

THE PROBLEM OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE OF TRANSCAUCASIA AND POLITICAL PARTIES

Vahan Melikyan

Institute of History of NAS RA

The Formation of the new Government of Transcaucasia and the Discussion of the Problem of Independence at the Seim

As a separate intermediary period in the activities of the Transcaucasian Seim could be regarded the formation of the new government.

In March 13 (26), 1918, at the 17th session of the Seim N. Chkheidze, the chairman reported that the «praesidium of the Seim was requested to invite a person who could take the responsibility to form the government».¹

As such became Yeugeni Gegechkori, the chairman of the Commissary, who immediately presented the team of the new government – Ye. Gegechkori (chairman and defence minister), A. Chkhenkeli (foreign minister), E. Ramishvili (interior minister), N. Khomeriki (minister of agriculture), Kh. Karchikyan (minister of finances), N. Usubekov (minister of public education), Kh. Melik-Aslanov (minister of communications), F. Khan-Khoiskij (minister of justice), A. Khatisyan (minister of food supply), M. Hajinskiy (minister of trade and industry), V. Gobechia (marine minister), G. Ter-Ghazaryan (minister of employment), L. Behbutov (minister of post office and telegraph), H. Ohanjanyan (minister of state care), I. Haydarov (minister of state control) and H. Qadzaznuni (minister without portfolio).²

Reminding the deputies that the new government follows the program-declaration of the Seim, E. Gegechkori presented the priorities of the government.

At first place was the problem of «firm peace and restoration of neighborly relations with Turkey».³

Beforehand let us distinguish two circumstances; first it was obliged that now the unitary Transcaucasia who did not recognize Soviet Russia, used to have «neighborly relations» with the Ottoman empire still at the eve of World war I. Once more the Georgian interests and approach was given priority in regard to this question. It should be remembered also the anti-Russian Georgian-Turkish secret treaty, which violates the legal status of unitary Transcaucasia. Menshevik Ye. Gegechkori easily buried in oblivion the important legal starting point, according to which Georgians, and even «Georgia» being incorporated into the Russian empire could not have relations with Turkey. Anyway, delicately was pursued the old program of separation from Russia through the aid of Turkey, which once more proves our statement that for the Socialist-

¹ See Transcaucasian Seim, Hearing 17, March 13, p. 28.

² Idem 29.

³ Idem: 29.

Menshevik Georgians the Bolshevik coup became a favorable occasion for the realization of their program.

The next contradiction was how Ye. Gegechkori understands the signature of the «honorary peace» with Turkey, who at that moment already had reconquered Western Armenia and was approaching the Transcaucasia. The fall of Erzerum and the shameful handover of Kars to Turks fully reveal the tendencies of the Georgian policy and perspectives, particularly the strategy according to which the «honorary peace» was going to be signed at the expense of Armenian territories and Armenian interests in Transcaucasia. Moreover, Ye. Gegechkori's speech was based on the controversial statement that the «honorary and firm peace is given to those peoples who are ready to fight back the assault of the enemy directed against their territory and vital interests».⁴ It is remarkable that still in March 13, when the independence of Transcaucasia was not declared yet, the chairman of the Transcaucasian government assures that «relying upon the Transcaucasian peoples' firm determination who came out to defend **their independence** and liberty until the last drop of the blood, the government shall do everything to fight back them all» (highlighted by the author).⁵

As the second important problem was regarded the improvement of revolutionary achievements for all peoples of Transcaucasia including the uprooting of the remains of feudalism, improvement of the condition of working classes. The third problem was the improvement of the government structure; for example, it was supposed to establish state monopoly on items of everyday life, nationalization of some branches of industry, establishment of control on banks by means of their forceful unification, revision of the whole system of taxation. For Ye. Gegechkori only a strong authority could secure these undertakings who «will be able to overwhelm criminal opposition». Indeed, he have in mind the activities of St. Shahumyan and, particularly the threat of the Bolshevik troops of Sarikamish who were proceeding towards Tbilisi.

The next important problem was, according to Ye. Gegechkori, the creation of real power, that is the army, when «the troops of the disunited region due to the existence of national councils and other organizations directly obey to the government».⁶ It seems that this was not the fourth but the first problem for the «Georgian government» and Georgian-Tatar alliance which could give an opportunity to reach the independence of Transcaucasia. That is why, greeting Ye. Gegechkori with ovations the Seim likewise met the speech of I. Tsereteli. He was concerned with two problems; how the situation of the new authorities could be evaluated and what kind of resources does it have. Highly appreciating the fact that seemingly the government has no opposition in the Seim, he suggested as a directive that «this body of representatives does not have more or less influential group connected with the population which could declare to the

⁴ Idem: 30.

⁵ Idem 30.

