

DROSHAK NEWSPAPER: A NEWSPAPER THAT OPENLY SUPPORTED TERRORISM

(DROŞAK GAZETESİ:
AÇIK AÇIK TERÖRİZMİ SAVUNAN BİR ORGAN)

Prof. Dr. Jean-Louis MATTEI
Historian

Abstract: *In this article, the author studies one of the issues of the Droshak newspaper published in January 1897. Droshak (Flag) was the official news organ of the ARF (Armenian Revolutionary Federation) or Dashnaktsutyun. This issue, in particular, mentions the Van Revolt of 1896. The issue also talks about the death of the revolutionary Bedo, who fell during the clashes. Bedo is portrayed as the “Protective Angel of the Armenians” and in the newspaper, Armenians are often called upon to exact their revenge. In fact the, Van Problem was to continue in the following years. For this reason, the Van Committee Members Aram Manukyan and Ishan were to give weapons to the Armenians and kill all of their opponents. Through such violent means, they prepared the 1915 Van Revolt. So, the Armenian thesis pretending that the revolt happened by itself is rebutted. The part of the newspaper that tells how the Priest Komitas was killed by a terrorist from Dashnaktsutyun openly shows that the Armenian terrorism was first of all directed against the other Armenians who refused to co-operate with the Committees. After comparing different documents, the author speaks of the efforts made by Avetis Aharonian and Kristapor Mikaelian for promoting the Droshak on the international arena. In the future, Droshak was to give birth to the French Pro Armenia that concealed its terrorist mindset, and became a tool in the hands of the Dashnaktsutyun Members.*

Keywords: *Droshak newspaper, 1896 Van Revolt, 1915 Van Revolt, Pro Armenia newspaper.*

Öz: *Yazar bu makalede Droşak gazetesinin Ocak 1897’de çıkan sayısı incelemektedir. Cenevre’de basılan Droşak (Bayrak), Devrimci Daşnaktsutyun/Taşnaktsutyun’un resmi basın organıydı. Söz konusu sayıda özellikle 1896’da meydana gelen Van isyanı anlatılmaktadır. Sayıda aynı zamanda çatışmalar sonucunda öldürülen Taşnak Şefi Bedo’dan bahsedilmektedir. Bedo, “Ermenilerin koruyucu meleği” gibi gösterilmekte ve gazetede sık sık Ermeniler intikamlarını almaya*

çağrılmaktadır. Aslında Van meselesi devam edecek bir olguydu ve gelecekteki yıllarda intikam fikriyle hareket eden Aram Manukyan ve İřkhan gibi komiteciler, bölgedeki Ermenileri silahlandırarak ve karşı gelenleri öldürerek 1915 Van İsyanı hazırlayacaklardı. Bu vesileyle Van isyanının kendiliğinden ve hazırlıksız patladığını iddia eden Ermeni tezleri çürütölmektedir. Bir terörist/Taşnak komiteci tarafından Papaz Komitas'ın öldürölüşünü anlatan gazetenin bir bölümü şunu açıkça göstermektedir: Taşnakların terörü her şeyden önce kendi halklarına, yani Ermenilere yönelikti. Çeşitli belgelerle bir kıyaslama yaptıktan sonra yazar, uluslararası alanda Droşak gazetesinin tanıtılması amacıyla Avetis Aharonyan ve Kristapor Mikaelyan'ın çabalarından bahsetmektedir. Droşak gazetesi ilerleyen zamanlarda bu sefer Fransızca olarak çıkan, ancak terörist zihniyetini gizleyen Pro Armenia gazetesini doğuracaktı. Pro Armenia, Taşnakların elinde bir propaganda aleti şekline gelecekti.

Anahtar kelimeler: *Droşak gazetesi, 1896 Van İsyanı, Taşnaklar, 1915 Van İsyanı, Pro Armenia gazetesi.*

Previously, in the 42nd issue of the *Ermeni Arařtırmaları*, I had made an analysis of a copy of the newspaper *Armenia* published in Armenian in Marseille since 1885 by the founder of the Armenakan Party, Mekertich Portukalian. As a result of my analysis, I had come up with the following conclusion: Despite coming from terrorism – as in, from the Black Cross terrorist organization– and also organizing terrorist acts in the Ottoman Empire early on, Armenian leader Portukalian, on the verge of the First World War, adopted a moderate stance and cautioned his Armenian cognates not to leave the Ottoman Empire. He wrote articles titled “Turkey [he meant the Ottoman Empire] is changing after the Second Constitutional Era”.

Armenia was of course not the only newspaper to defend the Armenian cause. Beginning from 1891, the newspaper *Droshak* (or *Troshak*)¹ was representing the theses of the “Dashnaksutyun”. After a humble beginning (as a matter of fact, its founders, Kristapor Mikaelian and Rosdom could not even save a copy of the first issue),² *Droshak* (Flag) gained a significant importance and in time became the first reference newspaper of the Armenian revolutionaries.

