

THE FOUNDATION OF THE ARMENIAN REVOLUTIONARY FEDERATION AND ITS ACTIVITIES IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE IN VIEW OF RUSSIAN ARCHIVAL SOURCES (1890-1915)*

(RUS ARŞIV BELGELERİ İŞİĞİNDA ERMENİ DEVRİMÇİ
FEDERASYONUNUN KURULUŞU VE OSMANLI
İMPARATORLUĞU'NDAKİ FAALİYETLERİ (1890-1915))

Olga BYKOVA HERGÜL

PhD Candidate,
Ural State University (Ural Federal University - UrFU)

Abstract: *Established in 1890, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF - Dasnaktsutyun) is a prominent Armenian nationalist organization that sought to attain an independent Armenia. Like other Armenian nationalist organizations, the ARF engaged in propaganda and agitation to draw the world's attention towards the Armenian Question. However, ARF was set apart from other Armenian nationalist organizations by its radical mentality and scale of its aggressive acts. In this context, the organization resorted to actions that can be described as terrorism. When examined, Russian archival documents belonging to the years 1890-1915 demonstrate that ARF was heavily involved in forming armed groups for inciting rebellions in the Ottoman Empire. When the First World War began, the ARF decided to side with the Russian Empire to the detriment of the Ottoman Empire. Eventually, the organization's activities and the agitation of the Ottoman Armenians came to represent a serious security threat to the Ottoman Empire. This would eventually lead the Ottoman government to take the radical decision to relocate Ottoman Armenians away from sensitive areas to other parts of the Empire. This article demonstrates that, with the help of Russian archival sources, the ARF's actions had dire consequences for both Ottoman Armenians and Muslims. According to the article, it can be argued that the unbalanced and adventurist methods of ARF damaged the Armenians more than anyone else did.*

* This article utilizes the archival materials gathered by Dr. Mehmet Perinçek during his research at the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF).

Keywords: *Armenian Revolutionary Federation, Armenian Question, Terror, Ottoman Empire, Russia, First World War*

Öz: 1890'da kurulan Ermeni Devrimci Federasyonu (EDF - Taşnaksütyun), bağımsız bir Ermenistan'ın kurulması amacını gütmüş önemli bir Ermeni milliyetçi örgüttür. Diğer Ermeni milliyetçi örgütler gibi EDF dünyanın dikkatini Ermeni Meselesini çekmek için propaganda yapmış ve kışkırtıcı faaliyetlerde bulunmuştur. Ancak EDF'yi diğer Ermeni milliyetçi örgütlerden ayıran, bahsi geçen örgütün radikal zihniyeti ve saldırgan faaliyetlerinin boyutları olmuştur. Bu bağlamda örgüt terörizm olarak tanımlanabilecek faaliyetlerde bulunmuştur. 1890-1915 arası Rus arşiv belgeleri incelendiğinde EDF'nin Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda ayaklanma çıkartılması için yoğun bir şekilde silahlı grupların oluşturulması sürecine dahil olduğu ortaya çıkmaktadır. Birinci Dünya Savaşı başladığında; EDF, Osmanlı İmparatorluğunun aleyhine olacak şekilde Rus İmparatorluğunun yanında yer almıştır. Sonuç olarak örgütün faaliyetleri ve Osmanlı Ermenilerinin kışkırtılması Osmanlı İmparatorluğu için ciddi bir güvenlik tehdidi haline gelmiştir. Bu durum, bir süre sonra Osmanlı hükümetinin radikal bir karar alarak Osmanlı Ermenilerini hassas bölgelerden İmparatorluğun başka bölgelerine sevk ve iskân etmeye karar vermesine yol açmıştır. Bu makale Rus arşiv kaynakları ışığında EDF'nin faaliyetlerinin hem Osmanlı Ermenileri hem de Müslümanları için vahim sonuçları doğurduğunu göstermektedir. Makalede, EDF'nin dengesiz ve maceraperest yöntemlerinin Ermenilere herkesten çok zarar verdiğinin söylenebileceği belirtilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Ermeni Devrimci Federasyonu, Ermeni Meselesi, Terör, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, Rusya, Birinci Dünya Savaşı*

INTRODUCTION

The precise date of the emergence of the Armenian Question is a matter of dispute among historians. However, there is consensus that the issue came to the fore in a more profound manner in the last quarter of the 19th century. We can observe that several parallel occurrences influenced the emergence of this question.

One instance we can point to is the emergence of the Armenian Question as a matter concerning the international community underpinned by the desire of the Great Powers to interfere in the domestic affairs of the Ottoman Empire.

Parallel to this development, we can observe the beginning of the formation of Armenian nationalist organizations. With the emergence of the Armenian Question at the international arena, the Armenian bourgeoisie came to the opinion that the foundation of an independent Armenia could only become possible with the support of the Great Powers. The said powers became incensed with this development and became the primary supporters of the emerging organizations.

Among the committees and organizations founded, the most prominent was the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF - *Dasnaktsutyun*), also referred to as the Dashnak Party, which was established in 1890. The ARF became distinct from its contemporaries with its insistence on radical Armenian nationalism and use of violence. The use of terrorism was one of the primary tactics of the ARF.

The party's insistence on the use of violence, armed uprisings, and attempts to prepare the ground for foreign intervention into the Ottoman Empire came to represent an existential threat to the continued existence of the Empire.

