

ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTS

SPEECHES OF ARMENIAN DELEGATES AT 1919 PARIS PEACE CONFERENCE

THE COUNCIL OF TEN

FRANCE
M. Gout

ITALY
H. E. M. Crespi.
M. Galli.

PRESENT DURING QUESTION 5

ITALY
H. E. M. Crespi.

• ARMENIAN DELEGATION
Boghés Nubar Pasha.
A. Aharonian.

Interpreter: Prof. P. J. Mantoux.

Joint Secretariat

AMERICA, UNITED STATES OF.....Lieut. Burden.
BRITISH EMPIRE.....Captain E. Abraham.
FRANCE.....Captain A. Portier.
ITALY.....Licut. Zanchi.
JAPAN.....M. Saburi.

* Kaynak: Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States The Paris Peace Conference 1919 (United States Government Printing Office, 1948) Cilt IV, Sayfa 139-157.
(Çeviren: Ömer Engin Lütem)

- (The Armenian Delegates then entered the Room.)

(4) M. AIIARONIAN read the following statement: “As representatives of the Armenian Republic—which has been regularly constituted for a year in Transcaucasia, with Erivan as the statement of seat of its Parliament and Government we have the

Armenian honour to lay the following facts before the Conference and to make the following request : Before the war of 1914-1918, there were about 2 million Armenians

in Transcaucasian Russia, to say nothing of Armenians in Turkey and Persia. A fifth of these were scattered in the big cities, especially Tiflis, Batum and Baku, and the remainder, i.e. more than a million and a half, lived as a compact community in the districts of Erivan, Kars, Chucha, and Alexandropol, which have been the dwelling-place of our race for two or three thousand years and where the Supreme Head of the Armenian Church, the Catholicos of all Armenians, lives in his monastery of Echmiadzin.

At the beginning of the war, our nation not only forgot all grievances against Tsarist rule and rallied whole-heartedly to the Russian flag in support of the Allied cause, but our fellow-countrymen in Turkey and all over the world offered to the Government of the Tsar (the archives of the Russian Embassy at Paris prove this) to establish and support Armenian legions at their own expense to fight side by side with Russian troops under the command of Russian generals.

The Tsar’s Government stated, through its Ambassador in Paris, that it would be preferable if individual Armenians enlisted in the Russian Army. They at once did so and during 1914, 1915, 1916 and 1917 Armenian volunteers from all parts of the world fought for the Allied cause side by side with their fellow-countrymen who were regulars in the Russian Army; more than 180,000 Armenians defended the freedom of nations, and this devotion to the common cause called down on the Armenian people the hatred of Ottomans and Young Turks, which gave rise to massacres lasting two years and laid waste aft the Armenian vilayets of the Ottoman Empire.

In 1917, when the Russian revolution summoned the Constituent Assembly, the Armenian deputies (who had been freely elected by -our nation) received a mandate to fight to a ffinish and to help loyally in the organisation of a Russian Republic based on a Parliamentary constitution and federative rule. Russia had no more faithful helpers during Kerensky’s rule than our nation, either on the

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battlefields of Europe and Asia or in any administrative offices of the capital or provinces.

In the Autumn of 1917, when all Armenian territory and the Ottoman vilayets fled by the combined efforts of Russia and Armenia, as well as the provinces of Transcaucasia, were exposed to the Turkish invasion owing to Bolshevik defection, the leaders of our people, both laymen and Churchmen, begged the authorities and the Russian Command not to forsake them and renewed their offers of help to continue the struggle. But the Russian generals themselves were forsaken by their men, and the Peace of Brest-Litovsk handed over to Turkey the western half of Caucasian Armenia, including the gate of Kars which laid all Transcaucasia open to invasion.

In order to oppose this invasion and still remain faithful to the Allied cause, the Armenian people in the Caucasus summoned the National Congress on 20th October, 1917; 125 delegates duly elected by the Armenian people, appointed a Council, or rather a Government for National Defence. I became its President, and the mandate given to its 15 members was to resist the Turkish invasion by all possible means and to replace the collapsed Russian front in Asia by an Armenian front.

From October 1917 to June 1918 this Government, under my direction, reorganised and maintained an Armenian army with the help of Armenian resources alone without any help from Russia (which we considered from then onward as a foreign country) or the Allies, who were too far away from us to send more than encouragement and promises. Even Armenian soldiers serving with the Russian armies on the European front could not rejoin us, and Armenian volunteers still fought in the Allied ranks in Palestine.

