NEW MENTALITY, NEW ARMENIA

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Category: Opinions

The Recurring Story of "Hammer and Anvil"

Harut Der-Tavitian, Los Angeles, 22 December 2020

Հայերէն բնագիրը՝ Նոր Մտածելակերպ, Նոր Հայաստան («Մուրճի եւ սալի» կրկնուող պատմութիւնը)

"Turkish-Bolshevik relations are an unbelievably painful issue, fatal and catastrophic for our homeland and for the Armenian people. ***It is no longer a secret that Armenia was squeezed and destroyed between the Bolshevik hammer and the Turkish anvil, becoming the innocent victim of the world revolution.*** *... The Turkish-Bolshevik relations are not only a story of the past, but an urgent issue of today and tomorrow. Every person interested in the destiny of Armenia and the Armenian people should know this story in order to understand everything that befell onto those.* ***He must know in order to avoid inaccurate judgments, baseless illusions and wrongful steps in the future.****" (Simon Vratsyan "Armenia Between the Bolshevik Hammer and the Turkish Anvil" 1953)*

This article expands on the following point raised in our previous article (Why and is it that...): "Why did Russia get a foothold in Azerbaijan at the expense of impoverishing Armenia?" Attempting to answer this led us to re-read the above-mentioned book by the fourth and last Prime Minister of the First Republic Armenia, Simon Vratsyan. To re-read it in light of our defeat in the recent Artsakh war and to find parallels between what happened during Vratsyan's time a hundred years ago and today. Though our main goal is to discuss the impact of Russian-Turkish relations on Armenia, we find it necessary to simultaneously discuss two other major issues that are closely related to our subject: The sovereign statehood of Armenia, and the question of Karabagh (Artsakh).

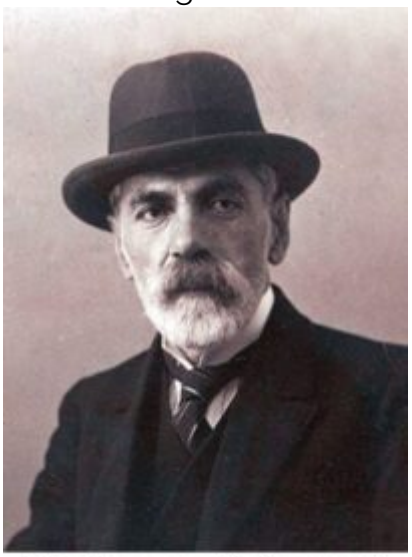
The Sovereign Statehood of Armenia, and National Orientation

Vratsyan writes at the beginning of the book: "In December 1920, Armenia was forced to accept the Soviet regime, then to renounce independence. Why? **Didn't the Armenian people deserve independence? Was Armenia incapable of leading an independent state life?**" Vratsyan, unfortunately does not answer his questions directly and does not delve into his thoughts exhaustively and analytically. He, however, responds indirectly by referring to the causes for the decline of independence. He continues: "An objective study of the facts gives us the right to claim that **the reasons for the decline of Armenia's independence were not internal, but mostly external**."

When we review the 1958 edition of Vratsyan's "The Republic of Armenia" volume, there too we do not find the critical and objective analysis of the questions whether we were worthy of independence or not, and whether our people were capable of leading a sovereign life or not. On the internal front he blames the Armenian Bolsheviks for the demise of our independence, and on the external front he mainly blames Kemalist Turkey and Bolshevik Russia, followed by England and

France. He writes: "The Armenian people waited in vain for justice by the "great allies" who had forgotten the services rendered to them by the Armenians and the solemn promises made to the Armenians. Now everyone was working to secure their own benefit by exploiting the Armenians." During our scholastic years, reading such statements naturally filled us with anger against foreign powers, but we did not realize that such emotions did not help us comprehend the essence of the issues and learn its lessons, and hence did not enlighten us. To be enlightened we had to read the words of the first Prime Minister of the First Republic of Armenia Hovhannes Kajaznuni: "We put our own desires in others ... We overestimated our capabilities, our political and military worth, the importance of the services we rendered to the Russians . And by overestimating our very modest worth, naturally we also heightened our hopes and expectations." And, naturally, the disappointments followed.