The beginning of World War One made an already bad situation worse. The ARF collaborated with the armies fighting against the Ottoman Empire, going as far to provide militants to fight in the ranks of enemy armies. The Ottoman government was left with little option other than the relocation of Armenians within the remit of the Relocation and Resettlement Law of 1915.

The Armenian Question as an International Matter

The Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 is an important date for the Armenian Question becoming a matter of international concern. The signing of the Treaty

of San Stefano after the war formalized the intervention of foreign states in the internal affairs of the Ottoman Empire. Article 16 of the Treaty, accepted with the invention of Armenians, stipulates that the Ottoman government undertake reform in the “Armenian provinces”, and that Russia should continue to occupy parts of the Ottoman Empire until these reforms were satisfactorily concluded.

The influence of the Russians as arbiter on behalf of Ottoman Armenians caused consternation for the British and was the cause for the gathering of the Berlin Conference. During the Berlin Conference, Article 16 of the Treaty of San Stefano was superseded by Article 61 of the Treaty of Berlin. This article

As Armenian statesman B. A. Borian emphasized, while the Treaty of Berlin stipulates that the Ottoman government must undertake “reform in areas where Armenians reside,” it ignored the fact that Armenians were widely dispersed throughout the Ottoman Empire, therefore the true aim of the Berlin Treaty was to exert influence over the Empire as a whole.

stipulated that the Ottoman government was bound to undertake reform in the “Armenian provinces” under the supervision of the six Great Powers that participated in the conference. Article 61 of the Treaty of Berlin made the Armenian Question, which hitherto had been an internal matter for the Ottoman Empire, a matter concerning the international community.

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Armenians reside,” it ignored the fact that Armenians were widely dispersed throughout the Ottoman Empire, therefore the true aim of the Berlin Treaty was to exert influence over the Empire as a whole.¹ The entry titled “Armenian Question” in the 1926 edition of the Great Soviet Encyclopedia notes that the Treaty of Berlin found support among the “leading lights of the Armenian bourgeoisie in addition to Russia, the other great powers would assist in the foundation of an Armenian state.”²

The Foundation of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation

Armenian nationalism was set to undergo a new stage of developments after its ideological genesis in the 19th century. As Armenian historian Eduard

1 Mehmet Perinçek, *B. A. Boryan'ın Gözüyle Türk-Ermeni Çatışması* (İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 2014), 44.

2 Mehmet Perinçek, *Rus Devlet Arşivlerinden 150 Belgede Ermeni Meselesi* (İstanbul: Kırmızı Kedi Yayınevi, 2013), 31.

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Oganesyan posits, Armenian circles were aware that without propaganda, agitation, and active organization, the foundation of an independent Armenian state could not be realized.³

With the weakening of the Ottoman Empire, the Great Powers saw an opportunity to interfere in the domestic affairs of the Empire. Armenian intellectuals sought to draw the world's attention to the Armenian Question, but they came to the realization that to succeed in keeping this issue on the international agenda required more serious organized steps.

A great number of Armenian groups and organizations were established during this period. Some of these include the *Narodnaya Volya* (Dastanyan, Mikaelyan, Zavaryan), radical chauvinists (Hatisyan), patriots (O. Argutyun, M. Şatiryan, G. Stepanyan, N. Gagesyan, H. Yusufyan, N. Matisyan, A. Narbekyan), intellectuals gathered around the *Mshak* newspaper (Aknuni), and the self-described Marxist Hunchak Party.⁴

The view of uniting these disparate groups under a single roof came to gain currency among Armenian intellectuals, resulting in the foundation of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation. The Armenian Revolutionary Federation, founded in 1890, supported the theoretical aims of Armenian nationalism and sought to implement the opinions intellectuals had been arguing for. It was agreed that the party should be organized from Tbilisi, Georgia. Among the founders of the party were Hristofor Mikaelyan, Simon Zavaryan, Abram Dastakyan, Levon Sardaryan, Levon Sarkisyan, and Loris-Melikyan.⁵ The party's newspaper *Droshak* (The Flag) was founded the same year. Party organizers were dispatched to "Turkish Armenia", Trabzon, Istanbul, North Caucasus, Baku, and Ahrabadagan in "Iranian Armenia".

The Hunchak Party was initially part of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, but quickly withdrew in 1891, claiming that the ARF did not adequately adhere to the principles of socialism.

The ARF's first party program was published in the September 1894 issue of *Droshak*. The program, while not sufficiently mature and far from lucid, openly states that the policy of the ARF is the economic and political independence of "Turkish Armenia" by means of rebellion.

3 Eduard Oganesyan, *Vek Borbi*, Vol. 1 (München-Moskva: İzdatelstvo "Feniks", 1991), 41.

4 Oganesyan, *Vek Borbi*, 80.

5 Hratch Dasnabedian, *History of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation - Dashnaksutiun (1890/1924)* (Milan: OEMME Edizioni, 1990), 31.

The period between 1892 and 1895 saw the growth and consolidation of the party. The ARF continued to dispatch organizers to various parts of the Ottoman Empire to engage in the dissemination of propaganda and to prepare the ground for rebellion (Arabo, Markar Varjapet, Avetisyan, Grayr, Tersimi Keri and others). Munitions began to be procured and disseminated within the borders of the Empire from depots in Artptakan (Iran), Sürmeli, Kars, Gyumri, and a munitions factory was established in the Iranian city of Tabriz.

