

## IDEAS OF NATIONAL SELF-DETERMINATION AND SOVEREIGNTY IN THE POLITICAL-PHILOSOPHICAL CONCEPTS OF MAGHAKIA ORMANYAN AND LEVON SHANT

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### Abstract

*XIX-XX century's geopolitical realities, constitutional and national-liberation movements, and the change in Ottoman state-legal order became the historic-political basis of the political-philosophical constructs of the thinkers of that time. Due to the military and diplomatic policies of the superpowers Full or partial liberation of the people under the rule of the Ottoman Empire was conceived by the Armenian nation as a historic injustice against the Armenians and a violation of the principle of the legal equality of the nations. In the context of these realities, prominent political scientist-philosophers of that century Maghakia Ormanyan (1841-1918) and Levon Shant (1869-1951) argue for the fundamental ideas of civilizational identity, protection of historical rights, political self-determination, freedom of self-government of the Armenian nation, substantiate independence and national-state sovereignty as highest values.*

**Keywords:** M. Ormanyan, L. Shant, sovereignty, right to self-determination, nation, legal subject, civilization, independence.

In the middle of the 19th century, the goal of the constitutional movement in Western Armenia was the national self-determination of the Armenians. According to Armenian figures, the natural basis of the legitimacy of the nation's political self-government is the existence of the Armenian nation and

nationalism: *if there is no nation, there is not and cannot be a state, but not vice versa*. The foundation and key to the solution of national practical-legal-political issues are the philosophical argumentations of the Armenians as a functioning nation.

Maghakia Ormanyan values the national factor as the basis for the historical dynamics, the development of the nation, and the signification of statehood. According to his belief, “the first step, result and target of **associations** is nationality, with which people will realize their associate nature within legal, possible and beneficial limits” (1880, p. 20). L. Shant’s opinion is concordant with this conclusion: “The nation is the only natural and basic social body because all other social organizations, institutions, factions are its fractions, born of it, incapable and meaningless of living without it” (1979, p. 69). Thus, a complete society is formed in the cohabitation that has already formed as a nation in its social and political nature.

Ormanyan confirms that the concept of “*nation*” should not be understood only as “people”, because it contains a *political* meaning. It should be noted that the nation differs from other ethnic groups in the characteristics of political self-organization and self-governance. The basis of national identity is the soul of the nation, by which the Armenian differs from other nations and peoples, confirming its uniqueness, the National Self.

Shant defines the concept of “*people*” as follows: the people of a certain tribal origin, living in a certain geographic environment, having a historical past and present, having a certain mentality, customs, traditions, religion, and state structure, inheriting an original culture “...is a completely different and unique entity compared to other similar entities” (1979, p. 42).

Thus, with the combination of natural and cultural-civilized immanent abilities, the individuality of the people is revealed, which Shant interprets with the concepts of “*nationality*” and “*national*”: “We will call the individuality of peoples nationality”, because “what separates and differentiates a people from other peoples is its nationality, and what unites the parts and

individuals of a people is its national traits” (1979, p. 43). Therefore, ***nationality is the fundamental principle that identifies and self-determines peoples***, which conditions and combines other factors.

According to the thinker, “humanity” is not a sum of similar individuals, but “a living forest, with countless colors, endless forms” (Shant, 2008a, p. 88). When the sense of a “communal self” is transformed into a national consciousness, it results in the ***appreciation of national identity as the independence of the nation's individuality***. Therefore, the nation is also “... not a simple collection of individuals of the same tribe, but a unique and complete body of a more complex and higher type, made up of the connection of these individuals... with its own special composition, new phenomena, new powers, new consequences” (Shant, 1979, p. 49).

Shant rejects the views according to which the national and the nations disappear in the civilizational dynamics. On the contrary, “Civilization... is the most basic condition for the development of nations, the strengthening of national traits... and the appreciation of one's own uniqueness” (1979, p. 64). Therefore, peoples are valued in human civilization to the extent of the specification of their national originality, ethnic-cultural viability, and national will to self-organize and self-determine as an independent individuality.

