

## BOOK REVIEWS

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**Territorial losses of Soviet Armenia and the Autonomous  
Region of Nagorno Karabakh in the 1930s.** Yerevan, Zangak,  
2015, 160 pp. + 4 p. insert + 2 maps.

An important political-scientific collective work has been recently delivered to public judgement responding to the Armenian Nation's painful and motivating issue of territorial losses suffered by Soviet Armenia and the Autonomous Republic of Nagorno Karabakh in 1920–1930. The timeliness of the work is also in that the authors had managed to substantiate the fact that part of the Armenian territory liberated by the Armenian Freedom Forces to date had been unfairly annexed by the Soviet Azerbaijan during the Soviet years. Hence, the book is righteously aimed by the researchers not only at scholars of history, but also at political figures, diplomatic staff and political scientists.

It has historically emerged that the Armenian world has in the last two millennia suffered territorial losses. Over 300 thou sq km of Armenian provinces

had been conquered, split or seized, leaving a very small portion of this area to the present-day Armenians.

The territorial losses of Soviet Armenia started with the illegal Moscow – Kars treaty of 1921, the unfortunate continuation being that in the subsequent Soviet years, too, under the pretext of borderline adjustments, the use of water, nomadic life, forests, etc., the two adjacent Soviet Republics made periodic use of the Soviet Armenia's areas. What is involved here is the processes of assimilating Armenia's areas located in Zangezur, Dilijan, and Lori by the border-line regions of Georgia and Azerbaijan. However, that is not the half of it. There have also been cases of internal occupation of the territories making part of the Autonomous Region of Nagorno Karabakh proper inside its borders, when under the name of border-line adjustment individual land spots were cut off and joined to falsely created regions of Soviet Azerbaijan. That was going on all through the years 1920–1930, under the cover and connivance of the Central Committee the Russia's Communist Party (of Bolsheviks) Caucasus Central Bureau, the Transcaucasian Land Committee, the Central Executive Committee of the Transcaucasian Union, and the decisions of their multiple committees, with relevance to the interests of the Georgian and Azerbaijani authorities. This remarkable research is dedicated to throw light upon those issues. The raising of this matter is extremely well-timed, considering the regional challenges to date, to say nothing of the inhumanity and de facto war, occurring now with regard to the problem of Karabakh.

This research is a novelty in respect of several aspects:

First of all, the authors have disclosed and put into circulation the relevant documents, official documentary evidence, that had hitherto been unknown or under cover. While executing the assignment, the group was not delimited by the Armenian archives only, but also studied the Central Executive Committee of the Transcaucasian Union, Council of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom), and other foundations, disclosing relevant archival documents of great value. Use has also been made of the documents deposited in the NKR State Archive (Stepanakert). Thus, the available documentary and statistical data have been joined together, to completely account for and to map out the territorial losses, so as to substantially upgrade their scientific assessment. From this standpoint, the authors addressed not the bare propaganda tricks, which is characteristic of the Turkish-Azerbaijani indoctrination machinery, but rather the specific facts, official decisions and numerical information, while presenting the territorial losses of Armenia, captured by Turkey in the first place, alas, already within the Soviet period. The group of authors have recorded on the basis of abundant documentary evidence that apart from the fact that the 1921 Moscow and the consequent Kars agreements had inflicted significant territorial losses upon Armenia, more losses were suffered by Armenia in the process of adjusting the borderlines dividing the three Republics of Transcaucasia, the process being purely an interior matter having nothing to do either with Turkey or any other foreign power.

Another novelty of the present work is that the group of authors led by K. Khachatryan of NAS RA made a summary of the 1920–1930 borderline

«adjustments», or rather, borderline misrepresentations in their totality, which action has gone unnoticed by all researchers to date. It is well known that the borderline distortions with regard to Armenia have also been practiced in the subsequent Soviet decades, up until the 1970s, including those in connection with the Armenian-Turkish borderline, which can of course be made subject of a specific examination.