The ARF planned events that would garner attention, particularly in Istanbul. In 1892, Ovannes Yusufyan (Melik) moved from Trabzon to Istanbul and

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established a solid underground base for the ARF in the capital. The party also opened branches in the cities of Trabzon, Batumi, Nakhchivan, Tbilisi, Baku, Gandzan, Karabakh in addition to the Balkans, Egypt, Cyprus, Genève, Paris, Marseille and the United States (in 1896).⁶

The Organizational Activities of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation: One of the Earliest Acts of Terror

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Even while in its nascent phase, the ARF stated as early as 1891 that its purpose was to call the Armenian people to arms against their Turkish rulers. Not content with just that, official documents of the organization show that it

6 Dasnabedian, *History of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation...*, 35, 47.

7 Perinçek, B. A. *Boryan 'ın Gözüyle...*, 45; Oganesyan, *Vek Borbu*, 59.

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planned armed attacks on state officials. The organization contained a “Terror Organization Committee” to prepare attacks and bring them to realization.⁸

The planned acts of terror mentioned above were set to be organized in Istanbul, were described as the “most suitable setting”⁹ by the historian Oganesyán.

The first leg of this planned terror campaign aimed to assassinate Armenians in the service of the Ottoman state. Among those murdered were Maksut Simon Bey, the head of the Ottoman intelligence organization Artashek, senior gendarmerie officer Adisi Tigran, retired bishop Mambre Benlyan, and surgeon M. Tutunciyev.¹⁰

The ARF was successful in drawing global attention to their cause with the undertaking of two large terror attacks in Istanbul. The first was an attack on the head branch of the Imperial Ottoman Bank and subsequently an attack in the Istanbul neighborhood of Samatya.

Twenty-six members of the ARF armed and in possession of explosives, occupied the Imperial Ottoman Bank on 26 August 1896. The one hundred and fifty people inside were taken hostage. Hoping to benefit from Istanbul’s strategic position to garner attention, the ARF members murdered four of the hostages and wounded five others. They passed their demands to the foreign diplomatic missions in Istanbul, eventually managing to secure their own safe passage to France on board the yacht of the French ambassador Le Gironde. Arrested upon arrival in France, Armenian sources suggest that the ARF militants were freed within a short while and managed to return to the Ottoman Empire to continue with their activities.

The raid on the Imperial Ottoman Bank is one of the first instances of the use of terrorism for political ends in modern history. It resulted in clashes between Turks and Armenians on the streets of Istanbul. According to ARF sources, militants belonging to the organization used a total of 154 homemade bombs during the subsequent disturbances in the Samatya neighborhood. It has been recorded that Armenian women joined the ranks of the men during the disturbances. Robert Chalmers, an official from the United States embassy,

8 The charter of the ARF contained the article titled “Terror”, in which it was explained how the party would employ terrorism. For the full text of the charter, please see: GARF Fond 102, Opis 253, Dela 280, List 1-12. There is also a Turkish translation of the text at: Kolektif, *Çarlık Polis Raporlarında Taşnaklar* (İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 2007), 54.

9 Oganesyán, *Vek Borbi*, 87.

10 Oganesyán, *Vek Borbi*, 87.

noted that the disturbances were organized based on political, not religious or ethnic, fault lines. The fact that non-Muslims of other denominations were not harmed during the disturbances is an important indicator in this regard.

Georgian statesman and writer Karibi, noted that the ARF reached its aims with these disturbances. Namely, encouraging a clash between Turks and Armenians then subsequently absolving themselves of responsibility. The disturbances succeeded in attracting the attention of European public opinion. According to Armenian statesman Borian, what was termed “public opinion” was that of the influential classes in Europe – crooked journalists, tabloid writers, political adventurers, and those who had thrown in their lot with the British and the Greeks. The decision of the ARF to spill blood in this way can be explained as an attempt to benefit from the desire of the Great Powers to find new markets to exploit in the East.¹¹

The methods of the ARF were in line with the desire of the Great Powers to be given a cause to intervene in the domestic affairs of the Ottoman Empire through the spilling of innocent blood rather than listening to mere chattering from ARF representatives.¹² This strategy is best summarized by the ARF-aligned historian Oganessian; “the Europeans began to sympathize with a nation which many of them had not even previously heard of.”¹³

The next serious act of terror organized by the ARF was the 1897 bombing of the seat of the Ottoman government, the Sublime Port. This act, undertaken by the organization’s Istanbul Central Committee, did not have the desired effect and is generally considered to have been unsuccessful.¹⁴

The ARF’s second general meeting was held in Tbilisi in 1898. This meeting was dedicated to the question of strategy. It was decided that for the purpose of revolt and defense, the ARF would gather weapons and munitions in Istanbul, Cecilia, Sason, and Vaspurakan (modern day Van and its surrounding regions). The meeting also decided to launch a new party publication entitled *Volya* in 1900, which would be established with money extorted from affluent Armenians. Moreover, the ARF decided that the punishment for Armenians who refused to donate to the organization would be death.

11 Perinçek, *B. A. Boryan’ın Gözüyle...*, 48 ; E. Oganessian, *Vek Borby...*, 87 et. al. ; Dasnabedian, *History of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation...*, 47 ; Arman Kirakosyan, “K Voprosu O Konstantinopolskoy Rezne 1896 Goda,” *Literaturnaya Armeniya*, No. 4 (1989): 100 – referred to from Ch. A. Roberts, “A Mother of Martyrs”, *The Atlantic Monthly*, c.83 (1899): 92.

12 Perinçek, *B. A. Boryan’ın Gözüyle...*, 45 ; L. M. Bolhovitinov, *11 Aralık 1915 Tarihli Resmi Ermeni Raporu*, Hazırlayan: Mehmet Perinçek (İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 2011), 36.