According to Ormanyan, ***the nation is the substance foundation of statehood, the essence, and purpose of national existence***. Similar observations of some European thinkers are noteworthy. German philosopher K. Hübner confirms: “The nation is not a derivative of the state structure, but the structure of the state itself is derived from its nation, which must follow its specific cultural goal under changing historical conditions. The structures change, but the nations remain” (2001, pp. 27-28). It is obvious that both Ormanyan and Hübner value the nation as the natural-substantial basis of the existence of the state. J. G. Fichte and A. Muller emphasize the supratemporal nature of nations.

According to Fichte, “The state is not an end in itself, but a means... The state is a creation of reasoning, but it is endowed with vitality due to the nation” (Hübner, p. 144).

From the point of view of political philosophy, the identity of the state is embodied both by the right to independence of the highest authority and by the right to independent political development of the nationality as a legal subject. ***The nation is the source and holder of state sovereignty.*** Shant substantiates that the subject of civilization and statehood are definitely nations, because “All organs of a nation are organs of civilization and the nation in itself is an organism producing civilization” (1979, p. 69). Each people forms a certain political system. In fact, Shant refers to ***the natural state of the indigenous nation***, which performs the political function of unifying the nation. However, the situation is different in the case of occupation, when a new type of state is formed - an ***artificial*** state. According to him, when a ruling state allows its subjects to preserve some elements of their national civilization, it always fears that it will lead to sovereignty. We can conclude that ***the national civilizational value system is the basis for restoring the state sovereignty of the subject nation.***

According to Ormanyan, the national liberation movement and the creation of autonomous political structures are manifestations of Armenian political competence. In different periods of history, wars of aggression have prevented the restoration of statehood, however, "The Mamikonians, Bagratuni, Artsruni, Rubineans, Orbalians, Davit, and Mkhitar Siunia... the brave sons of Ulnia, established and defended strong empires, authorities, kingdoms, and autonomy in private provinces or in safe mountains" (Ormanyan, 1879, p. 22). It should be noted that although these establishments and state-legal institutes did not turn into a Pan-Armenian state by the natural course of political reforms, they were of exceptional importance, proving ***the inalienability of Armenian national sovereignty and the nation's ability to create a state and conduct state policy based on it.***

Ormanyan appreciates the officiating of Armenians in the Russian, Ottoman, and Persian governmental institutions, and legislative and judicial bodies, thanks to which they protected national rights as much as possible, mitigating the anti-Armenian tendencies of the dictatorial policy. In addition, Armenian figures contributed to the modernization of the government system of those states, trying to introduce constitutional principles, the goal of which was the overthrow of the dictatorial order and the formation of a legal state. That was the first stage of the political strategy according to national ideology, which was to be followed by national self-determination in the Motherland itself. Ormanyan's rhetorical question is remarkable. "...why not say that today's Armenian already shows the talent that is the supreme genius of our time, *political science*?" (1879)

Criticizing the XIX-XX centuries' international political and diplomatic processes, Ormanyan confirms. "Until it is clearly shown or seen that the European powers have a benefit in forming an Armenia or improving an Armenia, it is not possible to believe the words, nor to trust the promises" (1929, p. 475). The main condition for the legalization of *the political identity* of the nation is the international recognition and validation of the historical existence and rights of the national entities. From this perspective, he poses important questions: "How should a political individuality determine its borders, its union, its existence? What will be the conditions of the union, how far will the demands of independent administration or free reign be extended?" (Ormanyan, 1929, p. 475)

It should be noted that the direct consequence of political and diplomatic developments at the end of the 19th century was the struggle for the recognition of the right to self-determination of the nations declared "small". Ormanyan calls it the right to determine one's own existence or the definition of political individuality. Moreover, he emphasizes *the mandatory exercise of the right to self-determination in the Motherland of the self-determining subject*. This point of view is argued by his

following questions: where is the "good place of the Armenians" endowed with national rights, and where should Armenians self-determine as a political individuality? And, if the Western Armenians or several Armenian-inhabited provinces are meant, how should the self-determination of Russian, Persian, and Armenians scattered throughout the world be resolved? "Should they be included in the territories they live in, or considered absent citizens of the Armenian state?" He demands that when solving the problem of national self-determination, "...in a certain border, the main and traditional place should be taken into account" (Ormanyan, 1929, p. 369), and not to divide Armenians by arbitrary administrative divisions, violating the integrity of the natural existence of the nation.