⁶ Idem 32.

peoples of Transcaucasia that it would not aid this government and shall direct its power towards other combination of public force, the creation of other political program».⁷

The position of I. Tsereteli was based on the fact that, regardless his political affiliation, the Georgians had occupied all important and decisive positions in the government, and also, benefiting from the «goodwill» of Dashnakcutyun (hereafter ARF) and Musavat, the representatives of national democratic parties, and especially the Armenian people's party, loyal to the government, were not included in the Commissary. The same tendency, as we saw above, was extant in the case of the program pursuing the creation of a homogeneous-socialist government, which ultimately might actually subdue, under the leadership of Georgian Mensheviks, Dashnakcutyun and even the Muslim «Socialists».

Being a conscious and forward-looking politician, I.Tsereteli was aware of the «depths of the state» where the opposition «digs a hole under this government».⁸ In this case he means the necessity of a united front in the context of the Turkish invasion, and like a skilful demagog, brings the example of Georgia. «while in Transcaucasia the democracy collects forces and declares mobilization in Georgian villages and cities, there appear people who agitate to renounce the performance of their civil duties».⁹

He uses the epithets «Dark forces», «ultra-revolutionaries» in regard to the Bolsheviks, and, referring to the existence of a new common enemy after Russian Tsarism, delicately tries to take under the wing of Mensheviks the Georgian nationalism, which, as it is well known, did not proceed further beyond bombastic declarations, transgressing appeals of Ye. Gegechkori and others connected with the united army, defence of the motherland etc. In this background looks tragic that while the Bolsheviks act in accordance with their program and slogans, the so-called Transcaucasian social-democrats, who clearly realize currently unsolvable and hostile interethnic relations, did nothing except declarations of solidarity and brotherhood between nations. «When we read the report of general Andranik, - exclaimed I.Tsereteli, who writes that the troops sent in order to defend the Transcaucasia, through away their weapons and escape in panic, when we read that in the Yerevan province the troops defending the country are directing their weapons against the peaceful population, then in this situation we can say that exactly in this manner a good ground comes into presence for dark activities. And when we hear that in the Muslim neighborhood happen inadmissible and criminal acts against the government, the presence of elements who try to prevent the movements of troops proceeding towards our borders, sowing of national hostilities, we shall say that the opposition is hiding there also, who helps the external and internal enemies with its dark dealings»¹⁰.

⁷ Idem 33.

⁸ Idem 33.

⁹ Idem 34.

¹⁰ Idem 34-35.

I. Tsereteli concludes that the only means of salvation is the existence of the united government composed of the representatives of all peoples, which should be given extraordinary credentials.

He did not hide that this extraordinary measures are necessary against the Bolshevism.¹¹

Every word or praise at first glance were endowed with absolute logics taking into account the war conditions. But it should be mentioned that during this period anti-Bolshevism of I. Tsereteli, other Mensheviks, Muslim-socialists and Dashnakcutyun prevails in respect to the Turkish threat. No matter how much I. Tsereteli and others speak of the Turkish threat, about the unity and solidarity, in the same context they mean the Bolshevik threat, especially in the situation of latest developments.

Speaking about the Turkish invasion and its possible consequences I. Tsereteli forecasts the same dangers for Armenians and Georgians. It became known that before the dialogue between Zhordania-Khatisyan in May 1918 («not to be drown together»), still in March I. Tsereteli had suggested the thesis, according to which «in the critical moments we should not forget that any of the three most numerous Transcaucasian nations is able to destroy the others and himself, and none of them could save himself if he refuse to provide its forces in order to save them».¹² First, in May 1918 N. Zhordania did not follow the advise of I. Tsereteli. Surprisingly, none of the national fractions of Seim did not respond to this conclusion. It appears that there was nothing unexpected; still from the spring of 1917 for the Georgians it was clear that Western Armenia should remain under the authority of Turkey (and now they were going to do everything for the fulfillment of that program - V.M.), and now speaking exclusively about Transcaucasia I. Tsereteli actually denies the existence of Armenian question, the problem of the defence of Western Armenia and the Turkish front and he did not even think that the Dashnak fraction could resist his position and have its own opinion.

To the culmination of the conflict remains at most one month when A. Chkhenkeli would give Kars to the Turks.

Only Cadet Yu. Semenov opposed who got angry for the absence of Russians among the main nations; he also bypassed the fact that in that case anti-Bolshevism and anti-Russianism were regarded as identical. This position of I. Tsereteli was aimed at the program of the separation of Transcaucasia from Russia and the creation of independent Transcaucasia.¹³

Instead of opposing, on behalf of the Dashnak fraction held a speech S. Harutyunyan who told that the party «**submits** all the physics and mutual influence which it has among the Armenian people **to the mission of the Transcaucasian**

¹¹ Idem 35-37.

¹² Idem 39.

¹³ Idem: 41-42.

government according to all paragraphs of the Declaration specified by the government»¹⁴ (highlighted by the author).

All parties responded to the establishment of the new government.

