

# ARMENIA AND THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

Dr. V. NERCESSIAN

## 1

Mr. A. Aharonian formally asked the League of Nations, on September 25, 1920, that Armenia be admitted to membership in the League. Armenia was eager to become a member of the League in order to benefit from Article 10 of the League Covenant which says: «The members of the League engage to respect and maintain against all external aggression the territorial integrity and present political independence of all members of the League. In case of any such aggression, or in case of any threat or danger of such aggression, the Council shall advise upon the means by which this obligation shall be fulfilled».

The League of Nations was unable to give any direct help to the Armenians from 1920 to 1922, although it attempted from time to time, to remind the Supreme Council of the Allied Powers of its duty toward Armenia.

In the collection of papers belonging to Lord Robert Cecil, now deposited in the Department of Western Manuscripts of the British Library there are two interesting documents which I present to the Haigazian Armenological Review readers.

The document entitled «Recent Events in Armenia» is a report prepared by the Italian Delegate to the Council of the League of Nations which was translated into English by Luigi Villari, dean of foreign representatives in Tiflis and forwarded with a covering letter to Lord Robert Cecil, Viscount Cecil of Chelwood, (b. 1864, d. 1958). The document is in his collection of papers which the Department of Western Manuscripts acquired in 1954.

Lord Robert Cecil had been Assistant Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs under Lord Arthur James Balfour until 1919. He was one of the founders of the League of Nations. Late in 1920 he went to Geneva as a delegate to the newly founded League. That first meeting of the Assembly of the League of Nations ended on 18 December 1920. In the collection of papers there is a letter from Avetis Aharonian dated 27th December 1920 [Add.Ms. 51095, fol. 7] and this report [Add.Ms. 51095, fol. 15].

Société des Nations

League of Nations  
Geneva, March 12, 1921



It was not cowardice on the part of the Armenians who for the last two years had given such great and striking proofs of their courage and bravery on their various fronts — Turkish, Georgian and Azerbaidjanian; nor can it be said that it was a strategic victory on the part of the Kemalists, who advanced without any resistance over territory which was well-known to them, and were favoured to a remarkable extent by the native population which was of their race and religion.

The Kemalists, having arrived at Alexandropol, obtained control of the only Armenian railway, and cut off the capital Erivan, threatening it from all sides; at the same time they thrust forward to Marabelis and almost Delijan, and found open before them the roads through Baku and central Asia and the southern road through Georgia. It was a bold adventuresome move — but for the moment no one was in the position to oppose it — to break so long a line, and one so far from the base, and to compel the Kemalists to a precipitate and disastrous retreat. Thus the Kemalists began by forcing the Armenians to lay down their arms and afterwards to accept a disastrous armistice, which was converted into the Treaty of Kars imposed by Karabekir Pasha on the Armenian plenipotentiaries, and signed by them at midnight of December 2nd, under a threat of resuming the march on Erivan and to destroy the Republic of Armenia.

In the meantime, other grave events were taking place. The Soviet Committee of Baku, in concert with those Armenian elements who supported the theories and organisation of the Bolsheviks, decided to carry out a coup d'etat in Armenia by introducing a Soviet Government. The promoters of this movement were influenced — indeed perhaps actuated — by the proposal to save Armenia from the Kemalists and to cut them off from access to Baku. This coup d'etat took place on November 29th, when the Armenian Bolshevik Committee of this city, together with a body of Russian troops, invaded the Armenian frontier, established itself at Dilijan and proclaimed a Soviet Government there. After tentative efforts to form a Government based on compromise and a military dictatorship, the Armenian Government on the evening of December 2nd passed into the hands of Armenian Bolshevik elements which had come from Baku with M Kassian at their head, under the control of M Legrand, a commissary of the Moscow Soviet, a renegade of French origin, born in Russia, a representative and agent of the rulers at Moscow.

The Kemalists maintained their position in Alexandropol, which they should by that time have evacuated, and awaited there the ratification of the Treaty of Alexandropol.

