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COVERAGE OF THE ARMENIAN REFORM ISSUE IN THE PAGES OF "HORIZON"

Abstract

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Armenian Question regained a strong urgency. This was caused by the Balkan crisis and the formation of a new international situation on the one hand, and by the further deterioration of the socio-economic situation of Western Armenians under Ottoman rule on the other. The Young Turks continued Sultan Hamid's policy of the extermination of Armenians. In the autumn of 1912, European powers, primarily Russia, initiated negotiations with the Turkish authorities on the fundamental issue of implementing necessary reforms in the Western Armenian provinces. At the same time, the regions under the Turkish control further intensified the persecution of Armenians, aiming to depopulate the indigenous Armenian territories.

All of this, in essence and depth, was reflected and illuminated in the pages of "Horizon", an influential Armenian periodical published in Tiflis (Tbilisi) during 1912-1914. The material presented in "Horizon" is a truthful reflection of this complex and dramatic period of our history and serves as a true lesson and message for present and future generations.

Keywords: *Armenian reforms, Turkish authorities, great powers, political forces, international diplomacy, public opinion, autonomy.*

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Introduction

The Armenian Question regained prominence and urgency on the international diplomatic stage in the summer of 1912. This was also greatly contributed by external circumstances, particularly the new and more favorable situation created in the Middle East and the Balkan region.

The Balkan crisis infused Armenian national political and spiritual figures with new impulses of hope and optimism, prompting them to take pro-Armenian actions. The leading Armenian political powers, among which the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, changed their position and relations with the ruling Young Turk party in Turkey. In fact, assessing the deterioration of the situation of Western Armenians, Armenian national parties once again linked the solution of the Armenian Question with the support of the great powers, primarily Russia.¹ In a short period, the Young Turks, with their vile actions, proved that they were the true continuers of Sultan Hamid's anti-Armenian genocidal policy.²

On the outbreak of World War I, not only there was a crisis and war in the Balkans but also the contradictions between the largest European powers became significantly acute. However, the situation had never been so favorable for the Balkan countries to launch armed operations against Turkey, especially since the country was in a financially and morally ruined and weak condition.³

However, the political situation remained quite tense, because Russia's advancement into the depths of Asia Minor and the Mediterranean basin was obstructed not only by Germany and Turkey but also by Russia's allies, England and France. "England viewed Russia as a temporary ally... England everywhere sought alliances with powers that could hinder, even to the slightest extent, Russia's ambitions to expand southward into the warm waters of the Mediterranean to dominate the routes to India".⁴

It is obvious that the Armenian Question was a pawn in the political games of the great powers, however, at this particular moment, the aspiration of Russia objectively coincided with the liberation aspirations of Armenians.

¹ History of Armenia 2012, 444.

² **Aghayan** 1994, 364.

³ **Kilimdjian** 2022, 351.

⁴ **Simonyan** 1991, 230.

One of the most influential Eastern Armenian periodicals published in Tiflis, "Horizon", where such personalities as Hovhannes Tumanyan worked, closely followed the events in and around Western Armenia. In addition to its local authors, the reporters used several materials taken not only from Armenian but also from foreign-language media. Nothing escaped the keen eye of the periodical. Moreover, "Horizon" constantly observed the hellish situation prevailing in Western Armenia, which was getting worse day by day.

According to the periodical, the situation of the Armenians in their homeland was indeed tragic. And this was proven by the publication of various and abundant new facts and observations.

Criticism of the Anti-Armenian Actions of the Turkish Authorities

While international diplomacy and the press were making a fuss about the implementation of Armenian reforms, the Ottoman authorities and their obedient Kurds continued their policy of unrestrained exploitation and ruthless, cruel oppression of Armenians, as had been the case during the anti-Armenian years of Sultan Hamid.

Being absolutely opposed to the idea of reforms in the Armenian provinces, the Turkish authorities stubbornly resisted, using as a pretext literally everything – from distorted realities to fabricated stories.

The pressure from European public opinion to implement reforms infuriated the Young Turk authorities, pushing them to display even more brutal treatment towards the already fragmented and exhausted Armenians.

On various occasions, "Horizon" stated that already in the provinces of Western Armenia, after a prolonged repression and periodically repeated massacres, Armenians were being reduced to a minority.

Thus, on February 5, 1913, a comprehensive article titled "The Number of Armenians" (a series of essays) testified that in the Western Armenian provinces (in their ancestral homeland) Armenians no longer constitute the absolute majority of the population: "Where are the numerous Armenian villages of the Abagha Plain, Aghbak, Kotur with their dense Armenian population? Those vast provinces have been emptied and deserted, and the lands of the Armenians have passed into the hands of the Kurds, becoming deserted pastures, uninhabited, uncultivated lands, fragmented estates... Where are the Armenians of the Bayazet region, who were so numerous in the 1890s?

