

THE HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROCLAMATION AND FORMATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA 1918–1920

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Huge literature of both scientific and political character was created on the history of the Republic of Armenia in 1918–1920. Nevertheless, today there are still problems, the study of which is not only of purely scientific, but also of cognitive, political and practical importance.

Currently, taking into account the growing day-to-day falsification by Turkish-Azerbaijani historiography in the field of the problem under consideration research on the close study of the following issues becomes relevant:

- historical and ideological background of the Republic,
- democratic processes in the newly created state,
- the policy pursued by the government,
- lessons of the First Republic, the problem of continuity of statehood on the example of the three Republics.

Today, there is still a false opinion in the scientific and political literature that in May, 1918 the Armenian people restored their statehood not as a result of their struggle, but because they were sentenced to independence in the conditions of the collapse of the Russian Empire, moreover – independence, as a good will, was granted to the Armenian people by the Ottoman authorities. However, the reality is that the Armenian people have regained their independence thanks to the powerful national liberation struggle.

In February, 1918, taking advantage of the withdrawal of the Russian troops from the Caucasian front, the Ottoman forces launched a counterattack and managed to re-occupy a number of Western Armenian provinces such as Erznka, Derjan, Erzroum, Sarighamish in March, and Kars in April.

Under those circumstances, the experience acquired by Aram Manukyan, in the administration of the province of Van in May – June 1915, prompted that, as soon as it was possible, the Tiflis Armenian national Council, which since the autumn of 1917 had become a serious center of leadership of the Armenian political

The Historical Significance of the Proclamation and Formation...

life, had to deal with the protection of the population of Armenia without delay and the establishment of the foundations of statehood.

Therefore, having received dictatorial powers from the National Council, he moved to Yerevan, assumed the duties of the head of the local national Council, established order in the region within a very short period of time, organized the military forces. Thus, he truly became the founder of the future Republic of Armenia¹.

The legislative body of Transcaucasia (the Seim), under the pressure of Turkey, adopted the decision on secession of the region from Russia. The Armenian delegates of the Seim, in fear of being left alone against the Turks, made a decisive step towards independence, and voted in favor of the resolution on the Declaration of the region as a Republic independent from the Russian Empire. It is obvious that day by day the issue of independence was becoming an agenda for the Armenian leaders.

On May 15, Alexandropol was captured by the Turkish troops. The enemy that invaded Ararat valley had created a serious threat for both Eastern Armenians and hundreds of thousands of Western Armenian refugees who had taken refuge in Eastern Armenia. Therefore, the primary task of the Armenians was to stop the enemy, and they started along the entire front line from Akhaltsikhe to the Sharour plain.

In connection with heroic battles the May in 1918, the Armenian Historiography mainly refers to the battles for Sardarapat, Bash Aparan and Gharakilisa. However, recent investigations have led to the conclusion that they began in 1917.

Beginning from December, for 6 months the resistance battles against the Meskhetian Turks and regular Ottoman troops continued in Akhaltsikhe and the neighboring Armenian and Georgian villages under the leadership of Zori Zoryan². In March-May, defensive battles took place in the province of Akhalkalaki, in particular in the villages of Damala, Karzakh and Satkha³.

¹ On the exclusive role of Aram Manukyan in the restoration of the Armenian statehood in the province of Yerevan, see in **Ասրյան Ա.**, Արամ Մանուկյան. կյանքը և գործը, Ե., 2005:

² See more about Akhaltsikhe's self-defense in **Սիմոնյան Ե.**, Ախալցխան կրակե օղակում, Ե., 2000:

³ **Սանոսյան Ա.**, Ախալցխայի և Ախալքալաքի 1918 թ. ինքնապաշտպանությունը, Ե., 1992 and **Մելքոնյան Ա.**, Ջավախքը 19-րդ դարում և 20-րդ դ. առաջին քառորդին, Ե., 2003, էջ 271–284:

Melkonyan A.