Instead of giving a history of the *Droshak* published in Tbilisi, Geneva and Paris, the purpose of this article is to see and show the contents of *Droshak*.

Hereby, I would like to thank my dear friend Maxime Gauin who e-mailed me the January 1987 issue of *Droshak*.

Indeed, it is very hard to find pictures of the *Droshak*. Recently, the administration of the Dashnaksutyun Party, which still stands to this day, reissued several issues of the newspaper but it was not possible to attain them.

Anyway, the logo of the aforementioned issue is *Droshak/Troshak*. Right below it is written: “‘Hay Heĝapokhak (an) ‘Dařnaksutyun’ organ” (an organ of the Armenian Revolutionary ‘Dashnaksutyun’ Party). However the name of the editor is not given.

First, they break some news:

“Haydukayin krrivi Basenum” (About the fight of the Armenian brigade in Pasen)

1 In Eastern Armenian it is *Droshak*, in Western Armenian it is *Troshak*. K=G, D=T, B=P, P=B. Except the section “Komitas Kahanan”, the issues of the newspaper were redacted in Eastern Armenian. Despite some differences, Armenians generally understand each other. Because she is of Eastern Armenian origin (from the old USSR), Anahide Ter Minassian always writes “*Droshak*” and “*Dashnaksutyun*” in her books.

2 Jean-Louis Mattei, *Büyük Ermenistan Peşinde Ermeni Komiteleri (The Armenian Committees' Pursuit of a Greater Armenia)*, Bilgi Yayınları, Ankara, 2008, p. 147.

“At the beginning of December of 1896, a fight (krriv) broke out in Pasen³ between an Armenian brigade made of a group of supporters of Dashnaksutyun (hump-himbi) and Kurds accompanying border guards. The fight took 4 hours and it was a great victory for our guys. One of our comrades fell during a second fight, while 5 people died and 8-10 got wounded from the soldiers’ and Kurds’ side”

The newspaper continues:

“1896-1897

The terrible angel of death had spread its wings above Armenia. A person could have thought that only ruins were left of our homeland and that the dark skies were painted even darker with its black smokes. The corpses of hundreds of thousands (hariyur hazar) of innocent Armenians (anmeg Hayeri), cut down by swords were left scattered and were whispering: “Revenge!” (Vrej). A thick layer of snow was hiding the corpses from the eyes of wild animals.”

The following should be immediately stated:

- 1) The news could be true. But there is no evidence of such news in the archives. Besides, not much detail is given on the news.
- 2) After five lines, the author of the article tries to shock his readers with the description of hundreds of thousands of corpses by exaggeratedly saying irrelevant things. Even if he tried to make a metaphor, was the author aware of the exaggeration in his article?

The ridiculous image of corpses whispering “Revenge!” shows that the article slid from the field of news into the field of propaganda. These lines were written for this purpose: to show that the Armenians were innocent and tens of thousands of them were slaughtered. Here, what is talked about here is a time frame before the resettlement. Armenians were going to use the same tactic 20 years later: Blaming Turks and gaining the sympathy of Europeans by not to giving details, exaggerating, manipulating numbers, not proving anything, and putting forth the same sources every time.

However the most discomfoting point is the use of the word “vrej” (revenge). “Vrej”, revenge, should not be the rallying cry of a political party (especially

3 The village Pasen of Avnik in the Erzurum region.

a party that is supposedly “revolutionary”). Nevertheless, “Vrej” was read on the red flag during the Dashnak Kukunyan’s 1890 expedition.⁴ But there is more: Even today, in the ceremonies held by the Dashnaktsutyun, flags similar to that one are still shown and the word “Vrej” can still be read on them.

This should be also added: Such a rallying cry is not fitting of a community claiming to be Christian. An objection could be made to the statement above: The Dashnaktsutyun was an atheist party. But then, how could the increasing affinity between the Armenian Church and the Dashnaktsutyun be explained? Also since when did revenge become a revolutionary rallying cry?

This could be interpreted as such: in reality, the Dashnaktsutyun was not an atheist, a religious or especially a revolutionary party. Dashnaktsutyun was an opportunist organization that had blood on its hands.

The author of the article titled “1896-1897” continues:

“In these circumstances, the Armenians were facing the year 1897. The new year wasn’t promising poor Armenians any new hopes or any new life (voç nor hoys yev voç nor kyank).”

The Dashnaktsutyun was an atheist party. But then, how could the increasing affinity between the Armenian Church and the Dashnaktsutyun be explained? Also since when did revenge become a revolutionary rallying cry?