13 Oganessian, *Vek Borby*, 89.

14 Dasnabedian, *History of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation...*, 48.

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The third ARF congress was organized in Vienna in 1904. After this conference, it is observed that the ARF dramatically increased its activities. According to reports of the Tsarist police, the ARF formalized and was “now giving priority to organizational activity with newly founded and reformed bodies such as occupational, rural, paramilitary, defense units, in addition to ‘crazy terror’ organizations established to intimidate opponents. Discipline has increased, and measures have been taken to increase organizational secrecy.”¹⁵

In addition to this, the ARF was continuing its organizational activities in the Caucasus with haste. During the 1905-1907 revolution in Russia, the organization struggled both against the rule of the Tsar and against non-Armenians in the region, particularly non-Muslims. According to Armenian statesman Borian, “with the appearance of the Dashnaks [ARF] in the Caucasus, terrorism and mutual slaughter between communities became the order of the day.”¹⁶ The 1905-1906 clashes between Armenians and Tatars is one of the most important examples in this regard. The Armenian Bolshevik leader O. A. Arutyunyan noted in his memoirs that the ARF “began a campaign of terror under the slogan ‘kill as many Azeris as you can, loot their belongings, have no mercy.’” The ARF members dispersed amongst Armenian villages to deliver speeches inciting massacres, making calls upon the villagers to take up arms so that they could defend Armenians’ “honor and life.” With such speeches, they strove to have the Armenian population arm themselves against the Azeris. Furthermore, ARF brigands engaged in looting, killing the civilian folk, and burning down Azeri villages.¹⁷

The ARF undertook these efforts to change the demographic composition of the South Caucasus to secure an Armenian majority at the expense of Muslims. It was intended that Armenians arriving in the future from Iran and the Ottoman Empire would be allocated the land that Muslims were expected to have abandoned. According to Tsarist police reports, the number of Armenians who migrated to this region reached 500,000 within 5-6 years.¹⁸

The Procurement of Arms and the Arming of the People

The ARF Committees, which had been active since the 1890s in “Turkish Armenia” continued with their activities at the dawn of the 20th Century. During

15 *Dashnaki. Iz Materialov Departmenta Politsii* (Baku: Izdatelstvo “Kommunist” TSK KP Azerbaizhan, 1990), 23 ; Kolektif, *Çarlık Polis Raporlarında Taşnaklar*, 23.

16 Perinçek, *B. A. Boryan 'ın Göziyle...*, 48.

17 Perinçek, *Rus Devlet Arşivlerinden...*, 66.

18 *Dashnaki. Iz Materialov Departmenta Politsii*, 24 ; Kolektif, *Çarlık Polis Raporlarında Taşnaklar*, 24.

this period, the ARF was organized in the cities of Trabzon, Karin (Erzurum), Erzincan (Erzincan), Van, Muş, Mages (Bitlis) and Hnus (Hinis). The primary goal of the groups in these areas was the procurement and dissemination of arms. This activity was undertaken under the supervision of well-known ARF figures such as Rostom, Arabo, Serob, Grayr and Gamul.¹⁹ The primary weapon smuggling routes were from Tebriz, Salmasd and Maku to Vaspurakan. The roads between Kars-Pasen and Erivan-Surmeli were also of importance. Some of the ARF's Tebriz leadership such as Toros, Garo and Sako would often go to Russia, purchase arms and munitions to be sent to Tebriz and Salmasd. These arms would be reassembled at special ARF armories.²⁰

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The prolific trafficking of arms and munitions is mentioned in hundreds of documents and court depositions held in the Russian state archives. These documents, prepared by Russian judicial authorities, are an important source when it comes to an external opinion on the issue.

The summary of court proceedings dated 23 October 1879,²¹ which were sent to the deputy head of the Russian gendarmerie in Yerevan, Staff Captain Grekov, are an indispensable source regarding weapons smuggling. In sum, the proceedings note that an Armenian by the name of Amayak Canpoladov requested that a certain

Kovalenko, a private attached to the *Derbent Piyade Alayı* (Derbent Infantry Regiment), supply him with thirty rifles from military stocks. When Kovalenko asked what the weapons were to be used for, he was told they needed for the defense Armenians who were in the process of uprising in the Ottoman Empire, and that additionally ten Armenian "specialists" would come to receive the weapons from Kovalenko. According to the court proceedings, the Armenians who requested the rifles were "members of an underground Armenian revolutionary organization," and furthermore were involved in the "purchase and sale of weapons for the purpose of revolution."²²

19 Oganessian, *Vek Borby*, 94.

20 Dasnabedian, *History of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation...*, 52.

21 The dates used in the documents are based on the old Julian calendar used by the Russians. This calendar is 13 days behind the Gregorian calendar in use today.

22 Olga Bykova, "19. Yüzyılın Sonlarında 20. Yüzyılın Başlarında Türkiye'deki Ermeni Hareketiyle İlgili Çarlık Mahkemelerinde Görülen Davalardan Örnekler," *Yakın Dönem Türkiye Araştırmaları*, No. 12 (2010): 196.