Successful battles against the Turkish invasion were also fought by the inhabitants of the Shirak plain, joined by the fighters of the famous volunteer Pandoukht⁴. The abuses of the local Tatars were also curbed by the Armenian self-defense forces of Ghamarlu (now Artashat) – the southern part of Ararat valley. Thus, the aforementioned heavy fightings, continuing until the end of May, significantly weakened the threatening Turkish troops and local gangs that joined them and prepared the victories of the Armenian troops in Sardarapat, Bash Aparan and Gharakilisa.

In May 1918, thanks to the victories in the heroic battles for Sardarapat, Bash Aparan and Gharakilisa, the Armenian soldiers and people's militia led by Tovmas Nazarbekyan, Movses Silikyan, Daniel-bek and Pogos-bek Pirumyants, Garegin Nzhdeh, Dro, A. Bey-Mamikonyan, N. Ghorghanyan and other talented military leaders managed to stop the advance of the Turkish troops deep into Eastern Armenia and disrupt the Turkish program of destruction of the Eastern Armenians and the final extermination of hundreds of thousands of Western Armenian refugees who had found shelter in Ararat valley and elsewhere. All strata of the Armenian people participated in this national struggle. The commander of the cavalry platoon, the future Marshal H. Baghramyan, linguist H. Ghapantsyan, writer A. Bakounts, Archbishop Garegin Hovsepyan, leading the detachment of clergymen took part in the May battles. The servicemen – representatives of other nationalities, the Russians - N. Perekrestov, N. Klich, A. Shneur, the Greek Sakilari, many Yezidis and others distinguished themselves in the battles.

It is no coincidence that in recent decades, the Armenian Historiography has significantly revised its approaches in connection with the prerequisites for the restoration of Armenia's independence at the end of May 1918, clearly emphasizing the pan-Armenian essence of the heroic struggle of the Armenian people. Therefore, once and for all, this erroneous opinion that the independence of the Armenian people was presented on a silver platter, by the good will of the Turks, should be consigned to oblivion.

Since early May, the Georgian political circles, in order to achieve complete independence and restore their own statehood, intensified their contacts with the German General von Losov in the region and, ultimately, on the 26th of the same month announced the dissolution of the Transcaucasian Seim and the declaration

⁴ 1918 թ. Մայիսյան գոյապայքարի պատմության նոր էջ, Ե., 2005, էջ 54–85:

The Historical Significance of the Proclamation and Formation...

of independence of Georgia. The Caucasian Tatars followed their example. On May 28, the National Council of Armenia made a serious step towards independence by sending a delegation to Batumi for negotiations with the Turks. The Declaration of Independence of Armenia, written by Nikol Aghbalyan, was adopted on May 30.

The Armenian Apostolic Church headed by Catholicos of All Armenians Gevorg V, the Prime Ministers Hovhannes Kajaznuni, Alexander Khatisyan, Hamo Ohanjanyan, and Simon Vratsyan, national and state figures Dro, Avetis Aharonyan, Abraham Gyulxhandanyan, Levon Shant, Vahan Tekeyan, Samson Harutyunyan and Khachatur Karchikyan, Nikol Aghbalyan and others played a significant role in the restoration and strengthening of the Armenian statehood.

The Yezidis living in Armenia, led by Usub Bek Temuryan (member of the Armenian Parliament) and Jhangir Agha, contributed to the effective participation both in the heroic May battles and in the state-building process.

The history of the Republic of Armenia (1918–1920), which began on May 28, 1918, is marked not only by the restoration of independence, but also by the creation, in its administrative structure, of a democratic parliamentary Republic⁵. In just two and a half years, the First Republic acquired all the characteristic features of independent statehood – the territory, the authorities, the army, international recognition, etc.