Then, the responsible person for these disasters i.e. Abdul Hamid II is mentioned:

“Grabbing their lyres with their bloody hands, diplomats were singing the chorus showing Abdul Hamid as the ‘protector of the Armenians’ and their chests were decorated by medals given by the most brutal sultan in the world.”

This is in accord with the discourse employed by the Dashnaktsutyun: that Foreigners should not accept any medals from the Sultan. According to this discourse, a foreigner accepting a medal from the Sultan meant that he was cooperating with the “monster”.

Getting back to the text:

“But the Sultan was not only feeding with the blood of Armenians (Bayts

4 *Greater Armenia*, pp. 164-165.

sultanı terr çer kşdatsel Hayı aryunov), but also sensing that the province called Vaspurakan populated by many Armenians was undefeated.”

An important element is encountered here. Vaspurakan is the Van province in Armenian. It was a very important center for the Armenian civilization in time immemorial. Following their defeat, committee members such as Aram and Ishan were going to focus their efforts on the region. From the beginning of the 20th century onwards, ammunition and fighters coming from Russia were going to go to Van. That is why several Armenian historians such as Anahide Ter Minassian and Jean-Marie Carzou do not tell the truth when they write that the 1915 Van Revolt was unexpected, unprepared and spontaneous.

As a matter of fact, following the 1896 defeats, Armenian Committees started to become active in Van region as of 1904, thanks to Aram Manukyan.

Beside the newspaper analyzed here and the other newspapers, a clear evidence for these is: in the 1910 International Socialist Congress, the Dashnaktsutyun delegation, in the written notice they prepared, was praising themselves for the *armament* of the Armenians in Van. An interesting side of this: All of these were done in contradiction to the rules set by the Young Turks Government. On the contrary, the agreement between the Young Turks and the Dashnaktsutyun was stipulating for the disarmament of the committees. However, none of the other socialist delegations in Kopenhagen noticed the “oddity” present there. They believed everything the Dashnaktsutyun told them. They blindly believed that the Dashnaktsutyun was socialist. This “eclipse of reason” could also explain the complacency of the French socialists.

Returning to the Van events, when the war broke out, the city was already planned to be handed over to the Russians. Indeed, Aram, a committee member coming from Russia, could have only become the governor of Van under Russian rule, and he did indeed become the governor. In other words, because of the Van Revolt, the Ottoman administration was obliged to intervene in 1915 and adopted the Law of Resettlement to prevent other revolts.

The text continues:

“The Sultan saw that, thanks to the revolutionary forces, the heart of the Armenian identity (Hayutyán sirtı) was still strong and that the local Turkish administration was not powerful enough to attack Van with its small forces.

However they had to realize the heinous Lobanov plan. The governor

of Van started to get prepared. Despite all of Armenia trembling because of the executioner's sword (չայելով vor amboğdş Hayastanı doğum er dahci srits), the city of Van gathered several revolutionary forces in autumn.

Finally on June 15, the Van conflict began because of an ordinary reason. Revolutionary forces valiantly fought government forces for six days..."

Before all, Aleksey Lobanov-Rostovski (1824-1896) should be mentioned. As it is seen, this person, who was already dead when *Droshak* emerged, was disliked by the author of this article. As a matter of fact, Foreign Minister Lobanov was not Armenian-friendly. According to the Armenian Wikipedia, Lobanov proposed the Tsar an "Armenia without Armenians" (Hayastann arrants Hayeri).

However, did Lobanov really say such a thing? It should not be forgotten that Armenians also claim that such words were said by Talat Pasha. It is also certain that Lobanov did not understand the benefit of the destruction of the Ottoman Empire. The instability created by its destruction could have served the interests of France, Germany and England, rather than Russia. Tsarist Russia could have made a mistake by encouraging the Armenians. Based on clear evidence this time,⁵ Anahide Ter Minassian makes an accurate and important observation: Initially the Tsarist Police was arresting Armenian revolutionaries after catching them. On the other hand, she writes that numerous members of the Armenakan Party were taking refuge in Russia.

Yes, the 1896 Van Revolt ended with a heavy defeat for Committee members and especially Armenakan members. One of the backbones of the organization and a friend of Portukalian, Mıgırdıç Avedisian was killed during the clashes.

Actually, to perceive the 1896 revolt as the rehearsal of the 1915 revolt would not be too wrong.

This issue of *Droshak*, which analyzes the 1896 Van Events and refers to it the most, supports our opinion. The alleged "massacres" perpetrated against the Armenians existed for the most part in the imagination of the committee members and was the product of propaganda. General Mayevsky (Russian consul in Van at that time), who witnessed the 1896 Van events, actually blamed the Armenians.

⁵ Anahide Ter Minassian, *La Question Arménienne*, Editions Parenthèses, Marseille, 1983, p. 136-150, Colonel Debil's report dated February 12, 1903.