The non-party newspaper «Kavkazskoe slovo» (Caucasian word) writes that this act «brings some certainty in the actually formed political structure. From this point of view, in regard to the formation of the new Cabinet, **in the Declaration of the government we see a new step which was made towards the independent and sovereign statehood** (highlighted by the author)¹⁵. The newspaper sees a progress even in the fact that instead of former commissars now was introduced the term *nakhharar* which speaks in favor of the increase of the competency of the new representatives of the state and concludes that from the state-legal point of view this is «the first cabinet of Transcaucasian ministers». The newspaper regards as the testimony of the change of the constitution the responsibility of the cabinet. The difference and progress are seen in the next; while formerly the formation of the Commissary was arranged by the approval and agreement of the regional center of the representatives of workers and soldiers, from now on the government would be accountable only before the Seim as the supreme legislative body. In this regard the newspaper points to an omission concerning the next; if Transcaucasia has chosen the parliamentary principle, then these innovations should be made through legislative manner.

The newspaper especially attached importance to the character of the government, in this case to the principle of coalition and tries to understand the peculiarities of the Transcaucasian form under the light of European and Russian ones.

In the period of the February revolution coalition meant the cooperation of socialist and bourgeois elements in the same cabinet. Meanwhile, the European vision of coalition means the introduction into the cabinet of the representatives of different political parties. In normal conditions European governments were mostly homogeneous, i.e. they consist of one party, which comprises majority in the parliament (for example, England).

During exceptional situations, in order to consolidate the state, was permitted to organize coalitionary, interparty cabinets.

In the Transcaucasian new government the principle of coalition was put into practice according to European and Russian models. «The formation of our cabinet, concludes «Kavkazskoe slovo» - is a result not of the agreement between two compact socialist and non-socialist groups but of more compound combination - socialist, bourgeois-feudal and national ones»¹⁶.

The Armenian Revolutionary party of Dashnakcutyun confesses that «the Menshevik program was realized, that is to form the state power from some people who

¹⁴ Idem: 42.

¹⁵ See Caucasian word, March 15, 1918, N 59.

¹⁶ Caucasian word, idem.

'join the revolutionary program'.¹⁷ ARF was satisfied with the fact that socialists and revolutionary forces resemble majority in the government. ARF did not conceal also that it was not their expectations, and believes that it is possible to establish a strong and homogeneous state power.¹⁸

This opinion was shared also by Armenian social-democrat Mensheviks. Regarding the Coalition government as a result of the composition of deputies of Seim, S. Arkomed (G. Gharajyan) mentions that «the homogeneous democratic power about which the democratic circles and media continuously writes and orates during the last months, was not vaccinated in our country». ¹⁹ He finds that the formation of the homogeneous socialist power had failed partly since in the Seim the fraction of the Social-revolutionaries actually was absent, likewise the People's socialists, Bolsheviks, hence it was impossible and absurd to form a government exceptionally consisting of Mensheviks.

«Anyway, stresses S. Arkomed, the majority of the new government could be regarded as democratic. If it would be possible to subdue those members of the new government (he bears in mind Musavat and other Muslim parties - V.M.) who do not belong to progressive democratic parties, to the policy of the majority, adapt and be loyal to its Declaration, then a productive work could be expected from the new government». ²⁰ Moreover, he thinks that although the portfolio of the Minister of Public Education has not «military» significance, it is not appropriate to lend it to a Musavatist, since the Turkish people and especially its Musavatist representatives means backwardness and slowdownnes, which is the greatest enemy to the education». ²¹

Thus, in March 13, 1918 the new government of Transcaucasia was formed. It was a coalition which brought together three authoritative Transcaucasian political parties, the latters expressing the interests of the three main peoples of the region. The program of the homogeneous post-October socialist government was not realized and it was impossible since many parties which consider themselves as socialist-revolutionary, were mostly nationalistic, especially Tatar-Muslim groups.

It could be said that after the Bolshevik coup the «socialist» complexity of ARF was released from its chains and the national tendencies began to prevail.

The classical Georgian socialist-Menshevik elite, in the context of the departure from Soviet Russia, the termination of the Bolshevism in Baku and separate negotiations with the Turkey, also had gained absolutely nationalistic character; in fact, these forces who had formed the power and government under the socialist and

¹⁷ See Horizon, March 15, 1918, N. 55.

¹⁸ Idem.

¹⁹ See Payqar, March 16, 1918, N. 55.

²⁰ Idem.

²¹ Idem.

revolutionary slogans, finally declared the national character and perspectives of this state.

The debates in the Seim regarding the Problem of the Independence of Transcaucasia

In the Transcaucasian Seim the problem of the independence of the region first was debated in February 22, in the 9th session.

The debates had begun with the suggestion of S. Vracyan who says that the problem should be discussed beforehand in the fractions and only after it should be included in the agenda. N.H. Zhordania argued against motivating that «if we discuss this important problem behind the scenes, then the people would be unaware; in order to prepare the people we must do it today».²² It appears that, according to N.Zhordania, the already unified and solidary Transcaucasian «people» should have an active role in the solution of this fatal problem and such statement itself would not force the people to face the fact.