After the proclamation of independence, one of the priority tasks was the establishment of authorities. At first, the temporary functions of power were carried out by the Armenian National Council in Tiflis, which could not move from Georgia to Yerevan because of the prohibitions imposed on the roads by the Turks, as well as by other circumstances. In Armenia, power remained in the hands of the Yerevan National Council.

On July 19, 1918, the National Council arrived in Yerevan. With the consent of the Tiflis and Yerevan National Councils and political parties, the Supreme body of power – the Council of Armenia (Parliament) was formed. It included representatives of National Councils, different parties, non-party and national minorities – a total of 46 members. On July 24, the composition of the government was made public: Prime Minister Hovh. Kachaznuni, the Minister of Internal Affairs

⁵ **Hovannisian R.G.**, *The Republic of Armenia*, vol. I–IV, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1971–1996, **Հակոբյան Ա.**, *Հայաստանի խորհրդարանը և քաղաքական կուսակցությունները (1918–1920 թթ.)*, Ե., 2005:

Melkonyan A.

Aram Manukyan, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Alexander Khatisian, the Minister of Finance Khachatur Karchikyan, the Minister of Defence General Hovhannes Hakhverdyan, the Minister of Justice Grigor Ter-Petrosyan.

On August 1, the initial session of the first Armenian Parliament – Council (Khorhrdaran) was solemnly opened in Yerevan. Avetik Sahakyan (father Abraham) was elected Chairman of the Council. The session adopted a decision on the earliest possible measures concerning the withdrawal of the country from the most difficult situation. Before the adoption of the Basic Law – the Constitution, it was decided to temporarily be guided by the Collection of Laws of Tsarist Russia. By the end of the year, the judicial system had improved. A jury trial was established.

On December 26, 1919, the Parliament adopted an important decision on the recognition of Armenian as the state language. Office work in all institutions should henceforth be conducted in Armenian. The national flag - the tricolor was adopted, which was to be erected over the buildings of public administration. The architect Alexander Tamanyan and artist Hakob Kojoyan presented the Coat of Arms of the Republic. “Our Fatherland” was used as the national anthem in the Republic. The awards and holidays were determined. Decisions were made on the creation of the Orders “For Services to the Motherland”, “Vardan Zoravar” and others. Repatriation began.

The government of the Republic of Armenia paid great attention to the issue of strengthening the Army. The old Army, the core of which was the Armenian corps, no longer corresponded to the spirit of the time, and therefore, on the basis of a new mobilization of 20–25-year-old young people, the Armenian division was formed under the command of Movses Silikyan. Until 1920, the number of 10 regiments of the Army reached 25,000. Foundations were laid for a Navy on Lake Sevan with the first military vessel “Ashot Erkat”.

On June 21–23, 1919 elections were held with the participation of 366 thousand voters and 7 political parties. All citizens who had attained the age of 20, regardless of gender, nationality or religious affiliation, received the right to vote. The right to vote was also granted to Western Armenian refugees. Of the 80 members of Parliament, 72 were Dashnaks. Three of the elect were women. The newly elected Parliament opened on August 1, 1919 and approved the composition of the new government under the leadership of Al. Khatisyan.

The Historical Significance of the Proclamation and Formation...

The western Armenian refugees, who constituted a large number in the Republic's, population were dissatisfied with the fact that their homeland – Western Armenia was left out of attention by the Armenian government. At the end of October 1918, the news of the defeat of Turkey by the Entente countries in the World War aroused enthusiasm among the Armenians. In February, 1919, a Congress of Western Armenian refugees was held in Yerevan, which put forward the idea of creating a United Armenia. The congress considered that this Republic should be called the Ararat Republic. As for the Republic of Armenia, it should include Western Armenia as well. To solve this historical problem – the creation of a United Armenia, on the day of the anniversary of independence – May 28, 1919, the government headed by Al. Khatisyan declared Armenia a “United Free Republic”. Thus, the authorities considered themselves also the owner of Western Armenia. Armenia was proclaimed a single unified state.