Vratsyan does not say a word about our inability to foresee the events or about our short-sightedness. We feel obliged to once again quote Kajaznuni's words written in 1923: "If it is rightfully said that to govern means to foresee, then we have been useless governors, because we have lacked that capability to foresee. We kept making mistakes in our calculations and kept encountering surprises, surprises only for us, because we did not know how to foresee." He continues: **"Complaining bitterly about our fortunes and seeking external factors for the causes of our misfortunes is one of the characteristic features of our national psychology,** from which the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) is not free, of course. It seems we found peculiar solace in the belief that the Russians had treated us malevolently (later it was the turn of the French, the Americans, the British, the Georgians, the Bolsheviks - all the world). It seemed like it was a great virtue and a great courage that we have been so naive and short-sighted, to put ourselves in a position that anyone could deceive, abandon, betray, massacre or let massacre us." The diagnoses made by Kajaznuni were interpreted by Vratsyan as those of "an old man's sick, incomprehensible wanderings". He would point out where "his entire mistake" was and would add: "He believes he instinctively understands the Armenian people and the Armenian reality, while in reality, what he understands intuitively and instinctively is very far from the Armenian people. He is not an Armenian, he is a simple person. There is nothing typical in him as an Armenian". Do you see where the mistake is? Do you realize how beneficial it would have been for our nation if instead of ridiculing the oppositionist with personal insults we would have debated over the pros and cons of the ideas he expressed? This is what we should have done in reality, to, as Vratsyan states: "avoid inaccurate judgments, baseless illusions and wrongful steps in the future." Unfortunately we did not and we suffered badly.


Hovhannes Kajaznuni

In 1958 Vratsyan wrote: "Forty years have passed since the birth of the Republic of Armenia, but the idea of independence has not yet become a common national perception in the psyche of Armenians. Time is a decisive factor in the assessment of historical events and, over time, for generations. However, forty years were not enough to quell the aroused passions over the Republic of Armenia, and for the idea of independence. Why? Because the idea of independence was abused to advance partisan interests and create discord and division. In the absence of a national orientation mindset, we created good Armenia (Հայաստան) and bad Armenia (Վայաստան), spiritual homeland and Bolshevik homeland, ARF Armenian and non-Armenian Armenian (Remember Vratsyan's description of Kajaznuni as "he is not an Armenian, he is a simple man", from which the slogan "he who is not a Dashnak is not an Armenian" came around), the national church and the Bolshevik church, and so on. Among all this, how can one expect "the idea of independence to be rightfully ingrained in the consciousness of the whole Armenian people"? And the few who tried to do that, such as Sarkis Dkhrouni, were killed by a fratricidal bullet.

We had to wait until the movement of the 1980s, when the Karabakh Committee members came out with publications such as "The Time to Disembark From the Train", "The Law of Exclusion of the Third Force", "What is Our Way", and more, to revitalize petrified and stereotyped mindsets. When calls for independence rang from inside our homeland, the three main parties of the Diaspora, at the instigation of the ARF, contested it. It is very likely that SDHP and ADL party were unaware that Marukhyan's ARF was already in the service of the Russian KGB, which did not look with a keen eye at the inevitable world developments. The Soviet Union collapsed and Armenia, not remaining under its ruins, managed to gain independence in a constitutional way, not through the efforts of the ARF, but through Kajaznuni's "other people with a different name, a different psychology, a different past." And unfortunately, the ARF, which considered Armenia's independence its monopoly, transferred the destructive partisan mentality to Armenia and started a struggle against the new ones. Why? Let's give the floor to Kajaznuni again. "We have not been able to differentiate the state from the party and have introduced partisan mentality into the running of the state affairs. We did not have statehood mentality."

Due to this destructive partisan mentality, realities were distorted, the traits of "anti-national" and "traitor" surfaced, as well as "sellers" of Artsakh, etc. And under the veil of patriotic slogans resignations were forced, the October 27 massacre took place, followed by seizure of power, rigged elections, March 1, robbery, etc. The ideas of a national orientation and sovereign statehood were subordinated to the pursuit of partisan gains by becoming tools in the hands of foreign powers.