With more argumented statements made a speech **S. Tigranyan**. He says that the solution of this extremely important question should be linked with numerous connected topics. «The decision to declare the independence of Transcaucasia is only an exposed phrase, - mentions he, - which could be pronounced but the independence could not become a fact».²³ S. Tigranyan was right when he concludes that the formation of the state is a process where the political body is becoming independent. As a first step of actions of this process the deputy of ARF points on the armistice signed with Turkey, a fact which means that Transcaucasia had gained the status of an independent state. As a continuous second phase he considered the possible signing of a treaty in Trapizon. S. Tigranyan fully appreciated the negotiatory process carried out by the Seim and regional government with Turkey, labelling it as «an extremely important fact» on the path leading to independence.

It is worth to note the diplomatic and political turnround in the formulation of S. Tigranyan, who said that the war was inherited from Russia: **«the war was initiated by Russia and Transcaucasia as a part of Russia inherited it; in fact, Transcaucasia became hostile to Turkey»**²⁴ (highlighted by the author).

We think that this statement represents the new concept of the political orientation of ARF, that is a turnover towards Turkey. In this case after the adoption of the decree of the Council of the Peoples' Commissars (*Zhoghkomkhorh*) «About Turkish Armenia», namely in the context of the Turkish invasion Armenian national party fundamentally draws back from Russia and in the forthcoming negotiations with Turkey was not relying on the aid of the latter. It could be suggested also that the ARF was hopeful on the

²² See Transcaucasian Seim, 9th session, February 22, p. 14.

²³ Transcaucasian Seim: 14-15.

²⁴ Idem: 15-16.

negotiations in Trapizon and it is regrettable that their failure and an absolutely distinct situation were out of question. At the same time, referring to the allies of *Entente*, S. Tigranyan was sure that after the peace treaty there would be no more allies but «equally neutral relations». In the case if the peace treaty would not signed he was puzzled with the relations between Transcaucasia and England, USA and others: «how could we say that we are neutral towards England but not the same towards Turkey, to what extent is expedient our alliance».²⁵

And, finally, S. Tigranyan who regarded the region as a part of the certain political body, the declaration of independence connects with the financial condition of Transcaucasia.

N. Zhordania suggests²⁶ to discuss the problem taking into account the current situation in the region. As such starting point he regarded the war. He rightly says that the territorial issues everywhere were solved through the sword, and only the Bolsheviks who withdraw their troops from the Western and Caucasian fronts, think that «the terms of peace is possible to dictate without military force».²⁷ After the Bolshevik coup he already the second time repeated the idea that during the last one hundred years Transcaucasia was involved in war without the participation of Russia, moreover, it has no army and is going to defend the region against the Turkey and other hostile countries. Recalling the shameful issues of the Brest treaty, N. Zhordania concludes that the only path is the consolidation of the peoples of Transcaucasia based on the common political framework.²⁸

Regarding the Muslims he stresses also that «we, Christians, used to pull the Muslims towards Russia and had pro-Russian orientation. Now, when the war had changed the situation, it might be said that **the Muslims also have right to form their own orientation** (highlighted by the author). If we, Christians, have Christian orientation, why the Muslims could not have Muslim orientation».²⁹ In this case it was pan-Turkism.

Smartly and at the same time simply, through the Muslim fractions N. Zhordania fully was legalizing the cooperation between the Georgian Menshevik and Tatar nationalistic forces and on their behalf and means now was going to change the political orientation of Transcaucasia, not even taking into account the Armenian viewpoint. For N. Zhordania, the term «unified Transcaucasia» embraces the Georgian and Tatar population (i.e. Muslim majority) and all others except Armenians. N. Zhordania was not even asked the main question, how he imagines the unified region which already have pro-Turkish orientation and in this «perfect situation» the condition of Armenians, especially the problem of the Turkish front. «If there is a dilemma - Russia or Turkey, he

²⁵ Idem: 16.

²⁶ See Zhordania 1919: 74-79.

²⁷ Transcaucasian Seim: 18.

²⁸ Idem: 18-19.

²⁹ Idem: 19.

concludes, - then we chose Russia, **but if there is a dilemma Turkey or Transcaucasia, we chose the independence of Transcaucasia**³⁰ (highlighted by the author).

The doubledealing and political falsification is seen clearly in the fact that the independence of Transcaucasia exactly was associated with Turkey, more to say, that was the demand of Turkey in the negotiations at Trapizon. This time N. Zhordania was tangled in his political formulations when he insists that «the problem is placed as the next; here it should be the Turkish orientation and Turkish invasion, or we must declare our independence in order to avoid it».³¹ The denial of the Russian orientation he tries to justify with the absence of the «Russian bayonet», again neglecting the Armenian factor. According to N. Zhordania, «Russia himself had gave up its own orientation and suggests us to stand on our own feet».³²

At the moment the only and mighty argument of N. Zhordania was the next: the Transcaucasian region deals with the Soviet Russia jointly and just this Russia had signed the treaty of Brest. Here he masterly but also with apprehension tries to avoid the fact that there exists one more Russia leading by A. Denikin and others which later, in 1919-1920s seeks for the cooperation with Armenians and their military and political forces against the anti-Russian Georgian-Tatar union.