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Additional court proceedings note two individuals -either directly or assisted by others- had provided weapon parts from both the state weapons manufacturer and the Moscow arsenal in the guise of scrap metal to be reassembled then sold to Armenians. According to the depositions of the mentioned individuals, 1898 represented a milestone as the demand for illegally procured weapons showed a great increase and buyers began to take a greater interest in the quality of the supplied weapons.²³

In the early years of the 20th Century the armament of Armenians was continuing with haste in “Turkish Armenia,” with the ARF at the head of efforts. Documents from the Russian archives demonstrate the extent to which Armenian groups had undertaken preparations on the eve of World War One, particularly when it came to organizing irregular *çetes* (gangs). The role of certain individuals in these plans must be emphasized.

A report dated 3 June 1904 written on the headed paper of the Tblisi Directorate of Security, noted that “wanted individual Ovanes Tumanyants went to Gyumri on the 25th or 26th of April and from there provided arms and money for a 300-person *çete* that had been assembled to infiltrate Turkey [Ottoman Empire]. According to information obtained, he was also one of the leaders of this *çete*. Nikolay Bagratov Şaverdov, one of his close collaborators, had also gathered Armenian youths in the Ikogat village of the Konzazar region for the purpose of forming *çetes* and provided them with paramilitary instruction. After obtaining consent from Tumanyants, Şaverdov armed the youths and sent them onwards to Turkey.” According to a Tsarist police report, in a two months period over 150 persons had been sent to the Ottoman Empire in this manner.²⁴

The fourth general congress of the ARF was held in Vienna in February 1907. The organization’s/party’s new program was approved and came into force the same year. As before, the ARF program proposed a “Turkish Armenia” and a “Transcaucasian Armenia” that would be independent of each other. The program held that the irrevocable demand of a “Turkish Armenia” would be politically and economically free, have regional autonomy, and maintain a federal relationship with the rest of the Ottoman Empire.²⁵ Other issues dealt with by the party congress included matters of organization, discipline, propaganda, use of tactics, political line, and the necessity for armed rebellion.²⁶

23 Bykova, “19. Yüzyılın Sonlarında...,” 200.

24 GARF, Fond 102 OO, Opis 1904, Dela 11.1, List 141, 141ob.

25 Perinçek, B. A. *Boryan'ın Gözüyle...*, 41.

26 *Dashnaki. İz Materialov Departmenta Politsii*, 28 ; Kolektif, *Çarlık Polis Raporlarında Taşnaklar*, 28.

Upon further examination, the 1907 party program reveals articles of interest. In the program's "Maximum Demands" section, the necessity of founding "war groups" comprising at least 50 persons to be sent to the Ottoman Empire is mentioned. In line with the party's program, the use of terrorism is one of the most basic strategies of the organization.

The ARF gave importance to the "fighter groups" organized as part of the ARF. Russian police reports mention few distinct types of group. Each of these groups was assigned with the task of only completing the mission assigned to it. One of those was the "Self Defense Group" which was a unit comprised of volunteer Armenian soldiers. They were assigned the task of coming to the fore during uprisings and clashes. According to reports, the other "fighter groups" were founded with the purpose of undertaking assassinations on behalf of the ARF. For example, one of these groups was the "Terror Preparation Committee" comprised of three people. This group's task was to administer and prepare the ground for terrorist activity, produce explosives and procure arms. In addition to this organization, a group was assigned the task of assassinating senior members of the ARF who had fallen out of favor with the leadership. Another group was established with the purpose of assisting the "Terror Preparation Committee" by working with sympathetic police offices to identify persons likely to be harmful to the ARF and placing them under following.

The 1907 program of the ARF stipulated that terrorism would not only be used against opponents, but also against members of the party that had fallen foul of the leadership. In this regard, it was stipulated in the program that punishment would be given to those who breached the terms of the organization by stealing weapons and funds but also for the "crimes" of treachery, betrayal and the murder of comrades.

The punishments to be meted out to party members were clear: warning, expulsion, detainment, and death. The primary task of every ARF member was to protect the secret nature of his domestic and external tasks and to pass intelligence onto his superior. The punishment for violation and non-observance of these principles was terror. Resultantly, not only were Armenians victim of this strategy, but also Russian and Turkish statesmen.²⁷

The methods of the ARF disturbed other Armenian groups and resulted in criticism being directed to the ARF. The *Zang* newspaper published in the

²⁷ Dasnabedian, *History of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation...*, 41 ; Kolektif, *Çarlık Polis Raporlarında Taşnaklar*, 41.

Iranian city of Tabriz in its 14 April 1911 issue criticized the ARF's methods in an article addressed to the Tblisi office of the *Mshak* newspaper:

“The Dashnak Party [ARF] is behaving in an arrogant and aggressive manner. It uses appropriate and murder in pursuit of its goals without a second thought. These vile affairs are carried out with the consent of the educated party leaders. (...) The Dashnaks, who constantly complain of the oppression of the government, are pursuing a form of oppression a thousand times more oppressive than that of the government.”

The article continues by mentioning that the ARF had recently wounded a person who had criticized them.²⁸

The degree of preparedness among the large-scale “war groups” formed during the 1900s is noteworthy. The Zinvor of the ARF (the armed troops of the ARF) possessed modern weapons and a large supply of munitions. Additionally, the ARF founded a military academy in Bulgaria which produced 53 graduate officers in 1907.²⁹ All these elements demonstrate just how comprehensive the ARF's preparations were.

With the passage of time, the organization of these armed groups became more professional and this was reflected in secret police reports. In a report written in the name of a police department chief dated 13 July 1907, it was noted that a leading representative of the ARF's Kars regional leadership was expected to transcend the Ottoman border with the purpose of selecting leaders who would then go on to organize revolutionary *çetes*.