Thus, Ormanyan rejects the principle of administrative self-governance, on the basis of which the mechanical divisions of the national-historical territories themselves are carried out, and the nations appear under the rule of foreign states, being deprived of their national rights. He puts forward important preconditions, which should become the inviolable basis of diplomatic negotiations on the issue of *national self-determination*. According to him:

- nation creation and its maintenance are determined by the tribal origin and historical homeland.
- natural individuals of a self-determining nationality are compatriots with a common origin and relationship, in this case, the use of language is not essential, and the religious difference is not a negative condition.
- a nation cannot be expelled from its homeland by any international law, that is, international law must not contradict the natural-historical law of nations.
- the conditions for the restoration of the historical and political rights of the nation are "historical existence, political life and having a civilized country" (Ormanyan, 1929, p. 369), as well as the entire cultural-civilizational value system.

- compatriots who emigrated from the homeland should not be considered anti-national elements alienated from the national identity.
- foreign subject-nationals born in the historical homeland who have continuously lived in the same country for five years are granted civil rights if they renounce the citizenship of the former state.
- occupied homelands, which are illegally owned by foreign powers, must be returned to the rightful owner, the nation, by an international legal decision.
- it is necessary to compile the census of nationalities (natural personalities) and the cartography of self-determining entities (political individualities).
- the alliance of nations is acceptable for the establishment of diplomatic relations, unification of common interests, cooperation on means necessary for political reforms, and other purposes.
- subjects who violate the right to political immunity of self-determining nationalities or independent countries should be tried in the International Supreme Court composed of representatives of superpowers and neighboring states of the region, where any action prohibited by law will be condemned.
- it is necessary to resolve inter-ethnic and inter-state controversial issues through political and legal processes, concluding them with mutually beneficial agreements and excluding military clashes. Otherwise, the natural right of self-defense will be exercised.

If the solution to political problems depends on the will of the superpowers of the world, then the right to choose the solutions to domestic problems, in particular, conditions and means of the survival and development of the nation, belongs to the nation. In the present situation, Ormanyán views the legal-political path of solving national problems as more realistic, excluding the effectiveness of revolutionary movements. He considers real

national-constitutional autonomy with parliamentary governance. According to the thinker, *full national sovereignty is the foundation of state sovereignty*, and *the national sovereign government is the guarantor of national unity*. From this starting point, the paradigm of national-state centralism is also substantiated.

According to Ormanyan, the rights of power and self-government are predetermined equally for all nations and not for any "chosen" people. So, if power is granted by divine laws, then governance is accomplished by national rights. This idea is consistent with the perspective of Movses Khorenatsi put forward in the 5th century. "...the Armenian people are endowed with national and state sovereignty from the beginning, which corresponds to the natural law, therefore it is their natural (inalienable) right." (Mirumyan, 2006, p. 216).

Ormanyan values sovereignty not only as an attribute of the state but also as a natural right of the nation. The main condition of self-government of national coexistence is the sovereignty of the nation, which politically embodies the state, and spiritually, the church. Arguing that *sovereignty is the natural basis of the political independence of nations*, he states: "...all authority should belong to the nation, whose protection and maintenance it provides because if a nation does not have its own authority, but is governed by the authority of another nation, it is considered under the rule of another" (Ormanyan, 1985, p. 20).

The issue of sovereignty in Shant's concept is argued in national, state, and civilizational dimensions. Emphasizing the idea of national self-determination, he affirms: "The people themselves must be the owner, supervisor, and controller of their country, their government, their civilization, and their economy: the basis of any social phenomenon is the people, and whatever is done must be done by the will of the people and for the people" (1979, p. 90). He considers the idea of the supremacy of the people to be the main lever of the political processes of the New Time.



The result of the realization of the idea of the sovereignty of the people is parliamentary governance, the representative system, the republics, etc. According to Shant: “One of the inevitable conclusions of that idea is *the demand for independence* of the subjugated and dominated nations, and the implementation of that demand is the series of liberation wars of the last century and a half” (1979, p. 91). He values the prudent policies of those countries (especially England) that assume the principles of independence and sovereignty, transforming the imperial government into a federal system of governance, while he refers to the Soviet state as a “false federation”.