Through the French Consulate at Tiflis, the French Government sent us a telegram from His Excellency Boghos Nubar Pasha. (head of the Delegation sent to the Allies by the Armenian Catholicos), in which our fellow-countrymen throughout the whole world urged us to hold on whatever happened and not to abandon the cause of the Entente.

On behalf of the National Council, I replied, through the French Consulate at Tiflis :

- (1) That the Armenian Nation was ready to do its supreme duty, as it had done since the beginning of the war ;
- (2) That it counted on the material, moral, and, if possible, military help of the Allies.
- (3) That it masked them to acknowledge the independence of Armenia.

In reply to this telegram, I received a second communication from His Excellency Boghos Nubar Pasha (still through the French Consulate) in which the promise of help and assistance was renewed to us.

As regards the independence of Armenia, we were told that the declarations made in the British House of Commons and the French Chamber of Deputies were of such a nature as to satisfy our claims.

Although we did not know what the text of those declarations was, the Armenian Nation rallied round its National Council, in order to fling itself yet again into the struggle against the Turks. A levee en masse was decreed, and an army of 50,000 men organised in the latter months of 1917, notwithstanding the endless difficulties created by the antagonism which our various Caucasian neighbours manifested against us and against the Entente.

The Tartars and the Kurds, siding openly with Turkey, organised themselves at our rear and did whatever they could to hamper us. The Georgians—with whom we had been linked in the past by the common bond of religion and of suffering—did not consider it their duty to side with us. Though far from the Allies and without their promised help, alone, abandoned and even harried by our neighbours, we nevertheless threw ourselves once more into this supreme struggle, intending, even if we could not be victorious, to stop the Turkish advance towards the interior of the Caucasus, whilst awaiting that Allied victory as to which we never cherished the least doubt.

General Nazarbekian - whose military skill had been greatly appreciated in the Russian Army - was appointed Commander-in-Chief, and the renowned Andranik, who had fought Abdul Hamid and Turkish tyranny for 30 years, was placed at the head of a division of Turkish Armenians. It was this Armenian Army which entered the front abandoned by the Russians, and held it from Erdinjan to the Persian frontier.

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This unequal struggle against a greatly superior enemy lasted 7 months. The most sanguinary battles took place at Erdinjan and at Van. There were encounters at Erzerum, Sarikamish, the fortress of Kars, Alexandropol, Sarderabad, and Karaklis, when the Turks lost very heavily. I myself went to Sarikamish, in order to re-establish moral. It was this heroic Armenian resistance which not only prevented the Turks from advancing into the interior of the Caucasus, but also, by holding back their army, prevented their descent into Mesopotamia for 7 months and helped General Allenby to victory in Palestine by deflecting a large proportion of Syrian forces.

In the meantime, German troops having reached the Caucasus, Georgia declared its independence under German military protection. Tartary, with the help and support of the Turkish army, also declared its independence under the name of Azerbaijan. Caucasian unity was thus destroyed. It was then that the Armenian National Council proclaimed the independence of Armenia.

Our Republic has been in existence for nearly a year. She has repulsed Tartar and Georgian aggression, and has maintained a regular and disciplined army approximately 40,000 strong. We have been untouched by Bolshevism and any other demoralising taint, and have kept perfect order over a territory of 60,000 square kilometres.

It is on behalf of the Armenian Republic that I now make the request set forth below :

In view of the fact that Russia abandoned the Armenians to their fate, in spite of their entreaties, allowed a war beyond their strength to devolve on them alone, and that, moreover, without even consulting them, she handed over to Turkey by the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk the Armenian provinces of Kars, Ardahan and Kaghisman, and so ruined hundreds of thousands of Armenians; that by these very acts she broke all ties which bound her to the Armenian nation, the Armenian Republic asks for recognition of the independence it won on the battlefield, and which the success of its arms has forced even our enemies to acknowledge. In view of the sacrifices which Armenia made, without bargaining, for the cause of the Allies, I have the honour to demand, on behalf of the Armenian Nation, that it should be given, through its delegates, a well-merited seat at the Peace Conference.