The Impact of the Karabakh Issue on Armenia

Just as Armenia seceded from the collapsing Soviet Union in a constitutional way, so too did The Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region (NKAR) secede from Azerbaijan. However, Azerbaijan rejected this process and resorted to pogroms and war, which ended in its defeat. The independent Republic of Armenia, to avoid being labeled as an aggressor against the Azerbaijani state, and to

overcome UN and international community condemnation, presented the war as the internal conflict of Azerbaijan: a minority, NKAR, struggling for self-determination. On the legal ground, the war was between Azerbaijan and the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. Armenia simply acted as a defender of the NKAR's rights and its security guarantor. Unfortunately, even this delicate issue was exploited by partisan circles with statements such as Artsakh was liberated "against Levon Ter-Petrosyan's will." It was thanks to this step of the Armenian diplomacy that the Artsakh Republic became one of the signatories of the 1994 ceasefire.

We are all familiar with the developments that followed. Some internal and external forces could not digest this exceptional national achievement and so they managed to create a schism between the two main creators of the victory: Levon Ter Petrosyan and Vazgen Sargsyan. Unfortunately, the ARF played a big role in this rift by assuring Sargsyan that they would raise more than $500 million- a-year from the Diaspora to support his plans. This is how the resignation of President Ter-Petrosyan was demanded and Robert Kocharyan's candidacy for president was advanced against Karen Demirchyan. In the 1998 presidential elections, Kocharyan was "elected" president by constitutional violations and electoral fraud.



Karabakh Committee

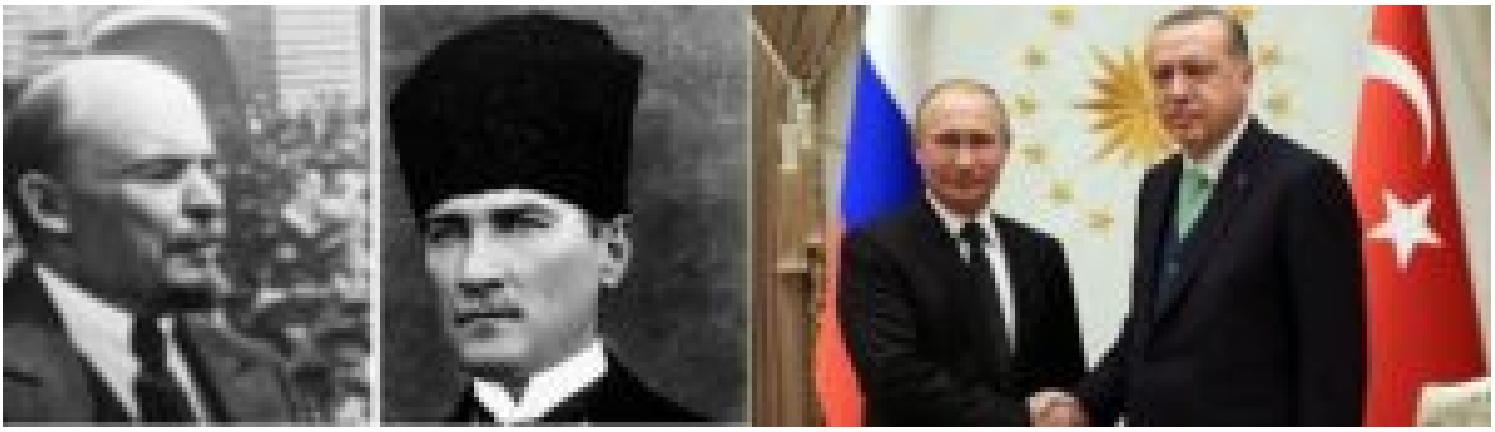
Less than a year later Sargsyan realized that he had been deceived. In the 1999 parliamentary elections he allied with Demirchyan and won a brilliant victory, thus restricting Kocharyan to the status of "Queen of England." The same forces that created the rift in the first place could not digest this success and carried out the Oct. 27, 1999 massacre. Our independent statehood was beheaded, Kocharyan took Artsakh out of the negotiation process and we had 20 years of plunder, which is why we got to where we are.