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They are gone, they have migrated, been massacred, put to the sword... And what about the Mush plain, Sasun, and Karno plain? Everywhere the Armenian population has decreased".⁵ (Emphasis ours – A.K.)

The decline of the Armenian population was not a random phenomenon; it had long been initiated, directed, and controlled by the Ottoman authorities.

Every week, the periodical, entitled "The Armenian Question" presented the real situation in the Armenian provinces, the atrocities committed by Turks and Kurds, the complaints presented to the Patriarchate by the Armenian community, etc. On February 6, 1913, under the same title, information was provided that the Armenian villages in the Karkar district under the jurisdiction of the Bitlis governorate had "become a playground for lawless policemen, who, under the pretext of searching villages and individuals, were torturing, robbing, and committing violence against women".⁶

On February 19, under the same title, the newspaper reported on the dire situation of Armenians in Bayazet. The same article provided details about the tragic events that took place in Hadjin, which resulted in the burning of the local carpet and sock factory (owned by Terzyan), as well as the orphanage. Moreover, it stated that "the widows working there are now left unemployed, and the orphans are homeless and without food."⁷

On February 24, 1913, the article "Current Life in Van" once again stated that the cruel times of Sultan Abdul Hamid are not yet past, but are present: "The zaptiahs (Turkish police officers), those evil figures of Hamidian days, are active again. Under the pretext of searching for Haji Yaqub's terrorists in the distant districts of Karkar, Karjkan, and Khizan, they are robbing, humiliating, and raping".⁸

The letter from Akhtamar, subtitled "The Current Situation of the Armenian-Inhabited Provinces", reported that the country's deplorable situation was worsening day by day, and the Armenian population did not know what to do... The government was so indifferent to all this that one could think it was its

⁵ "Horizon", 1913, № 28.

⁶ "Horizon", 1913, № 29.

⁷ "Horizon", 1913, № 39.

⁸ "Horizon", 1913, № 43.

goal to expel the working class from the Armenian villages and force the rest to starve to death.⁹

On March 14, 1913, the daily newspaper reported under the title "The Armenian Question" on the approaching disaster in Vaspurakan." A letter from the region warned that anti-Armenian actions were taking place in Van and its surrounding settlements: "There is no security; the Kurds are lying in ambush in groups along the roads of Van, waiting to kill and rob the unfortunate villagers passing by. The local government takes no action to prevent these Kurdish movements. On the contrary..."¹⁰

In another letter ("The Situation in Alashkert") sent from Kaghzvan it was reported that every day Armenians from Alashkert were crossing into Russia in groups. The Armenian youth of Alashkert were fleeing their homeland because of the violence and merciless treatment inflicted by the Turkish authorities.¹¹

On May 2, 1913, the newspaper reported that the atrocities of the Kurds in the Mush Plain had intensified. At the same time, the government was making arrests for even the slightest pretext or suspicion. For instance, in the city of Mush, Arakel Simonyan was arrested on the grounds of being "suspected of transporting weapons".¹² On May 9 of the same year, in the editorial titled "We Do Not Believe," it was noted that the "New Provincial Law" devised by the Turkish government, supposedly aimed at establishing order in Anatolia and addressing the legitimate demands of Western Armenians, It showed that "when it comes to silencing any fair complaint or resolving any issue, the Turkish governments – whether responsible or irresponsible, constitutional or monarchical – are remarkably alike."¹³ Strongly criticizing the so-called Turkish reform project, the editorial stated that the nations subjected to Turkish rule had suffered many bitter experiences from such programs and that the initiatives of the Turks had primarily served to suppress the demands of the non-Turkish population.¹⁴

⁹ "Horizon", 1913, № 44.

¹⁰ "Horizon", 1913, № 57.

¹¹ "Horizon", 1913, № 57.

¹² "Horizon", 1913, № 94.

¹³ "Horizon", 1913, № 95.

¹⁴ "Horizon", 1913, № 95.

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In № 98 of the periodical, citing the Armenian Patriarch Arsharouni of Constantinople, it is reported that over six months, the Patriarch had received over 176 complaints and reports regarding the dire situation in the provinces of Armenia, however, all of them remained without any consequence.