The report continued by stating that the ARF, in an effort to convince the youth to sign up to their organization, was spreading rumors that the Ottoman government intended to exile the Armenians of the provinces of Erzurum and Van.³⁰

In another secret report dated June 1907, it was noted that Kurat Taho, an associate of the ARF's infamous leader Andranik Ozanian, gave speeches at Armenian churches stating that the Armenians had 5000 weapons massed on the Russian-Ottoman border and they would invade the Ottoman Empire once the conditions had ripened.³¹

28 GARF, Fond 102 OO, Opus 1910, Dela 29, List 58.

29 *Dashnaki. Iz Materialov Departmenta Politsii*, 39 ; Kolektif, *Çarlık Polis Raporlarında Taşnaklar*, 39.

30 GARF, Fond 102 OO, Opus 1907, Dela 171, List 77, 77ob.

31 GARF, Fond 102 OO, Opus 1907, Dela 171, List 59.

Documents in the Russian archives candidly record how the ARF gathered money from locals for the purpose of solidifying their armed revolutionary activities, how they used this money to purchase arms and munitions, how they established factories to produce munitions, how they established “war groups” under the name of “humb” and how they applied the methods of terrorism.³² A colonel attached to the Tblisi regional gendarmerie mentioned in a report dated 19 June 1909 that the ARF had managed to make the local population listen to them and apply their demands without question.³³

With the acceptance of the new Ottoman constitution and the large-scale arrests against ARF members in Russia in 1907 and 1909 that crippled ARF’s power and organizational capacity in the country, the ARF in Russia was placed on the back foot. On the other hand, however, the ARF committees of “Turkish Armenia” and Europe were growing stronger. The Western Bureau of the ARF intensified its activities in the Ottoman Empire. The collapse of Abdulhamid’s regime and the reintroduction of the Ottoman constitution was followed shortly after by the 5th ARF congress held in Varna, Bulgaria in August 1909. The changing conditions within the Ottoman Empire was a cause for an intensification in ARF activity. The party founded both eastern and western bureau in “Turkish Armenia.”³⁴

At the same time, not only was ARF involved in the revolutionary activities taking place in the Ottoman Empire, it was also collaborating with the political parties that were opposed the Ottoman sultan. Upon the initiative of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), all the opposition parties active in the Ottoman Empire assembled in Paris in 1907³⁵ and agreed to cooperate to dethrone Abdulhamid.³⁶ Between the years 1908-1914 the ARF existed in the Ottoman Empire as a legal political party with representatives in parliament. The ARF submitted to the Ottoman parliament and government a request for an autonomous Armenia.³⁷

However, when the ARF realized that it would not be able to attain what it requested with its then current methods, by the 1910s, it repudiated its cooperation with the CUP and decided to pursue its interests alone. This change in strategy can be observed from Russian intelligence reports. According to a report dated 3 September 1911, a conference was held in Istanbul that was

32 GARF, Fond 102 OO, Opis 1907, Dela 171, List 365.

33 GARF, Fond 102 OO, Opis 1909, Dela 14,8, List 19, 19ob.

34 Oganessian, *Vek Borby*, 164.

35 Şükrü Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 191-197.

36 Mehmet Perinçek, *Rus Devlet Arşivlerinden...*, 32.

37 Dasnabedian, *History of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation...*, 43.

attended by members of the ARF and the CUP. At this conference the ARF stated “that it had cut off all its relations with the CUP due to the reemergence of clashes between Kurds and Armenians, that it did not wish to have any links with the CUP, and that it would attain its autonomy through its own efforts.” Apart from this, it was explained that the ARF “had made the decision have all its armed units at the ready status.”³⁸

The Eve of the First World War

It can be observed in Russian intelligence reports that the Armenian organizations stepped up the pace of their organizational activities in terms of procuring arms and founding *çetes* when it became clear that the First World War was inevitable. A colonel attached to the Tbilisi gendarmerie sent a report to the police department on 2 November 1912. In the report, the colonel cited Muş, Van, and Zeytun as being centers where the ARF had organized armed units for the purpose of revolution.³⁹

It can be observed in Russian intelligence reports that the Armenian organizations stepped up the pace of their organizational activities in terms of procuring arms and founding çetes when it became clear that the First World War was inevitable.

All contemporaneous sources document that Van was the center of the ARF organizational activity during the period. From 1913 onwards, the flow of arms was directed towards Van. According to an intelligence report dated 8 February 1913, on 13 January 1913, 52 Berdan rifles, 42 7.62 mm rifles, and 17,000 bullets were sent to Van by an Armenian named Kevork and an Ottoman subject named Hayko. The use of the weapons was left to the discretion of the ARF’s Van committee.⁴⁰ In the procurement of arms, both the ARF internal and international committees played a role. Further reports note that arms were being sent to “all corners of Turkish Armenia,”⁴¹ and the armed ARF members who crossed the border into the Ottoman Empire were gathering in Van.⁴²

However, the Dashnaks political position changed again during this period. Armenian political organizations sought to return to the pre-1908 policy of seeking to secure the support of Russia and Europe to bring diplomatic pressure