The new Armenian Government has persisted, from the beginning of its assumption of power, in declaring that it would not recognise as valid, nor accept nor ratify this Treaty of Alexandropol, on the ground that its terms are too severe, and that it was imposed by Karabekir Pasha forcibly,



and only by means of dire threats. The latter has sent a protest to Angora, and has invoked and is now awaiting, the intervention of the Government, or rather the ruling powers at Moscow. The latter have now summoned a conference to Moscow in which representatives from Moscow, Angora, Armenia and Azerbaidjan, but not from Georgia are to take part.

The Kemalists declared that they had no intention of amending the Treaty of Alexandropol. Meanwhile, the Soviets had satisfied Armenia by restoring the districts of Karaba<sup>(5)</sup>, Zanguezur and Natchichevan<sup>(6)</sup> had recently been taken from her by Azerbaidjan. But in consequence of the pretexts of the Kemalists, it appears that the Soviets at the last moment agreed that the region of Natchichevan should remain in the hands of the Turks, who claim that they should keep it as well as the district of Kars in order that a plebiscite on an ethnical basis should decide to whom these districts should belong.

Thus the Republic of Armenia is now composed of the districts of Erivan, Echmiadzin, Surmalu, Alexandropol, Karabik<sup>(7)</sup>, Zanguezur and also of the small territory (part of which is in dispute) of the Georgian province of Tiflis.

The new Armenian Government is carrying out its duties zealously and with the keen desire to further the interests of the people. Except for the imprisonment of a few politicians, amongst them the expresident of the Council and Minister for Foreign affairs, Dr Ondianjan<sup>(8)</sup>, no acts of persecution, much less of terrorism, have been committed or allowed to be committed. That part of Armenia which has thus become Bolshevik remains calm; an amnesty has already been declared; and to alleviate the great sufferings of the population the Soviets have had bread, flour and petroleum brought from Baku, although these articles are scarce.

On the other hand, it appears that the Kemalists have taken possession of the depots and magazines at Alexandropol and have conveyed them all to Kars and Erzerum. As far as can be gathered the Armenian people would not be satisfied if Bolshevism were the officially declared policy of the Government. The people of the Armenian Republic consist for the most part of country people, tillers of the soil (92 per cent), and all of them abhor the principles of communism. It is calculated that barely 135 individuals out of two million Armenians, were known to be Bolsheviks. But the Armenian people did not oppose a form of administration which is apparently Bolshevik, to which it resigned itself in the hope that the Bolshevik label would at least save it and liberate it from the Turks. But it has already been disillusioned, and fears that the Bolsheviks of Moscow are making every effort to avoid a conflict with the Kemalists, at least for the present.

Indeed, when the coup d'etat in the Government of Erivan was first announced, it seemed likely that the entire Russian army would march upon Armenian territory in order to expel the Kemalists. But the Russian troops which have advanced into this territory were very few in number — some

few thousand soldiers — and not in a position to offer serious resistance to the Angora forces, so that Armenia is still living today under the incubus of a permanent danger, at the mercy of Mustapha Kemal. The military situation may, however, change very rapidly, since the Soviets have at their disposal a short distance away two other complete armies, one of which is guarding Persia and the other Georgia, but it does not seem probable that during this winter (which, owing to exceptionally heavy and early snow and frost, is a severe one) or that in the following months the Soviets would desire to make considerable alterations and concentrations in their troops in the Armenian sector.

Armenia has neither chosen nor wished to become Bolshevistic either in appearance or fact. It is really a question of imposition from outside, in spite of which fact communist principles have not made and will not make any progress. The powers which are interested in the future of Armenia should not blame her for the change of Government and administration which has taken place; she is but a victim, and it would be unjust to hold her responsible.

Moreover, the Republic of Armenia is now recognised as an autonomous and independent State, both by the Russian Soviets and by the Kemalists, and her condition cannot really be compared or confused with that of Azerbaidjan, which has lost in fact all liberty of action. In Armenia there is no town so universally important and so coveted as Baku, nor has she much accumulated sources of petrol, naphta, and minerals, oils; this will perhaps preserve her, and ill render the chains of the tyrants of Moscow lighter and easier.