In his speech N. Zhordania even exclaimed: «long live independent Transcaucasia, down with Turkey»³³, and this in the situation when at that moment the «united» delegation of Seim was negotiating in Trapizon. Raffling the playing card of Batumi and Kars, N. Zhordania once more tried to blackmail saying that «not only those territories but also the whole Transcaucasia could have been devoured by the shift of the Muslim masses»³⁴. He even assures the Muslim deputies with confidence that the joining of Muslims to Turkey does not meet their interests and they must offer something else to their people. N. Zhordania mentions: «If they say that they do not accept neither Russian nor Turkish orientation, the Muslim population will follow them».³⁵ He shares the idea that the declaration of independence possibly will follow the process of negotiations at Trapizon when the region might be required unacceptable conditions. This could secure the international character of the decision. Unlike the Armenian side, N. Zhordania and others clearly imagine their position and were aware of the possible political developments.

As to the final part of N. Zhordania's speech, it contains a context full of terrible perspectives and danger. Taking into account its importance let us cite the full passage: «In order to be understood and accepted not only by other countries but first of all by

³⁰ Idem: 20.

³¹ Idem 20.

³² Idem.

³³ Idem: 20.

³⁴ Idem: 21.

³⁵ Idem.

the peoples of our region, it is necessary to have warranties that the declaration of our independence shall not become a signal for total national fire. If we discuss the main nations, then we see that the Muslims and Georgians in any case can live in solidarity. It is warranted that these two peoples shall not violate the peace, although there are some contradictions in the province of Akhaltskha; and I shall say that I have been there and everybody can say that not the Muslims of Akhaltskha are guilty but the Georgians. Further, you know that the Georgians and Armenians indeed can live in solidarity and between these peoples national conflicts never existed and now there are not such. **But how could be harmonized the interests of Armenians and Muslims»**³⁶ (highlighted by the author).

F. Khan-Khojskij representing the fraction of Musavat finds that the problem of the independence of Transcaucasia arouse after the Bolshevik coup and the tension regarding it he connects with the elimination of the Caucasian front and later with the problem of the treaty with Turkey. The declaration of independence of Transcaucasia he regards as the only solution to the problem.³⁷ Stressing that all Muslim fractions are determined to keep the solidarity by means of the Seim, he reminds that it must be obligatory for all parties of the Seim that during the negotiations with Turkey to regard the 1914 borders and also the borders of the pre-war Transcaucasia as a starting point. F. Khan-Khojskij masterly includes Dagestan within the boundaries of Transcaucasia.³⁸

Cadet Yu. Semenov stresses that declaring the independence Transcaucasia would fall under the Turkish yoke, since immediately after the Bolshevik coup the Turkish government appealed to the authorities of Transcaucasia persuading them to declare independent states. It is worth to mention the idea of Yu.Semenov; the negotiations at Brest are nothing else but the continuation of war by means of other methods. They negotiate with one part of Russia and continue military operations against another part through Turkey. The Cadet deputy says that «All these leads to the dismemberment of Russia and when the Transcaucasian government answers to Turkey that he is with Russia, Turkey and Germany reply with violence and in the negotiations at Brest was added the paragraph concerning the regions of Batumi, Kars and Ardahan. Now declaring independence you think that you avoid the Turkish yoke? In fact, your independence is a compensation for Batumi and Kars. Turkey desires to have warranties that this independence would become a pro-Turkish orientation. Zhordania, against the regions of Batumi and Kars you give a real profit - the independence of Transcaucasia. But already eleven months (since the February revolution - V.M.) you stress that Russia should throw away the sword, you repeat peace, peace and peace. What means your peace? Peace means to put the sword in the scabbard and after reaching this you say that Russia has abandoned us, set

³⁶ Transcaucasian Seim: 23.

³⁷ Idem: 25.

³⁸ Idem: 26-27.