38 GARF, Fond 102 OO, Opis 1911, Dela 14.51B, List 15ob.

39 GARF, Fond 102 DOO, Opis 1912, Dela 14, List 21ob.

40 GARF, Fond 102 OO, Opis 1913, Dela 14.92B, List 15ob.

41 GARF, Fond 102 OO, Opis 1913, Dela 14.92B, List 18ob.

42 GARF, Fond 102 OO, Opis 1913, Dela 14.92B, List 31ob.

upon the Ottoman Empire. As the Dashnaks thought that Armenian independence could only be guaranteed with the assistance of the Russians, the Dashnaks began to display a favorable attitude towards Russia. The Russian government approved the Dashnak's advances as the First World War was becoming unavoidable, as Russian politician Pavel Milyukov⁴³ stated "The Armenians, as a nation wedged between Russia and Turkey, are gaining political importance."⁴⁴

The representatives of the ARF began talks with Mikhail N. Girs, the Russian ambassador in Istanbul and launched a campaign in Europe.⁴⁵ The ARF pledged

"It is in our national interests to work with the Russians and to bring the historic goal of Russia in the east to fruition. This desire burns in our hearts. The Russian flag will fly over the Istanbul and Dardanelles Straits. The Russians must free the subject nations that are under the Turkish yoke."

to renounce its activities against Russia and to fight on the side of Russia against the Ottoman Empire. With the impending outbreak of World War One, it was clear that the interests of the ARF were one with the interests of the Russians. The representatives of the ARF worked to bring the situation of the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire to the attention of the Russian government. As of October 1913, the *Orizon* magazine published in Tbilisi began to carry articles containing overtures of peace to the Russians. In these articles, the ARF stressed that the Armenians of Russia were amongst the best people of the world and

under the influence of the world's most advanced literature. The articles stressed that on the other hand, the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire lived in the most difficult of circumstances and that it was imperative on Russia to bring an end to the plight of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. It was further stressed that the desires of the ARF were the same with the desires of Russia.⁴⁶

As it stated in the Great Soviet Encyclopedia under the heading "Dashnaksutyun," the ARF suspected that in the case of a victory for the Central Powers, they would not be granted autonomy and for this reason they aligned themselves with the Allied Powers. When the Ottoman Empire entered the war, the Armenian National Committee appealed to Nicolas II with their requests. They noted that:

43 He was the founder and head of the Russian Kadets, a constitutionalist democratic party in the Russian State Duma. Through his writings and speeches, he became known for his pan-Slavist ideas and pro-Armenian stance, which included voicing support for Armenian autonomy in the territory of the Ottoman Empire.

44 Perinçek, *Rus Devlet Arşivlerinden...*, 33.

45 Perinçek, *Rus Devlet Arşivlerinden...*, 41.

46 GARF, Fond 102 OO, Opis 1913, Dela 300, List 9ob.

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“It is in our national interests to work with the Russians and to bring the historic goal of Russia in the east to fruition. This desire burns in our hearts. The Russian flag will fly over the Istanbul and Dardanelles Straits. The Russians must free the subject nations that are under the Turkish yoke.”⁴⁷

The Volunteer Units of Armenians Organized Under the ARF Served as the Vanguard of the Russian Army on the Eastern Front.

The Russian government welcomed these developments. The Russian government was aware of both the spite that the ARF held for the Ottoman government and the preparation for war that the ARF was engaged in. The Tbilisi Area Gendarmerie Commander wrote to the Security Directorate on 12 September 1914 that no pressures should be placed on the Dashnaks and that they should be permitted to freely cross the border from Russia into the Ottoman Empire.⁴⁸ In a report presented to the 1923 ARF conference, Hovhannes Kajaznuni, the first Prime Minister of Armenia and a founding member of the ARF, noted that before the war had even started by the fall of 1914, Armenians had begun to organize volunteer units in the south Caucasus “with great noise and energy.”⁴⁹

As a result of intense struggle by the beginning of the war, the ARF had managed to gather a serious number of soldiers and weapons in “Turkish Armenia.” According to a 1914 Russian intelligence report, “If the Kurds begin to use force against the Armenians, the Armenians are armed well enough to repel any such attacks.”⁵⁰ This demonstrates how well the Armenians were armed.

Intelligence reports further state that the ARF was waiting for the outbreak of war with suspense, and almost all of the Armenian males were prepared to take up arms against the Ottoman Empire as volunteers.⁵¹ Correspondingly, a report dated August 1914 notes that 15,000 Armenians were on standby waiting for the founding of armed units in the Caucasus.⁵²

47 Perinçek, *Rus Devlet Arşivlerinden...*, 42.

48 GARF, Fond 102 00, Opus 1914, Dela 343.4, List 9ob.

49 Ovanes Kaçaznuni, *Taşnak Partisi'nin Yapacağı Bir Şey Yok* (İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 2005), 30.

50 GARF, Fond 102 00, Opus 1914, Dela 14.79B, List 6ob.

51 GARF, Fond 102 00, Opus 1914, Dela 14.79B, List 54ob.

52 GARF, Fond 102 00, Opus 1914, Dela 14.79B, List 55ob.

The Temporary Committee of the ARF took a decision that stipulated in the outbreak of war that the armed units in the Caucasus would join the Russian army en masse along with all of their military equipment, further noting that these volunteers were bound to provide the required assistance to the Russians.⁵³ Armenians from the areas of Tblisi, Yerevan, and Elisabethpol (Gence) had provided 80,000 volunteers for the Russian army.⁵⁴ In addition to their own arms, Armenian units who were provided special education were supplied with 6,000 additional rifles by the Russian state on behalf of Andranik.⁵⁵ The records for the year 1915 also demonstrate that the Armenians had succeeded in arming themselves.⁵⁶