Also, the Dashnaks could have complained as they were deprived of Russian support. However, Russia was actually their base of operations and warehouse. On top of that, everything suddenly changed in 1911-1912 and the committees became the most fervent supporters of the Tsardom. Armenian Committees were now freely able to print their propaganda brochures in the Russian Empire. The Ottoman Empire was becoming their target and the First World War was about to break out. Tsarist Russia was not representing barbarism anymore; on the contrary it was civilization itself. Thousands of volunteers (in Armenian: *gamavorner/kamavorner*) from every corner of the world went to Russia. They attacked the Ottoman Empire in 1915, guided Russian soldiers and facilitated the march of the invaders. Maybe the provocateurs coming from Russia could not be called traitors, but what about the ones who were born in the Ottoman Empire?

The article continues as follows:

“... the revolutionary forces fell into the trap of our false protector, the British Consul (*dzuğakn inknelov*) and left the city of Van. The swords of the Turks shined again.”

These lines deserve an explanation. The last name of the British Consul was William or Williamson. In 1895, the Russian Consul writes this about him:⁶

“Revolutionary Armenians gather in the house of the British Consul and are literally encouraged. Committee members are gradually gaining more importance. They extort money from the rich and the elite. They kill the ones who do not obey.”

However the phrase “false protector (*mer keğdz paştpan*)” shows that ultimately the Armenian committee members were not satisfied with the aforementioned person.

Antranik Chelebian gives these other details:⁷

“After an approximately one week long Van resistance clashes, three Armenian party leaders who believed fez wearing British Ambassador [it should be consul] Mr. Williamson’s deceptive words and advices, took the decision to move the resisting youth into Iran.”

6 *Greater Armenia* pp.167-168.

7 Antranik Chelebian, *Antranik Paşa*, Pêrî Yayınları, Translation from Armenian to Turkish: Mariam Arpi and Nairi Arek, Istanbul, 2003, p. 69.

Maybe the British Consul realized that the committee members were not acting chivalrously.

Chelebian writes that the British Consul actually feared a possible Russian intervention. This finding is accurate.

The methods of Dashnaksutyun and other terrorist organizations should especially be kept in mind.

These impressions are already confirmed when one looks at the archives and in the book *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Ermeni İsyamları, III. Cilt (Armenian Revolts in Ottoman Reports, Vol. III)*, page 70, the following lines are present:

“The youth, who studied in the aforementioned School [which was previously opened by Portukalian] were nurtured to become fedayeens, and began to take action by distributing brochures calling for a rebellion, killed the Kurds they encountered in the mountains and the country side, killed Armenians loyal to the Ottoman Empire and -arguing that it was for the good of the people- started to demand money from important and respectable Christians of Van by threatening them.”

All these confirm the following: Portukalian, who printed the newspaper Armenia in Marseille, was initially was nothing more than the leader of a terrorist organization.

This important document, dated 16 November 1896, makes us think: These youths who took refuge in Russia or Iran, were no doubt the continuation of the terrorist organization Black Cross (Sev Khach) which was led by Portukalian.⁸ These methods of resorting to the same violence and blackmail were part of the Armenian terror directed towards Armenians themselves.

All these confirm the following: Portukalian, who printed the newspaper *Armenia* in Marseille, was initially was nothing more than the leader of a terrorist organization. Portukalian had left Van in 1885, but his supporters (the Armenakans) were trying to sow discord in the Van region after 11 years. In other words, Portukalian was ruling over the Armenakans of Turkey and Russia by sending instructions from Marseille.

The above mentioned document mentions other organizations as well (the

⁸ For more details, please see: Jean-Louis Mattei, “Mıgırdıç Portukalyan: Terörizmden Şüpheli Bir İlimlılığa” (Mkrtich Portukalian: From Terrorism to A Suspicious Modertaion“, *Ermeni Araştırmaları*, Issue 42.

Hunchaks and Dashnaks). It should be kept in mind that Dashnaksutyun leader Kristapor Mikaelian was a “specialist” in blackmailing, threatening, violence, assassinations and bombings. Kristapor Mikaelian was also the director of the newspaper *Droshak* in Geneva. But as mentioned above, nothing was written below the newspaper’s logo.

If the copy is further read:

“Revolutionaries moving away from the city ran across Kurds and soldiers of the Government. A fight broke off again and this time Government forces killed the few Armenian revolutionaries. The revolutionaries who fought to the last man died heroically in the battlefield. Along with them died Bedo, the protective angel of Vaspurakan who deserves to be worshipped.”

From what has been written, it is understood that Bedo was an experienced agitator. As a matter of fact, in a letter by a Dashnak sent from Tabriz in 1896, such phrases are found:

“Tasho and Bado have lots of work to do. Ask everything to them and abide to their judgements. Bedo hid in Van for many years like a prisoner. Follow the orders of Tasho and Bedo and support the task.”⁹

On the other hand, since we do not run across his name in any Ottoman document, we can assume that Tasho is the codename of famous committee member Mardig.

