

## ՀՐԱՊԱՐԱԿՈՒՄՆԵՐ PUBLICATIONS

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### **ARMENIA'S HOUR OF DESTINY**

The Armenian issue has been reflected in a number of international treaties since its internationalization. These treaties obliged the Ottoman Empire to assume certain obligations, which instead of being fulfilled consistently were violated, however without any responsibility for the Empire. The lack of clear-cut mechanisms for reforms allowed the Turkish side to constantly avoid, not fulfill its commitments, gain time, waiting for disagreements and dissensions between the powers, which would allow to forget about the commitments for good, and try to resolve the Armenian issue in a unique way, by simply annihilating them<sup>1</sup>.

The Armenian issue became a subject of discussion in international diplomacy in the international agreements adopted at the San Stefano Conference and the Congress of Berlin. It was put forward to improve the situation of the Western Armenians, to guarantee their security, to ensure their certain political and legal status. The initial aspirations of the Armenian side were aimed at the autonomy of Armenia.

The great powers competed against the autonomy or independence of Armenia in order to strengthen their influence in the Ottoman Empire. The European powers addressed the Armenian question in order to secure their own

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<sup>1</sup> Hovhannisyan 2009, 122–123:

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economic and political privileges, as well as prevent Russia's intervention through Armenian reforms and the occupation of the Armenian states.

But if before the First World War the great powers were against the idea of autonomy of Western Armenia, the situation changed with the intervention of Turkey against the Entente powers. From the beginning, the main goal of Armenian figures was the creation of Armenia by uniting the historical Great and Lesser Armenias, as well as Cilicia. World War I created a new situation in the world, which caused serious concern to Armenian politicians as new massacres awaited the Western Armenians.

On the other hand, the war raised hopes among the Armenians that the defeat of the Ottoman Empire would allow them to gain autonomy in Western Armenia and Cilicia<sup>2</sup>.

On January 26, 1914 (February 8), an agreement was signed on reforms in Western Armenia, which was a compromise between the Russian and German-Turkish programs, and the concessions were violated due to the reduction of the rights of the Armenian population.

According to the agreement, two separate administrative units would be formed from the vilayets of Erzurum, Trabzon and Sebastia as well as Van, Bitlis, Diyarbakir and Kharberd and be headed by the powers and the European general nominees appointed by the Turkish government<sup>3</sup>.

However, the chief overseers failed to reaffirm their commitment, as the Ottoman Empire, at war with Russia, thwarted the plan of reforming Western Armenia. From the internationalization of the Armenian Question in 1878 until the Treaty of Sevres, the Armenian territorial claims underwent certain changes. However, at any stage, the Armenian politicians had the goal of creating a united states by unifying all the Armenian territories.

After the end of the First World War, it was possible to create a united Armenia. An independent Armenian state had already been formed in Eastern Armenia, and Western Armenia could be liberated without a shot if the allies wished to capture it<sup>4</sup>.

The settlement of the Armenian question could have taken a positive turn even in 1919, when there was no Kemalist movement. The Armenian issue was not

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<sup>2</sup> Պողոսյան 2020, 26:

<sup>3</sup> Մարության 2014, 77:

<sup>4</sup> Մարության 2020, 48:

resolved by the Mudros ceasefire. On the one hand, the colonial aspirations of Britain, France, and the United States in the Middle East, and on the other hand, the expanding Kemalist movement, endangered the prospect of a fair solution to the Armenian Question.

From the formulation of the Armenian Question until 1918, in international diplomacy documents, the toponym Armenia was used to mean Western Armenia. Meanwhile, after the heroic resistance after the invasion of Transcaucasia by the Ottoman Empire in 1918, Armenia's independence was consolidated with Armenian weapons in Eastern Armenia, which was de facto recognized by the Allies as the Republic of Armenia in January 1920. The Treaty of the Sevres de jure recognized the united Armenia which presupposed the unification of Eastern and Western Armenias<sup>5</sup>.