Shant predicts with political optimism that human civilization can condemn any domination, as it rejected human slavery in the past. According to him “*every nation - its own state*” is equivalent to the *principle of justice*. It has been the natural aspiration of all peoples for centuries, and now it has become a political demand for the self-determination of the nations.

According to Shant, *the ideal is the civilization model*, according to which “every nation has only one state, and every state serves only one nation when humanity must recognize only the nation-state” (1979, pp. 96-97). Certainly, this model differs from the European understandings of a nation-state, in which the national factor is ignored, and the origin of nations is viewed as the result of socio-economic developments of recent times. Conditioning the existence of statehood with national integrity and unity, he affirms. “Each nation is its own master and must choose both the method of its internal government and its external state” (Shant, 2008b, p. 171). Thus, he also confirms Ormanyan's idea that the *nation is the essential basis of statehood*.

Shant discusses the issue of inter-ethnic, inter-state, and inter-civilizational relations. According to him, the (XIX-XX centuries) people's modern politics is based on the national idea. If in the previous centuries, the rights of the royal house were important, now the development of civilization is linked with the

realization of the idea of *the sovereignty of the nation*. According to his conviction, tyranny, the enslavement of peoples, and denationalization "...are seen...as an obstacle to the development of civilization and as an immoral phenomenon". The issue of "...separation of forcibly united nations and the demand to unite the forcibly divided parts of the same nation, by which history and reality gradually take the national path" (Shant, 2008b, 171) is followed.

Shant justifies the necessity of a confederation of small independent states in order to fully protect national interests. According to him, the modern civilizational movement is manifested by two trends: on the one hand, *the breakup of large states and the formation of free and independent nations*, on the other hand, *the establishment of international relations of newly independent states*.

The political interaction of nations has led to the idea of an international organization to limit the belligerence of powerful states and regulate international relations. Such a role was assumed by The Hague Conference and the League of Nations, although their activities were incomplete. International politics should be aimed rather at the cooperation of nations than their annihilation. According to Shant, the basis of international solidarity is not the states, but "the Nations, which have been and are the natural basis of human groups and union. So are the nations, which will gradually become the main units of universal connection and alliance" (1979, p. 118).

Shant finds improbable the assumption that there can be an "ideal union" in the world, i.e. one nation, one state, one civilization. Therefore, the idea of a united, undifferentiated, like-minded humanity, according to him "is more of a religious need than a political and civil one". In this context, he criticizes anarchism, positivism, and Marxism: "... Socialism by its very nature is not a friend to small nations, small existence, and small independence, it is the supporter of "big" races and "big" peoples..." (Shant, 2008c, p. 145). The political scientist has a

remarkable view on the historical-political perspective of nations, according to which: “The development of humanity and civilization leads us towards greater decentralization, towards small nations, of course with a common alliance” (Shant, 1979, p. 124). Nature does not tolerate uniformity, because natural creativity tends to create new colors, new forms, and nations.

The issue of *the Armenian civilizational identity* has a special place in Shant’s concept. Regarding Armenia as a country located at the crossroads of the East and the West, he expounds on the criteria for the identification of the Armenian nation. According to him, *nationality is the primary and main characteristic of Armenians in comparison to other nations*. Another significant factor is *the adoption and nationalization of Christianity*, which fundamentally changed the Armenian political and civilizational position, making them more closely associated with the West. Armenians used to be associated with the Western, especially with ancient civilization, but, in Shant’s opinion “...half of their blood being Urartian... they were connected to the East with their behavior and manners, understandings, spirit, and disposition: they were the people of the East” (1979, p. 180). After all, *national culture is synthetic*, which has had a significant impact on civilizational development.