Today, among the controversial issues of the history of the First Republic, we can highlight the problem of foreign policy pursued by the authorities of the country. And nowadays, the state leaders are accused of political orientation in the issue of Russia's preference to Western European countries, which is one of the main reasons for the territorial losses and the fall of the Republic. However, the principle of Historicism, time factor should not be ignored. First, during that period there was no single Russia. In addition to Central Soviet Russia, there were many Russian non-Soviet formations (state entities created by Denikin, Kolchak, Vrangel, and others), with some of which the Republic of Armenia established various ties, while taking parallel steps to establish relations with Soviet Russia⁶.

As for the “pro-western” orientation of the leaders of the Republic, that was dictated by the realities of the time. The countries of the Entente as the victorious side after the First World War, being the main force that “created weather” in Europe and in the world, gave generous promises to solve the Armenian issue by uniting the two parts of Armenia.

It is noteworthy that the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the First World War awakened the hope of creating statehood among the Cilician Armenians as well. Having received the consent of other Armenian national parties and political forc-

⁶ Read more about the relations between the Republic of Armenia of 1918–1920 and non-Soviet formations of Russia in **Պետրոսյան Գ.**, Հայաստանի Հանրապետության հարաբերությունները Ռուսաստանի ոչ խորհրդային պետական կազմավորումների հետ (1918–1920 թթ.), Ե., 2006:

Melkonyan A.

es, on August 4, 1920, members of the Armenian National Union headed by the prominent leader of the Hnchakyan party Mihran Tamatyan, proclaimed the “Independent Christian Republic” of Cilicia⁷. However, the French military authorities did not recognize Tamatyan’s “government” and, having dispersed him by force of arms, began to use violence against Cilician Armenians.

Armenia opened its diplomatic missions in almost twenty countries. Arshak Jamalyan became the representative of Armenia in Georgia, Mikael Varandyan in Italy, Avetis Aharonyan in France, Hovsep Arghoutyan in Persia. On January 23, 1920 a telegram was received from the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Great Britain Lord Curzon, which stated that the Paris Conference, convened by the Entente countries, had decided to recognize the independence of Armenia. This news was marked by 101 cannon shots in Yerevan. On April 24, 1920 Armenia was recognized by the United States. Armen Garo was appointed the representative of Armenia in the USA. Armenia also had a female diplomat in the person of Diana Abgar, who began her activities in faraway Japan.

The First Republic of Armenia was born on the territory of only 12 thousand square kilometers. However, its territory gradually expanded when Turkey defeated in the war, capitulated and signed an armistice with the Entente countries in Mudros on October 30, 1918. The Turks pledged to withdraw their troops to the pre-war (until 1914) borders. During the spring of 1919, the Republic included the region of Kars, Nakhichivan, and in 1920 – Artsakh, with a territory of about 60–70 thousand square kilometers.

The Entente countries were preparing to sign Peace with the countries of the Triple Union, which was to determine the post-war borders. At the end of 1918, the Parliament of the Republic of Armenia formed a special delegation chaired by Avetis Aharonyan, which was sent to Europe to protect the interests of the Armenian people at the Peace Conference opened in Paris, in January, 1919.

An Armenian national delegation headed by an Egyptian Armenian Poghos Noubar, representing the Western Armenians scattered throughout the world, also arrived in Paris. Separate differences between the two delegations were resolved through negotiations and a joint program was developed to be presented to the Conference.

⁷ Յուշամատենան Մեծ եղեռնի (1915–1965), Պեյրուս, 1965, էջ 911:

The Historical Significance of the Proclamation and Formation...