The Revelation of Contradictions among European Powers

On January 10, 1913, "Horizon", while listing the obstacles facing the Armenian Question, simultaneously noted that there had never been a more favorable time for its positive resolution. "One such time is the present, when defeated Turkey might be compelled to make some concessions under the pressure of European powers, including in favor of its Armenian subjects".¹⁵ It was once again emphasized that during such critical times, the entire Armenian nation must closely follow the course of events and "to the best of their abilities, contribute to ensuring that they result successfully for the suffering Armenians under Turkish pressure".¹⁶

In the article series "The Armenian Question and Its Solution", reviewing the previous developments, it is concluded that any European power opposing Russia's expansion was also against the Armenian Question: "Thus, the Armenian Question in its current form, primarily concerned with physical existence, is tied to Russia's progress."¹⁷ The article series, referring to the events of the 19th century, states that Germany, Austria, and especially England displayed a negative stance toward the Armenian Question. The criticism is particularly directed at England, which adopted an anti-Russian and anti-Armenian stance during the Persian Wars of the 19th century, as well as now when the Turkish-Armenian question is on the agenda: "We see England again with Turkey on one side, and against Russia and at the same time against the Turkish-Armenian Question on the other."¹⁸

The extensive article "Triple Entente and Germany in the Armenian Question", published on January 19, 1913, discusses the position of the European powers towards the fact of the political coup carried out by the Young

¹⁵ "Horizon", 1913, № 6.

¹⁶ "Horizon", 1913, № 6.

¹⁷ "Horizon", 1913, № 11.

¹⁸ "Horizon", 1913, № 11.

Turks in Turkey. It is noted that the aforementioned coup was severely condemned by the Russian, French, English, and Italian press and public opinion.

Only in Austria, the press and society approached the changes in Turkey with some reservations. Perhaps only in Germany the press and political circles, from liberal radicals to extreme right-wingers, unanimously expressed delight at the coup, hoping that "together with the Young Turks, the German influence on the Bosphorus shores would return, which, due to the political preferences of Kemal Pasha, had been replaced by British influence".¹⁹

According to the periodical, the Armenian Question had now become a point of sharp confrontation between the European powers, and each of these states sought to turn Anatolia into a vital area exclusively for its own interests. It is assumed that France, England and Russia have reached some agreement on determining the boundaries of the interests of each state in the Armenian and other vilayets of Asia Minor. Furthermore, it is assumed that "if this agreement takes the form of Russian occupation in the Armenian-inhabited vilayets, then Germany, and possibly the Triple Entente alongside it, will act with all their might to prevent it."²⁰

The newspaper's attitude towards Russia and the Russian government is unequivocally positive. In numerous articles and reviews, it is noted with hope and conviction that the attitude of the Russian press and official circles towards the Armenian Cause has been favorable and benevolent. "Even the Russian press, which draws inspiration from people close to government circles, has a positive attitude towards the Armenian Cause. Thus, the Russian official and unofficial atmosphere has been and continues to be favorable to the Armenian Cause."²¹

On February 2, 1913, the periodical noted that if the Ottomans (Turkish authorities) had ever carried out any reforms, it was only in the "European part of the countries under their rule... while the Asian part was foreign to them and was subjected to complete neglect and contempt."²²

¹⁹ "Horizon", 1913, № 19.

²⁰ "Horizon", 1913, № 19.

²¹ "Horizon", 1913, № 24.

²² "Horizon", 1913, № 26.

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The newspaper often reprinted or commented on materials related to the Armenian Question, published in foreign-language press. On February 20 of the same year, an article was presented, taken from the Bulgarian press, under the title "Albania and Armenia," in which the Albanian and Armenian problems were compared. Noting that the Europeans gave autonomy to Albanians, who were neither a nation nor had a civilization, the author asks: "But why was the Armenian problem not solved in the same way? Does the Armenian nation have less right to demand a better state? Hasn't the Armenian nation given a thousand times more evidence than the Albanians that they deserve their own government?"²³

The Strong Turkish Opposition to the Reform Program

In its first issue of 1914, summarizing the previous year, the newspaper notes: "we spent days and months filled with hopes and emotions, with heartfelt expectations and vivid dreams. The Armenian Question had captured the attention and thoughts of Armenians scattered all over the world. It was the cause of supreme justice, once again presented to the world by a small yet ancient civilization of the East."²⁴

On January 9, 1914, the periodical, citing relevant material from foreign media, noted that the Sublime Porte was causing new difficulties, which resulted in delaying the implementation of reforms.²⁵

It should be added that in each issue of the newspaper, the opinions and emerging tendencies regarding the Armenian Question, expressed by leading European periodicals and news agencies, were analyzed. Thus, in the article titled "Armenian Reforms and the Russian Press," the views expressed in various Russian publications on the Armenian reforms were comprehensively discussed, and changes in Russian public opinion were recorded. "Horizon" was one of the first to inform Armenians about the Russian-Turkish agreement on reforms, and on February 2, it published an extensive article on the main provisions of the adopted agreement.