Finally, in page 360 in volume II of the same book, it is seen that the Dashnaksutyun seal was taken from the corpse of Bedo. The seal consisted of three letters: H.H.T/H.H.D (Hay Heğapokhagan Taşnaktutyun or Hay Heğapokhakan Daşnaktustyun).

Antranik Chelebian confirms all these:¹⁰

“Under the leadership of Bedo and Mardig, the Dashnak and Hinchak group with 80 rifles headed to Iran through the Abağa line. Like the others, they were also surrounded and cruelly killed. Only their guide survived. “

The interesting part of these is this: Bedo ran wild in Van for years. Yet, he

9 *Ermeni Olayları Tarihi*, “Hüseyin Nazım Paşa”, new issue, Volume I, Ankara, 1998, p. 138.

10 *Antranik Paşa*, p. 69.

was the one who was “cruelly” killed... Moreover, he is referred to as the “protective angel” ...

However, all reports clearly show: the duty of the committee members was to torment the Muslims (Turks and Kurds). So, who in fact were the cruel ones?

Armenian committee members tortured and killed their cognates who did not share their views. According to the militants, Armenians loyal to the Ottoman state were “traitors”.

I will analyze this important subject in another part of this article. But for now let us return to the copy of *Droshak* at hand.

After feeling sorry for the condition of the Armenian people, the author of the article in *Droshak* continues:

“The Dashnaksutyun Party saw the importance of the moment, understood what reactionism is and decided to mobilize (vcrets) them by delivering a strong blow (mi zoreğ harvatsov). The blow has to be a strong one. Affecting both the Sultan and Europe, the terror to be employed (aztoğ) should mobilize the Armenian people embracing reactionism (sarsap). With such a blow, a new life, a new hope, a new spirit will emerge in the people.”

After stating that the Dashnaks are ready to have new martyrs, the author of the article concludes:

“We neither believe the sultan, nor the diplomats. We Armenians, we finish the year ‘96 happier compared to the beginning.

We face the year ‘97 with more faith.

We continue to be careful ... and we certainly declare that it is necessary for us to always struggle. We are convinced that the only way for the salvation of Armenians is revolution. The world wants us to have this sacred fight, of which we are convinced of as well. Only the free Armenians deserve to be members of this world.

We also believe that our enslaved people (isdruk joğovurd), as well as our ruined homeland and the sacred memory of our hundreds of thousands of martyrs want this sacred fight from us.

We start this new year shouting ‘Fight! Fight! A more unrelenting fight!’”

As is seen, the last lines of the article leave no room for doubt: the message of ‘any method may be employed, so that Europe may intervene’ is given. It is stated that Armenian people will be shot if they resist the requests of the committee members.

In fact, it was seen that many Armenians did not obey the committee members, on the contrary they reported them to the Turks. This is an important point that needs to be noted.

This should also not be forgotten: Armenian committee members adopted the methods of blackmailing and assassination in Russia as well. Principally, the founders of the terrorist organization called “Black Cross” and the Black Cross of the Ottoman Empire established with these same methods were Portukalian and Hayrig Khrimian (what’s more, he was a religious leader!)

Demanding money from the rich or the deemed to be rich Armenians in Van region was a method that originated from the Black Cross, and was a common method used by Armenakan and Dashnaksutyun.

However, things did not go as planned. Despite the British support, as it is seen, even the Consul of Britain in Van had left the causes that committees pursued.

The year of 1896 was a catastrophic year not only for the Dashnaksutyun, but also for all Armenian committees. That is why the author of the article (it is uncertain if it was Kristapor Mikaelian, or Rostom, or someone else) calls his fighters to fight, emphasizing the heroism of the committee members. He hereby tries to conceal their defeat.

If we go on analyzing the newspaper: after this general article, there is some kind of a story about the Van Revolt.

Apparently, this method was not an unusual one in the Droshak newspaper. The author of the story says “menk” (us) and hereby brings the reader into his fight. This method had probably aimed to make the Armenian cause more popular. Hence, compared to Droshak, the rival “Hunchak” newspaper sometimes may seem more abstract, more technical. Let us not forget also that in the future illustrations, pictures and photographs would be also published.

Undoubtedly, the director of the newspaper Kristapor Mikaelian was looking for a talented author.