On August 10, 1920, Peace between the Entente and Turkey long-awaited for the Armenians was signed in Sevres, a suburb of Paris. The chairman of the Armenian delegation Av. Aharonyan signed the Treaty on the Armenian side with a pre-ordered golden pen. Articles 88–93 of the Treaty concerned Armenia. Turkey recognized Armenia as a free and independent state, to which most of the provinces of Erzroum, Van, Bitlis and Trabzon should have been attached. The right to sustain the new Armenian-Turkish border was granted to the American President Woodrow Wilson. Armenia received access to the Black Sea through the port of Trabzon. Thus, the territory of Armenia was to be about 160 thousand square km, the centuries-old dream of the Armenian people to create a united state was becoming a reality.

Unfortunately, this Treaty was not implemented due to a multitude of circumstances. First, it was not ratified by the Parliaments of the signatory countries – Great Britain, France, Italy, Japan, Romania, Turkey and, because of the outbreak of the Turkish-Armenian war, even Armenia. Secondly, the Great Powers postponed its implementation, and then gave it to oblivion, arguing that they would need huge military means in order to crush the Kemalists who did not recognize this Treaty in Turkey. Thirdly, the opponent of the Entente – Soviet Russia – supported Kemal Ataturk, the enemy of the Treaty of Sevres, and became his ally.

On April 28, 1920, with the active support of Mustafa Kemal, Musavatist Azerbaijan accepted the 11th Red Army without resistance and became Soviet. The Russian-Kemalist cooperation began to take more effective forms. In 1920, the government of Lenin provided Turkey with 200 kilograms of gold bars, a large amount of weapons and ammunition, and sent experienced military commanders there.

The Armenian-Russian negotiations launched in May in Moscow were accompanied by various obstacles from Azerbaijan and Turkey and were eventually interrupted with the decision to continue in Yerevan.

The Red Army entered Karabakh in May 1920, Zangezur in June, and Nakhichivan in August. On August 10, on the same day when the Treaty of Sevres was signed, an Armenian-Russian agreement was signed in Tiflis according to which Russia recognized the Republic of Armenia, and the latter agreed to the temporary occupation of the above-mentioned three provinces as Armenian-Azerbaijani disputed territories by the Soviet Russians.

Melkonyan A.

On August 24, 1920, a draft of the Russian-Turkish Treaty of cordial and sincere friendship was agreed in Moscow. It recognized the integrity of Turkey, including the cities of Kars, Ardahan and Batumi, that is, the borders of 1877. In fact, the agreement on August 24 was directed against Armenia.

It is not accidental that soon - on September 1-7 - at the congress of the peoples of the East in Baku, convened on the initiative of the Communist International, the Bolsheviks, appealing to the Muslim peoples, came out against the infidels with a call to carry out a socialist revolution. It is noteworthy that Azerbaijan, which was already Soviet, was proclaimed at the Congress as the stronghold of the international proletariat, and the Republic of Armenia replete with refugees - the den of imperialism. In order to crush it and establish the Soviet order there, it was supposed to use the armed forces of the Kemalists Turks. A few days after that anti-Armenian Congress, the Kemalists, with the connivance and support of the Soviet government, invaded the territory of the Republic of Armenia. The Bolsheviks, among whom were also figures of Armenian nationality, began propaganda in the Armenian Army, urging not to fight against Russia's allies - the Kemalists Turks. This circumstance had a negative impact on the combat capability of the Army. On October 30, the enemy captured the Kars fortress.

On November 29, 1920, the Military Revolutionary Committee of Armenia, with the help of the 11th Army, entered Ijevan from Azerbaijan and declared Soviet power in Armenia. The government of the last Prime Minister Simon Vratsian was forced to relinquish power on December 2, in Yerevan. The Armenian-Turkish agreement signed in Alexandropol on the night of December 3 ended the war. According to this truce, the territory of Armenia was significantly diminished. The Armenian-Turkish border was to pass along the Akhurian-Araks line. The province of Sourmalu, which was not part of the Ottoman Empire, was transferred to Turkey; a special administration under the control of the Turks was to be established in Nakhchivan.

According to the figurative expression of the last Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia S. Vratsian, Armenia was crushed between the Bolshevik hammer and the Turkish anvil. It is clear that in such conditions the collapse of the Republic was inevitable.