Transcaucasia in a situation, that he is forced to declare independence. Eventually it turns out the result to which Germany, Austria-Hungary and Turkey were aspiring - the disintegration of Russia. With your independence you will fulfil the aim of Germany; finally are you sure that you could secure the unity in your country».³⁹ Yu. Semenov was targeting the weak position of N. Zhordania - the false slogan of friendship and solidarity, moreover, he stresses the circumstance that the Turks say «give us Batumi and Kars, you answer that not only we should not give Batumi and Kars but shall keep the borders of 1914 and want the autonomy of Turkish Armenia».⁴⁰ To this follows the main argument of Yu. Semenov, is Transcaucasia ready to fight against Turkey, while declaring the independence it will lose the Northern Caucasus, would become a new administrative unit and thus appearing on the edge of a havoc and turn into a vassal of Turkey. He reminds also that in this manner Transcaucasia involuntarily would become hostile to *Entente*, while the part of Russia who fights against Bolsheviks remains on the side of the allies. In this regard we find necessary to focus on the announcement of the provisional bureau (petition) for assembling the Russian national congress. There it was said: «Taking into account that the Seim could not be ruled as a body of the State Duma, the Provisional Bureau of the Russian national council does not recognize the jurisdiction of the Council of peoples' commissars (*Zhoghkomkhorh*) to sign a treaty and the regulations of the borders of Transcaucasia. The Provisional Bureau of the Russian national council regards impossible the handing over of Kars, Ardahan and Batumi to Turkey. The Provisional Bureau finds that the detachment of Transcaucasia from Russia is not a necessity, it is inadvisable and would be destructive for the Russian population and for the Transcaucasian democracy as well».⁴¹

S. Tigranyan tries to clarify some aspects regarding the formation of an additional commission in order to organize a detailed discussion.

National-democrat V. Tevzaya labeled the concept of Yu.Semenov as expected since that party did not tolerate not only the separation but even a wide decentralization of the state. Here the dangerous nuance was that the deputy was trying to transfer into political arena the decisive and most vital problem and thinks that Cadets need Batumi, Kars and Ardahan in the case of further attack and for the justification of the ideology of their party. Not concealing his hatred towards Russia V. Tevzaya does not see any difference between Russian and any other tyranny and concludes that «when we face the alternative of the enslavement or destruction of Transcaucasia, we choose our independence since the Turkish empire is eager to see Transcaucasia as becoming a buffer state just for the self defence of Turkey. After all, it should be remembered that although Russia is weakened but not destroyed and the future Russia could become such as it used to be»⁴². V. Tevzaya compares the future independent Transcaucasia

³⁹ Idem: 29-30.

⁴⁰ Idem: 31.

⁴¹ Idem: 17-18.

⁴² Idem: 36-37.

with Switzerland, identifying the existence and sharpness of Armenian-Georgian-Tatar problems with the geopolitical situation in Swiss republic.⁴³

In this regard we can once more mention that while dealing with important problems the Georgian Menshevism and national ideology were in full solidarity, complementing each other.

On behalf of the fraction «**Hummet**», which was a part of Menshevism, held a speech **S. Aghamalov**. He was surprised that with the case of independence of the region Armenians and Tatars should confront each other, and even more, in this regard ARF and Musavat have no doubt. He came to the next fairy conclusion: «if Seim would say that Transcaucasia is independent, that word would become a fairy beginning of the unification of peoples; these peoples would think - we are a unitary people, unitary nation».⁴⁴ Further, he tries to argue with confidence that the Muslims of Transcaucasia does not have Turkish orientation and that the Armenian-Tatar confrontation is artificially inflated. As to the falling into the arms of Turkey he finds that «the separated brother is the same as an alien man». He was hopeful that the independence could save from annihilation and inter-ethnic confrontations⁴⁵.

S. Vracyan from ARF calls attention on the circumstance that although the peoples dreamed of the independence it is strange that the representatives of all Transcaucasian peoples speak of it with rough sense. He noticed that the well founded answers were not given to three aspects of the problem: could the independence a) allow to wrestle against anarchy, b) change the attitude towards the front, and c) could the stance towards Turkey undergo changes.⁴⁶ S.Vracyan focused also on the question that in the case of Turkish invasion there is no guarantee that the Turkey would be satisfied with the 1914 border.

«Who says that the declaration of independence would be the guarantee which will save us from the demands of Turkey», concludes the ARF deputy.⁴⁷

It is worth to mention also the questioning of S.Vracyan where he blames N. Zhordania and F.Khan-Khoiskiy that the attitude towards Russia does not bother them; everybody bears in mind the feasibility and the demands of life. He says: «In that case we shall clarify is really the life enforces to act in that manner and **really Transcaucasia would remain unified, unseparated**»⁴⁸ (highlighted by the author). S.Vracyan concludes that until the final solution of the problem we shall wait the report of the Trapizon negotiations and since the only argument regarding the declaration of the independence of Transcaucasia is the demand of Kars, Ardahan and Batumi, therefore

⁴³ Idem: 37.

⁴⁴ Idem: 38.

⁴⁵ Idem: 39.

⁴⁶ Idem: 40.

⁴⁷ Idem: 41.