Analyzing the key points of the agreement one by one, the newspaper expresses doubts about the decision made on the land issue, finding that the

²³ "Horizon", 1913, № 40.

²⁴ "Horizon", 1913, № 1.

²⁵ "Horizon", 1913, № 5.

solution to the land issue in the Western Armenian provinces is possible only through administrative means, whereas "the adopted program stipulates the solution of this issue through legislative or judicial means. Doesn't this mean endless postponement and "burial" of the long-standing land issue?"²⁶

A similar perplexity is expressed regarding the division of Western Armenia into two sectors: "Above all, we find it deeply regrettable that an economically and politically complete country is being divided into two regions without any justified reason".²⁷

The following issues provide detailed information about the administrative division outlined in the reform plan, the powers of the general inspectors, the electoral procedure, the formation of general councils, the national composition of the councils, and the provincial committees.

The preface to "The Armenian Question," while re-evaluating the importance of adopting the reform plan, simultaneously expresses concern about several issues related to key positions, including the term of office of general supervisors. How many years are they appointed to the position, can they be dismissed prematurely, and under what conditions?²⁸

In the February and March issues of the newspaper, the pro-Armenian and anti-Armenian points of the reform plan, as well as the opposite opinions, were constantly and continuously discussed. The newspaper's pages harshly criticized the changes that had been made to the detriment of the Armenian Cause. In general, despairing moods were rising due to the abovementioned changes.

Thus, it was known in advance or assumed that in the Armenian provinces, half of the police, administrative, and judicial officials should be non-Muslim, and the other half Muslim. However, according to the current agreement, this point was not mandatory for the general inspectors; they might apply this principle of society if they do not find it inconvenient".²⁹ One of the unacceptable changes concerned the procedure and requirements for the composition of the provincial assembly in the Van and Baghesh vilayets.

²⁶ "Horizon", 1913, № 25.

²⁷ "Horizon", 1913, № 25.

²⁸ "Horizon", 1913, № 27.

²⁹ "Horizon", 1913, № 35.

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But now it turned out that after the new census, if the Christians in those provinces made up less than 50% of the total population, they would have representatives in the provincial assemblies proportional to their numbers. Thus, if the Turkish government managed to restore one of its old censuses and artificially reduced the number of Armenians, then the provincial assemblies in those provinces would have a Muslim majority... and the rest was more than clear."³⁰

Yes, the Turkish authorities would falsify any statistics, as they had never been disposed towards Armenians in a spirit of goodwill and had never wanted to make simple and basic human rights accessible to them.

The newspaper's observations included numerous facts and examples of how the Turkish authorities neutralized pro-Armenian provisions (for example, regarding the use of the native language), which had been discussed in the press.

Inspectors: The Controllers of Armenians Fate

In the spring of 1914, active and practical negotiations were underway, regarding the appointment of European supervisors in the two Western Armenian sectors. The editorial board of "Horizon" closely followed these developments, republishing important information from foreign-language press, as well as offering its commentary and observations.

In the editorial of the newspaper on April 3, 1914, it is stated that the implementation of Armenian reforms depends not so much on the existence of a democratic and broad plan, but on the body executing the plan, in this case, the appointed inspectors, to whom the fate of the Western Armenians is entrusted. It was a worrying possibility that the inspectors could become pawns in the hands of the Sublime Porte. In such a case, "the people, instead of having a loyal defender of their rights and aspirations, will have a more malignant and dangerous enemy than the Turkish government, because these individuals are likely supported by major powers as well".³¹

However, the newspaper simultaneously expresses optimism that at the current alarming moment, the presence of the inspectors will have a positive practical significance, acting as a certain deterrent "against Kurdish atrocities

³⁰ "Horizon", 1913, № 35.

³¹ "Horizon", 1913, № 72.

provided that the inspectors are immediately appointed to their positions and sent to their posts".³²

The newspaper provides extensive information about the life and activities of the inspectors M.L. Westensenki (Netherlands) and M.N. Hoff (Norway) in the May 8, 1914 issue and other editions.

