own purposes. In fact, as in the previous Russian-Turkish wars, and during World War I, no such positive result was achieved. With the exception of a few Kurdish tribes, the Russian authorities failed to persuade the Kurds to take their side.²¹ They continued to serve the Ottoman authorities faithfully during this war as before.²²

Not only the plight of the Armenian and Assyrian population of Vaspurakan, but also their moral and psychological decline caused serious inconvenience to the governor. So, he authorized Chankalian to make a report for the Catholicos and ask him for help.²³ Moreover, the relations with Georgians were exacerbated, who thought that the vicegerency deliberately populated the Armenians in Georgian areas. In a report, dated May 10, 1916, the head of the Tiflis Gendarmerie Department, Colonel Ivan Pastryulin was informing the Viceroy's Assistant in Civil Affairs, Prince Vladimir Orlov, that the Georgians were unhappy with the Armenian refugees' privileged status, comparing with those of other nations. According to Pastryulin, Georgians would join Muslims against Armenians at the first opportunity.²⁴

We consider it necessary to state that the Armenians of Batumi and Kars suffered the most at the beginning of the war, the Georgian population suffered less material and human casualties than the Armenians, and as far as the Muslims were concerned, a considerable part of them not only provided aid to the Ottoman troops but also

²⁰ General Tovmas Nazarbekyan gives evidence that the forces of the Caucasian Army were reading Nikolay Romanov's order on the need to attract the Kurds to their side. The general finds the order wrong. To his conviction, the level of their consciousness was so low that it was impossible for them not only to conquer but also to promote friendly relations with the Armenians. See NAA, s. 45, l. 1, c. 7, l. 22, circular-23. The Russian command provided Major General Ashraf Bek Shamshadinov with 50,000 roubles for the Kurds to take them to their side, but to no avail. The attempts to organize a Kurdish brigade by the same person also failed; see Sahakyan 2010b: 25. Similarly, it was not possible to use another Kurdish bey, Abdurezak, whose squad, consisting of about 300 men, was engaged in looting alone. The chief of the Van garrison, General Nikolaev, has repeatedly appealed to the command to remove Abdurezak and his "volunteers." The Kurdish Bey was imagining himself as a future ruler of Kurdistan. See also p. 30. According to General Nazarbekyan's information, the Russians paid Abdurezak 300 roubles per month. See NAA, s. 45, l. 1, c. 1, p. 17, circular 22. Even after such attempts, the authorities have continued to hold vain hopes that the Kurds can be faithful allies. As a result of such short-sighted policies, the situation remained volatile particularly in Vaspurakan. The Russian authorities of the province, blindly executing the order of the Viceroy, were arming the Kurds, and, in some cases, confiscating weapons of Armenians; see Sahakyan 2010a: 196.

²¹ Murtullah Bey of Moks and the head of Shatakh tribes, Shekir's son Lezki, obeyed the Russian command and settled in the Armenian villages of the Armenian valley with their families and pets; see Materials 2016: 204. This, however, did not prevent them, and especially Murtullah Bey, from raising a weapon against the Russians a year later, see Sahakyan 2009: 48.

²² The above is testified by the intelligence services of the Caucasian Army, which proves that during the war the Ottoman command also received intelligence from the Kurds, who, being well-positioned in the area, were often able to approach the locations of the Russian military units; see Sahakyan 2009: 50.

²³ Sahakyan 2008b: 26.

²⁴ NAA, s. 1168, l. 1, c. 315, p. 29.

participated in the massacres of Armenians.²⁵ So, the Georgians' discontent was inappropriate, and the Armenians had long dreamed of returning to their homes.