Despite the fall, the existence of the Republic did not remain without consequences. The Bolsheviks were forced to create a new Republic - Soviet Armenia on its basis. During the period of almost 70-year history of Soviet Armenia the

The Historical Significance of the Proclamation and Formation...

Armenian people experienced an economic and cultural boom. In fact, on the basis of the First Republic, although in conditions of a completely different political and administrative system, the ground was prepared for the formation of the Third Independent Republic.

From the distance of a century, that is the historical account of the restoration of independent statehood in May 1918.

1918–1920 ԹԹ. ՀԱՅԱՍՏԱՆԻ ՀԱՆՐԱՊԵՏՈՒԹՅԱՆ ՀՈՉԱԿՄԱՆ ԵՎ ԿԱՅԱՑՄԱՆ ՊԱՏՄԱԿԱՆ ՆՇԱՆԱԿՈՒԹՅՈՒՆԸ

ՄԵԼՔՈՆՅԱՆ Ա.

Ամփոփում

Չնայած 1918–1920 թթ. Հայաստանի Հանրապետության պատմության վերաբերյալ ստեղծված գիտական և քաղաքական բնույթի ահռելի գրականությանը, այսօր էլ կան հիմնահարցեր, որոնց ուսումնասիրությունն ունի ոչ միայն զուտ գիտական, այլ նաև ճանաչողական, քաղաքական ու գործնական մեծ նշանակություն:

Նկատի առնելով թուրք-ադրբեջանական պատմագրության կողմից խնդրո առարկա հիմնահարցի ոլորտում կեղծարարության օրեցօր աճը, արդիական է, մասնավորապես, մի քանի հարցերի քննությունը, որպիսիք են հանրապետության ստեղծման պատմական և գաղափարաքաղաքական նախադրյալները, նորաստեղծ պետության մեջ ժողովրդավարական գործընթացները, կառավարության վարած քաղաքականությունը, Առաջին հանրապետության դասերը, պետականության շարունակականության խնդիրը՝ երեք հանրապետությունների օրինակով:

Հանրապետությունը կարճ կյանք ունեցավ, սակայն նրա գոյությունն անհետևանք չմնաց: Նրա հիմքի վրա բուշևիկները պարտավորված ստեղծեցին նոր հանրապետություն՝ Խորհրդային Հայաստանը, որն էլ իր հերթին հող նախապատրաստեց Երրորդ՝ անկախ հանրապետության ձևավորման համար:

Այս է շուրջ հարյուրամյա հեռավորությունից 1918 թ. մայիսին անկախ պետականության վերականգնման պատմական խորհուրդը:

ИСТОРИЧЕСКОЕ ЗНАЧЕНИЕ ПРОВОЗГЛАШЕНИЯ И СТАНОВЛЕНИЯ РЕСПУБЛИКИ АРМЕНИЯ 1918–1920 ГГ.

МЕЛКОНЯН А.

Резюме

Хотя и по истории Республики Армения 1918–1920 гг. издан огромный массив литературы научно-политического характера, но на сегодняшний день есть множество вопросов, изучение которых имеет не только сугубо научное, но и познавательное, политическое и практическое значение.

Поскольку турецко-азербайджанская историография изобилует бесчисленными фактами фальсификаций по данной проблеме, то по сей день весьма актуальным остается изучение ряда вопросов, к каковым относятся: исторические и идеолого-политические предпосылки создания республики, демократические процессы, имевшие место в новосозданной республике, политическая линия правительства республики, уроки Первой республики, вопрос преемственности государственности на примере трех республик.

Первая республика просуществовала недолго, но на ее основе большевики создали новую республику – Советскую Армению, которая в свою очередь подготовила почву для формирования Третьей – независимой республики.

В этом и заключается, спустя почти столетие, историческое значение восстановления независимой государственности в мае 1918 года.