At the same time, it is reported that Hoff and Westenenk threaten to leave Turkey because the Sublime Porte "does not want to grant the vali the right to dismiss officials and the military-civilian powers."³³

On May 11, the article titled "The New Governors" once again emphasizes that the implementation of the reform program largely depends on the personal mood of the inspectors, as several key points of the program are formulated vaguely and ambiguously, and therefore the personal qualities and role of the general supervisors are of great importance: "From this perspective, it should be noted that the impression received from the general inspectors is, for now, sufficient. In both their homeland and the informed circles, they enjoy a reputation of being strict but just individuals, with two qualities that hold great value in the conditions of Armenia under Turkish rule".³⁴

Conclusion

Presenting the ongoing political and diplomatic struggle regarding Armenian reforms, the Horizon periodical highlights the European powers, for whom the tragic situation of Armenians and the question of their existence were of no importance.

The periodical simultaneously examines and sheds light on the situation prevailing in Western Armenia at that time with objective ruthlessness, showing that the Turkish authorities not only have no intention of implementing the reforms outlined in the agreement but also continue their genocidal policy with even more ferocious manner, aiming to reduce Armenians everywhere to a miserable minority.

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³² "Horizon", 1913, № 72.

³³ "Horizon", 1913, № 97.

³⁴ "Horizon", 1913, № 100.

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ՀԱՅԿԱԿԱՆ ԲԱՐԵՆՈՐՈԳՈՒՄՆԵՐԻ ՀԻՄՆԱՀԱՐՑԻ ԱՐԾԱՐԾՈՒՄՆԵՐԸ «ՀՈՐԻԶՈՆԻ» ԷՋԵՐՈՒՄ

ԱՐՄԵՆ ԿԱՐԱՊԵՏՅԱՆ

Ամփոփում

Հայկական հարցը XX դարի սկզբին կրկին ձեռք բերեց սուր և հրատապ նշանակություն: Այն մի կողմից պայմանավորված էր բալկանյան ճգնաժամով և միջազգային նոր իրավիճակի ձևավորումով, մյուս կողմից օսմանյան հպատակության ներքո գտնվող արևմտահայության սոցիալ-տնտեսական վիճակի առավել վատթարացումով: Երիտթուրքերը շարունակեցին սուլթան Աբդուլ Համիդի՝ հայ ժողովրդին բնաջնջման ենթարկելու քաղաքականությունը: 1912 թ. աշնանից սկսվեցին եվրոպական տերությունների՝ գլխավորապես Ռուսաստանի բանակցությունները թուրքական իշխանությունների հետ արևմտահայկական նահանգներում անհրաժեշտ բարենորոգումներ անցկացնելու հիմնահարցի շուրջ: Միաժամանակ թուրքական կառավարող շրջանները էլ առավել խստացրեցին հայահալած գործընթացը՝ նպատակ ունենալով հայաթափել բնիկ հայկական տարածքները:

Այս ամենը խորությամբ արտացոլվել և լուսաբանվել է Թիֆլիսում լույս տեսնող «Հորիզոն» ազդեցիկ հայկական պարբերականի էջերում՝ 1912–1914 թթ.: «Հորիզոնի» հրապարակումները մեր պատմության այդ բարդ և դրամատիկ դարաշրջանի ճշմարտացի արտացոլումն են, իսկական դաս և պատգամ՝ ներկա և գալիք սերունդներին:

Բանալի բառեր՝ Հայկական բարենորոգումներ, թուրքական իշխանություններ, Մեծ տերություններ, քաղաքական ուժեր, միջազգային դիվանագիտություն, հասարակական կարծիք, ինքնավարություն:

ОСВЕЩЕНИЕ ПРОБЛЕМЫ АРМЯНСКИХ РЕФОРМ НА СТРАНИЦАХ «ГОРИЗОНТА»

АРМЕН КАРАПЕТЯН

Резюме

В начале XX века Армянский вопрос вновь обрел актуальность. С одной стороны, это было вызвано Балканским кризисом и формированием новой международной ситуации, а с другой – дальнейшим ухудшением социально-экономического положения западных армян под властью Османской империи. Младотурки продолжили политическую линию султана Абдул Гамида по уничтожению армян. Осенью 1912 года европейские державы, и прежде всего Россия, инициировали переговоры с турецкими властями по ключевому вопросу реализации необходимых реформ в западноармянских провинциях. Одновременно на территориях, находившихся под контролем Турции, усилились преследования армян с целью обезлюживания коренных армянских земель.

Все эти политические перипетии нашли отражение на страницах «Горизонта» – влиятельного армянского периодического издания, выходившего в Тифлисе (Тбилиси) в 1912–1914 годах. Материалы, опубликованные в «Горизонте», правдиво освещали этот сложный и драматический период нашей истории и являлись своеобразным посланием для нынешних и будущих поколений.

Ключевые слова: *Армянские реформы, турецкие власти, великие державы, политические силы, международная дипломатия, общественное мнение, автономия.*