The Caucasian Armenians ardently desire reunion of the republic with the Armenian provinces of Turkey, for the following reasons :

- (1) Because the two main sections of the nation, Turkish Armenia and Caucasian Armenia, though separated from each other in an entirely arbitrary manner are identical as regards essential characteristics, speaking the same language, and possessing the same traditions and customs, religion, church and ecclesiastical head- the Catholicos of all Armenians.
- (2) Both sections of Armenia represent a single geographic and economic whole, extending from Lori [Gori?] and Borchalu in the north down to the Mediterranean and, in the south, to the Armenian Taurus.
- (3) This national unity is imperative not merely by reason of historical rights, but also by reason of present necessity, for Caucasian Armenia, which is civilised and powerful and possesses a population of nearly 2,000,000, would be the only sufficient basis for the reorganisation and restoration of Turkish Armenia, now depopulated and ruined by the Turks.
- (4) The desire of the Caucasian Armenians to be united to their compatriots in Turkey is all the more intense and justifiable from the fact that a large portion of the population of Caucasian Armenia originated in Turkish Armenia, and was transplanted by the Russians during the last century. In fact, the districts of New Bayazet, Kaghisman, Kars, Alexandropol and Akhaltzikh are populated almost exclusively by Turkish Armenians.
- (5) The ecclesiastical centre for all Armenians is situated 'within the territory of the Republic at Ecbmiadzin, on the banks of the Arax. Within this territory are also to be found nearly all the capitals of the various dynasties of Great Armenia, i.e. Armavir, Vagharchapat, Dvin, Artachat, Yervandakert, Yervandachat and Ani.
- (6) The valley of the Arax which is the centre of Armenia, has also from time immemorial been the centre of Armenian culture and civilisation. The ruins of the capitals above mentioned bear witness thereto.
- (7) Armenian unity is necessary, for should the two sections of the people remain divided, such division would give rise to an undying desire for union, which desire 'would inevitably cause disturbance and unrest.
- (8) The union of Turkish and Caucasian Armenia is already an accomplished fact, for within the territory of the Armenian Republic there are at present from

400,000 to 500,000 Turkish Armenians who have escaped massacre by the Turks during the war, and the younger generation of which has fought for the conquest of liberty on all our battle-fields.

The Caucasian Armenians, for their part, have during the last thirty years continually sent the best of their youth, under the leadership of such glorious chiefs as Durman, Vartan, Dro, and many others, to fight against Turkish tyranny and deliver Turkish Armenia from the Ottoman yoke.

Our history has proved that unity and independence alone have served the Armenian Nation.”

BOGHOS NUBAR PASHA made the following statement :

“I shall try to be as brief as possible in order not to tax your patience. I think it is needless to recall the numerous promises of reform made by the Porte since the Congress at Berlin. These promises were never fulfilled. Nor need I recall the massacres and deportations concerning which you have full knowledge. You also know by official evidence, which has been published, the unheard of crimes surpassing in horror all that history has registered hitherto, the victims of which reach and even exceed one million.

I wish, however, to recall that at the beginning of the War the Turkish Government had offered to grant the Armenians a sort of autonomy, asking from them in exchange, volunteers to rouse the Caucasus against Russia. The Armenians rejected this proposal and placed themselves without hesitation on the side of the Entente Powers from whom they expected liberation.

The Armenians have fought at the side of the Allies since the first days of the War, until the signature of the Armistice on all fronts.

I shall not repeat what they achieved in the Caucasus. M. Ahrounian, President of the delegation of the Armenian Republic has just given you a long account far better than I shall be able to do.

I would like to mention, however, that in Syria and Palestine, in the Legion d’Orient where Armenian Volunteers, in accordance with the invitation made by the French Government to the National Delegation in 1916- when the agreement between the Allied Powers was signed- gathered to the number of five thou-

sand forming more than half the French contingent and took so brilliant a share in the great Palestine victory, which liberated Syria, that General Allenby sent them an official congratulation.

Lastly, in France, in the Foreign Legion, a crack Corps 'which has covered itself with glory, Armenian Volunteers gained a special distinction for bravery and endurance. Of 800 recruits at the beginning of the campaign, scarcely 40 have survived. All the rest fell facing the enemy.

This Military contribution has been officially and warmly appreciated by the Allied Governments and I need not press the matter further. All that I wish to indicate is that this attachment of the Armenians to the cause of the Entente was one of the motives of the massacres and deportations.

The Armenians, therefore, have been belligerents. The complete victory of the Allies has finally liberated Armenia from the Turkish yoke. That is an accomplished fact. We would add that, if to the victims of massacres and deportations, be added our losses on the field of battle, it will appear that the tribute of life paid by Armenia is heavier than that of any other belligerent nation. Her losses reach more than one million lives out of a total population of 4½ million souls. Armenia has earned her independence by the arms and the blood of her children.

I have two kinds of observations to present. I wish first to speak of the delimitation of the future Armenian State as we understand it. I shall then give you some details concerning the population.