⁴⁸ Idem: 42.

it is premature to come to solution.⁴⁹ According to S.Vracyan, because of the Armenian opposition the solution of the independence was postponed.⁵⁰

I. Gobechia of SR party, introducing their approach says that they are unequivocally for the Russian orientation and finds out that the declaration of the independence of Transcaucasia should be carried out in the peace summit. He was seriously concerned that the greatest threat during the Turkish invasion should come from the Muslims, which would be difficult to keep back. In addition, I. Gobechia, on behalf of the SR fraction suggests «not to give up the announcement of the independence of Transcaucasian republic».⁵¹

On behalf of the Muslim Socialist group held a speech **A. Kantemirov**. He complained that the character of the Muslim self-determination is not specified and concludes that the independence of the region is not a necessity. On the contrary he suggests their approach according to which democracy should put an upper hand on the state power. «For us it is not important to see Western Europe as a single political unit but that the power their be at the hands of democracy».⁵²

As an argument A. Kantemirov stresses the harmony between the unified economic and political-legal fields of the Caucasus. «From this point of view the problem of the Transcaucasian independence could be easily solved, without fear and a glance towards Russia ... we find that the peoples of Transcaucasia shall be self-determined and become a historical totality».⁵³ Realizing that in the near future it is impossible to predict the fate and goals of Turkey and Russia, he, falling into contradiction, began to assure that the threat comes not from the Turkey but from the north.⁵⁴

G. Oniashvili of Menshevik fraction reproached those who hand over this very important problem to the discussion of the commission, and, understandingly, among them to ARF. Falling into exaggeration he was trying to assure that Transcaucasia is independent since long and the only thing that remains is to give it a legal content. Regarding the process of negotiations with Turkey a necessity but not an alternative strategy, he gave an importance to the declaration of independence of Transcaucasia.⁵⁵ Worth to mention the questioning of D.Oniashvili regarding the new slogan which should consolidate Transcaucasia. He finds that in the case of the «self-defence» it would lead «only the Armenian population and part of the Georgians». As to the Muslims, he does not rule out the possibility that «they probably will fight against us than with us against

⁴⁹ Idem.

⁵⁰ See S. Vracyan, Republic of Armenia: 79.

⁵¹ See Transcaucasian Seim: 43-44.

⁵² Idem: 45.

⁵³ Idem: 46.

⁵⁴ Idem.

⁵⁵ Idem: 47.

the Turks», at better would keep neutrality.⁵⁶ At the same time he was not hopeful that it would be possible to stop the Turkish troops, after which he again comes to an incomprehensible and controversial conclusion that the only means of salvage is the declaration of independence. If D. Oniashvili clearly distinguishes the anti-Turkish position of Armenians and Georgians and an unhidden sympathy of Muslims towards Turkey, then where did he see the profits of that independence, better to say how.

The hopelessness of situation is stated by the **ARF deputy M. Arzumanyan**. His argumentation was the next; if the Bolsheviks give the regions of Batumi and Kars to Turkey, then the declaration of independence remains the only means of negotiations with the Turks. Comparing with the declaration of independence of Ukraine, in the case of Transcaucasia did not see ceremoniality, but, on the contrary, rumors and contradictions. Referring to N. Zhordania, M. Arzumanyan states the argumentation of the commission, regarding it as a result of the majority of the Muslims. Only with the achievement of consensus in the commission will be possible to come to a common decision and then there would remain only to «hear the act of the declaration of independence, raise up the hands and declare the Caucasus independent».⁵⁷ «When we were speaking about the economic activities of our members of the Seim, we elected a commission which worked five days and reported about the results - rations. This small topic was connected with one hundred people, but when we deal with the independence of the whole region, we do not want to use some days for the detailed discussion by the commission. I suggest this question to be transferred to the commission which should report about the results and we shall make our decision»⁵⁸.

It is interesting that after this fundamental and consistent suggestion Ye. Gegechkori, the chairman of the Commissary, decided to transfer the discussion to the «major events» which took place in the Yerevan province, seemingly with the aim to press on the implacable and aggressive position of the ARF⁵⁹.

Anyway, even after discussing it N. Ramishvili, on behalf of the Menshevik fraction suggested the Seim the next formulation: «discussing the question of the declaration of Transcaucasia as an independent, democratic republic, the Seim, regarding the positive solution of the question possible, instructs the special commission to comprehensively work out the question within a short period»⁶⁰.

While making the final decision Musavat announced that until the independence of Transcaucasia is not declared their fraction refuses to participate in the activities of the commission⁶¹. In the context of this short announcement the true approaches of Musavat and Muslim fractions in general, were manifested, that is do not take into

⁵⁶ Idem: 47-48.

⁵⁷ Idem: 50-51.

⁵⁸ Idem: 51.

⁵⁹ Idem.

⁶⁰ Idem: 56.

⁶¹ Idem: 58.

account the opinion of Armenians, in our case the ARF and ultimately tear off Transcaucasia from Russia, declare the independence of the region.

Finally, the commission was elected by the principle of including two members from bigger and one from smaller fractions. N. Ramishvili announced 12⁰⁰ as a time for the assembling of this commission.

So, in February 22, 1918 (after May 5 - V.M.) first time the Seim had discussed the problem of independence on the level of state and the government.

It directly was connected with the «shameful» territorial concessions at Brest-Litovsk, negotiations at Trapizon, a possible Turkish invasion and the alternative of the Sovietization of Transcaucasia.

