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THE ZORYAN INSTITUTE

"THE ARMENIAN REPUBLIC" by Simon Vratzian

2-nd Edition

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Mshag Press, Beirut

(684 large-sized pages)

SIMON VRATZIAN was the last prime minister of Free Armenia that lasted 2 years and a half (May 28, 1918 - Nov. 29, 1920). One of the Tashnak leaders, he lives in Beirut in our quarter. He is 90-ish. He was in Buones Aires, later in the States for many years.

This book is probably the most important source about the development of Armenian events in Caucasia between 1914-1920. I had read this book about 15 years ago. I saw it with Mr. Asbed Donabedian the other day, so I took it. I am translating some pages and quotations that concern the Armenian volunteers movement in Caucasia.

A.C.

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This was the situation, when, in July (1914) the 8-th Party (Tashnak) Conference opened in Erzerum.

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The Conference had not finished its work yet, when, news of the European war reached us.

The conference had ended its work, when, Behaeddin Shakir and Naji Bey, envoys of the Ittihad Party, reached Erzerum. They had brought with them some Caucasian and Persian-Azerbaijan agents and soldiers.

The plenipotentiaries of Ittihad proposed to the representatives of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation\* to join the Turks in the event of a Turko-Russian war, and incite the Armenians of Caucasia to revolt against the Russians. They insisted that the Georgian and Caucasian Turks had already declared their agreement and were preparing to revolt. And, indeed, the Caucasian Turks, who had accompanied the Ittihad plenipotentiaries, were giving assurances that they were on their way to Caucasia to instigate agitation and revolt, and, in the event of war, to break up the rear of the Russian army.

Behaeddin Shakir<sup>†</sup> and Naji Bey ~~and Naji Bey~~ were convinced that the time had come for the Caucasian peoples to liberate themselves from the Russian yoke. They insisted that Turkey had no intention of occupying Caucasia. They wanted to create a Caucasian autonomous state - under the protection of Turkey - that would be a barrier between Turkey and Russia. They promised the Armenians to create an autonomous state for them from parts of Russian-Armenian and Turkish-Armenian territories.

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The representatives of the Arm. Rev. Federation declared that they were absolutely against the idea of Turkey's entering into the war, because, they were convinced that the final victory belonged to the Allies. Consequently, in such an event, the fighting Turks would suffer much. They tried to prove that neutrality was the best policy for Turkey. A neutral Turkey could benefit more than a belligerent Turkey.

Ittihad's plenipotentiaries, nevertheless, were steadfast in their proposal. The question of war was settled for them. Germany's victory could not be <sup>admitted</sup> suspected. They tried to convince the Armenians to join them against the common enemy. But the Tashnak representatives declared that if, in spite of their will, war (Turko-Russian) broke out, the Tashnak party members of Turkey would fully perform their duties towards the government. As for the Caucasian Armenians, the Tashnak party cannot undertake to incite them to revolt, particularly because, the Turks, with their policies towards the Turkish Armenians during the past five years, have created such a situation that is far from winning the Russian Armenians to their side.

~~This~~ This was not what the Turks wanted. They were demanding (from the Armenians) more tangible proofs about their "Ottoman patriotism". The Armenians could not have promised more. Psychologically and from a ~~ix~~ human point of view that was not possible. Far from instigating the Armenians of Caucasia, it was even difficult to inspire the Armenians of Turkey with "Ottoman patriotism". The Turkish regime was so much discredited in the eyes of the Armenian people.

On the contrary, in the event of war, an outburst of anti-Turkish feelings was more probable, and that's what exactly happened. The Turko-Russian war had <sup>broken out</sup> broken out yet, when, a vigorous, and, in the full sense of the word, a spontaneous volunteers movement spread among the Armenians of Caucasia. In a short time 4 volun-

\* The Armenian word for federation is "tashnaksutune." "Tashnak" is the abbreviation of Tashnaksutune.

\*\* Behaeddin Shakir was one of the notorious rulers of Ittihad. He was assassinated by the Armenians in Berlin. In all six of the Ittihad rulers were assassinated.



teers groups were organized, and the number of applicants to join was a few times more than the number required. Leaders hard-boiled in guerilla warfare - Antranig, Vartan, Kéri, Hamazasb, Dro, Khécho, and others - took command of these groups. The political slogan of the movement was: "Autonomy to the 6 vilayets and to their integral part Cilicia, under the powerful protection of Russia." The Russians were encouraging this movement, directly or indirectly, and the Tzar made a promise of autonomy to the Catholicos of All Armenians, in Tiflis (or Tbilisi), during a reception. Vorontzov-Tashkov, the viceroy of Caucasia, gave a similar and written assurance to the Catholicos.

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The volunteers groups were 4 at the beginning, under the commands of Antranig, Kéri, Dro and Hamazasb - 2500 strong in all. Later the groups became 7 and were incorporated into the regular Russian army.

By organizing volunteers groups, the leaders of the Armenians of Caucasia aimed at participating in the war against Turkey and liberating the Armenians of Turkey. On the other hand, by having armed soldiers in the ~~fr~~ front they could help in the self-defense of the Armenian people, and prevent or minimize the massacres.