From all this, it becomes clear that some internal and external forces diverted the Artsakh issue from its original goal of national liberation in order to serve their sectarian interests and seize power in Armenia.

For the benefit of our readers let's draw a parallel. The day after the sovietization of Azerbaijan (April 28, 1920) a threatening telegram was sent to Yerevan to clear the Armenian troops from the territory of Karabakh and Zangezur. Vratsyan writes: "It must be said that Armenia had no "military operations" in Azerbaijan. At that time incidents were taking place in Karabakh. The people of Karabakh refused to recognize the government of Azerbaijan and wanted to join Armenia. The Musavat government, with the help of Khalil Pasha, directed its entire army against Karabakh and tried to forcibly subjugate its people, at whose request a military unit headed by Dro was sent to help them. At the time of Azerbaijan's sovietization, almost all of Karabakh was in the hands of Armenians." We know that Karabakh found itself within the borders of Azerbaijan because of Stalin. But did you know that the five-member body that made that decision first voted in favor of Armenia by a margin of three to two? The next day, under pressure from Stalin, that decision was overturned in favor of Azerbaijan. The one who changed his position was the only Armenian member of that five-member body.

The Impact of Russian-Turkish Relations on Armenia

Vratsyan writes: "The Republic of Armenia fell under the joint blows of the Turks and the Bolsheviks. First of all to the Bolsheviks, because if Soviet Russia had not encouraged and helped, Kemalist Turkey would not have had the courage to attack Armenia at that time."



To draw parallels with today, let us note the situation at that time.

1- World War I is over. The Russian and Ottoman Empires have collapsed and Soviet Russia and Kemalist Turkey are rising from the rubble.

2- The West, mainly England and France, is repartitioning the Ottoman Empire and establishing its zones of influence. Both are concerned in developments in Russia and the threat that the "working class" revolution could pose to their colonial interests.

3- The leaders of the defeated Unity and Progress party (CUP) led by Talaat Pasha had defected to Germany and were planning anti-British programs including the creation of a revolutionary movement in the Islamic countries of Central Asia. Enver Pasha is active in Russia, preparing to cross into Turkey with Bolshevik aid and seize power in the event of the defeat of Mustafa

Kemal. Talaat, Enver and Kemal are competing to lead the new Turkey in formation.

4- With the help of the British, Talaat is assassinated in Berlin by Soghomon Tehlirian. Enver, who was sent to Bukhara by Lenin to quell a local movement, secretly cooperates with the enemy, falls from favor and is assassinated by Hagop Melkumyan. As for Kemal, he becomes everyone's favorite when he collaborates with Kazim Karabekir starting in 1919 and records successes on the battlefield. In April 1920 he becomes the President of the Turkish Grand National Assembly. He exploits with great success the competition between Russia and the West for the benefit of Turkey's national goals, taking advantage of everyone.

5- The then-Armenian authorities are pursuing a short-sighted policy, dazzled by the West's "solemn promises given to the Armenians" (Vratsyan) and "overestimating our very modest merits, naturally, we also exaggerated our hopes and expectations" (Kajaznuni). On the other hand, Azerbaijan, seeing the advance of the Soviet armies, declares the sovietization of Azerbaijan on April 28, 1920, collaborating at the same time with the Kemalists. We rely on the West for the promises of an Armenia from sea to sea, that will be given to us by the Treaty of Sevres (August 20, 1920). This fact turns the Turks and the Russians more against us.

6- The Armenian authorities, having exhausted all resources on the one hand agree to the transfer of power to Russia (November 29, 1920), and on the other hand sign in Alexandropol (Dec. 2, 1920) the humiliating treaty with Turkey.

7- Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan were going through the same mess. The latter two come out of it winners, while we come out losers.

What happened in the past thirty years?

1- The collapse of the Berlin Wall brought forth the formation of a new world order. Germany united and the Soviet Union collapsed.

2- With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the bipolar world came under the unipolar control of the United States. That gave rise to competition for redistribution. As a result all 15 republics that constituted the Soviet Union gained independence and turmoil in the Middle East increased. Independent Armenia tried to lead a pro-Armenian national policy. Artsakh was liberated and its adjacent seven districts came under its control.