The Armenian volunteer units had already begun attacking local Muslims and looting their property. In a report written by a Russian colonel dated 8 November 1914, it was reported that Armenian units numbering some 500 persons under the command of Drastamat “Dro” Kanayan had attacked a Kurdish village while on the way to Beyazıt from Iğdır. It was reported that the doors of the houses were forcibly destroyed and that the remaining valuables looted.⁵⁷

Armenian statesman A.B. Karinian, in his article titled “On the Nature of the Armenian Nationalist Movement,” noted that the Armenian volunteer units in the Russian army were exalted with the success of the Russians on the battlefield and in the areas they occupied they used all means to increase their influence as much as possible. To achieve this, they were required to physically destroy the non-Armenian local population. In broad terms, the Armenian units worked to eliminate the non-Christian population in eastern Anatolia.⁵⁸

A.A. Lalaian, the Soviet historian of Armenian descent similarly noted that the Armenian volunteer units lusted for blood. Under the command of ARF leaders, they murdered Turkish women, children, the elderly, and the infirm. The villages occupied by the ARF were “liberated” of their inhabitants and were transformed into unrecognizable ruins.⁵⁹

53 GARF, Fond 102 OO, Opis 1914, Dela 14.79B, List 61ob; GARF, Fond 102 OO, Opis 1914, Dela 343.4, List 203.

54 GARF, Fond 102 OO, Opis 1914, Dela 14.21B, List 4.

55 GARF, Fond 102 OO, Opis 1914, Dela 14.79B, List 62ob.

56 GARF, Fond 102 OO, Opis 1915, Dela 14.6B, List 11.

57 GARF, Fond 102 OO, Opis 1914, Dela 343.4, List 169ob.

58 A.B. Karinyan, “K Kharakteristike Armyanskikh Natsionalisticheskikh Techenii,” *Bolshevik Zakavkazya*, No. 9–10 (1928): 87.

59 A. A. Lalayan, “Kontrevolyutsionnyi ‘Dashnaksutiun’ i Imperialisticheskaya Voina 1914-1918 Gg.,” *Revolutsionnyi Vostok*, No. 2–3 (1936): 45.

Soviet Armenian politician S.G. Pirumyan similarly described the volunteer units as “fascists”⁶⁰ who had systematically sought to eliminate the Kurdish and Turkish population of Eastern Anatolia as part of a preordained plan by the ARF.

The aforementioned preparations for war, the armed rebellions and the attacks on civilians meant that the ARF represented a threat for the both the Ottoman state and the local non-Christian population in Eastern Anatolia. In addition to this, we have demonstrated that the Armenians organized volunteer units to fight against the Ottoman Empire in World War One. In this situation, the Ottoman government sought to come to an agreement with the ARF. According to a report penned by a Russian colonel dated 10 March 1915, the ARF had been offered to pass over to the “Turkish side.” However, this proposal was rejected by the ARF on the basis that after the conclusion of the war, Russia would strive to improve the condition of the Armenians and allow them to administer their own affairs.⁶¹

The position adopted by the ARF in support of the Russian war effort against the Ottoman Empire and their refusal to reach agreement with the Ottoman state meant that the Ottoman government was left with no option but to adopt the Relocation and Resettlement Law (*Sevk ve İskân Kanunu*) in 1915.

CONCLUSION

The ARF worked to establish an independent Armenia by using various methods both inside the Ottoman Empire and abroad.

One of the ARF’s preferred methods was that which was aimed at gaining the attention of the Great Powers. In addition to this, the ARF also used methods

The ARF worked to establish an independent Armenia by using various methods both inside the Ottoman Empire and abroad. One of the ARF’s preferred methods was that which was aimed at gaining the attention of the Great Powers. In addition to this, the ARF also used methods of terrorism and propaganda based on constructed grievances. The use of terror also extended to Armenians who did not share the aims of the ARF.

60 S. G. Pirumyan, *Diasporadaki Taşnaklar* (İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları, 2007), 150.

61 GARF, Fond 102 OO, Opis 1915, Dela 14.79B, List 11ob.

of terrorism and propaganda based on constructed grievances. The use of terror also extended to Armenians who did not share the aims of the ARF.

The ARF, which relied on the support of external forces to bring its goals to realization, shaped its position according to the regional balances of power. Among those the ARF sought to gain the support of at various periods, we can count Britain and Russia among the European powers, the European and Russian socialist movements, and the Ottoman opposition movements.

In the 25-year period under examination in this article, details have been given regarding the efforts over the ARF to establish *çetes* and arm the Armenian populace. As a result of the efforts to arm themselves and form *çetes* from the 1890s onwards, the ARF came to represent a threat for the Ottoman Empire. The aim of the ARF in this regard was to change the demographic composition of the “six *vilayets*” (six provinces) that the ARF argued constituted “Turkish Armenia” by the use of violence and looting. The ARF took the side of the Russians at the outbreak of World War One and rejected rapprochement with the Ottoman government.

All these developments shook the foundations of the internal security of the Ottoman Empire and meant that the Armenians of the Empire began to be viewed as a potential threat. These developments led the Ottoman government to take a radical decision to relocate Armenians from sensitive security zones in Eastern Anatolia.

In sum, the ARF exhausted every possible method in pursuit of an independent Armenia, negatively affecting the Armenians of the region as much as it affected the Muslim population. Because of the failure of the ARF strategy, the party came under severe criticism from prominent Armenian politicians and statesmen and even members of the party itself. It can be argued that the unbalanced and adventuristic methods of the party damaged the Armenians themselves more than anyone else did.

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