One year later (in 1898), Avetis Aharonian (1866-1948) had sent a story called “Khay” to Mikaelian and one day he excitedly went to the office of *Droshak* in Geneva to learn his opinion. He explains what had happened:

“Kristapor, who was sitting at the table, raised his head and looked at me over his glasses with a smooth and beautiful smile and said:

‘You see, I told you will get through it, didn’t I? ‘Khay’ is a good idea. It should continue.’”¹¹

Aharonian, who wrote many stories for *Droshak* such as “Khay”, “At the Prison”, “Traitor”, “Hazre”, finally became one of the pillars of the newspaper.

Aharonian, who himself did not fight, nevertheless knew very well about the lives of Armenian fedayeens i.e. Armenian committee members. But this should be emphasized: Aharonian, in his stories, does not mention the massacres organized by Turks. He condemns the ill treatment of the militants in prisons. He could have condemned, but as far as I know there is no document about the Turkish prisoners who fell into the hands of the fedayeens or the volunteers. Furthermore, in his story “Hazre”, the old lady Hazre burns the house of the priest with her own hands.

This act reminds us of this fact: With the purpose of blaming Turks, Armenians set their own villages on fire. More precisely, the committee members were forcing all villagers (both their supporters as well as opponents) to do so.

Aharonian was already close to General (in reality, gang leader) Antranik. In his story, old Hazre dies happily on the lap of her hero, Antranik, whom she had never seen.

But another fact opposes this romantic picture: dictatorship of the committee members against the Armenian civilians...

May be Antranik does not represent the opinion of every committee member, but is it not Antranik who said:

“The fedayeen is not at the service of the people, on the contrary, the people are at the service of the fedayeen!”

Moreover, when analyzed, the facts which confirm the things mentioned here can be found at the end of the *Droshak* newspaper.

¹¹ Avetis Aharonyan, *Fedailer; Özgürlük Yolunda* (The Fedayeens on the Road to Freedom). Translation from French: Figen Yılmaz, Introduction by L. Ketcheyan p. 21.

This 24-lined section, written in Western Armenian, is indeed very important to understand the mentality of Dashnaksutyun:

“Priest Komitas (Komitas Kahanan),

The betrayals of Der Komitas, who was murdered by Van Dashnaksutyun Central Committee, were many. It will be enough to explain this: The assistant of the church, along with the cattle herder named Arsen, were excommunicating the revolutionaries from church rostrum, openly calling them ‘rascals’ and ‘immoral’ (sriga; amparoyagan), and putting an effort to call upon those who were receiving and concealing the revolutionaries that they should report the ‘Dashnaks’ and indirectly get in touch with the government or the Armenian Bishop.

Around 11 in the morning, when Priest Komitas went to read the Bible to one of the patients of the church, a terrorist¹² gets close to him and stabs the priest’s neck with his dagger and the tip of the dagger comes through the other side of his neck. His head falls back and suddenly the priest passes away. As a result of this, the government does not take any measures and arrests nobody.

The murdered priest was one of the closest advisors of the traitor (tavacan) Hovhannes Agha (who was also murdered by the Dashnaks recently).

When they see each other in the afterlife, they should take note and *smarten up*.”¹³

Despite being in the “bibliography”, in his book (in fact, Anahide Ter Minassian is daughter-in-law of famous Dashnak, Rüpen Ter Minassian) he does not narrate what is exactly mentioned in the *Droshak* newspaper.

Even the only full text published in the newspaper does not inform about this issue.

In spite of this, he (himself) wants to vindicate the Dashnaksutyun Party in his book *La Question Arménienne*,¹⁴ but at the same time he unwillingly accepts that it is a terrorist organization. Indeed, according to Minassian,

12 The French word “terroriste” is used in the original text.

13 The last word in the microfilm is difficult to read.

14 *La Question Arménienne*, p. 167, note 105.

starting in 1903, by personal order of Kristapor Mikaelyan, a section called 'Terror' is printed regularly at the last page of *Droshak* newspaper.

As is seen, this section is the continuation of the section (Komitas Kahanan) that we just analyzed (this section was probably published irregularly before 1903).

Of course, according to Minassian, Matheos Balyozian, who was murdered in 1902 in Izmir, was a 'spy', a 'collaborator'. However, at the 564th page of the 35th issue of Masis newspaper published in August 31, 1902, and at the "Huşadedr" (Agenda) section, this can be seen clearly: according to "Agenda" which was written before his assassination, and according to Armenian public opinion, Matheos Balyozian was a "philanthropist" who opened up his home to the Armenian orphans.

For this reason, the following determination can be made: Matheos Balyozian was murdered by the organization because he refused the blackmails of Dashnaktsutyun.

All these methods, of course, are far from all kinds of democratic principles. Above all, the Armenian civilians were the target of committee members i.e. terrorists. As is seen, people who did not surrender to blackmails and extortion were murdered. Sometimes a "people's court" was gathered, sometimes the Dashnak chiefs did not even feel the need of enact such charades.