The situation in Van, especially in the Armenian settlements of the provinces, was threatening. The Kurds were continuing attacks on Armenian settlements. According to contemporaries, not only Armenians but also Yezidis were subject to Kurdish plunders.²⁶

The refugees from Vaspurakan hurried to their native lands, as the refugees in Yerevan and especially in other places of the Vicegerency felt that the situation was getting worse day by day. We find evidence of the said fact in the petition of a group of figures from Van, addressed to Catholicos Gevorg V and dated January 16, 1916.²⁷

In a letter to Catholicos Gevorg V, dated February 9, 1916, Chankalian and Nerses Dshkhoyan raised, among other things, the issue of replenishing the police force. They wrote: "Noting that the current Vaspurakan police force consists of only volunteer Armenians who have already been remarkably helpful in their small staff, it is necessary to further strengthen and especially secure the existing staff to provide and satisfy all the needs of the immigrant population".²⁸

²⁵ See in detail Sahakyan 2012: 256-276; Sahakyan 2013: 7-45.

²⁶ Horizon. 31.VI.1916: Ruben Muradyan, a Yerkrpah, was killed by brigands in unknown circumstances; see Ashkhatanq. 28.V.1916.

²⁷ NAA, s. 57, l. 2, c. 1293, p. 43-48.

²⁸ Idem, s. 57, l. 2, c. 1979, p. 8. In a letter addressed to the Armenian Revolutionary Federation's Eastern Bureau, dated April 14, 1916, Grigor Bulgarian (Grigor Keozyan) expressed his dissatisfaction with the state of anarchy in Van and the province. Murders and robberies continued. According to his information, Termen had decided to liquidate the militia and "It seems that he is disappointed. The restriction of the rights given to volunteers has slowly begun. The affair of distributing benefits through them is now discontinued. It is promised to form a new committee, which will include Termen, Kostia (Kostantin Hambardzumyan – R.S.), Dr. Matinian (they both are our friends) and others ...". See Materials 2016: 194. We believe that the prominent figure did not have much accurate information about the events in Van. Yes, robberies and killings continued in the city and provinces, but what could do a handful of poorly-armed militias whose status was not even clarified. In addition, there were disagreements between parties. After all, some of the Armenian-American volunteers were Reformed Hunchakists, and Ekaryan and his allies were Constitutional Ramkavars. The latter, as was common in political life, were guided by the policy of including their party comrade in important posts, agreeing to appoint Terzibashyan as mayor if he joined the party (see Darbinyan 1947: 343). So, Grigor Bulgarians' dissatisfaction was not appropriate. The militia was not abolished in April. It was liquidated later, but it did play a role in alleviating the hardship of the Armenian population to some extent. We would like to state that Chankalian and his four subordinates distributed bread to Armenian and Assyrian refugees. They succeeded in fulfilling their duty, for which the Food Authority decided to award each militia 15 roubles, see Van-Tosp. 3.I.1916, page 15. It should also be noted that, on the instruction of the National Bureau, Bulgarian worked with 12 friends in Van and mainly participated in the intelligence activities of Russian units, see Manukyan 1937. 59. Termen noted one of the major pains in Armenian and other societies - the divisions between the parties that did not allow the nation to unite and achieve its goal. He noted that "The Armenian society or, more precisely, the Armenian people must forget all party disputes, unite strongly for a common, non-partisan cultural-creative work, the consequences of which will soon be apparent, to restore prosperity in the Van region," see Van-Tosp. 7. II. 1916, page 15. It is worth mentioning that one of the contemporaries generally appreciated the activities of the district head. "Mr. Termen, District Leader ... though a man of weak character and an indecisive person, he is disposed very well towards the country to see it prosperous and well-maintained again," see Ashkhatanq. 12. X. 1916.

The Armenian side offered Termen to hand over the city's public order to the militia, but the head of the district disagreed, having the General Voronov's order.²⁹

Beginning from July 25, 1916 it was reported in Van that the Cossacks had committed murders in Karchkan.³⁰ Three Armenian villagers were killed in the gorge, called Paghaprak, and three more in Oghvan valley. At the same time, the Russian command ordered that the population of the provinces of Gavash and Karchkan be expelled as Turkish-Kurdish forces launched an attack on Datvan and Bitlis (Baghesh). General Voronov ordered the evacuation of orphans and sick people from Van. As the residents of Van have testified, "this news left an overwhelming impression on the people." Chankalian made a special appeal to the youth of Vaspurakan to enlist in the militia.³¹