In this discussions were fully revealed the positions and strategy of three leading political forces of Transcaucasia.

The Georgian Mensheviks were confident that after the elimination of the All-Russian Constitutional Assembly there remains nothing that connects Transcaucasia with Russia. The Bolsheviks of Brest-Litovsk conceded to Turkey vast territories and in the case if the statehood of Transcaucasia would fail to recognize the attachment of Batumi, Kars and Ardahan to Turkey, the latter needs one authorized independent voice, i.e. the fact of its independence. Let us add that Turkey has made a similar suggestion still in the context of the armistice at Erzinka.

According to the logics of speeches, the position of the Muslim groups could be divided into two parts; on the one hand the unhidden position of loyalty towards pan-Turkism, which usually masterly was camouflaged with rhetoric of phraseology of the democracy and solidarity of peoples, and from the other side the political line of the Georgian Mensheviks under the leadership of N.Zhordania was receiving full credence.

The position of ARF expresses the whole course of events and logics of the post-October period, the isolation of Armenians and their political forces. An unsolvable knot of contradictions came into presence; from the one side the anti-Bolshevism directs the ARF to the joining of the regional authorities and to the strategy of a joint front against the Turkey, from the other side, the impossibility to solve some problems by means of own resources does not allow the Armenian politicians to burn down all bridges connecting them with Russia, especially in the situation of the upcoming Turkish invasion. This was the reason that the Soviet government at Baku lead by S. Shahumyan, about a month later, especially in the context of the failure of the Trapizon negotiations, was regarded as a short-termed but irreplaceable ally on the way of the solution of Armenian problems.

The immediate declaration of independence was directed to the prevention of that «threat», which, according to the Georgian-Tatar union, could ultimately cessate the region from Soviet and the traditional Russian imperialistic ambitions in favor of the desired «peaceful» Turkey.

The media of Armenian parties included in the Seim responded the question of the independence.

«Horizon» of ARF referring to the existence of preconditions of the independence (the treaty of Brest-Litovsk, the absence of authority in the region) discussed in February 22, at the same time mentions that these «go beyond the world of guesses». The newspaper writes that «These guesses are as possible as the opposite ones and asks why the independence of Transcaucasia shall force the Turks to recognize the 1914 borders and not the opposite. Is there any argument to think that declaring independence we could make easy the invasion of Turkey into Transcaucasia. Who could guarantee that our independence should satisfy the Turks whose appetite is well known. Why not imagine that the Turks should try to extend their rule until the Caucasian mountains which is their old desire. **And it is at least levity and unforgiveable for the amenable politicians to discuss such a serious and crucial question based only on guesses**»⁶² (highlighted by the author).

In the face of «Mshak» the Armenian peoples' party, stating that Transcaucasia, not recognizing the Bolshevik state, actually acts independently and finds that «in the current situation the independence could lead to the total disintegration of Transcaucasia, the total development of anarchy and bloody inter-ethnic clashes».⁶³ H. Arakelyan was confident that currently this question should be removed from the agenda.⁶⁴

The Armenian social-democrats expressed their position in the special meeting summoned in March 15. Among the participants were G. Gharajyan, Ar. Zurabyan, A.Bekzadyan, A.Vardanyan and S. Pirumyan.

In his report Ar. Zurabyan spoke against the idea of the independence of Transcaucasia, justifying it with the perspective of the separation from the Russian proletar family and the impossibility to join the Turkish one. A.Bekzadyan rules out this separation, taking into account the factor of the noticeable influence of Turkish-Tatar Musavatism in the Transcaucasian government which could inevitably put this region under the influence of Turkey. Only Gh. Ter-Ghazaryan spoke in favor of the independence.⁶⁵

In March 9 in the Armenian section of the socialist-revolutionaries held a speech L. Atabekyan. Pointing on the principles «The disintegrated Russia could not be a balsam for the illness of Transcaucasia» and the «Independent Transcaucasia is a fiction» his own position and that of his party he connects with the Georgian Mensheviks and Tatar socialists, suggesting the way out in the «close union between Armenian, Turkish and Georgian democrats». As to the cooperation with the Bolsheviks L. Atabekyan suggests convenient preconditions: a) if they shall go to defend the front, b) do not declare a struggle against Armenian and Georgian democrats in the face of Mensheviks and

⁶² Horizon, February 25, 1918, N. 42, also Molot, February 27, 1918, N 41.

⁶³ See Mshak, March 8, 1918, N. 49.

⁶⁴ Idem.

⁶⁵ See Payqar, March 18, 1918, N. 57.

ARF), 3) if during the struggle against counter-revolutionary forces do not exploit the SR organizations.⁶⁶

It is important but also tragic that the theory and the party-bound templates does not halt this forward-looking and dedicated man who some days later was killed in Baku, proving by his deeds the behavior of the Armenian politician.

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⁶⁶ See Ashkhatanqi droshak, April 1(14), 1918, N. 19.