Killing their own people's priests would come to be a tradition for the Dashnaks. In 1896 for example, a resident of the Charpanak Monastery, Bishop Boğos was killed due to his loyalty.¹⁵

But there is more; in March 24, 2005, Justin McCarthy said the following during his speech at the Turkish Grand National Assembly:

"Arsen, the priest in charge of the Akhtamar Church in Van, the religious center of the Armenians, was murdered by Ishan, one of the leaders of Van's Dashnaks... After Father Arsen was killed, the Dashnak Aram Manukian, a man with undetermined religious beliefs, became the head of Armenian schools."

The reader will recognize Father Arsen. As is seen at the presented document, the clergyman was helping Father Komitas. Father Arsen was the

15 *Osmanlı Belgelerinde Ermeni İsyamları* (Armenian Revolts in Ottoman Documents), 1896-1909 III. Cilt, p.70.

“representative” of Father Komitas. Since 1904, terrorist Ishan, who arrived in Van, probably wanted to kill his predecessors and subsequently killed Father Arsen.

Sirak Mesrop Manasiyan, born in 1905 and one of the witnesses- of the “Van Revolt”, was referring to him as “Mr. Ishan”. The witness Sirak Mesrop was 10 years old when Ishan died. According to his testimony, the corpse of the fedayeen was thrown to a well.¹⁶

Considering these assassinations and killings, it is hard to believe that these revolts, which lasted almost 20 years, broke out spontaneously.

Did the parents of Sirak Mesrop know that Mr. Ishan, whom they respected, killed the priests of their people? As Christians, did they approve such acts?

Governor of Van Kapamaciyan, who was an Armenian but not a clergyman, was killed in 1912 by the Dashnaks, probably by personal order of Aram Manukian.

Considering these assassinations and killings, it is hard to believe that these revolts, which lasted almost 20 years, broke out spontaneously.

Siranush Simon Tutuncian,¹⁷ who was born in 1906 in Van, personally knew Father Arsen and told:

“We were going to the Church of the Virgin Mary. The church was quite big: its capacity was enough for 500 people. Father Arsen was performing a religious ceremony when the clashes for the defense started on April 7.”¹⁸

This was probably another Father Arsen. This ceremony was performed openly in 1915 and at the beginning of the revolt.

Whether it was another Father Arsen or Siranush Simon’s mistake, it is certain that Ishan killed Father Arsen, because there is the following Armenian document:¹⁹

“He succeeded, mainly in getting back precious manuscripts [stolen by the Kurds] and enriching the library of the monastery. ... Vartabed Arsen’s end took place in 1904. Tashnag Ishkhan and his band invaded

16 He suspected a trap by Cevdet Pasha.

17 *Memories of the Witnesses of the Armenian Genocide*

18 This date shows that the Van Revolt started before April 24.

19 Levon Kazanjian, *Renaissance of Van-Vasburagan*, p. 57.

Ahtamar and butchered Arsen Vartabed and his secretary Mihran Kevorkian, driving them to the sea, having stolen Vartabed's ring and purloining his wealth. It was being said that Arsen Vartabed was responsible for a battle with the Ishkhan band and the Kurds.”

However, as far as is understood from his memoirs, Siranus Simon did not know anything about the murder of priest Arsen by his father and his mother's friends. The reason he did not know was maybe because he was born in 1904. On the other hand, maybe his father and mother preferred to keep silent about the not so glorious actions of the committee members.

The witness tells elsewhere:

“The fedeyeens visited our home in disguise. They were called ‘fugitives’. Food was provided to them and they paid for it. We kids knew that we were not supposed to talk about them to anyone and we knew that these ‘fugitives’ were revolutionaries. I personally knew most of them. *We had close relations with the Turkish Vali Cevdet and Kasım bey. We visited their houses with my mother.*”

Yes, you read it correctly. All these witnesses prove the two-facedness of some Armenians. But the ill treatment or massacres by Turks are not mentioned. Then, why and what issues are mentioned?

What is mentioned is the Turkish military intervention towards committee members/revolutionaries. This is probably not enough to call Mr. Cevdet a “monster”, whom Armenian women normally often visited.

Well, was the *Droshak* newspaper distancing itself from all these things that happened? No. In 1915, after a long propaganda, armament and killing process, Aram Manukyan finally delivered the city of Van to the Russians...

It is impossible to call him a “traitor”, because he had come from Russia...

To sum up, both Turkish and Armenian documents (especially this issue of the *Droshak* newspaper that we analyzed) show that terror organizations, especially the Dashnaksutyun, were running wild in Van. More importantly, the documents show that the defense of Van, in other words the revolt organized by the committees, was planned well in advance with certain deeds. Priest Arsen, who was not the primary target at the time, survived in 1896, but he was finally killed by the infamous terrorist Ishan²⁰ in 1904.