Naturally, in the Soviet years among many other problems it was not encouraged to discuss any problems associated with borderline disputes between Armenia and Turkey or between the «three brotherly republics». In this country it has become possible only after rehabilitation of the Armenian Independent Statehood.

A scholarly achievement of the work is that the authors made a joint comparative effort applying their assignment to the territorial and borderline problems, processed an abundance of historic material, often including the tsarist sources and extensive factual and statistical data producing scientifically substantiated and convincing findings.

The discussion of this problem started in Yerevan in December 1920, with the Dro – Legrand Agreement, i.e., since the day of declaring Armenia a Soviet state, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Article whereof, based on relevant research, approximated the surface area of the Soviet Armenia to exceed 43 thou sq. km (see op. cit. p. 18)

The next item to consider were the most disastrous agreements for our Nation, the Agreement of Moscow, 1921, and its adoptee, the Agreement of Kars with the resulting huge territorial losses. In this situation, the Bolshevik Russia, in the name of its far-reaching interests, denied support to the weak and helpless Armenia and the Armenian people having suffered heavy defeat in the Turkish-Armenian war, reaffirming the occupation of the indigenous Armenian territory by the Kemalists through the unlawful Russian-Turkish Moscow agreement, indicating the Turkish-Armenian borderline as the rivers Akhurian and Aras. The Armenian-Turkish state border was drawn in blatant violation of the International Law, with no knowledge or participation by the Armenian delegation.

The disastrous losses by the Armenian Nation inflicted by the Moscow Russian-Turkish Friendly and Brotherly Agreement, included not only awarding to Turkey the regions of Kars, Ardahan, and Surmalu, but also Article 3, as required by Turkey, handing over of the 5.5 thou sq km territory in Nakhijevan on the left bank of the Aras river to its junior brother Azerbaijan.

In the work under review, the authors, one by one, noted the facts of the losses by the Armenian indigenous territories. It is stated in the book that only the Armenian territories handed over to Turkey and Azerbaijan were in excess of 25 thou sq. km (p. 21). «Thus, – sum up the authors, – the Russian-Turkish «treacherous deal» took away from Armenia and rewarded to Turkey and Azerbaijan a significant part of the Armenian territory, severely violating and trampling the fundamental principles of International Law (op. cit.).

The abovementioned facts are the territorial losses of Soviet Armenia. Those were soon followed by big and small clippings of the Armenian territory in favor of Azerbaijan and Georgia. In particular, the researchers had never taken their eyes

off Lori and Javakhk, considered an intricate issue of the time, although the issue had reverberations in the persons of Arsh. Jamalyan, the Armenian dip. representative in Georgia and Academician A. Melkononyanov of NAS RA, the research group had nonetheless scrutinized that as well, for their assignment was to complete the investigation. Emphasized as an appropriate action was the return to Armenia of the neutral zone of Lori aided by the Soviet Russia which was explained not as a favor to Armenia, but rather as an important role of Lori in Georgia's Sovietization. That event can undoubtedly be regarded as a singular appropriation by the Armenian Soviet Republic aided by the Red Army.

Nevertheless, in the process of study, the authors arrived at a general conclusion that in the issue of adjusting the territorial and borderline problems among the Transcaucasian Republics there was, to put it mildly, a manifest display of an unarmenian approach by the central authority. The book clearly shows what has been managed to be done, rather imperfectly, the same having not been accomplished in the Armenian-prevailing regions of Akhalkalaki and Tsalkai (Khrami). The authors of the book have also suggested that in all matter of the lost Armenian territories a certain part was due to the passive attitude of the Armenian authorities.

The problem of drawing the Armenian-Azerbaijani borderlines are much more problematic. The archival documents and circulating decrees and party resolutions showed essential violations of the Yerevan Dec. 2, 1920 Agreement to join to Armenia not only the territory of Zangezur of the former Elizabetpol province, but rather there was an indecision in the status of the border lands of Ghazakh region and villages of the same province. That used to be as a rule followed by claims to Armenian territories. As a result, while by the December 2 Agreement the Armenian Soviet Republic would have amounted to about 43070,4 sq. km, however already in the late 1921 – early 1922 it fluctuated within 32 – 33000 sq. km, being reduced by  $\frac{1}{4}$  (p. 54).