The Armenian issue as a territorial issue was resolved on the same days, on March 16, 1921 in Moscow with the signing of the Russian-Turkish friendship-brotherhood agreement. This agreement was mainly aimed at terminating the Treaty of Sevres. The government of Soviet Russia, not being internationally recognized, not only did not accept and recognize the Treaty of Sevres, but also made concessions to the defeated Turkey at the expense of the territories of Armenia, moreover, provided military, financial and political assistance to it.

Kemalist Turkey, in turn, played a false revolution with Bolshevik Russia, taking advantage of the contradictions between the Western powers; it not only was not punished for the genocide and did not return the territories of Western Armenia under the Treaty of Sevres, but also received Surmalu and Nakhichevan from the territories of Eastern Armenia by the Treaty of Moscow<sup>6</sup>. Armenia's "allies" France, Italy and England, also have their share of the blame and carry responsibility for the failure of the Treaty of Sevres.

The British historian Arnold Toynbee described the British policy as "both a moral and a political mistake". The policy pursued by the allies was really immoral, because, knowing that they were not going to provide practical assistance to Armenia, they continued to make empty promises. Those who were responsible for orienting the foreign policy of the Republic of Armenia were also guilty<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Մարության 2020, 51:

<sup>6</sup> Հակոբյան 2020, 131–132:

<sup>7</sup> Հովհաննիսյան 2020, 138–139:

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Field Marshal of the British Army Henry Wilson preferred the tactics of flirting with the Turks in order to ensure the peace for Great Britain in the east and serve Turkey as a bulwark against Russia. Therefore, he considered it impossible for the Western Armenian states to secede and join Armenia. He alleged that it was beneficial for the Great Britain to have a powerful and friendly Turkey, which spreads from Izmir to Baku<sup>8</sup>.

Thus, as a result of the incomplete and inconsequential steps of the reforms initiated by the Great powers concerning the Armenian issue, Abdul Hamid, and later the Young Turks, used this circumstance by organizing massacres against the Western Armenians and the Armenian Genocide.

The countries that signed the treaties but did not fulfill their obligations are responsible for the non-implementation of these treaties; they were not consistent in overseeing the process of Armenian reforms and forcing the Ottoman Empire to fulfill them.

Armenian Bureau,  
153, Regent Street,  
London, W.I.

No. 10.

14 January 1921

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The blow which fell on Armenians last month has been staggering enough in its immediate consequences. Our unfortunate people, exhausted by six years of trouble, basely deserted by its friends, were unable to make further resistance to the invading enemy, who, on his side, was assisted in every way by certain Great European Powers.

Our Republic, therefore, yielded to Soviet Union, solely for the sake of preserving the physical existence of the Armenian people.

None of the independent states, - Belgium, Serbia, Italy, Poland, etc. - occupied during the war by invading enemies, could have been restored to its previous condition without the help of the Great Allies. With due honor to the heroism and bravery of Belgians, Italians, Serbians, and Poles, none of them would have been able to clear their territories of hostile troops without the united pressure of the Allied armies, which was brought to bear on the invaders.

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<sup>8</sup> Նասիպեան 1994, 242:

The victorious Allies, moreover, have imposed such terms on Germany, Austria, and Bulgaria that those countries are practically driven to the brink of ruin.

But the same Powers that want to crush the ex-enemy states seem to be chivalrously inclined towards the Turk. Not only do they insist on revising the Treaty of Sevres, the terms of which they deemed on second thoughts, too hard upon the Turk, but they grant him credit in gold, enabling him to maintain a host of useless Turkish officials.

The moral imperative of assisting the Armenians to rid their country of the Turk, seems now to be obliterated from the conscience of most European statesman.