Delimitation

Our claim is that independent Armenia should comprise all Armenian territory and should be formed of:-

1. Cilicia (with Sandjak of Marash) the six vilayets of Erzerum, Bitlis, Van, Diarbekr, Kharput, Sivas and a portion of the vilayet of Trebizond giving access to the Black Sea.
2. The territory of the Armenian Republic of the Caucasus the population of which demands union with its brothers in Turkey under one single Armenian State.

It has sometimes been said and written that we wish to include within the

limits of this State the future Armenian State territories which are not Armenian. This is untrue. Not only do we not make any such demand, but on the contrary, we ask that the final frontiers be fixed not by us but by a mixed Commission which shall work on the basis of historical, geographical and ethnical rights. The present administrative limits of the provinces or Armenian vilayets are arbitrary and false. They were drawn by Abdul-Hamid for the purpose of his policy in such a way as to include capriciously non-Armenian regions, in order to bring about a Muslim majority. Our request is that these outlying regions, generally Kurdish or Turkish, should be detached.

Thus, the whole of Hekkiari and the South of Diarbekr which are mainly Kurdish should be excluded from Armenia; similarly the Turkish region west of Sivas and many others. As to Trebizond we recognise that the population is mainly Greek, but the Port of Trebizond is the only considerable outlet for the whole of Upper Armenia on the Black Sea. Our claim is moreover in accord with the declaration made by M. Venizelos who treated the question in

broad spirit of equity, which I am happy to recognise, in his memorandum addressed to the Peace Conference.

As to our border with Syria, our Syrian neighbours have latterly it forward very unjustifiable claims to the major part of Cilicia which they would include in Syria.

This pretension cannot be maintained. Cilicia is an essentially Armenian Province. It was for four centuries until 1375 the State the last kingdom of Armenia. Some parts of it, such as the region Zeitun maintained up to our time a semi-independence under Armenian Princes. At Sis, capital of Cilicia, the Catholicos, religious head of all the Armenians of Turkey, has, from time immemorial up to the present day, maintained his pontifical seat.

As to the population the great majority is Armenian and Turkish. The Syrian element is insignificant. Before the war, there were in Cilicia only 20,000 Syrians as against 200,000 Armenians. No atlas of the ancient or modern world includes Cilicia in Syria. Geographically, historically, ethnically, Cilicia is an integral part of Armenia and its natural outlet in the Mediterranean.

The North frontier of Syria is the chain of the Amanus, not that of the Taurus, as represented in the publications of the Syrian Committee with the object of including Cilicia in Syria.

Population.

A few words now on the subject of population. I would like to say at the outset that there have never been exact statistics in Turkey. The Turkish Government always falsified those returns intentionally with the object of proving that the Armenians were an insignificant minority. I wish to cite a few examples of these falsifications. The Turkish Government showed the Armenians of the vilayet of Van as numbering 80,000. Now there is certain evidence that the number of Armenians from this vilayet who took refuge in Russia exceeds 220,000.

At the other extremity of Armenia in the whole of Sandjak of Marash the Turkish Government reckoned about 4,200 Armenians; now in the town of Marash alone according to Elysee Reclus there were more than 20,000 Armenians, half the population of the town. Zeitun in the Sandjak of Marash with its eight vilages had, in accordance with statistics made on the spot in 1880, 27,460 Armenians and 8,344 Muslims.

It has been alleged that there are no Armenians left in Armenia since the massacres and deportations, or at aft events that those who remain form an insignificant minority. Happily this is untrue.

Firstly, according to principles no-one today disputes, the dead must count as much as the living. It would be intolerable that the unspeakable crimes committed against a whole race should benefit their authors. But the purpose of exterminating a whole people was not achieved. After this War the Armenians will be, as before it, more numerous than the Turks and even than the Turks and Kurds combined.

In fact, although the losses of the Armenians were very great, those of the Turks in the course of the war have not been less. A German report gives 21/2 millions as the total losses of the Turks by war, epidemic and famine, which have caused terrible havoc owing to improvidence and shortage of hospital personnel and medicines. At least half of these losses have been sustained by the population of the Armenian provinces, which have been practically the only recruiting grounds for the Turks, and which have been invaded both by Russian and Armenian armies. If, therefore, it is admitted that the Turkish population has at least sustained equally heavy losses, the Armenians are still in the majority after the war, as they were before it. But this majority will be still greater when the Arme-

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nian Republic of the Caucasus is united to Turkish Armenia to form one State, as both the Armenians of the Caucasus and those of Turkey ardently desire.