3- The unipolar hegemony of the USA did not last long, as the world started moving towards a multi-polar direction, mainly by the reappearance of China. After the initial turmoil, Russia was on the move to re-establish its sphere of influence in the region. One of the results for Armenians was the massacre of Oct. 27, 1999 which was followed by the "pocketing" of Armenia by the "property for debt" deal and 20 years of authoritarian rule through its agents**. The latter took advantage of the situation by filling their pockets and being indifferent to the strengthening of the country's defense, despite witnessing that the enemy was purchasing billions of dollars**

worth of weaponry.

4- Syria also fell in the crossfire of the return of Russian influence, where its interests clashed with those of the Turks. Erdogan's Turkey, which was coldly treated by Europe, turned its attention to the East, Iraq, Syria, and even Libya, pursuing its national interests with the tacit support of the United States. The Russo-Turkish conflict of interests did not last long, when mutual benefits were seen which led them to cooperate. Even the downing of a Russian military plane (Nov. 2015) by Turkey and the assassination of the Russian Ambassador (Dec. 2016) in Istanbul, did not hinder the expansion of this cooperation.

5- Turkey signed a $2.5 billion deal with Russia on Sept. 5, 2017 to buy the S-400 air defense system. In April 2018 Russia started the construction of nuclear power plants in the Turkish cities of Sinob and Akkuyu for more than $20 billion. These deals progressed despite US protests. Russian exports to Turkey surpass $21 billion a year while it imports $4 billion worth of goods from Turkey.

6- US trade sanctions on Turkey and Russia brought the two closer together. Putin and Erdogan became modern-day Lenin and Kemal. Putin-Lenin are attempting to create a schism between Turkey and the West, while Erdogan-Kemal exploit the situation to their benefit.

7- Georgia and Azerbaijan benefited from this situation, while Armenia lost. The ceasefire agreement signed on Nov. 9, 2020 is similar to the agreement of Nov. 29, 1920 and the Treaty of Dec. 2, 1920. At that time, the Armenian Bolsheviks came to replace the ARF, and according to Kajaznuni: "They secured the only degree and form of independence possible in today's conditions." **Today, through democratic processes, the force that should come to power must be guided by the vision of national orientation, to secure the development of Armenia.** Neither the former regime nor the ARF should have the ambition to lead that movement. Their activity for the last 25 years proves that they are not adept to accomplish that task. In particular, they should not be an obstacle in the path of achieving this task, similar to what the ARF did in the 1920s and 1990s and is trying to do today. It is interesting to note that a hundred years ago and until the second half of the 1970s, the ARF led a staunch anti-Russian policy, considering the Russians, not the Turks, as our main enemy. But after that period, they reversed course 180 degrees. Which leads us to think whether that turnaround was necessitated by partisan or national motives?

So, what should be done to move forward?

A-Let’s not blame foreigners for the new catastrophe that befell us. Let’s not repeat Vratsyan's words: "An objective study of the facts gives us the right to claim that the reasons for the decline of Armenia's independence were not internal, but mostly external.” By sufficing with that and not investigating the internal causes of our misfortunes, we will again hand over the management of our destiny to foreigners. The saying "history repeats itself" has its logical continuation: "only for those who do not learn from it". Unfortunately, we have fallen many times and

are still falling in that second section.

B- Through objective and critical discussions let us learn our lessons from this catastrophe and work in national solidarity to eliminate its bitter effects.

Could we have avoided this catastrophe? Our answer is “yes.” Let our affirmation not seem immodest, for it is based on the many articles we have written over the past thirty years and the diagnoses we had revealed. Sure enough, the most important of these diagnoses are best explained by **Hovhannes Kajaznuni: "You love the tool more than the work" and Levon Ter-Petrosyan: "How long should the vice of being a toy in the hands of foreign powers be the way of life of Armenians?"** Rather than "external" factors, we have advocated the strengthening of the "inner" self as a basis for future victories. We tried to spread that mentality through articles, such as “From Selfishness to Patriotism”, "From Self-Deception to Self-Knowledge and Beyond", "All and Part", and many other similar articles.