However, the overwhelming majority of Van population was not disposed to leave, despite the controversial news. They were convinced that staying in the city and resisting the enemy would have less to do with the evacuation. The aftermath of the July 1915 retreat was vivid,³² so they appealed to General Voronov to supply weapons and ammunition to withstand the Turkish-Kurdish forces. Voronov sent a telegram to the commander of the 2nd Cavalry Corps, General Chernozubov, requesting to provide some weapons to the Armenians, but the commander refused; hence, Voronov hinted at the migration during a private meeting with the residents of Van.³³

In the evening of July 27, a meeting of organizations and representatives of the city was held in Van, where two committees were formed – one had to organize self-defense and the other, the regular migration of the population. Around 160 young people were involved in the armed group.³⁴ The transportation of sick people, women and children from the Armenian valley and Gavash began with carts and chariots. The companies, operating in Van, were distributing bread, sugar, rice and clothing in storage to those arriving from the provinces. The military was also seeing preparations for retreat.

On the night of July 29, an armed infantry group headed by Grigor Khilghatyan left for Berkri to secure the retreat. The residents of Van were vividly aware of the atrocities committed by the Kurds in the Berkri Gorge during the July 1915 retreat, when about 40,000 people were killed. There were guards in Van, consisting of Termen's Cossacks and fighters of Chankalian and Grigor Bulgarian.³⁵

²⁹ Hambavaber. 14. VIII 1916, p. 1032.

³⁰ NAA, s. 57, l. 5, c. 122, p. 1 circular 2.

³¹ Idem.

³² According to Ohandjanyan, "The people decided not to leave Vaspurakan at whatever cost.... Having instinctively grasped the state of affairs, people were convinced that having left Vaspurakan, they would no longer be its owner, instead of the Kurds and Assyrians who would take their possession"; see Sahakyan 2010a: 189.

³³ NAA, s. 57, l. 5, c. 122, p. 2. Ashkhatanq. 17. VIII. 1916.

³⁴ Ashkhatanq. 17. VIII. 1916.

³⁵ Idem.



Grigor Bulgarian (Grigor Kyozyan)

And when the population began to leave, General Voronov handed over unexpectedly 126 units³⁶ of weapons to Termen to supply the local militia with ordering the militia to leave the city at the same time. In contrast, Termen, the head of the district was trying to persuade the population not to be expelled because the city was not in danger, but Voronov was relentless; so, the population and the militia were forced to obey. Termen remained in Van with his guard.³⁷

According to Van residents, General Voronov had been trying to keep the Armenians in uncertainty for the last four days, giving contradictory orders one after another. Eventually, Termen managed to get permission and return to Van on August 2.³⁸ The militia remained in Van until August 8, witnessing Colonel Aghalarov and his subordinates robbing the warehouses of the Caucasian branch of the Union of Russian Cities and clothing, worth 100,000 roubles and stored by American missionaries. The robbers set fire two buildings to hide the traces of crime.³⁹

According to Chankalian, they had 200 "Berdan" and 123 "Kuchukap" rifles at their disposal. Grigor Bulgarian was very helpful in filling the staff of militia. About 45 militants were heading to Berkri to secure the retreat of the local population. Djahangir Agha also reached there with his soldiers. According to Chankalian, "the support shown by Grigor (Bulgarian - R.S.) and friends is invaluable."⁴⁰ Bulgarian, Shaghoyan and Baghdasaryan had a 12-member cavalry unit that was actively involved in "Almost all intelligence activities carried out by the Russian army as they were familiar with the area. They greatly help the army move forward and make the Kurds always driven and unable to settle there."⁴¹

The migration of residents of Van occurred almost without casualties, as the combat forces were able to occupy more important strategic positions, with the majority of the population being able to secure their means of transportation, including carts and chariots. According to eyewitnesses, one of the migrants was Termen's wife, Antoineta, who placed three young girls in her chariot.⁴²

On August 1, 1916, new officials were appointed by the decree of Termen to govern the city⁴³. Only Avetis Terzibashyan held the previous position.⁴⁴ Following this

³⁶According to Chankalyan, 123 rifles, see Horizon. 22. IX. 1916.

³⁷ NAA, s. 57, l. 5, c. 122, p. 2 and circular.

³⁸ Idem.

³⁹ Idem.

⁴⁰ Horizon. 22. I X. 1916.

⁴¹ Manukyan 1937: 59.

⁴² Ashkhatanq. 10. VIII. 1916.

⁴³ NAA, s. 57, l. 5, c. 122, p. 3.

⁴⁴ Horizon. 21. IX. 1916. The court was also reorganized. It was headed by Hambaryan. The members were lawyer Yeghia Kadjuni and Martiros Nalbandyan, former deputy dean of the Yeremyan School. See Ashkhatanq. 28. V. 1916.

brief report in one of the Armenian newspapers, one can assume that Chankalian was officially appointed commander of the militia in June.⁴⁵ The latter departed for Echmiadzin on August 29 to hand over to the Catholicosate the various silver utensils, vessels, etc.⁴⁶

On August 9, the militia expelled the Kurds from several villages in the Timar province who came for robbery.

On August 12, Chankalian told his friends that General Voronov "does not recognize the existence of the militia, he has given young people weapons only to keep people safe from dangerous places on the way to the Caucasus."⁴⁷



Avetis Terzibashyan



Armenak Yekaryan

In a letter to Catholicos on August 24, 1916, Achemyan, Mesropyan, Kosoyan, and Kaputikyan considered the recognition of the legitimacy of the militia's existence and the right to bear arms as one of the primary issues.⁴⁸

Prince Khachovsky, the former Russian Consul to Damascus, having the assignment of Romanov, the Viceroy, arrived in Van to investigate the so-called Kurdish "massacres" committed by Armenians. He had also organized Kurdish and Assyrian squads.⁴⁹

Unfortunately, the Armenian militia could not function for long. There were rumors of a retreat. As Hmayak Manukyan has testified, "Vaspurakan is already on its way back. During this migration, our friends, who had up to 70 soldiers with them, stayed in Van.... Ekaryan's militia is being discredited, he is leaving, having been replaced by Chankalian, a rebuilt Hunchakyan, who was under the influence of

⁴⁵ Ashkhatanq. 9. VI. 1916.

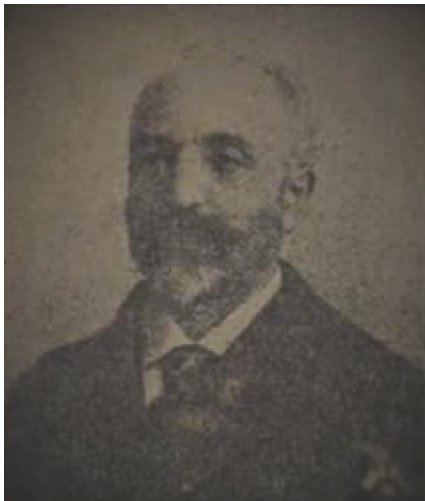
⁴⁶ Horizon. 21. IX. 1916.

⁴⁷ Ashkhatanq. 24. VIII. 1916.

⁴⁸ NAA, s. 57, l. 5, c. 122, p. 4. Unfortunately, it was already late, as Armenian-Americans were already preparing to return, see Ashkhatanq. 9. VII. 1916.

⁴⁹ Sahakyan 2010: 188. The Assyrian squads (militia units) were dissolved shortly afterwards. Prince Shakhovsky realized that some Kurdish tribes, including those of Berkri, would receive state allowances and food, see Ashkhatanq. 14. I. 1917. It should be noted that the Kurds of Berkri had been actively involved in the massacre of Vaspurakan Armenians during the July 1915 retreat.

our friends and has finished with the Ramkavars and Ekaryan."⁵⁰ The Armenian Reconstruction Committee sent Professor Michael Minasyan to Van, who, according to the Caucasus Gendarmerie Department's operative intelligence, sowed discord between the Constitutionalist-Ramkavars and the Reformed Hunchakists and interfered with the affairs of the local authorities. The head of the district, Lieutenant Colonel Termen, seeing Minasyan's interference, handed over the command of his detachment to Chankalyan. The latter was supposed to go to Khoshap on the order of the command, but Ekaryan refused to give him people. In this case, Chankalian turned to Grigor Bulgarian and Levon Shaghoyan, who provided the necessary number of armed men. This made matters worse not only for Termen but also for Chankalian and Ekaryan. At the beginning of April 1916 Termen convened a meeting, attended by A. Hambaryan, St. Malkhasyan, R. Shatvoryan and others, where A. Yekaryan presented his resignation.⁵¹



Hambardzum Arakelyan

As stated in a report of July 20, 1916, by the head of the Tiflis Gendarmerie Department, Colonel Pastryulin, "Such a change of policy towards the Ramkavars did not please Arakelyan, the editor of the "Mshak" newspaper, who is the soul of all anti-Dashnaktsutyun parties. He ceased to support the mentioned police by means of the "Committee for Restoration of the Economy of Armenia", as a result of which it fell into a state of crisis".⁵²

It is clear that the Russian authorities were well aware of disagreements between the parties, but did not take any step to eliminate the contradictions and maintain the Armenian militia of about 100 men. In fact, it turned out that the Armenians abolished the militia unit with their own hands, which was guaranteeing the security of Van Armenians to a certain extent.

Unfortunately, the Armenian press of the time, mainly the "Horizon" and "Mshak" newspapers, began publishing articles that blamed the activities of the militia and accused each other. There were many "credible" and "undisputed" facts that contradicted one another. This, however, did not produce any results, but further politicized the society. As a result, the militia was dissolved. The power, even in a small size, that instilled hope and faith in the Vaspurakan resident, who had seen the enormous amount of work, done by the Armenian authorities and led by Aram Manukyan, was abolished, when almost all the classes, regardless of party affiliation, were united into one single task. The court in Van, the municipality, the economic body, the militia and other structures were somehow the symbols of statehood. This was the

⁵⁰ Horizon. 21. IX. 1916.

⁵¹ Idem.

⁵² State Archives of Russian Federation, Stock of Police Department, Special Division, 1916, case 29, p. 22-23.

case that the Armenian political forces did not understand and support for their further functioning and development.

The Russian authorities achieved their goal - the Armenians "helped" dissolve a small subdivision, called to protect the Armenians of Vaspurakan, through their unreasonable actions. After the retreat, the Van court and police were liquidated, but the municipality continued to function. It should be added that Ekaryan and Chankalian could have met in Cilicia when the Armenian or Eastern Legion of the French Army reached there and the self-defense of the local Armenians was organized subsequently. The details of the two men's relationship in Cilicia are not known.

Unfortunately, the service of the Armenian militia, which was supposed to protect the safety and security of the Armenians of Vaspurakan, appeared again and again in the area of sharp divisions between the parties, which mainly affected the Vaspurakan people, seeking the way of returning to their homeland.⁵³

It is worth noting that the situation in Van-Vaspurakan has worsened after the departure of the militia, and especially Termen. According to Grigor Ohandjanyan, "The two authorities, political and military, clashed with each other, making a pretext for the people, and the people were always the victims."⁵⁴

In spite of all this, the Vaspurakan resident was determined to return to his native land and take possession of it in order to restore the economy and settlements, destroyed by the enemy. Proof of this is the Armenian government of Van, led by Constantine Hambardzumyan from 1917 to 1918.

⁵³ The correspondent of "Ashkhatanq" newspaper in Van described Termen's activities during the August retreat: "The District Governor Termen, despite his weak attitude in these critical days so far, has shown a high degree of vigilance and patriotism," see Job. 17. VIII. 1916.

⁵⁴ NAA, s. 28, l. 1, c. 171, p. 1.

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General Andranik and Jahangir aga



Gevorg V Surenants



Hrant Galikyan

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