But that is not all. As shown by the abundant and substantiated factual and statistical data of the research group, as well as by convincing mapping imaging and relevant scientific findings, the territorial losses by the Soviet Republic of Armenia were of a continuous character, i.e. continued throughout the Transcaucasian Union and as a direct result from the Transcaucasian Union, which was terminated at 29.8 thou sq. km, i.e. the area possessed by Armenian Republic to date.

It should not look surprising then, than the top Soviet authorities behaved similarly with Nagorno Karabakh proper. The research shows that the borderline clippings were done not only to Armenian Soviet Republic, but also to NKR. Thus, in the summer of 1923, in the formation of NKR, self-government was granted not to the whole Nagorno Karabakh, but only to «the Armenian part of Nagorno Karabakh» (p. 125). It has become clear that certain areas were severed off Nagorno Karabakh and were included in the Azerbaijani regions of Aghdam, Jabrail and Krdstan. Moreover, prior to that the Azerbaijani authorities were not inclined to bring into life the illegal notorious resolution of the Caucasian Bureau of Russian Bolshevik Party Central Committee as of July 5, 1921, with regard to which the Armenian Communist Party Central Committee made a record that

Azerbaijan's July 5 resolution on leaving Nagorno Karabakh within the borders of Azerbaijan was unsatisfactory.

To the honor of research writers, the new facts have shown that for two full years, July 5, 1921 to July 7, 1923, the Azerbaijani side delayed the formation of the Autonomous province, hoping to dilute those Armenian regions using administrative methods, so as to accelerate the process of de-Armenization. The news for the reader is also that the book presents calculations of the Nagorno Karabakh surface area amounting to about 8000 sq. km (p. 130). According to the authors, the area of NKO in the initial years of its existence amounted to about 5000 sq km (p. 135). But here too, its artificial territorial reformulation resulted in reduction, subsequently amounting to 4400 sq. km. (p. 142). Moreover, it was accompanied by another evil deed. The matter is that following the elimination in 1929 of the administrative unit «Red Krdstan» NKO «Via the Lachin Pass» was completely isolated from Soviet Armenia and was converted to an enclave of Azerbaijan.

Thus, summing up the above presentation, it can be concluded that occupation of Kars region and capture of Surmalu by Turkey, annexation of Nakhijevan and Nagorno Karabakh by Azerbaijan, on the other hand land seizures from Soviet Armenia under the pretext of «adjustments» by the neighboring republics, had accumulated in the Armenian people into a mass of explosive matter that had to inevitably explode into the liberation movement of Artsakh to rip up the falsehood and to rehabilitate justice and common sense. In this way, the authors of the book step forward using historical documents, factual computations and objective substantiations to reaffirm the righteous cause of the Armenian Nation to repatriate the 10<sup>th</sup> province of Artsakh to Mother Country, another step to be made being to cancel the unrighteous agreements like those of Moscow 1921 and Kars and to re-establish the all-Armenian historical legal rights with regard to Kars, Surmalu, and the Armenian symbol of Ararat.

The work is summed up with the following profound discourse: 'Thus' as a result of territorial borderline losses of 1920 – 1930s, NKO, Soviet Armenia and its legal successor, the Third Republic of Armenia, found themselves in a strategically unfavorable situation. And it is only the heroic victories of the Liberation Army of Artsakh that in the Soviet years liberated a large part of Armenian territories seized by Azerbaijan. Today they comprise an inseparable part of NKR (Republic of Artsakh) (p. 144).

Eventually, with regard to the contemporary character of the matter under discussion and its scientific, practical and political significance, we desire to see this work published in foreign languages (Russian and English). It is to be reminded that this research subject has been successfully discussed by the State Committee on Science of the Ministry of Education and Science, RA within the framework of Scientific Research Competition, the work having been carried out within its capabilities.

*English by Hachatoor*