Can you imagine how much Armenia would have prospered if instead of arousing fury we had conducted public discussions with sober minds and found solutions to our problems that benefitted our nation? **In such an atmosphere the fratricide of Oct. 27 and the beheading of our statehood would not have happened. Just to mention the major catastrophe that befell upon us.** Most likely we would have agreed to President Ter-Petrosyan’s proposal, that as victors we should seek a permanent solution to the Karabagh problem through mutual concessions, replacing the 1994 temporary ceasefire. In the event of such an agreement, we would have created the possibility that the Baku-Ceyhan oil pipeline would pass through its most convenient route, Armenia, instead of Georgia. The same goes for the railways. In the event of such an agreement, we would have strengthened the independent statehood of Armenia. But for whom was such a solution not profitable? Primarily to Russia and its servants, who harmed our homeland under the guise of "Defender of the Fatherland."

Unfortunately, the 1998 scenario is in action again today. It’s the same awful mudslinging, distortion and misinformation. We regret that the speakers in the square put themselves in a miserable situation when they resort to exploit statements made by foreign powers such as Putin, Erdogan or Aliyev to settle internal issues. Don’t they realize that those foreign powers are advancing their own national interests and their statements are intended to destabilize our country? As a major example, let’s mention Putin’s accusation that Armenia had not recognized the independence of Artsakh. The fact is that Russia also had not wanted to do that, because doing so would have encouraged the many “Karabaghs” in its territory to declare independence. But Russia recognized the independence of Abkhazia and Ossetia at the expense of Georgia only when its national interests demanded it. Considering the current situation, by raising the issue of the independence of Artsakh does Russia intend to repeat the example of Abkhazia and Ossetia at the expense of Azerbaijan?

Those who have been looting the homeland for twenty years are now delivering sermons about

the salvation of the homeland. Those who have ignored equipping the army with modern armament and the strengthening of the military for twenty years are speaking today about the importance of the role of the army. Those who falsified elections under an authoritarian regime and violated the law for twenty years today are purporting to teach us about democracy and the rule of law.

By doing so, as we did in 1998, we are further endangering our independent statehood by again placing it between the "hammer and anvil" of foreign powers. It is important to realize the necessity of pursuing a nationally oriented policy that puts the national interest above all else. That becomes possible when we realize that organizations and parties are just tools to serve the nation. They are not eternal and cannot be. The eternal is the Armenian nation which in its millennial history has seen many kingdoms, principalities, feudal dynasties, organizations, etc., which came about and went away serving the nation. It is necessary to objectively evaluate the work done by all such entities, but never at the expense of discrediting one to elevate the other**. Finally, we have to realize that the Armenian nation is the whole of us all, and the damage done to one part of it harms the welfare of the whole. As long as we do not realize this simple reality and are not guided by it, time and again we will find ourselves between the hammer and the anvil of foreign forces.**

P.S. We were moved to write this addition upon viewing the two processions of mourning that took place on Dec. 19 in memory of our soldiers who sacrificed their lives in the recent war. First, we regret that there were two processions as opposed to a unified national one. This reminds us of the separate processions that were held in the Diaspora in memory of our victims of the Genocide. This regretfully shows the politicization of the issue.

Second, watching the videos of both processions, it becomes evident that the one organized by the government had far more participants than that of the opposition. This shows that the people don't trust the calls for "salvation of the country" made by the opposition. But at the same time we get worried when we hear statements made by opposition leaders that reveal their intent to agitate the situation.

Let's give two examples of statements made by none other than Mikayel Minasyan, former President Serge Sargsyan's son-in-law. He threatened to "slaughter under the walls Nikol Pashinyan and his half-men." In another statement, he said: "The Crusaders, in the name of the church, did not have many forms of punishment. Either the victim's ears were cut off or his legs were smashed". Can you believe that these statements were made by our former ambassador to (of all places!) the Vatican? Can you imagine the terrible situation the state of Armenia, its population and the Armenians of the Diaspora will be in should such people come to power? What sane man can trust such people who claim to save the homeland? Knowing who stands behind the opposition and where they come from, we are convinced that their actions bring us closer to the brink of civil war than to the "salvation of the homeland." By aggravating the situation, they clearly intend to seize power and

restore authoritarian rule. This must be avoided in order to really save our homeland.

There are no comments yet.