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The volunteers groups, on the other hand, were ~~only~~ only a drop of water compared to the enormous help which the Armenians people gave to ~~the~~ Russia during the war. The 2 million Russian Armenians gave 250,000 soldiers to the Russian Army. All this sacrifice was made in order to liberate Turkish Armenia.

There is mention of a reference here: "La participation des Armeniens a la Guerre Mondiale sur le Front du Caucase 1914-1918", Paris, 1927, by General K. Ghorghanian. (I checked in the Jafet Library today and they have this book. In the book the author's name is written as: Général G. Korganoff. Simon Vratzian in his book had written it with letters that would pronounce exactly as Ghorghanian.)

At the beginning of the war, there was a general ~~x~~ conviction among the Armenian circles, that in a few months the Russian Army would occupy Van and Erzerum, thus liberating the Armenian provinces.

Days and months passed and the Armenian provinces were not liberated yet. On the contrary, in December 1914, parts of Russian Armenia was about to be lost to the Turks. Enver's armies had reached the heights of Sarikamish, and the capital city of Caucasia panicked.

Only the miracle, in other words the extraordinary winter saved Caucasia from being invaded by the Turks. His armies smashed ~~x~~ at Sarikamish, Enver poured his wrath on the Armenians of Turkey. The extermination of the Armenians was planned long ago in the Ittihad's den. An excuse was needed - and here it was: The Armenians were the cause of the Turks defeat.

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The rest of the book is about the Armenian events in Caucasia during ~~the war~~ 1914-1920, which can be summed up as follows; and which will interest you I am sure:

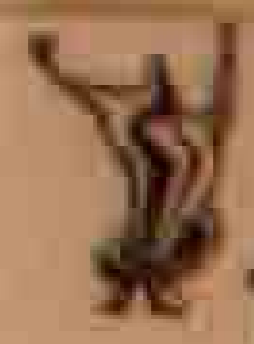
The three Caucasian nations (Armenians, Georgians and Azerbaijanians) formed a confederation during the war. Capital city was Tiflis.

On May 26, 1918, Georgia declared itself independent.

On May 27, " Azerbaijan declared itself independent.

On May 28, " Armenia found itself alone and "independent."

This independence caused so much anxiety to the Armenian authorities that they started looking for "mandateurs." They asked America, England, France, Germany, Italy and finally Russia, but none were interested in Armenia.



On May 30, 1918 negotiations started between Armenian and Turkish delegations in Batum. On June 4, by mutual agreement Armenia was declared independent. Its area was 12,000 sq. Km. (During the confederation the Turks had devastated and occupied large parts of Russian Armenia and had reached the environs of Yérévan.

On page 156:

Thus, according to the Treaty of Batum, Armenia became an independent state. With fear and trembling, it entered the family of sovereign states. Its area was 12,000 sq. Km. and its population, together with the refugees (about 300,000 of them) was approximately 1,000,000. And . . . 7 Km. ~~from~~ from Yérévan, the Turks had deployed their cannons..."

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Soon the Turkish army received orders to withdraw from parts of occupied Russian-Armenian territory, carrying with them all provisions from the villages and everything else that they could take with them, <sup>leaving</sup> leaving the Armenians behind with absolutely nothing to ~~live~~ live on. Six months later, at the beginning of 1919, the Armenian army moved right and left, and, one way or the other, enlarged its frontiers to include Kars and Ardahan provinces. The area of independent Armenia became 50,000 sq. Km. During the same 6 months, according to Vratzian's book, 180,000 Armenians died of famine.

Towards the end of 1920, Kemalist general Kassim Karabekir again attacked and devastated Armenia. By this time the other two Caucasian republics were already sovietized. Karabekir occupied four-fifths of Armenia, that is 40,000 sq. Km., leaving the Yérévan province (10,000 sq. Km.). The Armenian army surrendered and the Turks dictated their terms in occupied Alexandropol (nowadays, Leninakan). (Leninakan is now the 2-nd largest city of Armenia). One or two days before the Treaty of Alexandropol was signed ( a Turkish governor should sit in Yérévan; the Armenian army could not carry more than 1500 bayonets; the Turkish army could pass through Armenia to go to Azerbaijan, etc.), Armenian communist revolutionaries from Azerbaijan entered Armenia and declared it a soviet republic. (Nov. 29, 1920). The Russian army moved in and drove the Turks out of ... half of occupied Armenian territory, leaving Kars and Ardahan to the Kemalists. Thus Armenia became a Soviet republic with an area of 30,000 sq. Km. ( 3 times the size of Lebanon).

It ~~is~~ is not a secret that the Bolshevich government of Russia was encouraging and helping the Kemalist movement during those days just like the European powers were doing. It is my own belief that Lenin and Moustapha Kemal partitioned Armenia (that is, whatever was left of Armenia) between themselves; Or, seeing that the Turks were approaching the Baku oilfields too much, drove them a little away; Or, seeing that the Turks were about to swallow the whole of Armenia, belatedly awoke, and decided to take their share of the spoils; or, could it be that Lenin, in order to "win" Moustapha Kemal to his side, gave the two Armenian provinces of Kars and Ardahan to him as a ... gift? How else to explain the fact that they drove the Turks out of only half of occupied ~~Armenian~~ independent Armenian territory.

~~Simon Vratzian~~ Simon Vratzian describes these events in a chapter in his book entitled ... "Between the Bolshevich Hammer and the Turkish Anvil".