20 Ishan (1883-1915). His real name was Nikoghayos Mikaelian or Nigol. Ishan is still respected by Lebanese Dashnaks.

Droshak newspaper and its directors played a part in all of these. As a matter of fact, Aharonian was to meet with famous statesmen such as Georges Clemenceau. Neither Aharonian, nor Kristapor Mikaelian looked like cruel terrorists: they were well mannered, were good speakers, and were well dressed.

As a result of these contacts, in 1900, the first issue of the *Pro Armenia* newspaper was published in Paris. As Anahide Ter Minassian wrote, *Pro Armenia* was actually another press organ of the Dashnaksutyun. It was also a continuation of *Droshak*.²¹

Ter Minassian stated all of these as follows:

“*Pro Armenia* was created by Kristapor Mikaelian (a member of the Western Bureau and the editorial director of *Droshak* newspaper). It is a product of the cooperation between the Dashnaks and the French democrats and socialists. The editing committee consisted of G. Clemenceau, A. France, Jean Jaurès, Fr. De Pressensé, E. de Roberty.”

As might be expected, these important politicians and literary figures did not know much about the Ottoman Empire. They knew neither Turkish nor Armenian. Everything the Dashnaks said was true for them, because according to them, the Dashnaks/Armenians were progressivists, while the Turks were (generally) reactionists. The most interesting part is that Georges Clemenceau hated anarchists. After his appointment as the Interior Minister in 1906, as if to mock himself, he declared himself to be the “first cop of France” (“le premier flic de France”).

Clemenceau, hand-in-hand, arm-in-arm with Armenian terrorists! Was Cleamenceau, a man with a strong sense of humour, aware of this contradiction? Or was he the laughing-stock of these polite murderers? The second possibility is more convincing. As for Jean Jaurès, he was a peaceful socialist but he was also a victim of this right-leaning terrorist group. Certainly, he was deceived.

I have come up with this conclusion since *Pro Armenia* was very different from *Droshak*. In *Pro Armenia*, the heroism of the Dashnaks was not praised to the skies. In *Pro Armenia*, there was no section called “Terror”... Abdul Hamid II, on the other hand, was highly criticized. But these are only preliminary impressions. In a future article, I will make an analysis of several issues of the *Pro Armenia* newspaper.

21 *La Question Arménienne*, p. 165, note 88.

To sum up, the analyzed issue of *Droshak* suggests the following: Van and its surrounding region did not lose their importance even after the Dashnaks' defeat in 1896. On the contrary, Dashnaks wanted to exact revenge there. Its proximity to the Russian and Iranian borders brought it into prominence. In fact, Aram and his comrades, operating in Van region since 1904, had been laying the foundation of the 1915 Van Revolt.

Whether Turkish or Armenian sourced, all documents refute the Armenian theses.

At the beginning of the year 1897, terrorism was more prominent than ever. The so-called socialist Dashnaktsutyun's most favorite thesis was the acts of violence against both Armenian clergymen and Armenian and Turkish civilians.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aharonyan, Avetis. *Fedailer, Özgürlük Yolunda* (The Fedayeens on the Road to Freedom). Translation from French: Figen Yılmaz, Introduction by L. Ketcheyan, Belge Publications, 2001.
- Chelebian, Antranik. *Antranik Paşa, Pêri Yayınları*, Translation from Armenian to Turkish: Mariam Arpi and Nairi Arek, Istanbul, 2003
- Hüseyin Nâzım Paşa Ermeni Olayları Tarihi*. - 2. Ed.. - Ankara: Prime Ministry Printing House, 1998. - 2 c. (LXI, 463, 543 p.) Prime Ministry General Directorate of State Archives No: 15
- Kazanjian, Levon. *Renaissance of Van – Vasburagan Golden Age of Culture* (Veradznoont Van – Vasburagani Mshagootyani Vosgetar 1850 – 1950) Foreword by Samuel H. Toumaian Printed by Toumaian Brothers Boston 1950.
- Mattei, Jean-Louis. “Mıgırđıç Portukalyan ve “Armenia” Gazetesi (Terörizmden Şüpheli İlimliliğe)” (“Mkrtich Portukalian: From Terrorism to A Suspicious Moderation”, *Ermeni Araştırmaları*, Issue 42, 2012.
- Mattei, Jean-Louis. *Büyük Ermenistan Peşinde Ermeni Komiteleri* (The Armenian Committees' Pursuit of a Greater Armenia), Bilgi Yayınları, Ankara, 2008.
- Minassian, Anahide Ter. *La Question Arménienne*, Editions Parenthèses, Marseille, 1983.
- Osmanlı Belgelerinde Ermeni İsyancıları* (Armenian Revolts in Ottoman Documents), 1896-1909 Prime Ministry General Directorate of State Archives Vol. III. 2008 .