The Bolshevik (i.e., Russian) advance on Erivan may, indeed, seem to have struck a blow at the principle of Armenian independence; yet it appears to clear the atmosphere of a good deal of nebulous thinking. Except a few poets and schoolmasters, no one seriously believed that any Russian government, of whatever form, was likely to tolerate any independent state within the borders of the territory which had been under its political sovereignty up to 1917. That obvious conclusion, however, does not effect the Armenian problem in its essential points, as the historical-political bases of Armenian nationality lie on the ex-Turkish territory – the six Armenian vilayets – a territory which for 43 years has had a place in diplomatic history.

It is scarcely necessary to recall that, since the Treaty of Berlin in 1878, the Armenian problem had been identified with the six Vilayets inhabited by the Armenians. (Art. 61 of the Berlin Treaty). The Cyprus convention, between Great Britain and Turkey, signed before the signature of the Berlin Treaty, concerned itself solely with the welfare of the Christians of Asia Minor.

The last of many reform-schemes for Armenia, signed in February 1914, between Russia, on the one side, representing the Entente Powers, and Turkey and Germany on the other, was intended to be applied to the vilayets of Trebizond, Sivas, Kharput, Diarbekir, Erzerum, Bitlis and Van. During the war, all the pledges given by the statesman of Great Britain, France, etc., with regard to the liberation of Armenia, were worded in such manner as to signify without ambiguity the liberation of Armenia from the Turkish yoke.

Up to three years ago the provinces of Erivan and Alexandrapol, now lying within the borders of Erivan Republic, were considered to be integral parts of the Russian Empire. It was a mere historic accident that the independence of

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Armenia was proclaimed at Erivan and not at Erzerum or Van. For, in consequence of the adverse circumstances resulting from the war, the Armenian people were confined within the borders of the Republic and the remnants of the Armenians from Turkey were refugees in the Caucasus, Mesopotamia and elsewhere. For obvious reasons, the Turks wished to restrict the territory of Armenia within the boundaries of the old Russian Empire, outside of "their own Turkish homeland". In the summer of 1918, they actually succeeded for a moment in placing the center of our national state on the ex-Russian soil: i.e., at Erivan.

Had the circumstances remained as the Turks had designed, and had the Powers sanctioned this Turkish ruse, this would have been tantamount to the ultimate extinction of Armenian independence itself. The enemy of Armenia has been Turkey – a rotten state, which has been declining for the last 200 years – and not Russia, which has been growing and expanding for the last 200 years.

This attempted transfer of the Armenian political center from Turkey to Russia was, however, reversed by the Allied Powers in the Treaty of Sevres dealing mainly with the Turkish Armenian provinces of Trebizond, Erzerum, Van and Bitlis, the delimitation of whose frontiers was entrusted to President Wilson. As to the frontier in Russia, the Treaty of Sevres says (Art. 92) that "the frontiers between Armenia and Azerbaijan and Georgia, respectively, will be determined by direct agreement between the states concerned" and, in the event of their not coming to an agreement between themselves the Allied Powers "will provide for their (the frontiers) being traced on the spot".

As will be seen, the President of the United States was asked to arbitrate only in the territory of the ex-Ottoman Empire, where the center of the Armenian state and nationality was and would continue to be. This, of course, does not mean that an Armenian state, with its basis at Erzerum, could grow and prosper without the sturdy peasantry of the plain of Erivan or without the spiritual glamour of Etchmiadzin, and the glorious ruins of Ani. Once a healthy and self-supporting Armenian state were established in the Upper Euphrates and Tigris valleys, it would conceivably be able to persuade Russia in the future to cede to Armenia the districts of Erivan and Alexandropol which were an infinitesimal fraction of the gigantic Russian Empire.

The unfortunate change at Erivan did not essentially alter the Armenian Question; it only put the problem in its right perspective. The Treaty of Sevres

and the delimitation of the territory made by President Wilson could be the corner stone of the Armenian state on its real juridical terrain and it would be worthily represented by the Armenian National Delegation, presided over by Boghos Nubar Pasha. In case of necessity, the Delegation might discharge the functions of a provisional government, if supported by the Allied Powers.

A.S.

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