M. Abrounian [Aharonian] has just laid the case before you and I support what he has said. I cannot overstress the point that this is a matter of the greatest importance for the Armenians, because the two groups of Armenians are interdependent. The Caucasian Armenians are more numerous than the Turkish Armenians. The latter, however, are more favourably situated as regards fertile land.

As has already been said (and it is perhaps unnecessary to repeat it) there are bonds of race, blood, religion and language between the two groups. We are, in fact, brothers. The Armenians in the Caucasus have established themselves in that country to escape from Turkey. They have now only one desire, to return to their native land. During the massacres before the war it was due to the Caucasian Armenians that the Russian and Allied Governments were asked in 1915 and 1914 to approach Turkey in favour of the Turkish Armenians.

I wish now to say a few words with regard to the position of the Armenians in the East and in the Ottoman Empire. I shall demonstrate by a few facts that they are quite capable of governing themselves when the time comes for them to set up an independent State.

Just to give some idea of the economic activity of the Armenian element in Turkish Armenia, I will quote some figures, taken from pre-war commercial and industrial statistics of the Vilayet of Sivas, which I have produced at previous negotiations in Paris in 1912 and 1913.

The Vilayet of Sivas is the least Armenian of the six Vilayets, but if you look at the figures relating to imports you will see that out of 166 wholesale merchants, 141 were Armenians and only 13 were Turks. In the export trade there were 127 Armenian merchants and 23 Turks. Out of 37 bankers and capitalists, 32 were Armenians and 5 only were Turks. It appears, furthermore, according to the book recently published by M. Leipzius, that out of a total population of 20,000,000 inhabitants, of whom 2,000,000 were Armenians, the latter held some 80 to 90 percent of the commerce in their own hands.

M. Leipzius, after his enquiry at Constantinople in regard to the Massacres, stated that the result would be very detrimental financially to Germany and Austria, because, all commerce being in the hands of the massacred Armenians, the

Germans and Austrians would be unable to recover their debts.

I will quote a passage from a book by Dr. Rohrbach, a well-known pan-Germanist, who desired to see Germany annex Armenia, and this will give you an idea of the German opinion on the Armenians before the war :

“In present-day Turkey, reduced almost entirely to its Asiatic possessions, the Armenians carry much more weight than their numbers would seem to warrant. Owing to their high intellectual and commercial standards, they are without doubt the most active people among Eastern nations. In fact it might be said that they constitute the only people in those regions who are imbued with what might be called national qualities. The Armenian has that energy and tenacity of purpose which are quite contrary to the usually accepted attributes of the Eastern character”.

That is the opinion of a German, and it is simply because the writer is a German that I have made the quotation.

It remains for me to address you on Armenian policy, claims and aspirations. I have already told you what is meant by the Armenian State from a geographical standpoint. I must now point out that, from the political point of view, our programme has not varied in any way as far as the national delegation is concerned. This programme, which I have already had the honour to explain to the Great Allied Powers, may be summed up in three points:

1. Liberation from the Turkish yoke.
2. It is not sufficient to liberate the Armenian people who have been in bondage. As they will now find themselves in an inferior position I asked for the joint protection of the Powers. I have not asked for joint rulership, to which I already knew the meeting would be opposed. There had already been unfortunate examples of condominium, and I know that the meeting would not feel disposed to make one more example. As an Egyptian, I know exactly what it means.

By joint protection of the Powers I mean that kind of protection which would prevent aggression from outside, and not an inter-meddling with internal political and administrative affairs.

3. From the first I have also asked that the Great Protecting Powers should give a

mandate to one or other of them to administer and organise Armenia.

That is the programme we adopted in 1915. We modified it when the idea of a League of Nations was formulated by President Wilson, and we adapted our programme to the new ideas.

The first point of our programme is now realised, since we are freed from the Turkish yoke. The two other points are realised also, if the newspaper reports are correct, since the Peace Conference has already decided to place the peoples oppressed by the Turks under the protection of the League of Nations with a Power as mandatory. We therefore have the firm hope of seeing our aspirations realised.

We need only entrust ourselves to the sense of justice of the Peace Conference, and we have no doubt but that the Conference will approve the programme of our national claims. The Powers now know and can trust the Armenians, whose national feelings, vitality and warlike valour have been strikingly revealed in the course of the war.

The Powers can rest assured that, with the qualifications all now recognised, the Armenians, under a regime of peace, justice and liberty, and under the tutelage of the League of Nations, will soon form a flourishing and prosperous State, and will be one of the most powerful factors of peace and civilisation in the East.”

M. PICHON thanked , the Armenian Representatives, and the Armenian Delegation withdrew.