The dispute between the Kemalists and the Soviets has lasted from the time of the intervention and occupation of the former Russian frontier (Sarikanisch-Kars-Natchevan-Alexandropol<sup>(9)</sup>), and still continues.

**The letter is typewritten on paper with a printed heading République Arménienne. It is in Add. MS. 51095. The folio number is 7. The letter is addressed to Lord Robert Cecil, Viscount Cecil of Chelwood. The first meeting of the Assembly of the League ended on 18 December 1920; hence the letter from A. Aharonian is addressed from Geneva to London on 27 December 1920.**



RÉPUBLIQUE ARMÉNIENNE  
Délégation  
à la Conférence de la Paix

27, Avenue Marceau  
Paris le  
Genève, 1 27 Décembre 1920

Très honoré Lord,

Je n'ai pu à mon grand regret venir vous saluer au moment de votre départ étant cloué à mon lit dans un profond abattement physique et moral.

Les événements sont trop douloureux mais nous ne voulons pas désespérer. Nous attendons avec angoisse le résultat de la médiation américaine. Si cette médiation échouait, notre Délégation posera à nouveau devant les Alliés la question dont nous avons eu l'honneur de vous entretenir: celle de l'occupation de l'Arménie Turque par les troupes alliées. A ce sujet je me permets d'invoquer une clause de l'Armistice suivant laquelle les Alliés auraient le droit d'occuper les vilayets de l'Arménie Turque si des troubles se produisaient dans ces régions-là. Or non seulement il y a eu troubles mais les nationalistes turcs après avoir balayé l'Arménie Ottomane ont envahi la République Arménienne du Caucase laquelle pour sauvegarder la vie des populations vient de signer une paix extrêmement dure.

Vous n'ignorez certes pas que cette Arménie Turque constitue la plus grande partie de notre pays et qu'elle a été l'objet essentiel de nos revendications nationales depuis une quarantaine d'années. Depuis l'Armistice par des appels incessants nous avons adjuré les Puissances Alliées d'occuper les vilayets arméniens de Turquie afin de permettre aux centaines de milliers de fugitifs arméniens de rentrer dans leurs foyers et de reconstruire la patrie. Ces appels sont restés sans résultat. Néanmoins nous continuerons à y insister.

Nous comptons, très honoré Lord, sur votre puissant appui et nous espérons que vous voudrez bien user de votre influence auprès des Gouvernements Alliés afin que justice fut rendue au peuple infortuné de l'Arménie.

Veuillez, très honoré Lord, agréer avec l'expression de ma gratitude, les assurances de ma plus haute considération.

A. Aharonian

P.S. J'ai l'honneur de vous expédier copie d'une lettre de New York suivant laquelle l'emprunt au profit de l'Arménie serait en bonne voie. Ci-inclus une circulaire adressée aux Alliés.

Je pars bientôt pour Paris. Mon adresse 27, Avenue Marceau, Paris.

A Washington comme à New York nous avons plusieurs amis américains appartenant à tous les partis, prêts à travailler pour la réussite de notre cause, c'est pour cette raison que nous n'avons pu à notre grand regret accueillir favorablement la demande de Mr. Moor, qui a bien voulu nous proposer ses services.

A.A.

Au très honoré Lord Robert Cecil M.P.  
LONDRES

[Translation]

Most honoured Lord

Unfortunately I have not been able to come and see you when you left: I was lying in bed, physically and morally depressed.

The events are too painful but we don't want to be desperate. We are anxiously waiting for the result of the American mediation. In case of failure, our delegation will again set in front of the Allied<sup>(10)</sup> the question we had the privilege to expose to you: the occupation of Turkish Armenia by Allied troops. About this joint<sup>(11)</sup> I allow myself to recall an article of the armistice, according to which the Allies<sup>(12)</sup> should be authorized to occupy<sup>(13)</sup> the Turkish Armenian vilayets in case of disorder. In fact, not only there has been disorder, but the Turkish nationalists, after sweeping Ottoman Armenia, have invaded the Caucasian Armenian Republic, which has just been obliged to sign a very tough peace treaty in order to save the life of the population.