Shant criticizes the religious intolerance specific to Eastern politics, describing it as a struggle against national identity and independence. Thus, “...nation, religion, and independence are always closely connected, and adhering to one’s religion becomes a weapon, a means to protect one’s national identity, to preserve one’s state freedom” (1979, p. 181). The thinker values the religious revolution carried out by Trdat III, considering it a prudent policy for the sake of strengthening independence and statehood. Due to their *religious identity*, Armenians were saved from assimilation with foreign tribes, which would happen through conversion and intermarriage. He also emphasizes the role of the Armenian religion as a defender of spiritual and political independence in the fight against Christian states.

aspirations to deprive the Armenian Church of its sovereignty are well known. It should be noted that the role of the religious factor was significant also because *the Armenian Church united and served only one nation*, not accepting foreigners and people of different beliefs in its structures.

According to Shant, one of the civilizational potentials of the Armenians is the existence of *external and internal statehood in the Armenian world*. External independence has always been shaky due to the independent, semi-independent, or full subordination status of Armenians. Instead, they have always had a "...strong and solid internal statehood. The basis of that internal statehood is the ministerial right and government houses. The ministerial aristocracy maintained the political foundations of national independence until the XIX century, with some manifestations of sovereignty. The clergy played an important role in national life; according to Shant, they are a new kind of government and an intellectual aristocracy with a high religious and philosophical value system. Religious nobility "... was the second important factor leading the destiny and policy of our people, along with our secular nobility until the Turanian centuries" (Shant, 1979, p. 186). Both secular and religious figures sought to restore Armenian independence dreaming of a free civilization.

Thus, the main subjects of the civilizational movement in Armenia in the 19th century were the nobility, the clergy, and the intellectuals, who managed national institutions and exercised national rights in accordance with historical conditions. They tried to transform the national civilization with democratic-constitutional principles.

Shant distinguishes between two levels of application of the democratic principle: *internal* and *external*. In *domestic* life he emphasizes the sovereignty of the people, parliamentary governance, electoral system based on the principle of representation, civil liberties, etc.: "It is the people who own the country, and the people must be the supreme ruler of economic

and political life. Every law, order, and initiative must be carried out for the welfare and development of the people” (Shant, 1979, p. 189).

The political scientist considers the *external* manifestation of the democratic principle to be *the issue of national independence*. Each nation must manage its own political destiny. Therefore, the liberation struggle of nations is natural. This idea is argued in Shant's concept as an "*absolute requirement of civilization*", which is very close to the Armenian people. By the way, the tendency of the Armenian nation to European (Western) values was equal to the protection of the idea of national independence. Submission is a threat not only to national but also to civilizational identity. Therefore, "The idea of having an Armenian civilization without a full national existence, without state independence, is a stupid self-deception..." (Shant, 1979, p. 201). A people's agony begins when it ceases to strive for independence. The quest for independence is the powerful psychological bond that makes national unity and integrity possible.

Thus, the civilizational viability of a nation is manifested in the existence of independent statehood. Statehood is not the basis of a nation's existence, but it is the culmination of national identity and civilization on the level of political culture. Shant believed that the new civilization should bring to "the belief in the equality of nations, self-determination of nations and independence of nations. And the temple of our new creed is our native land, our homeland, and we must strive and we do strive for its full and free rule" (1979, p. 215).

The full sovereignty of Armenia and Armenians requires the concentration of national spiritual-and-mental, political, economic, and willpower, the strengthening of the national consciousness with the belief in the unshakable idea of independence.

### **Conclusion**

The ideas of self-determination and sovereignty of nations are central in the political-philosophical concepts of Malhakia Ormanyan, and Levon Shant, the outstanding thinkers of the 19th-20th centuries. They value the national factor as the basis of the historical, civilizational dynamics, independence of the nation, development, and the meaning of statehood. Affirming that nationality is the fundamental principle that identifies and self-determines peoples and is the source of state sovereignty, thinkers reject the theories according to which nations and nation-states disappear as a result of civilizational developments. International recognition and validation of the historical existence and rights of national legal subjects are considered as the main condition for the legalization of the political identity of states or nations. Emphasizing the exercise of the right to self-determination only in the Motherland of a self-determining national entity, political scientists argue that the development of civilization is conditioned by the realization of the idea of national sovereignty. Their principles were urgent in their era and are relevant in the current historical period of national problems and the clash of interests of superpowers. The arguments of Ormanyan and Shant about the ideas and principles of political philosophy can serve as a basis for the research of modern state and national-civilizational developments.

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