You don't ignore that this Turkish Armenia is the principal component of our homeland and that for forty years it has been the main goal of our claims. Since the armistice, we have constantly sent calls to the Allied powers, so that they would occupy the Armenian vilayets of Turkey in order to allow the hundreds of thousands of fugitive Armenians to come back in their homes and rebuild the country. These calls have had no result. In spite of which we shall go on insisting.

Most honoured Lord, we rely upon your powerful help and hope that you will agree to make use of your influence on the Allied governments so that justice be given to the unfortunate people of Armenia.

A. Aharonian

P.S. I am honoured to send you a copy of a letter from New York according to which the loan for Armenia is going on well. Included is a note directed to the Allied<sup>(14)</sup>.

I am soon leaving for Paris, My address:-  
27, Avenue Marceau, Paris

In Washington as well as in New York we have several American friends belonging to all the parties and ready to work for the success of our cause. That is the reason why we have regretfully not been able to give a favourable answer to Mr Moor's request when he kindly offered his help.

A.A.

To the most honourable Lord Robert Cecil M.P.  
London

#### Notes

1. The Paris Conference took place in June 1919, when the Treaty of Versailles was signed.
2. The Supreme Council held its conference in February 1920.
3. In the top left corner of the letter the Right Hon. Robert Cecil has written. «Bring up the report shown to Mr. Aneurin Williams.  
Add. MS. 51095. fol. 15.  
Aneurin Williams was the chairman of the British-Armenian Committee formed sometime between 29 November 1912 and 30 January 1913. Williams died in 1924. See A. Nassibian, **Britain and Armenian Question 1915-1923**, London, 1984, pp. 46-47.
4. Sebul.
5. Karabagh.
6. Nakhichevan.
7. Karabagh.
8. Dr. Ohanjanian.
9. Sarikamish... Nakhichevan...
10. Allies.
11. Point.
12. Allies.
13. To occupy.
14. Allies.



## ՀԱՅԱՍՏԱՆ ԵՒ ԱԶԳԵՐՈՒ

## ՀԱՄԱԴԱՇՆԱԿՑՈՒԹԻՒՆԸ

(ԱՄՓՈՓՈՒՄ)

Դկ. Վ. ՆԵՐՍԷՍԵԱՆ

Դկ. Վ. Ներսէսեան կը ներկայացնէ զոյգ մը փաստաթուղթեր, որոնք անմիջական կերպով կ'առընչուին Հայաստանի Հանրապետութեան եւ Ազգերու Համադաշնակցութեան փոխյարաբերութիւններուն: Անոնցմէ առաջինը տեղեկագիր մըն է Հայաստանի Հանրապետութեան 1920-ական թուականներու ներքին կացութեան, թուրք ազգայնական հորդաններու Հայաստանի վրայ կատարած յարձակումին, Ալեքսանդրապոլի դաշնագրի պարտադրանքին, եւ համայնավար ուժերու հայկական իշխանութեան ձեռքբերումին մասին: Ազգերու Համադաշնակցութեան Խորհուրդին պահանջով զայն պատրաստեց իտալացի Լուիճի Վիլարին՝ Թիֆլիս հաստատուած արեւմտեան ներկայացուցիչներու երիցագոյն անդամը եւ յղեց Լորտ Ռապըրթ Սեսիլին, որ փոխ նախարարն էր եւ օգնականը՝ Անգլիոյ արտաքին գործերու նախարար Լորտ Արթըր Չէյմս Պալֆուրին: Փաստաթուղթը կը կրէ «Արդի դէպքեր Հայաստանի մէջ» վերնագիրը:

Երկրորդ փաստաթուղթը 24 Դեկտեմբեր 1920 թուակիր մէկ նամակն է Հայաստանի Հանրապետութեան Պատուիրակութեան նախագահ Աւետիս Ահարոնեանին, եւ, ինչպէս առաջին փաստաթուղթը, ուղղուեցաւ Լորտ Ռապըրթ Սեսիլին: Այս մէկն ալ կ'առընչուի Լուիճի Վիլարիի տեղեկագիրին բովանդակութեան:

Երկու փաստաթուղթերն ալ կը հրատարակուին առաջին անգամ:

