

# Armenian Involvement in the 1925-1946 Kurdish Rebellions in Republican Turkey: Trying to Map the Origins of “Hidden Armenians

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## Abstract:

The history of Armenian-Kurdish relations extends over centuries. In the 1800's, Armenians were involved in the Kurdish rebellions in Kurdistan proper. The rebellions were crushed by Ottoman military might.<sup>1</sup>

After the Armenian Genocide of 1915, a new phase of Armenian involvement in yet a new episode of Kurdish rebellions ensued in Republican Turkey. This new collusion lasted all the way to the late 1930s. The aim of the ARF (Armenian Revolutionary Federation, AKA Tashnagtsutyune) at the time was twofold: Dispersion into the Middle East was considered to be a temporary sojourn and the ARF was adamant in its thinking that Armenians should repatriate to their historic homeland. The ARF attempted such an adventurous plan due to its knowledge that many pockets of Armenians—ergo, what would later become known as “Hidden Armenians”—existed in the Eastern Provinces of the newly established Turkish Republic.

Toward the end of World War II there was some optimism that the Soviet Union could reoccupy some of the historical Western Armenian lands and incorporate them into the Soviet Armenian Republic. The ARF, regardless of its ideological opposition to the Soviet Union at the time, agreed to a détente with its arch-enemy for such a nascent purpose.

Having access to archival material from republican Turkey, the Soviet Union, Armenia, France, Britain, as well as the memoirs and letters of some prominent ARF leaders involved in the Kurdish rebellions of the time creates a unique opportunity to present a more detailed account about the period under.

It was only after 1947 that this détente and the whole policy of returning to the homeland were totally abandoned by the ARF. By 1965, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversaries of the Armenian Genocide, Armenians still living in Turkey were forgotten. The ARF announced that there were no Armenians left behind and that the only policy to follow was that of the international recognition of the Armenian Genocide.

This chapter will not involve itself with the events pertinent to the Kurdish rebellions in the 1920s and 1930s. Rather, it will focus on Armenian and especially ARF participation in those uprisings.<sup>2</sup> This has to be done in order to close a gap in the international historical discourse regarding the subject, since Armenian and ARF participation were not tackled by historians for several reasons most important of which was and still is the language barrier (knowledge of Armenian) or the paucity of Archival material (perhaps the researchers in question didn't pursue the matter until “no stone remained unturned”).

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<sup>1</sup> Garabet K Moumdjian, *Armenian Kurdish Relations in the Era of Kurdish Nationalism: 1830 - 1930*, *Pazmaveb*, 1999, Vol. CLVII, No. 1 - 4, 268-347.

<sup>2</sup> In this regard see the following works: David McDowall, *A modern history of the Kurds* (I.B.Tauris: 3rd ed. Edition), 2004; Romano, David, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization and Identity* (Cambridge Middle East Studies), (Cambridge Univ. Press), 2006; Gérard Chaliand, ed., *A People Without A Country*, (London: Zed Publishing), 1984; Robert Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheikh Said Rebellion, 1880-1925*, (Univ. of Texas Press: Austin); Wadie Jwaideh, *The Kurdish National Movement: Its Origins and Development*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press), 2006), etc.

Moreover, and as an archival historian, it is my aim to present archival records almost in their entirety in order not to leave any room for individual interpretations and the misunderstandings they produce; in other words, I want to make the documents speak for themselves regardless of their length in some instances.

Finally, it must be underlined that the aim of this narrative is to bring to light the issue of Armenians who were left behind after the genocide and deportations. The archival documents from Armenian and Turkish sources indicate that such a phenomenon existed since the early days of republican Turkey. It is important to shed light on such people and their participation in the Kurdish rebellions of the period, since, as shall be seen, it was this people that today represent what has become known as Islamized and/or Turkified/Kurdified Armenians...

## **Introduction:**

I first got interested in Armenian-Kurdish collaboration in the period 1830 to 1930s in the early 1980s when I was preparing my senior thesis at the Institute Superior d'Aarmenologie in Beirut. After arriving in the United States, I translated my thesis to English and presented it for my bachelor's degree in History/Armenian Studies at the University of La Verne. The thesis was published in 1999.

At the time, having access to only secondary sources and some newspaper articles, the puzzling question at the time I wrote the thesis was why did the ARF wholeheartedly participate in and offer logistical support to the Kurdish uprisings from 1920 to 1940? The issue was baffling for me and many in my generation, since the Kurds had been the very instrument of Armenian demise during the genocide. Furthermore, they were now occupying the same lands that constituted the Armenian historical Homeland.

After years of extra research on the subject, the answer to this perplexing question came by way of a Turkish-Armenian activist, Hrant Dink,<sup>3</sup> who in early 2000 uttered what seemed to be a taboo to us, Armenians: That Armenians were still living in pockets of Western Armenia, albeit Islamized or Kurdified.

This made sense; since my research indicated that as early as 1924 the leadership of the ARF was cognizant of the existence of those Armenians that were "left behind." What made more sense was that the ARF leadership considered those Armenians as strategic assets for a policy of bringing the rest of Armenians that were dispersed into the Middle East as a result of the genocide back to their Homeland. Thus, Kurdish uprisings on these territories presented a means to accomplish that end.

This policy of returning to the homeland, which was central for the ARF leadership at the time, continued unabated all the way to WWII. At the time, the ARF, which was ideologically diametrically opposed to the Soviet Union, was even willing to let go of that animosity for the time, if the USSR would implement a policy of demanding Armenian lands to attach them to the Soviet Armenian Republic. When all hopes for such an endeavor vanished, the ARF leadership completely disassociated itself from the policy it had followed for over 30 years. With the coming of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Armenian Genocide in 1965, the policy was not only completely abandoned, but it became a taboo to even speak about those Armenians who were "left behind." From that time on, the mantra of the time

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<sup>3</sup> Hrant Dink was an Armenian journalist/activist with Turkish citizenship who was assassinated in Istanbul on January 19, 2007. Dink became famous for bringing forth a subject that had been a taboo in intra-Armenian politics since the 1960s; namely that of Armenians (Islamized, Kurdified, or otherwise) who were still living in the Kurdish inhabited southeastern parts of Turkey. Bringing back the issue was perplexing, since the dominant Armenian discourse has been that no Armenians were left behind.

was that Armenians were completely annihilated in their homeland and common sense entailed that all activism should be directed toward pressuring Turkey to acknowledge the veracity of the Armenian Genocide.

Today, as tumultuous events are shaking the Middle East and the legacy of the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916 is almost spent and the general area is in a geopolitical flux, the issue of the creation of a Kurdish state has once again been brought to the forefront. I am certain that with this new opportunity, the issue of the “Hidden Armenians” will also come to the forefront.

### **The geopolitical landscape: 1920-1924**

In order to assess how serious this rebellion was viewed by Turkey in terms of it leading to the formation of a Kurdish state on parts of the nascent Turkish Republic is apparent from the following fact:

In September, 1919, the British government sent Lt. Colonel E. Noel, who was a well informed intelligence officer, about the intricacies of the Kurdish movement in Western Armenia. The Major was tasked with identifying the power structure in the area and to conduct intelligence subterfuge operations and to gather as much pertinent information as possible. Major Noel was accompanied by Kurdish nationalist leaders Kamuran and Jeladet Bedirkhan, who were proponents of the creation of a Kurdish state. The Major toured all over the area of his operation. What he was able to ascertain was indeed remarkable and almost dumbfounded him: He found that Turks living in Western Armenia who feared the creation of a Kurdish state would rather prefer the creation of an Armenian state instead.<sup>4</sup>

It is important to note here that, regardless of Colonel Noel’s reports, “the high ranking officers of the British Intelligence Service—who considered Noel as the best authority on the Kurdish subject—were of the opinion that Great Britain will benefit more by having the Kurdish issue as a trump card in their hands rather than the Armenian one. In their opinion, the creation of a greater Armenia would mean that a proportion of one Armenian was to rule over ten Kurds, which meant instituting the rule of a very tiny minority over an large majority, which in itself could lead to unwarranted consequences...Noel also underlined that following such a policy would also deter an emerging Soviet Russia from playing the Armenian card in the future by announcing once again that it was the protector of the Armenians in the area.”<sup>5</sup>

An ever cognizant Kemal understood the intricacies of such an international political maneuver by tolerating the formation of a Communist Party in Turkey in order to secure Soviet friendship and, most importantly, financial and military aid. Later, however, in an effort to rectify his position with the

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<sup>4</sup> Major E. W. C. Noël I, *Note on the Kurdish Situation*, Baghdad, July 1919. For more regarding Lt. Colonel Noel see Jonathan Smele, *The Russian Revolution and Civil War 1917-1921: An Annotated Bibliography* (A&C Black, 2006), entry No. 2816, 286 . See also Christopher de Bellaigue, *Rebel Land: Among Turkey's Forgotten Peoples* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Iraq British Administration: 1914-1921, Office of the Civil Commissioner, *Précis of Affairs in Southern Kurdistan*, (Baghdad: 1919), 7.

West—that is, to appease its powers—Kemal dissolved that party in 1925, of course after physically eliminating its leaders.

The initial Kemalist tilt towards Communist Russia alarmed Europe. Its most affected powers, i.e. France, and Britain were worried that such an inclination would definitely endanger their new Middle Eastern possessions. Moreover, a Turkey friendly to Russia would extend communism's frontiers to the detriment of Europe and its spheres of influence.

France was the first to sign a treaty of friendship with the Kemalist government. This happened in early October 1921, when Kemal's forces had not yet extended their rule over all of modern day Turkey. Moreover, Greek forces were still active in Anatolia. In fact, to most Turkish nationalist leaders, the very existence of such massive Greek forces did endanger the very fabric of their fledgling nationalist movement. It is in this context that France's erratic behavior must be understood and properly analyzed—most probably a case of “cold feet.” With such French encouragement—as the signing of a treaty of peace and friendship with Turkey could have entailed-- Kemalist forces were able to halt the advance of the Greek armies who had already conquered Izmir and were moving inward, toward central Anatolia.

What is interesting here is that this Turkish victory was achieved through substantial Kurdish aid to Kemal's army. Thousands of Kurdish tribal warriors and previous Hamidiye regiment soldiers joined Kemal's army. The Turkish leader was thus not only able to confront the Greek armies but even to stage a strong counter-offensive which swept the advancing Greeks back to Izmir and literally into the Black Sea, together with the Greek and Armenian population of the city, under the very eyes of the British fleet which watched the tragedy unfold. According to some reports Her Majesty's sailors, following orders from their officers, even went as far as pouring boiling water on those seeking refuge on board British ships.

What was the reason or reasons behind this massive Kurdish aid to Kemal? After all, it was only months before that Kurdish chieftains who had met in Malatia had agreed to get rid of him. There is nothing surprising in such Kurdish attitude. By now, Kemal had become a seasoned politician; in order not to alienate the Kurdish chieftains, he never used the term “Turkish Republic” when addressing them or the Kurdish population at large. Instead, he started his movement in the heart of Kurdistan, where he promised Kurds a country where Turks and Kurds would live as equals and in absolute harmony. Kemal's promises were negotiated and hammered down during several meetings and conventions.

The first such convention was held in Erzurum. It is also known as the Congress of the Eastern Vilayets. Rumors had it that the Paris Peace Conference had already annexed the vilayets of Erzurum, Kars, Bitlis, Erzinjan, Mush and Van to the Armenian republic, whose borders were to be drawn by the president of the United States of America, Woodrow Wilson. Fifty-four prominent Kurdish chieftains and leaders from these territories came to Erzurum to meet Kemal and to join forces to struggle against the annexation of Kurdish territories to neighboring Armenia. Kemal, who had previously erred by claiming that those vilayets were “historically Kurdish territories,” and that “Armenians had no legitimate claims over them,” contradicts himself by stating that:

The Kurdish notable [who did participate in the Erzurum Convention of 1919, G.M.] had their own reasons for resisting such an outcome [annexation, G.M.]. When Armenians were deported during the war, Kurdish notables had sized their goods (lands). Serving under Armenian

domination would have meant dispossession as well as persecution [by] and servitude to a Christian regime.<sup>6</sup>

The Erzurum Convention decided to act quickly, and to do all that is in its power to prevent the annexation of the six eastern vilayets to the Armenian Republic. The convention also decided that Kurds would help the Turkish army against any Armenian expansion. Kazim Karabekir Pasha was sent to Kurdistan to recruit Kurdish soldiers and to supervise their training. It was this mainly Kurdish army that advanced against the Armenian Republic toward the end of in 1921. The offensive ended with the signing of a peace treaty of Gumri, which resulted in the Armenian loss of not only the contested vilayets but also of the districts of Kars and Ardahan. The Armenian Republic was thus squeezed into a small state, with an area of a bit over thirty thousand square kilometers.

The question that asserts itself here is whether the Kurds, after all their endeavors, were able to keep the eastern vilayets for themselves? The answer is a definite no. After the Erzurum Congress, Kemal led his army from one victory to another. He destroyed all possibilities of executing the Treaty of Severe. For three years he waged a two front war against the Greeks and the Allies in eastern and western Asia Minor. He made them realize that they had to deal with him as the new strong man in Turkey. In 1923, a new treaty was signed at Lausanne. Here, Kemal's free and independent Republic of Turkey participated as an equal negotiator. European nations, who only months before were engaged in a war of attrition against him, were now desperate to gain his friendship and have his new Turkey on their side as an important new ally, and, of course, a barrier, against Communist Russia.

In Lausanne, all dreams of Kurdish autonomy were shattered. As for the Kurds, they were deprived of any political recognition. The Turkish envoy to Lausanne silenced all talks about Kurdish autonomy. He stressed that "Kurds and Turks are now equal partners in the government of Turkey," and that "although Turks and Kurds may speak different languages, these two people are not different from the point of view of race, faith and custom."<sup>7</sup> If anything, this statement indicates that Kemalist Turkey viewed the assimilation and Turkification of the Kurds as a natural process. The Treaty of Lausanne gave other minorities in Turkey--like Armenians, Greeks, and Jews religious as well as some cultural "freedoms," which meant nothing on the ground. But Kurds, because of being represented as "equal partners" to the Turkish majority, were not counted as a minority. Thus, they were deprived from even the meager "freedoms" that other minorities were to enjoy. After 1923, the Turkification of the Kurds accelerated with the objective of literally melting them within the Turkish race.

In yet another blow to the Kurds, the Treaty of Lausanne divided Historical Kurdistan between the newly established Middle Eastern states of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. This was an indirect consequence of the planning and the execution of the Sykes-Picot agreement. England wanted the oil-rich fields of southern Kurdistan (Musul). It was annexed by Iraq, a British mandate. The oil issue exacerbated relations between France and England. Supposedly, oil was discovered after the Lausanne Treaty was signed. However, France insisted that the British already knew about the oil reserves in the area and preferred to say nothing about it during negotiations. Nevertheless, the two European powers

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<sup>6</sup> Gérard Chaliand, ed., *People without a Country*, 55.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 59-60. See also Garo Sassouni [Կարո Սասունի], *Kurd Azkayin Sharzhumnere Yev Hay-Kerdagan Haraperutyunnere XVrt Taren Minchev Mer Orere* [Քիւրտ ազգային շարժումները և հայ-քրտական հարաբերությունները ԺԵ դարն մինչև մեր օրերը], (Beirut: Hamazkayin Vahe Setian Press), 1968, 242-244. After the fall of the independent Armenian Republic, A.R.F. leaders and members at large were forced to exile and to an eventual process of reorganization. In this regard, many exiled leaders were in favor of close cooperation with the Kurds. It follows, therefore, that this exiled ARF leadership was instrumental in the formation of Hoyboun (see below).

were able to reach a compromise. Accordingly, France received twenty five percent of the oil revenue and also the districts of Jezireh and Kurd Daghi (Kurdish Mountain) in southwestern Kurdistan, which it annexed to its Syrian mandate.

### **1925: Sheikh Sa'id of Piran's Rebellion and its Armenian Connection:**

In the field of Kurdish historiography there is a general consensus that the first Kurdish rebellions—most pronounced among which was the Sheikh Sa'id of Piran's rebellion of 1925—in republican Turkey were religiously motivated. Mustafa Kemal, by abolishing the institute of the Caliphate in 1924 and introducing a westernized form of society upset the basic privileges of the tribal Kurdish population in the southeastern part of the new republic. However, before analyzing Sa'id's rebellion some statements must be made regarding the politics of the era.

Moreover, Kemal Soon introduced yet another decree; this time he banned all Kurdish organizations, as well as regular and religious schools. This action enlarged the existing gulf between him and the Kurdish people. It also pushed the latter into rebellion. From the onset, the Kurdish Association of Independence was making preparations for a general rebellion.<sup>8</sup> It had established ties with most of the religious sheiks and tribal chieftains. Its leadership had also created links with the Kurdish communities of Istanbul and Aleppo. In other words, the period 1923-1924 was completely devoted to the accumulation of military and other provisions in preparation for the general rebellion.

That an Armenian element was present in those early days of Kurdish unrest is also apparent from a letter that two members of the Turkish parliament from Dersim (Tunceli) wrote to the presidency of the parliament:

An Armenian with a Turkish name was apprehended in Dersim's (Pasen and Artnik) county. The people in the area were instrumental in identifying this person who was collecting money. A decision has to be made regarding Armenians who have assumed Turkish names in Dersim in order to stop their rebellious activities. I present this issue to the Turkish Higher National Assembly asking that such a decision is taken as soon as possible.

Member of Parliament from Dersim

Feridun Fikri

Member of Parliament from Dersim

Ahmed Shukry

[Signatures]

January 21, 1924<sup>9</sup>

In February 8, 1925 a Kurdish rebellion broke out in the Eastern Vilayets (provinces) of Turkey. The Sheikh Sa'id [of Piran] Uprising's aim was to achieve Kurdish independence through military means.

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<sup>9</sup> BCA (Başbakanlık Cumhuriyet Arşivi) [Turkish Republic's Prime Ministry Archives], Archival document number 030-10-00-00-6-35-31, page 3.

The rebellion encompassed some fifty to sixty thousand square kilometers of land to the west of Lake Van (see map below). The rebellion was crushed in April 1925 and the conspirators were put to the gallows in Diyarbakir. What is interesting to note is that many Western Armenians—precursors of what later was to be known as Kurdified or Islamized Armenians—participated in the rebellion. Of these most famous were the blacksmith Boghos of Chemesgadzak, who was condemned to death on September 26. Turkish authorities spearheaded a media campaign where they underlined the participation of Armenian and Assyrian militants in the Sheikh Sa'id Rebellion.<sup>10</sup>



Approximate area encompassing the Sheikh Sa'id of Piran Rebellion

## Hoyboun: An ARF Invention?

It took the ARF almost five years from the time it was ousted from the Republic of Armenia in 1921 to be able to reorganize its bodies and ranks. An ARF World Congress—only in consulting capacity—was called in Vienna in 1923. Two years later, in 1925, the ARF 10<sup>th</sup> World Congress was called in Paris. It was during this congress that the issue of ARF participation in the Kurdish rebellions was discussed. The congress decided to admit all that the organization could muster for this purpose.<sup>11</sup> The decision to aid and participate in the upcoming Kurdish rebellion was a core strategic decision of the ARF 10<sup>th</sup> World congress; By so doing would be able to find solutions for issues that had been left unsolved after the Great War, such as:

<sup>10</sup> V. Bayburtyan [Վ.Բայբուրտյան], *Krdere, Haykakan Hartse Yev Hay Kertakan Haraperutyunnere Patmutyan Luysin Nerko*, [Քրդերը, հայկական հարցը և հայ-քրդական հարաբերությունները պատմության լույսի ներքո; The Kurds, the Armenian Question, and Armenian-Kurdish Relations under the Light of History], (Yerevan: 2008), 13.

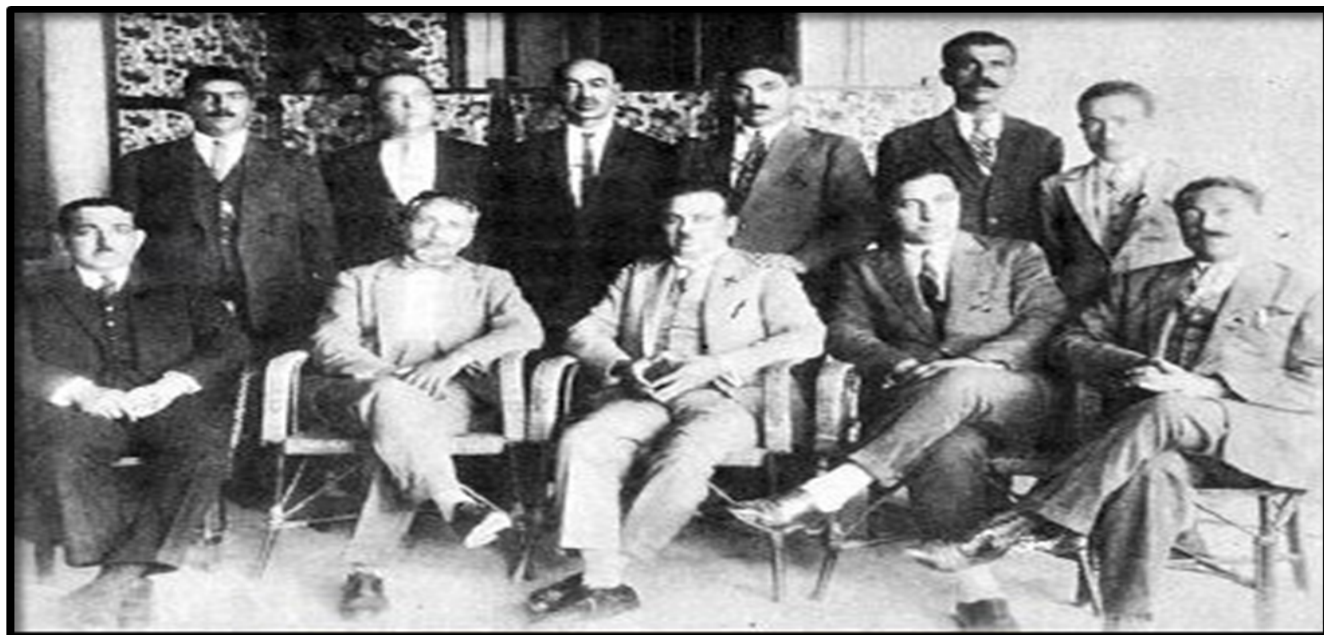
<sup>11</sup> There is important information regarding the Kurdish commander of the Ararat Kurdish Rebellion of 1927-1929, Ibrahim Haske Telli in Public Records Office, Great Britain Foreign Office, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, (University Publications of America), 1985. Moreover, the unpublished memoirs of Andre Amourian [AKA Mourian, GM], which is housed at the Hrayr Maroukian Research Cenrter in Yerevan, contains voluble information regarding the ARF activities in Iran in support of the above mentioned Kurdish rebellion. See Andre Amourian [Անդրե Տէր-Օհանեան Ամուրեան], *Pages from a Life* [Կեսանքի էջեր], Dossier No. 327, ARF Bureau Maroukian Library, Yerevan. Other important works in this regard include: Zinar Silopi, *Doza Kurdistan*, Steward Basımevı (Beirut), 1969; Nuri Dersimi, *Kurdistan Tarihinde Dersim*, Aleppo, 1952; Ататюрк, Мустафа Кемаль, *Избранные речи и выступления*, Москва, 1968; Sassouni, *Kurd Azkayin Sharzhumner*; габеков, *Секретный террор*, Москва, 1996; *Troshag*, ARF Central Organ, 1925-1934; and Arshak Safrastian, *Kurds and Kurdistan*, (The Harvill Press Ltd: London), 1948.



1. The Diaspora communities are not a final destination but just a temporary sojourn;
2. The Party should strive for the repatriation of those deported to their ancestral homeland;
3. If successful, The Kurdish rebellion can be used as a tactical element to achieve the above strategic goals...

The next stage was in 1927, where the ARF had an implicit participation in the formation of the Kurdish Hoyboun organization in Lebanon in 1927. Arshak Ssafrastian presents a lucid history regarding the formation of this all-encompassing Kurdish National Organization. He states that on October 5, 1927, a first of its kind meeting of Kurdish notables took place in the summer residence of famous ARF leader Vahan Papazian [Goms].

The meeting after deliberations decided the formation of the Hoyboun Kurdish Party. The party had an executive committee comprised of Sureyya, Jelalet [most commonly Jeladet], and Kamuran Bedirkhan [Bedirhan]—who were brothers—Memduh Selim Bey, and Shahin Bey. Jeladet Bedirkhan was the president of the Executive committee of Hoyboun from 1927 to 1932. Hoyboun's executive committee declared the Independence of Kurdistan on October 28, 1927 and also announced that a state of war existed with the Turkish Republic. The Kurdava village, located on the slopes of Mt. Ararat, was announced to be the interim capital of Independent Kurdistan. The permanent capital was to be Diyarbakir.<sup>12</sup>



Goms [Vahan Papazian, seated, second from Left] with Kurdish notables, during the deliberations, Bhamdoun, Lebanon, 1927

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<sup>12</sup> Safrastian, *Kurds and Kurdistan*, 84.



## Some Important Notes Regarding the Ararat Rebellion:

This section will not deal with the Ararat Rebellion per se. The event has been dealt with elsewhere.<sup>13</sup> Rather, I will try to present the intricate political atmosphere before and during the uprising. This will shed light into aspects of the matter that are not hitherto discussed.<sup>14</sup>

That the British—and to some extent the French—mandatory powers in Iraq and Syria were secretly siding with the Kurds at this time as a direct consequence of Kemal's tilt toward the Soviets is clear from the following Turkish archival document:

96 A/11

Document number 644/2910

To Office of Prime Minister:

According to reports we have received from Sham [Damascus] and Greece, The British High Command, having [honorably] discharged scores of Circassian and Kurdish officers from the British army in Iraq, are now facilitating their crossing of the border and stationing them in and around Dersim to oversee and lead special operations there. The movement of these officers will start on March tenth. New groups will then embark every twenty days until all fifty such officers reach their new destination. It follows that these officers will take part in a Kurdish rebellion that is targeted to start sometime in the spring. This operation is to augment the filtering in of Kurdish fighters from north-eastern Syria into the same area in groups. The aim of these operations is to strengthen the rebel forces inside Turkey and to provide most needed arms and ammunition. We are also informed that all these forces—together with Kurdish soldiers who had deserted the Turkish army—will be under the command of Colonel Ihsan Nuri. The information we got is from a very credible source.

Copy of this report was sent to the Turkish Army General Staff.

March 7, 1927

Minister of the Interior

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<sup>13</sup> Gérard Chaliand, ed., *A People without A Country*, (London: Zed Publishing), 1884; Robert Olson, *the Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheikh Said Rebellion, 1880-1925*, (Univ. of Texas Press: Austin); Wadie Jwaideh, *the Kurdish National Movement: Its Origins and Development*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press), 2006), etc.

<sup>14</sup> For a qualifying insight into the issue of an Armenian—and especially ARF—connection regarding the Ararat Rebellion see Aram A. Sayiyan, *Araradi 1926-1930 Krdagan Absdamputyune: H.H. Tashnagsutyun Yev Hoyboun Hamakordzagsutyun Yev Daradzasherchanayin Zarkatsumneri Hamateksdum* [The Ararat Rebellion of 1926-1930: The ARF-Hoyboun Cooperation Within the politico-military events in the Area], *Horizon Weekly* Special Paper Publication, 2015. See also HaKop HaTikyan, *Turkyo Hatuk Tzarayutyunnere Hay-Krtakan Hamakortsaktsutyun Dem (1920-1930)* [Turkish Intelligence services against Armenian-Kurdish Cooperation (1920-1930)] at [http://www.noravank.am/arm/articles/detail.php?ELEMENT\\_ID=13017](http://www.noravank.am/arm/articles/detail.php?ELEMENT_ID=13017).

[Signature]<sup>15</sup>

Prior to the rebellion in Ararat area—which is considered to be the strongest of the Kurdish rebellions in Turkey—a smaller scale Kurdish rebellion had started in Iran in 1926. The Iranian government tried to divert Kurdish rebellious agitation toward Turkey. There was an explicit cooperation regarding this between the Soviet and Iranian governments. The Tiflis based Soviet envoy to Iran, Minassian, had been able to bribe a high ranking Iranian postal office employee and was able to read the correspondence of the ARF and Musavat agents in Tehran. Minassian transferred this information to Teymurtash, the Iranian palace minister, and to the Turkish consul general in Tabriz. The ARF, in order to reestablish friendly relations with Iran, halted all its pro-Kurdish activities from Iran. Moreover, the ARF 11<sup>th</sup> World Congress also decided to adhere to the territorial integrity of Iran. In order to defuse any misunderstanding between it and the Iranian government, The ARF Bureau sent one of its seasoned cadres, Rupen Der Minassian to Tehran in 1929 who immediately asked for a special meeting with Teymurtash, who was the de facto governor of Iran. Teymurtash and Der Minassian were able to hammer down an agreement regarding the Kurdish issue. Even the shah was ostensibly unaware of this agreement. Rupen admits that instead of Ardashes Mouradian<sup>16</sup>—who had been arrested by the Soviets—a new



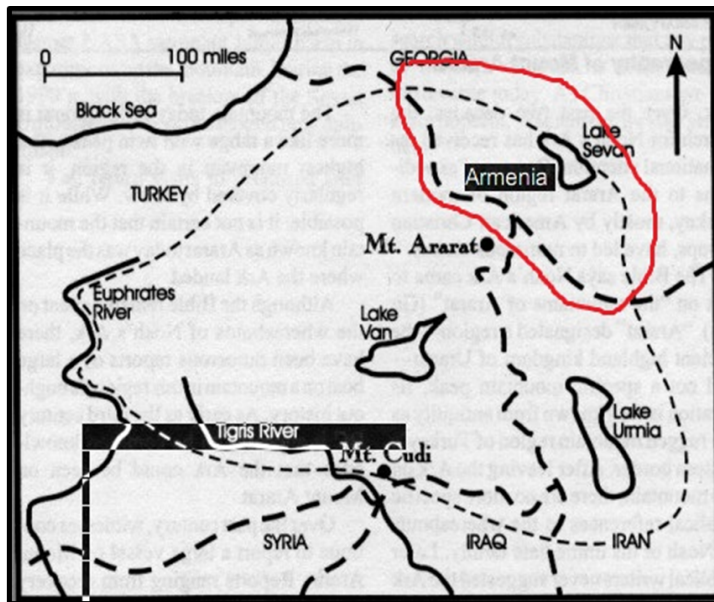
Zeynal Bey (Ardashes Mouradian, left) with Ibrahim Haske Telli, commander of the Kurdish forces in Ararat

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<sup>15</sup> BCA, Archival document number 030\_10\_00\_00\_106\_696\_25, BCA Note: Top Secret status of document is annulled.

<sup>16</sup> During the beginning stages of the Ararat Rebellion, Armenian-Kurdish cooperation was achieved through the efforts of Ziylan Bey, known to be one of the most famous rebels on the mountain. The shocking reality is that Ziylan Bey was not Kurdish but Armenian from the Khnus village of Sassoun. His real name was Ardashes Muradian. Sassouni, who knew Ziylan Bey-Ardashes Muradian, adds: “Ziylan Bey, who was none other than Ardashes Muradian from Khnus. He was a devoted A.R.F. agent sent secretly by the party to Ararat with the purpose of strengthening Armenian-Kurdish relations and helping the Kurds in their utmost struggle. Today, after twenty four years, we can openly declare the Armenian identity of Ziylan Bey.” Ziylan Bey (Ardashes Muradian) was ambushed and killed by communist spies who had infiltrated the ranks of the rebels on Mt. Ararat. Sassouni also mentions that Ziylan Bey was only one of the scores of Armenian freedom fighters in the Ararat Rebellion. His case is publicized because he had attained a certain level of leadership in the rebellion. The identities of other Armenian fighters—disguised as Kurds-- in the rebellion still remains to be determined. Sassouni, *Kurt Azkayin Sharzhumnere*, 284. The issue of Mouradian’s capture and disappearance remains an enigma even today. He was summoned to meet Armenian Bolshevik leaders in the border area along the river Araxes. Upon arrival, he was apprehended by Armenian security agents and smuggled to Soviet Armenia. The issue was brought up in a letter dated March 8, 1944 written by Rupen Der Minassian, where he asks the Soviet Ambassador in Cairo, Nikoly Novikov about Mouradian’s whereabouts. See NAA [National Archive of Armenia], fond 1048, list 1, folder 119, document number 7.

ARF cadre, Vahan Kalousdian,<sup>17</sup> was sent—via the Iranian-Turkish border—to serve as a liaison with the Kurdish forces together with a contingent of ARF fighters to Ararat.



An approximate map detailing the geographic area of the Ararat Rebellion (The area in red line indicates the rebellion's affiliation with Soviet Armenia)

The Iranian-ARF mutual agreement was based on the notion that the area of the Kurdish revolution must be enlarged. It also underlined that Vahan Kalusdian was to command the Northern section of the rebel area. His task was to menace the Turkish and Tatar population residing between Tashburun and Shahtakhd and to expel them to the other side of the Arax [Araxes] River. After achieving this, the Armenian-Kurdish joint forces were to control the Margara-Ikdir area and to make a stronghold in the Orgov-Chingil-Sinag mountain pass. It was from this base that Kalousdian was to get in touch with the Armenian fighters from Mush and Sassoun—within Soviet Armenia—on the slopes of Arakadz in order to form volunteer units out of them and to send them to the rebellion sight in Ararat. Moreover, the Kurdish tribes dwelling to the south—within Iran's northwestern area—were to form a strong backing for Ihsan Nuri's and Kalousdian's forces by not letting Turkish forces to circle them from the south. Other Kurdish tribal forces were to cut off the Bayazid road from Van and Arjesh.<sup>18</sup> This Tehran Agreement was accepted by the leadership of the Kurdish rebellion.

The uprising was doomed to failure because the maneuverings of the Soviet Russian regime regarding Iran and Kemalist Turkey's initial defeats that necessitated the utilization of northwestern Iranian territories for military operations to cut off the supply lines for the rebellion. Thus, The Turks were now cognizant that they had to somehow pressure Iran to close its borders and to allow Turkish military units to enter the territory in order to surround the uprising from both sides. The soviets, now cognizant that the situation was threatening their rule in Soviet Armenia, made Shah Riza aware by August 1930 that

<sup>17</sup> After Mouradian's capture, the ARF assigned Vahan Kalusdian (1879-1956, nomme de guerre Vali Bey, AKA Sev Vahan [Black Vahan])—who had been a captain in the army of the independent Republic of Armenia—as the new liaison with the Kurdish forces in Ararat. See Ghazar, "Kapitan Vahan Kalousdian [Sev (Black) Vahan]," in Avo, *Heghapokhagan Album*, C Series, No. 9, Aleppo, 1962, 275-276.

<sup>18</sup> NAA, fond 1048, list 1, folder 64, document number 17.

under such circumstances they are even ready to declare war on Iran. In order to make sure that the Shah understands the seriousness of the situation, Soviet military forces crossed the Iranian border. Shah Riza was thus compelled to accept the imposed situation and to accept the complete encirclement of the Kurdish-Armenian forces in Ararat. It was only after this was achieved that the Soviet forces left Iran and Turkish military contingents replaced them.<sup>19</sup>

Unaware of this Soviet pressure and Iran's succumbing to it, the Kurdish-Armenian forces were enlarging their territory and sending contingents all the way to Kars and Erzurum. However, the situation became known when the ARF Tabriz Central Committee sent two envoys to Ararat to inform the rebels that there would be no more help coming in from Iran. The only place that such help could be expected was to be Soviet Armenia, and that was a problematic issue since the Soviet army was heavily invested on the border. Regardless, and under such dire conditions, still Armenian fighters were brought in to Ararat.

In the meantime, Turkish forces had already surrounded the rebel area. Moreover, they were able to woo some Kurdish tribes to their side or at least to remain neutral if new fighting was to erupt. At the end there were only about 14-1600 Kurdish rebels and their Armenian cohorts remaining in the mountain area.<sup>20</sup>

It was only in the 1980's that it became clear—that Ihsan Nuri Pasha, the commander of the Kurdish forces, had already left Ararat and headed to Iran to join his tribe. He then assumed leadership of Kurdish forces in Maku and was killed during the battle in July 1931.<sup>21</sup>

### **Lessons learned from the Ararat Rebellion:**

Here are some observations regarding the Ararat Uprising:

1. The formation of Hoyboun by ARF efforts enabled the Kurds to establish a program of independence and national liberation movement with precise targets and goals. This collaboration caught the eye of the British and French mandatory powers, who somewhat facilitated the Kurdish effort in order to have a trump card against Kemal.
2. The Kurdish uprising brought to an end Kemal's pseudo Islamist coexistence paradigm and made the Kurds aware that what Kemal was trying to achieve was simply a Turkish state where all other ethnic elements were to be eradicated.
3. It was clear that the mandatory powers in Syria and Iraq used the Kurdish uprising for their own purposes. For them, it was important to have the Kurds rebel and shake up the nascent Turkish republic's internal peace. What they didn't want, however, was the creation of a unified Kurdish state.
4. Iran was cognizant of its own Kurdish issue and tried to help the rebellion in order to divert the Kurdish uprising to inside Turkey. This was a win-win situation for Teymurtash and the Shah, since by employing such a policy they would hit two birds with one stone...

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<sup>19</sup> NAA, fond 1048, list 1, folder 64, document number 27.

<sup>20</sup> NAA, fond 1048, list 1, folder 64, document number 307.

<sup>21</sup> Great Britain, Foreign Office, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs*, University Publications of America, 1985, 252.

5. That the Turkish army was unable to crush a Kurdish rebellion for almost three years and gave huge losses was an indicator that the military might of Turkey was a questionable assertion to say the least.
6. The uprising showed, if anything that the political stability of states such as Soviet Armenia were vulnerable. This necessitated the Soviet central regime to go all the way to to cross the border into Iran in order to save the deteriorating situation. Regardless, Armenians were being recruited inside Soviet Armenia to fight in Ararat.
7. The main reason for the crushing of the Ararat rebellion was the renewal of the Soviet-Turkish agreement of 1920 in 1930, which was this time used against the national interests of the Kurds.

### **The Aftermath of the Rebellion...**

The defeat of the Kurdish rebellion at Ararat was a decisive blow to Kurdish ambitions and ARF aspirations. It was brought about due to several essential considerations on the ground. One such important element was that the Soviets, fearing the weakening of the fledgling Turkish republic and Armenian ambitions emanating not only from an Armenian Diaspora, but rather from within the Soviet Armenian Republic,<sup>22</sup> decided to put their weight in order to suppress the Kurdish uprising. A Turkish archival document from the period illustrates this:

#### **Mihran Derderian's Letter:**

Per the information received from the [ARF] center in Paris, we now know the following:

Bolshevik Russia, upon being informed of the close relations between the Kurds and Armenians [reference is to ARF], has ordered the Armenian Army to move inwards and has replaced them with thirty five thousand Russian soldiers on the border [with Turkey]. Eight Turkish and four Russian batteries are bombarding Kurdish positions near Yerevan. The Kurds have sustained three defeats at the hands of the Russian attacking forces. During the fourth Russian attack, however, the Kurds were able to pass to the rear of the Russian army and kill some three thousand soldiers. A fifth battler is now underway. Three Russian infantry regiments, one thousand cavalry, and fifteen war planes are deployed against the Kurdish forces.

The Iranians have strengthened their positions in Maku and are not letting any Kurds to aid their brethren. One of the strongest Kurdish Sheikhs in Iran, Sheikh Halit [Khaled], has been bought over by the Turks. The ARF center has decided to send this man to hell most probably meaning to assassinate]...New attacks are decided for December. The Turks are dealing with the Kurds in ways they didn't use with Armenians. ..The Turks have gathered religious sheikhs and ulemas and have ordered them to write a fatwa [religious order] against the Kurdish fighters. In this fatwa, the Kurds are called devils and the followers of Ali...

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<sup>22</sup> It must be underlined that the ARF's main base in Armenia was the Armenian communities from Mush and Sassoun who dwelt (and still are) in the Mt. Arakadz area. Moreover, these were tiring times in Soviet Armenia, since the collectivization program that was implemented at the time was met with a tangible magnitude of opposition and dissent by the population.

The area around Yerevan is the scene of a huge human massacre...The Kurds are trying to ask for Europe's help and the ARF is now doing everything in its power to make this known in Europe. Money is being collected in all Armenian churches to aid Kurdish infants.

An Armenian member of the Cheka [Russian secret police] has defected and is now in Europe where he is speaking about the secret Russian policies. European newspapers are eager to publish what he is revealing. This man is even saying that a revolution in Russia against the Bolsheviks is eminent. He has stated that this will become clear by next March. A letter received from Istanbul is written thus: "Our patient is in desperate condition. All doctors can't find a cure. The doctors say he has no more than a year to live." There is no doubt that the patient referred to is our current government.

It seems that conditions in Turkey are very bad. Everyone is speaking against the government and its leaders in the teahouses and bars. This seems to be a new propaganda by the opposition to incite the people. It seems that Fethi is going to give a decisive blow to the new Fethi...<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, the animosity between the Soviets and the ARF is apparent from a second letter in the same document:

**Artin Deyirmenjian's letter:**

The ARF is the party who is the most opposed to the "Red Propaganda" of Bolshevik Russia. This party [ARF] has fought ferociously against the Bolsheviks but was unsuccessful. Regardless of our defeat, Russia is now cautiously following our actions. It seems that the Bolsheviks know that the ARF fulfills the decisions it takes. The Tashnaks could be considered as "terrorists" and they can assassinate Russia's leaders both inside and outside Russia. Tashnaks are not only found within the Armenians in the diaspora but also within Armenians in Russia itself. It is because of freedom fighters like Zemboyan and Boghosian. It's been years that the Tashnak party had decided to stop its "terrorist" activities. As the popular saying goes "he who falls into the sea hangs to any piece of wood to survive," a party that has no other means would definitely return to its "terrorist" activities. No nation has witnessed the insult that the Armenian nation has witnessed for the past forty years. Moreover, the lands that we had demanded is not benefiting Turkey today at all. We will work and toil on these lands and make them into an eden on earth. We will turn our mountains into gold. We will bring its people to the surface of the earth. We will use its minerals and waters. The black lands that are left unattended will become green again and forests will cover our homeland. Anatolia's ground is full with mineral deposits. We will bring those minerals out and make the poor people live a decent life. What have the Turks built there for hundreds of years except caravansarays, bridges, and

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<sup>23</sup> TCA, Archival document number 030-10-00-00-108-713-9, page 2.

fountains? Let's argue for a moment that the Turks of yesteryear were lazy and ignorant. Then, what can be said of today's Turks who have been Europeanized? What have they done in those lands? The mystro has changed but the music is the same old one. We are able to deal with our Kurdish neighbors and form a political understanding with them. Much new action will be witnessed during the coming year. Jamalian [AKA Arshak Chamalian] is a very intelligent man. I listened to him lecture for four hours when he visited here. He concluded his talk by stating: "My Effendis, live but don't die. You will be once again welcomed and happy on these lands. I can't forget his words. It is exactly what I had been waiting for. Adiyaman and its mountains are my ancestral lands and it is an eden on Earth. I want to die there and give my soul. Those who now live there don't know the meaning of what ancestral lands are."<sup>24</sup>

The question that asserts itself here is how could Turkish intelligence be privy of such letters written by ARF leaders in Syria? The answer:

Top Secret:

This is a summary of the report from military intelligence numbered 6579 and dated 22/10/1930:

One of our undercover agents located outside our country has been able to obtain the cipher of communications from a certain Uzunian, an ARF [Armenian Revolutionary Federation, Tasnaksutyun] agent, which indicates that according to the ARF, Dersim's rebellious forces are now under the total control of the ARF.

Moreover, our agent was able to secure two letters from Mihran Derderian and Artin Deyirmenjian, members of the ARF committee, which we are now able to read per the obtained cipher.

Minister of the Interior

[Signature]<sup>25</sup>

### **Armenian-Kurdish Cooperation Continues:**

As soon as the Kurdish rebellion in Ararat was crushed, Hoyboun and the ARF knew that the next stage of rebellion was to take place in the heavily Kurdish area of Dersim (Tunceli). For the ARF leadership, Dersim presented opportunities in terms of sizable Armenian population that were dwelling there amidst the Kurdish villages and hamlets.

However, the problem of the time was to regroup the Kurdish leadership in Northern Syria so that they could not be reached by Turkish authorities. It is interesting that such relocations were followed by Turkish military intelligence. A case in point is a Turkish archival document that mentions the Hoyboun leadership in exile:

Ankara, April 12, 1929

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<sup>24</sup> TCA, Archival document number 030-10-00-00-108-713-9, page 3.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., page 1.



**From the Ministry of the Interior**

**To Office of Prime Minister**

No. 3743

Information regarding Jemil Pasha Zade:

According to information received from Aleppo:

Those who have escaped [from Turkey] are not three but four in number; they are: Jemil Pasha Zade, Qadri, Bedri, and Mehmet.

They have been interrogated at the French Intelligence directorate center. They have reported that the government would send them to the gallows if a new wave of rebellion flares up. Hence, they have escaped [to Syria] for their lives. They also admitted that more Kurdish chiefs and rebellion leaders will escape and they have asked the mandate authority to help them to reside under their protection. The mandate authorities transferred them from Aleppo's Central Hotel to the Aqaba Quarters where a house was rented for them.

Mustafa and Bozan, sons of Shahin Agha, and Haji Hamdan from the Kurt Daghi (Amanos Mountain) have come to Aleppo and have had a prolonged meeting with the escapees.

Copies of this report was sent to: the Army General Staff

Minister of the Interior

Shukru Kaya

[Signature]<sup>26</sup>

The years 1930 to 1937 were years of preparation for a new rebellion. In the mid-1930s, there arose an autonomist movement in the Jazira province among Kurds and Christians. Its Kurdish leaders were Hacho Agha, Kaddur Bey, and Khalil Bey Ibrahim Pasha. Hacho Agha was the Kurdish chief of the Heverkan tribal confederation and one of the leaders of the Kurdish nationalist party Hoyboun. He established himself as the representative of the Kurds in Jazira maintaining the coalition with the Christian notables, who were represented by the Syriac Catholic Patriarch, Melik Shimon.<sup>27</sup>

That Turkish military intelligence was cognizant of what the Kurdish and ARF leadership was up to is revealed in an archival document, which states:

[Page 1] March 18, 1934

No. 56460

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<sup>26</sup> BCA, Archival document number 030-0-010-000-000-113-771, page 2.

<sup>27</sup> Jordi Tejel, Gorgas, "Les territoires de marge de la Syrie mandataire : le mouvement autonomiste de la Haute Jazîra, paradoxes et ambiguïtés d'une intégration nationale" inachevée (1936-1939)" (The territory margins of Mandatory Syria : the autonomist movement in Upper Jazîra, paradoxes and ambiguities of an uncompleted "national" integration, 1936-39), *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée*, 126, November 2009, 205-222.

**From the Minister of the Interior to Government Headquarters:**

We are hereby confiding to you the names of persons who participated in a meeting called for at Deyr Zor. Armenian, Kurdish, and Nestorian representatives from Beirut, Sham [Damascus], and Aleppo provinces deliberated on the topic of the formation of a joint government [in exile].

[Page 2]

This is a summary of the intelligence report Number 5/59 and dated March 3, 1934.

In a meeting called for by the Head Commissioner of Syria [not to confuse with the French mandate authority head commissioner] and hosted by the Deyr Zor delegation and in the presence of Kurdish tribal chieftains of Al Jazira. The main topic of the meeting was the separation of this area from Syria, which was communicated beforehand to participating delegates so they could come prepared.

According to information from the province of Mardin and whose certainty is impeccable, the meeting took place on February 12, 1934 the issue of forming a separate state from the lands between the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers, including areas on the border of Iraq. Kurds, Armenians, and Nestorians from the provinces of Beirut, Sham, and Aleppo had replied positively to such an endeavor. Armenians were represented by Bedruhi [?], the Kurds by Hacho and Molla Sadir Zade Abdulkarim from El Jazira, and Nestorians by Melik Shimon...

Please except my deepest regards.

Minister of Interior  
[Shukru Kaya, Signature]<sup>28</sup>

Garo Sassouni, who in the beginning of the 1930s was assigned by the ARF Bureau to be the liaison with Hoyboun and who, for that reason, had relocated to Aleppo, in order to oversee the task, in a letter to the ARF Bureau, writes the following regarding the above mentioned project:

**To the ARF Bureau**

Dear Comrades:

I received a large report today from Kurdish notables in Jezireh. Two of them are members of Hoyboun who—as Hacho has done—have now distanced themselves from the committee. For now the active leadership of Hoyboun consists of Sami, and colonel Namik (his name could be different since I was unable to read it coherently in the report). There are also the signatures of Saadettin and Melik Shmavon (AKA Melik Shimon, see above).

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<sup>28</sup> BCA, Archival document number 490-01-607-102-7, pages 1-2.

It seems that Hacho is the main reason for the report to be written. It is also correct to assume that Jelaledin [AKA Jeladet in other places]<sup>29</sup> is also involved in having the report written. The two are displeased from the actions of the Hoyboun Committee. It has been uncontrollable and much disorganized. Moreover, personal gains have surpassed those of the motherland.

They say that the unison of the two Arian peoples—Kurds and Armenians—is a great political accomplishment. However, they don't want things to be like in the past and people act on a personal whim and money, so dearly collected, to be spent for nonsense. They are happy that the representative of the ARF [Armenian revolutionary Federation, Tashnagsutyun] has come and wants to continue the collaboration between the two peoples. However, they are afraid that we [the ARF] have been doing business with people who have no organizational abilities and have usurped most of the funds delivered to them. Thus, they imply that a meeting takes place at their region or somewhere else of our choosing, so that the collaboration can be put on stronger foundation. All they want is that the ARF don't put their bet on a minority...

They have heard that Qadri wants to come here and meet with us. He might have invited them to come too. They have written the report hastily so that they are not left out of the meeting.

Their report underlines that the funds should not be delivered to single persons and that the money should be used only for actions inside the country [Turkey]. They insist that any transfer of such funds should be done through Hacho, who will spend it on those who enter the country and come back. They also insist that Hacho should head this fund disbursement, since he is a well to do person who doesn't need any funds for himself.

The actions that they recommend are:

1. The relocation [of Turks into Kurdish areas], which is most probably going to take place in August through September, makes it an imperative that we establish contacts with all Kurdish [tribes] and to prepare them for self defense.
2. It is eminent that a military action will take place this spring on Dersim. Thus the south [Kurds in Syria] can't remain indifferent.

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<sup>29</sup> Celadet Bedir Khan (Kurdish: Celadet Alî Bedirxan; 26 April 1893 – 1951), also known as Mîr Celadet [Prince Jeladet], was a Kurdish diplomat, writer, linguist, journalist and political activist. He held a master's degree in law from Istanbul University, completed his studies in Munich, and spoke several languages including Arabic, Kurdish, Russian, German, Turkish, Persian and French. He left Turkey in 1923 when the Kemalists declared a new republic. In 1927, he was present at the conference of Kurdish nationalists held in Bhamdoun, out of which Hoyboun and its executive committee were formed. Jeladet was elected as the first president of the executive committee.

After receiving this report it is now clear to me why Qadri is not coming to see me. Hoyboun remains divided into three sections...All three sections want to work with us...

Regarding why this division has occurred within Hoyboun I can say this:

My first observation is that all three sections want to be on friendly terms with us and they harbor no animosity toward us as we had expected in the past. Even Kurds in the country [Turkey] are on good terms with us. Moreover, we represent a third party that can be used to bring the three factions together.

On the other hand, this division makes it impossible to plan for a great rebellion, which demands extreme unity. If we intend to bring the three factions together and recreate a unity we need to organize another conference and that will cost us some 500 Syrian Pounds.

I am currently holding the three factions close to us. They are at least reporting to me. However, they are doing nothing of military importance inside the country. I am also keeping quiet regarding this last point since our funds are almost depleted. However, we must do something regarding the relocation campaign and the military action against Dersim.

I am going to consult with our local central committee regarding these issues. However, please meet and make decisions as to what we should do regarding the relocation campaign and the military action against Dersim. Also, please advise me regarding:

A new Kurdish-ARF conference,

Unite the factions and establish a military force with the knowledge of very few Kurdish leaders so that the issue does not become one that is spoken about [on the streets and in coffee houses],

What stance should I maintain regarding Hoyboun after I received the report?

P.S.: From reports that I have received from Qamishli, it seems that the Iraqi border is completely closed and all communication with Frants [?] had stopped. It seems that the latter is in a difficult position. Please write to me about this and also what the Hafiz faction thinks or is doing about this.

- Assyrians who were deported from Iraq were brought to Damascus. They now work in factories and other menial jobs.
- I will travel to Beirut on the 14<sup>th</sup> of this month. I will remain there until the 25<sup>th</sup>. You can write to me during this period through Kaspar Ipekian. I have to organize the area [Lebanon and Beirut in particular] and will try to raise some 700 Syrian Pounds...

With Best Regards,

Garo [Sassouni]<sup>30</sup>

Moreover, Sassouni presented to the bureau that the Kurdish ranks were not formidable and that there were internal divisions and blame and finger-pointing among the leaders of Hoyboun:

To the ARF Bureau

Dear Comrades:

I have been here [Beirut for two days. Qadri didn't come. I ordered my guys to send him over to Beirut so that I can get a report from him regarding the inner workings of Hoyboun.

My guys informed me that Qadri didn't come because of Hacho. Also he is involved in judicial proceedings.

Whatever you might think about Hoyboun, the gist of the matter is that they are neither in unison nor personally involved in real action.

Hacho and Jeladet are on good terms it seems. Jeladet had previously told me that Hacho is a Turkish agent. It seems that his conviction was the result of a monetary misunderstanding that had occurred between them some 2-3 years ago. It was for this reason that he doubted Hacho.

Hacho plays politics in the border area. However, he is most probably an agent of the French. His power stems from the fact that he is the owner of 2-3 villages in the border area and he makes lots of money out of them. Moreover, he receives a sum of 200 Syrian Pounds on a monthly basis from the French. The others [Hoyboun committee members] are poor and thus can't take action without funds.

Even though I haven't yet met with Qadri, but my impressions regarding him are positive.

We are organizing a fund raiser and we expect to collect about 2000 Syrian Pounds. Of that 1000 is the sum that the previous regional meeting [of the ARF] had asked the regional central committee to raise. Beirut must raise 700 Syrian Pounds. The problem is that the Armenian community here is poor. Our comrades started organizing an event. Let's see if they will be able to succeed in their endeavors. In the other cities [Aleppo, Damascus, etc.] the organization of the events is almost 70 percent complete...

With Best Regards,

Garo [Sassouni]<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Garo Sassouni, Letter No. 25 [1-18], Dated April 10, 1934, Aleppo [?]. The numbers with dashes in [] are deciphered as follows: [carbon notebook number-Starting page number of letter in notebook-Letter ending page in notebook, if indicated].

It seems that 1934 was indeed a very busy year for Sassouni. While the French mandatory authorities in Syria started to harass ARF agents, the intelligence branch of the same authorities in Beirut was concocting another plan vis-à-vis the ARF and the Kurds. Moreover, the letter is truly indicative of the Cold War mentality that was prevalent within the Armenian communities in Syria and Lebanon at the time...

To the ARF Bureau

Dear Comrades:

I am in receipt of your last two letters and also the letter regarding Arshag Chamalian...

- After our homes were searched [by the French authorities] there was lots of concern among our comrades. The general view was that the ARF was going to be persecuted [Tie to Archbishop Ghevont Tourian assassination in USA by ARF in 1933 and intelligence collaboration between USA and the French and British].<sup>32</sup> I was being informed on a daily basis that my house was next to being searched. The issue was later simplified when we learned that the French had conducted the searches because of an order by the judicial authorities. Later, I sent Movses [Der Kalousdian] to Beirut where he met with the [French] High Commissioner and other high ranking French officials. The High Commissar and his office are now fully informed of what our policies are and they are content. They have even promised to put some pressure on our adversaries as conspirators and Cheka cells. What is more important for us is that the French authorities have confided to our comrade that they are now aware of the entire pro communist Russia cell, which works on orders from Moscow. They have promised also that they are not going to hinder or prevent our actions and they will let us get stronger as a means of organization and peace keeping force without any interference by them. They have also confirmed that they are seeing a closeness between the communist agitators and the clergy and will not hinder to the latter's words regarding us. In fact, they are sure that [the clergy] too has a pro communist stance.
- The Aleppo Armenian National-Political Board celebrated the May 28 independence of Armenia Yesterday through a huge commemoration event. I was invited to talk and I did. The people are with us. The Prelate was not happy by my talk. He is not loved by the people. At the moment we want to keep the peace in this city.

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<sup>31</sup> Garo Sassouni, Letter No. 26 [1-26], Dated April 16, 1934, Beirut.

<sup>32</sup> The conflict climaxed on December 24, 1933, when several men attacked Tourian in the Church of the Holy Cross, in Washington Heights, Manhattan, at the start of the Christmas Eve service. Tourian's constant bodyguard, Kossof [Khosrov] Gargodian [Gargoudian], was sitting in the back of the church certain that there would be no assault upon Tourian in a holy place, on the day before Christmas. However, when the archbishop passed at the end of the procession the fifth row of pews from the rear, he was suddenly surrounded by a group of men in such a fashion as to hide the actions of their companions. Two of the assailants stabbed Tourian with large [butcher knives](#), and once the archbishop fell, the attackers scattered and mixed with the crowd. Two of the assailants were seized by the parishioners, beaten, and subsequently handed over to the police. See "Slain in 187th street church; Assassins Swarm about Armenian Prelate and Stab Him," *New York Times* (December 25, 1933).

- I will be in Suweyda and Kessab in a couple of days. Our Suweyda organization, which has some 370 comrades, is divided into two factions. The leaders couldn't solve the issue until now... I will try to calm things down and reignite the organizational activities.
- There are Armenians from Sassoun in this area. Altogether some 40 families. They used to live in an area that is under the protection of the Sheikh of Zilan. The Kurds in the area have been disarmed...The number of Armenians is much bigger than what we thought. When we asked the families how they are managing they told us that they register one head of household and keep ten secret in order not to arouse suspicions. They said that in some villages there are more than a hundred Armenians living in the barns. Why would we make Kemal Pasha [Ataturk] aware that there are so many Armenians living in the area? As you see, this is the conditions in old Sassoun. They have taken action before the area was disarmed. They think that there are two Armenian states: One is Higher Armenia [in Turkey] and the other is the Armenians in Syria. They have come over to see what we are doing here [in Syria] we sent two of them, one from Arkhond [?] and the other from Patsi [?] as scouts. These Armenian comrades are very valuable to us. They can scout for us for very cheap. It is interesting—to say the least—that Armenians [in Turkey] have still kept their faith and want to be part of the future of their Armenian brethren...
- I have no news from those we sent to Dersim.
- The Kurds here [in Syria's border with Turkey] are quiet for now. I am keeping my silence lest they ask for funds that we don't have. Whatever they write to us turned out to be nothing but bluffs. They know even less than us about what is really happening inside [Turkey]...
- There is an important proposal regarding the Kurdish issue that I bring to your attention. While in Beirut, I had several conversations with an Armenian from Mush who works for the French Mandate's General Security department. The person is Edgar Maloyan. While we were discussing the issue in general, I told him that if the French are willing to move, there is a lot that can be done in Turkey regarding the Kurdish issue...As I was preparing to leave Beirut, Maloyan came to see me and confided in me that French Intelligence has a huge network in Turkey; According to him agents go back and forth and that the French are extremely interested in the matter. He told me that he is confiding in me because he trusted me. He also told me that he has spoken directly about this with the French Intelligence director who answered that if the ARF member knows how to keep quiet then we can collaborate and we can even supply him with means. It was for me to decide if I wanted to meet the person. I understood that Maloyan was speaking about the French intelligence director for Syria, Turkey, and Iran. Apparently, the person, whose name Maloyan didn't give until I met him doesn't want to have any ties with Movses [Der Kalousdian] or Hrach [Papazian]. According to Maloyan if I could keep quiet and there is the possibility of a huge Kurdish insurrection, the French intelligence division is ready to work with us. Only the director and I would know the extent of such an



endeavor. Thus, I implore you to keep this between the two of you. I will write to Maloyan and inform him that I am ready to meet with the director. Please give me your opinion(s) regarding this. I don't see any problem in such a course of action. Let me also add, that Maloyan is the personal translator of the director. For example, he told me that some 4000 Turkish officers and soldiers [who are against the Kemalists] have deserted the army and passed to Syria. They are for now under the protection of the French Intelligence directorate. The director is very interested in what can happen in Dersim and what role can the Turkish opposition play in it. As a political stance, the French will keep a semblance of friendly relations with Turkey and they will sometimes be obliged to prosecute Kurds and Turkish opposition members.

- I will send Vartan [Shabaz] to Qamishli to organize the Kurdish fighting units there... This is an important area and if I had time I would have gone there for three to four months...

With Best Regards,

Garó [Sassouni]<sup>33</sup>

Sassouni apparently was also knowledgeable that Kurdish leaders (especially the Bedirhans) were being approached by Italian secret service agents in Beirut:

To the ARF Bureau

Dear Comrades:

...I was to have a meeting with the French Intelligence Director in Beirut. He was recovering after a serious medical operation. When I met him he told me that he is extremely interested in the internal affairs of Turkey. He wanted to meet with me on condition that the meeting and any details emanating from it would be kept under strict secrecy. The meeting was postponed by one and one half month until he felt better and resumed his duties...

I had a long conversation with Kaspar Ipekian regarding Jeladet. It seems that the Italian intelligence has approached him. His source was Hrach [Papazian]. I told him that Hrach's knowing about this was not coincidental. Furthermore, neither I nor the [ARF Bureau] had sanctioned him to work with Jeladet alone... We decided that I will not interfere if Jeladet wants to meet with the Italian side. The issue seems to have matured, since the Italians have offered Jeladet to come to Italy and start his Kurdish insurrectionist activities from there. It could also be that Jeladet is playing us, since he knows that if we need him to remain [in Syria] he could ask for more funds from us.

I don't know if you are aware in any form regarding Jeladet's contacts with the Italians. I am asking this since I was informed by Hrach that

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<sup>33</sup> Garó Sassouni, Letter No. 29 [1-38], Dated May 28, 1934, Beirut.

Sureyya [Prince Sureyya Bedirhan] and Kemran [Prince Kamuran Bedirhan] will arrive in Syria soon. It might be that the Italians have also offered the latter two to relocate to Rome. Please inform me about what you know regarding these issues...

Note: Princes Jeladet, Sureyya, and Memduh Bedirhan are brothers

With Best Regards,

Garó [Sassouni]<sup>34</sup>

This Kurdish-Armenian unification was a real problem for Turkey. Turkish military intelligence gathered any and all information it could about the meetings that were taking place. One such meeting took place in Aleppo in 1935. It must be noted that the Turkish intelligence document is full of information regarding several issues that are important for this discourse. It is presented here in its entirety:

[Page 2]

Copy of Original

Top Secret

August 11, 1935

Regarding the Kurdish-Armenian Unification

Lately, there has been many meetings and correspondence between Kurdish and Armenian leaders. Both sides have arrived at decisions during two meetings that we reported to you (January 2, 1935, in Aleppo, and January 3, 1935, in Qamishli). The united Kurdish-Armenian front was once again reestablished. There is, thus far, no name given to this new agreement. Moreover, the old name, Hoyboun, was not used either. However, the decisions reached are not that different from the previous one they have committed to [Hoyboun, 1927]. Accordingly:

1. The following persons were present at the Aleppo meeting:  
From the Armenian side:
  - Herak [Hrach] Papazian
  - Dr. Basmacıyan [Basmajian]
  - [Hayk] Balian, editor and owner of Astane [Aztag] newspaper  
From the Kurdish side:
  - Memduh Selim, Teacher at Antakya [Alexandretta] Lyceum
  - Mustafa Shahin, delegate from Jarablus [Jezire, AKA Jizre]

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<sup>34</sup> Garó Sassouni, Letter No. 32 [2-4-4], Dated July 18, 1934.

The meeting started at 19:00 hours at night [7:00 PM] and ended at 22:00 hours [10:00 PM]. It took place at the home of Dr. Basmajian. Memduh Selim and Mustafa Shahin returned to their regions early the next morning.

2. The following persons were present at the Qamishli meeting:

From the Armenian side:

- Garo Sason [Garo Sassouni]

From the Kurdish side:

- Hasan Agha, son of Hacho Agha
- Qadri, Jemil Pasha Zade
- Mehmet Bey

The main topic of this meeting was the organization of the rebel forces in and around Qamishli. Moreover, one more topic was discussed:

[Page 3]

Note: It seems that Hacho didn't participate in this meeting, since the French mandate Authorities had forbidden him from doing so. The French had decided this since they had observed that persons from Nuseybin and Mardin [inside Turkey] were coming over to meet Hacho. Thus the French decided to stop these meetings. Hacho and we want you to take this with utmost importance, had been going to Qamishli, Andivar and meeting with Kuburel Bey [?].

- B. We must also note that these meetings between the Armenians and the Kurds are the result of the endeavors of Italian intelligence in Beirut. The Italians wanted both sides to arrive at a final agreement. Both sides knew that the French and the British were not going help such a united front and the agents meeting in the above mentioned two places knew this. It seems that they were aware that the British wanted to fully exploit the oil and metals in their Iraqi mandate, while the French, who are asking for special treatment in Turkey regarding commerce there, want to have very good relations with Turkey and its government. On the other hand, the French are on good terms with the Russians. The British, on the other hand, seem to be very happy that the Islamic Caliphate is abandoned and they can now rule with ease the hundreds of millions of Muslims. Thus, we can be sure that we have no problems whatsoever with the French and the British. Italy seems to be the problem. In Fact, Italy prefers the return of the Ottoman caliphate. This stems from the fact that after the general war, Italy was not happy with what it got from the breaking down of the Ottoman Empire. It wanted an issue so that it could interfere in the internal situation of the newly formed Turkish Republic. And what better issue they could concoct better than Armenian-Kurdish unification and rebellion against Turkey? Italy finally found the issue it was searching for

Thus, Italy was pushing for an Armenian-Kurdish agreement in order to achieve these objectives:

1. To take over the Kurdish mandate.
2. An Armenian state comprised of Yerevan, Trebizond, and Northern Kurdistan would also be handed over as a mandate to Italy, which will then form a police force from local population to rule over this country.
3. Armenians can help Italy to take over the Syrian mandate from the French.
4. Italy could also employ Armenian and Kurdish forces to rule over its mandate in Antalya, Kushadas [?,[Perhaps Kushadagh?], and the Aegean Sea islands and also use these forces to support its efforts in case a new war erupts.

(Note: The most important issue for this unified Armenian-Kurdish front is Italy's taking over of the Syrian Mandate. Both Armenians and Kurds are aware that the French are working with the Turkish government. Moreover, the united front is also sick of the British. Thus, the Armenian and the Kurdish committees operating in the northern belt of Syria have tied their ambitions with the Italians. Their only fear is the Ethiopian problem; if Italy loses there, it will not be able to commit to another front in Kurdistan. However, if the Italians' win in Ethiopia they will look great in Europe and can venture into Anatolia.

The Armenians and the Kurds are also hopeful that in case Italy wins in Ethiopia, the League of Nations might accept an Italian mandate request for Syria. If such a thing occurs both Armenian and the Kurdish committees' demands would be met, since Italy would then have borders with Turkey.)

- C. Kamuran Ali Bedirhan, A Kurdish leader who resides in Damascus, as well as Armenian committee members Dr. Chavushian, [Hagop] Der Melkonian, and attorney Khosrov Tutunjian, all dwelling in Beirut, have been assigned as liaisons with the Italian side. They have discussed the above mentioned issues with the Italian Ambassador in Beirut.

...The discussions have been continuing for a year now. Many reports have been written to Rome. According to our information, a final agreement between the two sides can be reached in two weeks time.

What will be the role of the Italians in such an agreement?

There is no clear information yet. However, from information we gathered from Kurdish circles Italians will supply them with money and weapons. Furthermore, if the military operations [Kurdish-Armenian inside Turkey] show positive results Italy will put its weight to help their cause politically. This last point is not so welcomed by Armenians or Kurds,

since they know that Italy doesn't possess the clout of other European powers. Thus, what they are really after for now is to get money and weapons from Italy.

(Note: Armenians are well off in terms of funding. Our intelligence from Armenian sources has made it clear that the ARF Central Committee [actually, ARF Bureau] in Europe has several hundred thousand gold coins in its coffers. It is important to note that when the ARF was obliged to leave Yerevan, their ruling committee had one million and seven hundred thousand British Pounds. This was the sum remaining of a five million British Pound loan that the British had made to the Independent Republic of Armenia. The ARF had been spending from this 1.7 million British Pounds sum and now has about 400.000 British Pounds in banks in Europe. On the other hand, there are also sums that were donated for the Armenian-Kurdish insurrection by the Billionaire American wife of Grand Duke Cecil of the White Russians. However, The Tashnaks [ARF Bureau], who are very frugal when it comes to money, are not using the funds that are under their disposal they have to help the Kurds. Rather, they are encouraging their bodies to do fundraising for that cause. Moreover, they are also counting on and anxiously waiting for the funds they will receive from the Italians.

[Page 6]

Regarding weaponry:

According to our estimations, the number of Kurdish fighters in Northern Syria is about eight thousand. Armenians will supply another 5.000 fighters. As of this date, this force of 13.000 possess only 4000 rifles, which are of different makes and somewhat old. They don't have automatic machineguns—perhaps they have a dozen or so hidden. This means that they are in dire need for weapons from the Italians. There is also the problem that if those fighters enter Turkey, they could easily be supplied with rifles from those that were accumulated from previous attacks against the Turkish army...

When are the funds and weapons estimated to reach the hands of the insurgents?

From news we secured from Kurdish and Armenian sources it is not clear when such an undertaking can be accomplished. For the time being an agreement has been reached between them [Armenians and Kurds]. We will get more news once they start arming themselves.

(Note: We must stress that regardless of the signed agreement, a real Armenian-Kurdish military collusion is still a long time away. Both sides are under strict French surveillance for the time being...Their getting reports of a numerous and strong Turkish army contingent on the other side of the border from El Jezire [Jizre] is also making them realize that the time is not on their side. Italy is still preoccupied with its Ethiopian

campaign...They are also short on funds and the Kurdish side is very unhappy for that...

[Page 7]

We must not forget that the Kurdish fighters and especially their leaders are always asking for money [from the ARF]. Even if the Italians hand over some 50.000 or 60.000 Liras to them, they will not be content. They want a permanent and overflowing funding channel...

Garo Sason [Garo Sassouni] is still in El Jezire and is traveling nonstop throughout the area. He was seen in Hasije for one full day. He then returned to Qamishli. Hacho too has been seen in the same area, which means that they are working in tandem.

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To be used as Original<sup>35</sup>

On the other hand, Turkish military actions against other Kurdish strongholds were continuing unabated. This was done in order not to let Kurdish forces to coalesce in Dersim, which was to be the center of the next Kurdish uprising. Sassouni writes:

To the ARF Bureau

Dear Comrades:

After the [ARF] Regional Meeting I remained in Kessab for almost a week. Two members of the Central Committee came to see me. We talked about means to raise funds through commerce, which can be done in this mountainous region.

It seems that the Kurdish movement is continuing in Bohtan. Our scout in Andigar tells me that he hears cannon shells being fired over there. The French Mandate authorities have hardened the border passages so no Kurdish fighters can infiltrate into Syria...I had to return to Aleppo where I have been for the past week...

The deportation and relocation of Kurds seems to be a serious matter. The [Turkish government] is executing the law it had formulated regarding this action. It seems that the Kurdish Chief of Bohtan, Yaakub Agha has mustered many Kurdish fighters and is defending his positions. However, according to news he was martyred during the fights. The government has already started to relocate the Kurdish chiefs and their families from Bohtan and Kharzan...The Kurds are concerned regarding the French army. Bedirhan is not sure if he and his fighters will be able to infiltrate into Syria and be under French protection. They have presented a written permission to do so. The French position, at least the official position, is

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<sup>35</sup> BCA, Archival document number 030-0-010-000-000-115-799-15, pages 1-7.

not to allow them to do so. I saw Memduh and told him that writing such a request was wrong, since it puts the French in a difficult position regarding its relations with the Turkish government. The French are also not sure that if they allow fighters into Syria the matter will be kept in utmost secrecy. Thus we wrote to the fighters to defend their positions to the end and at that moment to protect themselves and the population in the mountains...If the movement spreads to Dikranagerd [Diyarbakir], Hakiyari, Urfa, and Mardin, then we have no other choice but to start the insurrection in Dersim. It is at that instance that our role becomes of utmost importance...

The scout that I had sent to Dersim has returned. He has been at Maratoug Mountain [in Sassoun] for more than four months. Dersim's two sections, the mountainous and the plain are in different conditions. The mountainous section is cut off completely from the government, while the plains are under the control of the [Turkish] army and has been disarmed. The mountainous area has enough arms and ammunition to start an insurrection. However, nothing good will come out of such an action, since the ammunition will be spent soon. They [fighters] need more ammunition if they have to defend their positions for a long time.

Our scout also visited Malikan where the chief has many fighters who are armed. He also visits Sayyid Ghayri [?]. He gives the chief the white handkerchief he carried with him. When the chief holds it over fire writing appears on it in red. He accepts the orders. The letter was addressed to him and Sayyid Pasha of Dersim...I had written on the handkerchief that the aim of the Turkish army was to subdue Dersim. I asked both Sayyids to be united and to reserve their might for an occasion that would come sooner than later...Our scout then heads to Modekan [Modki]. He partakes in the actions of the armed groups who had Armenians within them. They create some havoc in the plains that were under Turkish control. They come back with lots of foodstuff.

The Sayyid informs our scout:

1. He will gladly keep in touch with us [ARF]...
2. Dersim will always defend itself. However, its fighters can come out and enlarge the area of insurrection only if the south...They could even reach Arshni, Maratoug and Diyarbakir if arms and ammunition become abundant.
3. We need a third party to support us [the reference, it seems is for the French]. If such support becomes a reality, the insurrection might succeed...

Memduh [Memduh Selim Bey, a founding member of Hoyboun] came to see me yesterday and brought some ideas from Qadri, which the latter wanted me to be privy of them:



Qadri is of the opinion that we [ARF] are using the Kurds against the Turks in order to empty the area. Thus, he thinks that we are not straight forward with them [Kurds]...

I confided in Memduh that Qadri's thoughts are totally unfounded...I told him that if Qadri comes to see me I am able to supply proof to him of our intentions...

With Best Regards,

Garro [Sassouni]<sup>36</sup>

Sassouny continues to implore and to urge the ARF Bureau to commit to the Kurdish cause:

To the ARF Bureau

Dear Comrades:

I asked M [?] about 20 days ago to have his visas and be prepared to depart at any moment. Without even knowing what your meeting agenda is, I had a long talk with M and confided to him what my thoughts are...

I am hereby confiding in you, in writing, what my thoughts are:

1. As regards the Kurdish issue, if our ideas are practically aligned with them and we are aware of the military force preparations, then an agreement must be hammered out with them. The agreement must provide the following: 1) a huge fund so we can accomplish our aims in the Kurdish insurrection, the opposition to the Kemalist government, and the Caucasus front...In the last case we may be able to collaborate with the Georgians and the North Caucasus tribal population.
2. Iranian Issue: If this issue is understood as a strategic one, our aim should be to make our people [in Iran] aware of their nationality. This must do with tacit methods so as not to antagonize the authorities. After all, Iran is an important station for us and if, God forbid, we our fighters have problems inside [Turkey], Iran is the best suitable place for them to hide.
3. Iraq: I am currently unaware regarding the conditions in Iraq and can't supply you with any information.
4. Marisdan [code name for Kurdistan] issue: the [ARF] Bureau should be the entity that regulates the workings of our bodies in Syria, Iraq, and Iran, and should direct them in the proper direction as to what concerns the arming of the [Kurdish] rebels... The main aim of this operation must be an all encompassing insurrection. In the meantime, all this must be communicated to our forces inside [Turkey] so that they are psychologically ready to start such an operation at any given moment. In

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<sup>36</sup> Garro Sassouni, Letter No. 36 [2-4-19], Dated August 28, 1934.

all cases, the name of Hoyboun must be used to define such an insurrection. This means that we must have huge funds under our disposal for such a plan to succeed. We must also keep in touch and arm our people in Dersim, Diyarbakir, Malatia, and Sghert. The same should be done with our Armenian population and their fighters in Ararat, Van..., Sassoun and the border areas...The only problem I have at the moment is that I can't fully comprehend what the aim of our Kurdish allies is at the moment. Thus, I can't come up with an all encompassing budget for such an operation. Consider that the formation, arming and food supplies for two 5 to 10 member mobile groups of fighters would cost 4000 Syrian Pounds and about 350 a month thereafter. Bigger operations require much bigger funds...

5. Organizational: Our organizational structure and bodies in the countries I mention above is antiquated. They resemble the bankrupt Iranian Khanates of the past. They can't provide the funds that they are ordered to pay. You should know better about this and I am leaving the issue in your hands.

With Best Regards,

Garó [Sassouni]<sup>37</sup>

It seems that there are issues within the ARF-Hoyboun leadership and Sassouni tries to inform the ARF Bureau regarding it:

To the ARF Bureau in Cairo

Dear Comrades:

Qadri, representing Hoyboun, finally came to see me last week. We had a long conversation. Qadri had also called Memduh [Selim], and all three of us met. Our Central Committee was aware of my meeting and that the Bureau's initiative was to sign an agreement with Hoyboun.

We consulted for two consecutive days: What they were insisting upon was that they didn't want us to interact with them as some sort of unknown business partners, and that our agreement must be an agreement between two revolutionary and brotherly organizations against one enemy. I have now come to the conclusion that our path with Hoyboun is aligned.

They think that our funds are inexhaustible. They are of the opinion that they can do much, much more if we did open our coffers widely for them. They are flabbergasted that after the formation of Hoyboun in 1929 [Sassouni is mistaken here: Hoyboun, according to many sources, was formed in 1927, in Bhamdun, Lebanon, GM] we had decided to transfer all funds to the Hoyboun center in Hasije. They told me that the sums

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<sup>37</sup> Garó Sassouni, Letter No. 38 [2-4-26], Dated September 17, 1934.

provided at the time, which consisted of 700 gold coins and 700 Syrian Pounds were received by Kamuran [Bedirhan] and he provided a receipt for them. They vowed that the organization didn't even get half of those funds. They were also very suspicious regarding Goms [Vahan Papazian, who was the ARF representative during the Bhamdun congress]. I showed them Goms' reports and they were finally convinced that our comrade was meticulous in his reporting of monetary transfers...Thus, they confided that it was [Prince] Kamuran that had embezzled the sums...

We also talked for two additional days regarding our future projects against our common enemy [Turkey]. We came to agreement on the following:

1. It is important that the ARF and Hoyboun continue their cooperation to the fullest.
2. The insurrectionist movement's aim will be to fight against the enemy inside the country.
3. At the moment, Hoyboun will organize that movement from the Syrian border area.
4. Iran will be left at peace for the time being.
5. Iraq must have a Hoyboun affiliate. However, the center should make it possible for such an affiliate to be formed through forces in Iraq so that the mandate power there [Great Britain] is not suspicious.
6. Hoyboun will not have people on salary from funds delivered to it by the ARF.
7. A secret committee comprised of members from Hoyboun and the ARF should be formed and the Hoyboun center must get its orders and operation guidance from that committee. We decided that Qadri, Memduh and I will comprise the joint committee and will consult together and they will then take the issues to Hoyboun center. The existence of this committee of three will, for now, be known to us three and the ARF Bureau. They will this is a secret even from those closest to them.
8. Have cells of insurgents ready inside the borders [of Turkey] comprised by young fighters who have the capacity for military prowess.
9. Cities should be focused on for recruitment and absorbing young and vibrant cadres.
10. Scouting between the Hoyboun center and inside the country must be revitalized so that we have more precise information regarding events inside.
11. Propaganda must be strengthened against relocation and deportation of Kurds from their ancestral lands. Moreover, it was decided to propagate

within the Kurds the notion of not letting go of their firearms and use them to defend their families and lands.

12. Give special attention to Kurdish school children and instill in them the ideals of loving and defending their country.

We also talked about the urgency of the situation and the necessity of being ready for a huge insurrection and the methods of providing more arms. We decided to revisit each of these issues when they become urgent.

It was also decided that a sum of 80 Syrian Pounds was needed on a monthly basis in order to accomplish some of the issues in the agreement. We also decided that other funds will be necessary aside from the monthly stipend. They agreed that the sums will be administered by me and will be used only if all three of us agree on a project.

On another matter, I have to still pay 20 Syrian Pounds for the printing of Honar[?], whose editor is Jeladet. Thus he and the paper remain under our control...

With Best Regards,

Garó [Sassouni]<sup>38</sup>

Sassouni still continues to keep the ARF Bureau abreast of what's happening inside Turkey in terms of small scale Kurdish uprisings and local populations taking up arm against an aggressor:

To the ARF Bureau in Cairo

Dear Comrades:

...I received a letter from Qadri where he informs that a persecution had started against Circassians almost a month ago in Dikranagerd [Diyarbakir]. It seems that the persecution is widening to all areas inhabited by Circassians. Qadri thinks that the action was a result by a Circassian committee that had entered Turkey for insurrectionist motives. I couldn't verify this. It would be interesting to know what the Circassians outside [Turkey] think about this persecution.

In Sassoun proper, the populace near the Kus [Kush] River –near Maratoug Mountain is in rebellion. A huge armed force has gathered there. They are in a good defensive position. In other areas the people have been disarmed.

I am preparing a scout who knows Turkish and Armenian and is militarily prepared to go to Dersim. I will send our other scout with him. We have to wait for the situation to calm a little and the roads to open. I will also send a scout who had been to Sassoun last year from Qamishli...

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<sup>38</sup> Garó Sassouni, Letter No. 43 [4-43], Dated November 19, 1934.

I was waiting for some funds from you...I am broke. You should not leave me in such a condition. If you want results you must move and come up with funds. Don't think that we can raise funds over here, amongst poor people. We were able to raise some 600 Syrian Pounds during the last six months and 450 of that were spent for self defense initiatives in the interior.

I have talked at large about all of this to Arshag [Chamalian]...I had also written to you that Rupen [Der Minassian] must come here. If he can relocate for a long time, let him come for 2-3 months we can discuss matters together. Syria can't operate on the level of an ARF Central Committee. It needs a Responsible Body to take care of the [Kurdish] insurrections. That's why Rupen is important, since he has a vast knowledge about them [Kurds, since his days in Sassoun]...

With Best Regards,

Garos [Sassouni]<sup>39</sup>

In yet another letter, Sassouni touches base regarding intra-Armenian problems and also continues to supply the Bureau with information regarding the preparations in Dersim:

To the ARF Bureau in Cairo

Dear Comrades:

...I am writing this letter while I am saddened of what has happened in New York [Assassination of Archbishop Tourian, during which two of the assassins were killed?]. We are in mourning because of the death of our two comrades. Our bodies in the region have taken precautions and have instructed comrades, especially those that seem to be belly-cause, to remain calm. They see Armenians of other denominational and political convictions as enemies. The situation might lead to bloodshed. I think that you too should call for calm through a circular.

I called upon our scout at Qamishli, Yusuf (Hovsep) and told him to go to Dikranagerd. He will also visit Farghin, Pasur, Mush and Silvan and return.

Our two other scouts are preparing to go to Dersim. I am hopeful that they will cross the border in no more than two weeks...

With Best Regards,

Garos [Sassouni]<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Garos Sassouni, Letter No. 49 [3-12], from Aleppo, Dated February 4, 1935.

<sup>40</sup> Garos Sassouni, Letter No. 51 [3-12], from Aleppo, Dated March 6, 1935.

Finally, Sassouni writes to the ARF Bureau and supplies a tally the Kurdish forces ready for the Dersim uprising. The letter also contains important information about Sassoun and other Kurdish areas:

To the ARF Bureau

Dear Comrades:

I have been receiving sad news from southern parts of Maratoug. I was first informed about this news from Dr. K[arekin] Yeretsian, who has been in Qamishli during the last two weeks. I immediately called Tzetsi [Garo] from Qamishli, since our friend, Edgar Maloyan [a native of Daron] who works for the French Mandate's Surete General informed me that the authorities will definitely apprehend him. I think Garo should remain underground for some time. Thus, I instructed Dr. Yeretsian [A native of Sassoun who had studies in Prague and who was a participant of the 1921 February counter revolution against the Bolsheviks in Yerevan] to go to Qamishli as a doctor and thus would not attract attention. Yeretsian informed me that a woman from Bsherig [Sassoun proper] has arrived in Qamishli and told him that almost all of the 30 villages south of Maratoug have been burnt to the ground and the people relocated to Bsherig.

I also got a letter from Qadri that tells the same story. Qadri adds that many Turkish soldiers have been either killed or wounded during the skirmishes at Maratoug and that the wounded have been taken to Bitlis.

Qadri and Hoyboun remain in a waiting posture and that is not good for the morale inside.

Jeladet and Kamuran are in Damascus and are not part of the Hoyboun Center. Hazo too is outside Hoyboun. He however still talks with us. Qadri is now the central figure and I am conducting my business with him. He is the only one that has relatives and friends in Diyarbakir, Farghin, and Alizan. He can persuade them to take up arms and also to inform us about what is happening inside. However, Qadri always asks for money. He is a gambler and a drunken. He also sends money to his relatives and thus siphons sum from the funds allocated to the insurrection. Regardless, he is our best bet for the moment...

You have asked me many times to give you information regarding our fighting forces in Dersim. I can add to what I have reported to you before because of some information I received through Movses, who has been in the area:

1. Sayyed Riza, Abbas Tribe, 800 men under arms, Rahbet is the acting commander.
2. Kochughashi Tribe, commanded by Shahin, 700-800 armed fighters.
3. Kherghan Tribe, commanded by Selo Agha, 1000 armed fighters.

4. Tamanan Tribe, commanded by Hasan Agha, Aliye Hase, and Jebrayil Agha, 700 armed fighters.
5. Haydoyan Tribe, commanded by Khamar Agha, 900 armed fighters
6. Yusufan tribe, Commanded also by Khamar Agha, 100 armed fighters including many. Armenians.
7. Kurouban Tribe, commanded by Zeynal Chavush, 1500 armed fighters, a part of this tribe is under Turkish control.
8. Khelerantswis, not a tribe, unknown number of fighters.
9. Lolan Tribe, commander not known, 700 armed fighters.

We don't know much about Turkish military numbers. What we know is there are some 1000 soldiers in Khozat. No figures have reached me regarding Yerzenga or Kharpert...

With Best Regards,

Garro [Sassouni]<sup>41</sup>

### **The Dersim Rebellion:**

The last of the Kurdish major uprisings in the twentieth century in the Turkish Republic, the Dersim Rebellion, started in 1937 and continued unabated until 1939. The unrest engulfed a sizeable chunk of territory from the province of Bitlis all the way to Diyarbakir.<sup>42</sup>

One of the important tasks that Turkish military intelligence followed through with was to indicate any Armenian participation—be that through fighters infiltrating from northern Syria or Armenian villages and/or villagers still living in Turkey—within the Kurdish rebel forces in Dersim, Sassoun and other Kurdish areas. One document implies that:

[Page 1]

Document number 6/3554

11/9/ 1937

To the office of the Prime Minister:

- I. I am sending you a copy of the information received through a ciphered dispatch emanating from the Province of Bitlis numbered 789 and dated 10/9/1937. According to the report received Armenian fighters have been seen with the Kurdish band of Kerho.

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<sup>41</sup> Garo Sassouni, Letter No. 90 [6-1], Dated November 26, 1935.

<sup>42</sup> For more in-depth reporting regarding the events of the rebellion see Hans-Lukas Kieser, *Dersim Massacre, 1937-1938*, Online Encyclopedia of Mass Violence, 2011; Martin van Bruinessen, *The Suppression of the Dersim Rebellion in Turkey (1937-38)*, <http://textlab.io/doc/9395007/the-suppression-of-the-dersim-rebellion-in-turkey--1937-38->; Robert Olson, *The Kurdish Rebellions of Sheikh Said (1925), Mt. Ararat (1930), and Dersim (1937-38); Their Impact on the Development of Turkish and Kurdish Nationalism*, [https://www.jstor.org/stable/1571104?seq=1#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/1571104?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents).



- II. Considering this, I have already ordered the southern belt provinces to be extremely careful regarding the infiltration of any Armenian fighting force into our territories. I am also enclosing a copy of my order.
- III. I am also sending copies of this telegram to the Ministry of War, the Army General Staff Headquarters, and the Ministry for National Defense.

Minister of Interior

Shukru Kaya

[Signature]

13/9/37

[Page 2]

Copy of the ciphered report received from Bitlis numbered 789 and dated 10/9/1937:

Top Secret:

On the sixth day of September Ramazan Oghlu Selim and Ramazan Oghlu Bishara, who are members of the Kurdish Kerho band, were seen with five Armenian fighters around Sheikh Omar Mountain. The group met the sheppards Ali Oghlu Yesin from the village of Nizin and Mehmet Oghlu Jemil from the village of Esmeni. They were able to secure a big quantity of bread through the shepards. Ramazan Oghlu Selim and Ramazan Oghlu Bishara came down to the village of Nizin to obtain the bread, while their Armenian friends remained on the mountain. The group later got a goat from the sheppards. We have also been informed that the Kerho band obtain most of their foodstuffs from the Kerho Jeman villages of the Mutki area.

We ask you to take the aforementioned information very seriously and to advise us on how to handle the villages that are supplying food to the bandits.

We have already informed the Kaimakam of Mutki.

Governor of Bitlis Province

Shahinbash

To be considered as the original document.<sup>43</sup>

That forces were being brought in through Syria is also documented in another dispatch from Turkish military intelligence:

Top Secret:

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<sup>43</sup> BCA, Archival document number 030-10-00-00-105-685-33, pages 1-2.

Heading, 9/9/1937

We confirm that a band of 18 Hoyboun members have been tasked to enter Turkey to commit acts of banditry.

From the Ministry of the Interior

To the Office of the Prime Minister

Document number 7/2241

From a dispatch numbered 173 and dated 5/9/1937 that was received from our consulate in Beirut: on August 30<sup>th</sup> information was received that Abdulkarim, Osman, Kerim of Mardin, as well as a relative of Sheikh Sa'id named Mehmet and some other Kurds—all together numbering 18—are being sent into Turkey as chetes [freedom fighters] by Hoyboun. The group had moved from Sham [Damascus] to Aleppo. On November 2, they boarded a bus driven by an Armenian named Misis [?, most probably Masis], who took them to the Azzaz border pass.

This news, which has to be taken with utmost importance, has been conveyed to the First General Inspectorate, which in turn has ordered units in the area of what to expect and to do...

I am also sending copies of this telegram to the Ministry of War, Ministry of Exterior, the Army General Staff Headquarters, and the Ministry for National Defense, and border customs authorities.

Minister of Interior

Shukru Kaya

[Signature]

13/9/1937<sup>44</sup>

Still continuing to report about Armenian activities within the uprising, yet another Turkish intelligence document indicates the following:

Top Secret:

From the Ministry of the Interior

To the Office of the Prime Minister

Document number 19335/1030

On November 15, 1937 an Armenian was apprehended at the Shahinler Bridge. His identity was revealed when a letter written in Armenian was

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<sup>44</sup> BCA, Archival document number 030-10-00-00-115-803-36.

found sewn to the inside of his coat. The Armenian, whose real name is Benon Aprahamian, had slipped into Turkey through our border with Armenia in Khnus and was able to hide for a while in Shahinler village at the residence of a miller, Petrov, who is of Russian origin. After questioning him it was revealed that he was sent over by an Armenian committee member named Garabet who recruited him to become a freedom fighter for the sum of five thousand Manat. He also confessed that he was to meet four friends who have the rank of colonel and whose names he doesn't seem to know. They were to go to Erzurum to fight. Accordingly, we ask that police and army in Erzurum be aware of such a plot and do their best to apprehend the rest. I am also sending copies of this telegram to the Ministry of War, the Army General Staff Headquarters, and the Ministry for National Defense.

November 22, 1937

Minister of Interior

Shukru Kaya

[Signature]<sup>45</sup>

The Turkish government was once again confronted with a military operation that could shake the foundations of the fledgling republic. It was for the first time since the start of the Kurdish upheavals that the government used military airplanes to bomb rebel positions. It soon discovered that airplanes could be used in other ways to win the propaganda war the government had unleashed. This was to be accomplished by throwing propaganda leaflets from airplanes over the rebel areas. Sabiha Gökçen, Mustafa Kemal's adopted daughter<sup>46</sup> and the first Turkish air pilot was one of those who both bombed rebel areas and threw leaflets to plant confusion within the population in the rebel areas. Two such leaflets are presented here:

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<sup>45</sup> BCA, Archival document number 030-10-00-00-108-710-12.

<sup>46</sup> Sabiha Gökçen's origins are a matter of dispute. According to official Turkish sources and interviews with Sabiha Gökçen, she was the daughter of Mustafa Izzet Bey and Hayriye Hanım. During Atatürk's visit to Bursa in 1925, Sabiha, who was only twelve years old, asked for permission to talk with Atatürk and expressed her wish to study in a boarding school. After learning her story and about her miserable living conditions, Atatürk decided to adopt her and asked Sabiha's brother for permission to take her to the Çankaya Presidential Residence in Ankara, where Sabiha would live among Atatürk's other adoptive daughters, Zehra, Afet, and Rukiye. Sabiha attended the Çankaya Primary School in Ankara and the Üsküdar American Academy in Istanbul. In February, 2004 an article in the newspaper *Agos*—whose editor was none other than Hrant Dink—headlined “The Secret of Sabiha Hatun,” contained an interview with Hripsime Sebilciyan, a former Gaziantep resident, who claimed to be Gökçen's niece and that Gökçen herself was of Armenian ancestry. Mustafa Kemal took a liking to Sebilciyan, who was in an orphanage shortly after the Armenian Genocide, and adopted her. According to historian Pars Tuğlacı, Gökçen herself found out about her Armenian identity while in Ankara, when members of her family contacted her from Beirut. Gökçen reportedly visited her Armenian relatives in Beirut. She had four brothers, Sarkis, Boghos, Khachik, and Hovhannes. See Hrant Dink, “Sabiha Hatun'un Sırrı,” *Agos*, February 6, 2004; “Gökçen Ermeniymidi,” *Hürriyet*, February 22, 2004; Ali Bal, “Sabiha Gökçen et la controverse sur ses origines,” *Turquie News*, April 16, 2010.



Sabiha Gökçen

[Leaflet # 1, printed]

[Date assumed to be 1937]

To the People of Dersim:

Some of the clans (tribes) of Dersim have treated the government with animosity and, in some locals, have killed their neighbors and looted their assets. The government, who has thus far treated them with mercy, has now been changed by our king, who wants all those who committed such crimes to be brought to justice.

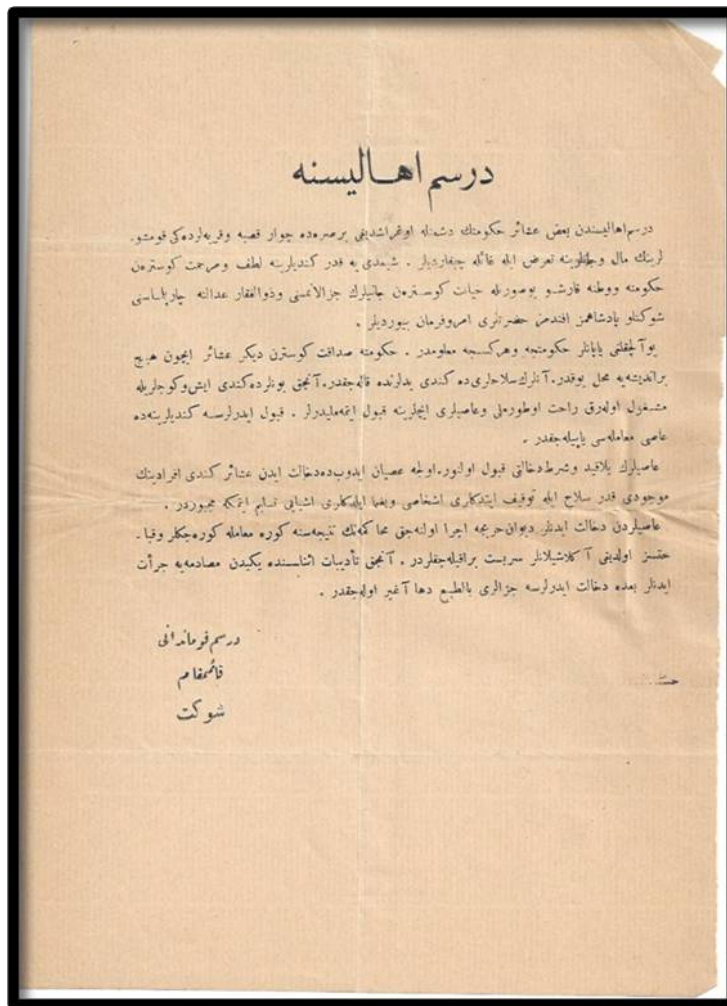


Photo of printed flyer

The government and the population know who these people are. Those tribes who had shown friendly attitude towards the government have nothing to fear. These tribes can also keep their weapons intact. However, it is imperative that those tribes remain aloof against those who had committed crimes and especially must not hide them in their midst. If they accept those within their midst they too will be treated in the same way as the criminals.

The rebels must know that they have to return all the assets and weapons that they had robbed from others. If they don't then they will be treated by the war department as criminals. They will be tried and the strongest and harshest actions against them will be taken. Rebels who fight against government forces will be punished even more severely.

Commander of Dersim Military Forces

Kaymakam [district governor]

Shevket

[Signature]

[Leaflet # 2, handwritten]

[Date assumed to be 1937]

To the People of Dersim:

A tribe whose actions regarding looting and rebelling against the government can only be described as cowardly has now been fighting against the government forces. You had seen how the government forces treated those who did not partake in such activities and who followed orders given to them with compassion. The government's compassion and its force to exact justice are great. That's why I am asking you not to endanger yourself and your assets. If you follow the governments' orders and do not help the rebel tribes the government is able to protect you against those tribes and criminals. Those who say the opposite to you are only liars and scoundrels. Those who take arms against the soldiers will only die. The terms of surrender are as follows:

1. Those who are armed must surrender them. They should inform [the government] about their assets of animals and tillable lands and will promise to go and work on their lands and tend to their livestock.
2. The armed rebels, after surrendering their weapons, will go and dwell and work with the tribes in the Bakh and Mazkert [Manazkerd] area. An inquiry will be conducted regarding their rebellious activity and if it is proven that they had not committed a criminal act then they will be left alone to continue their lives. Therefore, you have two choices: One is destruction and the other is being safe. You decide which choice you want to follow.
3. Now my words are directed to those who may think that as rebels they are already doomed; those of you who come forward and obey the orders will once again be considered the sons of the government. They will be allowed to be preoccupied with their work. Even if their noses bleed they have to inform [the government] about it.

Commander of Dersim Military Forces

Kaymakam [district governor]

Shevket

On his end, Garo Sassouni kept the ARF Bureau abreast of what was taking place in the interior of Turkey. The main issue that Sassouni underlined was that the fighting had already started and that money, and a lot of it, was necessary in order to sustain the uprising. Sassouni once again implored the Bureau to make this a priority for each and every ARF member:

[To be sent by ARF Bureau as a circular to central and stand alone committees]

You are already informed about the Kurdish insurrection in Turkey through newspaper news and articles. The foreign and Turkish printed media are presenting this insurrection as something that had just erupted. The reality is that the insurrection had started at the beginning of March of this year [1937] and are continuing unabated and with more ferocity.

We have received reports from Sassoun, Farghin, and Dersim in April and May, which give us a meticulous picture of what is happening... We didn't want to print these reports because we were of the opinion that it might hurt the insurrection and our fighting forces.

The Turkish government had forbidden its printed media from reporting on the Kurdish insurrection for some three years now.... Thus, the international community remained unaware of such actions inside Turkey, which have the capacity to weaken the Kemalist government, especially since there is also a Turkish opposition fighting against it...

As of this writing, a Turkish army of 40,000 is trying to subdue the insurrection. 10,000 soldiers are sent against Dersim and Sassoun, while 10,000 soldiers are stationed in Merdin ready to engage in battle. The international community is now aware of what is taking place. The Turkish government is trying hard to show that they are the master of the situation inside their country.

The insurrection in Dersim and Sassoun could soon involve all the provinces of Eastern Turkey. Even though the Turkish army has disarmed several areas but the fighting continues in mountainous strongholds such as Dersim and Sassoun. Our bodies are in communication with the inside and know that many new developments can take place.

In order for our bodies to understand the situation, let us review events since 1934. We were able to start a communication with Dersim in that year. We corresponded with Sayyed Riza... We tried to help them in several matters regarding armament and technology.

Our comrade remained there for four months and studied the situation. After he returned, he reported that Dersim is in need of 15,000 rifles and ammunition. We started preparations in earnest to supply the Kurds as much as we can so that they can defend themselves against a Turkish attack of the caliber we are seeing now...

Our comrade returned to Dersim once again in 1935 and remained there for one year and two months until 1936...<sup>47</sup>

The circular then speaks about the assassination of the comrade and continues:

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<sup>47</sup> Garo Sassouni, Letter No. 175-A, Dated June 24, 1937.

...Sassoun was organized as of summer 1934. We had close ties with [Armenian] villages in the Maratoug are...We knew, for example, that there were some 40 Armenian fighters in the mountain...

The insurrectionists are asking us for money to feed their families. They also want us to propagate the news of their insurrection and the reasons behind it to the international community so that people everywhere know of their plight under the Turkish military regime...

Our party follows the news of the insurrection eagerly. It will work inside [Turkey] and outside and provide important assistance to the Kurdish fighting forces. After all, this is the right path in giving a decisive blow to our common enemy, Turkey.

With the spirit of Camaraderie,

ARF Bureau<sup>48</sup>

The seriousness of the situation is apparent from yet a second letter by Sassouni on the same subject:

To the ARF Bureau

Dear Comrades:

I will send to you the circular that must be sent to our bodies Immediately [See Garo Sassouni, Letter No. 175-A, Dated June 24, 1937]. Please mention in *Husaper* [ARF Organ in Cairo] that all the information printed thus far [regarding the Kurdish insurrection] is from inside [Turkey] and is correct. If you have received other information please add it to the circular. Please feel free to edit it [circular] and write only the sections you deem fit to report to the party bodies. If you ask my opinion, I must stress that all of it should be included in the circular.

I have already informed you of what I think should be done. For God's sake why are you still sleeping over it and are doing nothing. You knew that this would happen almost two months ago and yet you decided to keep it dormant instead of putting things into action...You must be aware that since 1920 this is the most important period [for our cause] and we once again lost precious time by doing nothing...

Our party's modus operandi is puzzling me indeed...

Do whatever you want. Order our bodies whatever you see fit. Know this: I need some 10.000 [USA] dollars right away in order to keep the insurrection going on...

I am anxiously awaiting a reply...

With Best Regards,

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.



### Some Notes Regarding the Sanjak of Hatay Debacle (1938-1939):

The year 1939 saw some new French and British intrigue in the region. As if the Dersim Rebellion was not enough to handle, the ARF was soon to be engulfed in yet another matter of utmost importance. Since the year 1939 marks the beginning of the preparations for World War II, the French and the British, in order to dissuade Turkey from siding once again with the Germany—as was the case with its predecessor, the Ottoman Empire—decided in 1938 to hand Turkey a carrot—rather than the stick they had been waging against it since the beginning of the 1920s—by indicating that they were ready to negotiate with it to hand over a sizable part of northern Syria and Iraq (including the lucrative oil fields of Mosul), in exchange for siding with the Allies or at least remaining neutral.<sup>50</sup>



What France and Great Britain were negotiating with Turkey since 1938 in order to woo it to the Allies' side (Consider what is taking place in these areas today...).

Moreover, the French and the British were ready to hand over the Sanjak of Hatay (Alexandretta) as a gesture of good will toward Turkey in order to start the negotiations. This created a critical problem for Armenians and the ARF, let alone to all those Arabs who adhered to the notion of creating a Greater Syria. For the Armenians, handing over the Sanjak meant that two Armenian inhabited areas, namely Jabal Musa and Kessab, were to be handed over to Turkey. This was utterly unacceptable and something had to be done. In the end Jabal Musa was incorporated within the part of Hatay that was given to

<sup>49</sup> Garo Sassouni, Letter No. 176, Dated June 25, 1937.

<sup>50</sup> One can readily understand that what is happening today in the area is a direct continuation of this Franco-British policy. Turkey did finally receive the Sanjak of Hatay. It, however, never surrender hope of one day getting back the other territories promised, especially the oil rich areas of northern Syria and Iraq...

Turkey. Kessab, however, remained within the Syrian French mandate; this was accomplished through the efforts of Cardinal Aghajanian.<sup>51</sup>

There are several Turkish intelligence reports from the times that indicate this Armenian unrest and how other powers played in it:

Document No. K/1007

18/4/1939

From the Ministry of the Interior

To the Office of the Prime Minister

This is a summary of the latest reports regarding Armenian committees' relations with Italian intelligence in Syria.

According to reports received there is no certain proof that Italian intelligence is inciting Armenians to move. These reports show that there is a friendly relation between Armenians and Italian intelligence agents regarding the issues of the incorporation the County of Hatay [Alexandretta], Aleppo, and Northern Syria. The Armenian committees have discussed the issue and have delivered the news to their constituents in order to start an anti propaganda campaign against such a move. The goal is to keep the above mentioned areas under French mandate.

For the time being, the Italians are talking with Armenian committees to know exactly what their stance is regarding the incorporation of the above mentioned geographic areas to Turkey. The Italians are very careful, however, not to overtly show that they are really engaged in talks with the Armenian committees.

I am also sending copies of this telegram to the Ministry of War, the Army General Staff Headquarters, and the Ministry for National Defense.

Minister of Interior

Fayik Oztrak

[Signature]<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> On 5 July 1938, the Turkish army entered the Sanjak of Alexandretta and Antioch as per the agreement with the French colonial authorities, and the region was renamed State of Hatay. Many Armenians left Kessab for Lebanon or took refuge in the mountains. Many important personalities visited Kessab during this time. On 23 June 1939, the Hatay government was officially dissolved and the whole region became part of Turkey. By the efforts of the Armenian community of Paris, Cardinal Krikor Boghos Aghajanian, and the Papal representative to Syria and Lebanon, Remi Leprert, many parts of Kessab, inhabited by Armenians, were separated from Turkey and placed within the Syrian boundaries. The result of the annexation of the Sanjak of Alexandretta proved disastrous for the Armenians of Kessab: Mount Casius was attached to the Turkish side including Armenian farmland, properties, laurel tree forests and the grazing lands located in the mountain area and that once used to belong to the native Armenians. Besides, with this annexation, the Armenians of the town were also deprived from their traditional and historical Barlum Monastery, where the inhabitants used to celebrate the feast of Surp Asdvadzadzin (feast of the Virgin Mary) during August of each year.

In yet another such dispatch, Turkish intelligence reports that Armenians are getting frustrated from the French and are throwing their lot with the Italians:

The Armenians, by pushing forward their dismay regarding the French mandate authorities' friendly attitudes toward Turkey within the last period, are getting closer to the Italians and indicating that they want to serve for them. The head of this Armenian committee is Movses Der Kalousdian. Movses Der Kalousdian and his friends and cohorts in Beirut are the initiators of close relations with the Italians. If we also take into consideration what Armenians are speaking in Jebeli Musa [AKA Musa Dag], it seems that this person [Movses] is promising things to the Italians. He is aided in his endeavors by a seasoned committee member, Dr. Melkonian and Azirian from Adana. Moreover, a famous attorney from Antakya [Alexandretta], a certain Izmirlian has also joined forces with Movses Der Kalousdian.

Izmirlian had arrived in Aleppo on March 20<sup>th</sup> and participated in a meeting at which the French mandate's intelligence section translator, Khachig was also present. Dr. Kabayan and other persons had participated in this meeting. The agenda of the meeting was as follows:

1. The issue of the deportation of Armenians from the Sanjak [Hatay]
2. What would the French and the Italian stance be if an armed insurrection takes place in Jebeli Musa?

At the end a decision was made that no matter what happens, Armenians would not leave Jebeli Musa and would defend it through an armed insurrection.

During a conversation with one of the residents of the county [Hatay] who had fought against Turks in the past. Maloyan had incited the latter that the county could once again be put under Turkish yoke and that that is totally unacceptable for Armenians. The person had confided to Maloyan that the Armenians had tasted deportation and that they are not ready to undergo such hardship again. He also had stated to Maloyan that there is not even an ayota of love or respect left in Armenians regarding the Turks. Thus, the person had indicated, that the time is now ripe to arm and to train the youth and show that [Armenians] do not accept to be under Turkish yoke again.

On the other hand, Izmirlian had moved from Aleppo to Beirut and we think that he has been in contact with the Italians. That the county and Northern Syria would once again come under Turkish suzerainty has created a sort of concern and even anxiety among Armenians and could be the reason why they are getting closer to the Italians, who, seeing an

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<sup>52</sup> BCA, Document No. 030-10-00-00-109-722-15, page 1.

opportunity in this, are trying to establish a pro-Italian sentiment within the Armenian youth.

Zirkor Effendi from Aleppo, who is considered to be a well ballanced person, is of the opinion that France and Italy are worse than one another. Thus, Turks are a better choice [to rule over Hatay]. He further is of the opinion that today's Turkey is not the old Ottoman Empire. However, he knows that making Armenian youth understand this is a big and almost impossible endeavor. If France abandones the Armenians, it would indeed be very hard to not let Armenians fell pray to Italians.

Having lived for years in Syria and having seen good things from the French mandate authorities, Armenians in Syria, The Armenian committees there are now reevaluating their position anr are even thinking about how to take revenge of France if the latter accepts to hand over the geographic territories indicated above to Turkey.<sup>53</sup>

Finally, a third dispatch states that the takeover of the Sanjak of Hatay was a huge win for Turkish morale at a time when the country needed it most since its stability had been pounded at since it's creation in 1923. Hence, the handover was a decisive defeat to Armenians and Arabs:

[Page 1]

Republic of Turkey, Ministry of the Interior

No. 2151

July 31, 1939

To the office of the Prime Minister:

Concerning the unification of Hatay [Sanjak of Alexandretta] with Turkey, Armenians and Turkish opposition are on one side escalating their anti-French propaganda, and on the other hand trying to propagate the notion among the Arab people that Turkey is an enemy of the Arabs...

We are reporting to you the negative propaganda information we procured in this regard.

Copies of same were also sent to head of parliament, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and The General Staff of the army

Minister of the Interior

Fayik Oztrak

[Signature]

[Page 2]

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<sup>53</sup>BCA, Document No. 030-10-00-00-109-722-15, pages 2-3.

The Franco-Turkish agreement was a huge win for Turkey.

1. Turkey is yet a weak country. Its military power is at best feeble. Although it has five hundred planes, three hundred of these are old and are not combat ready. It [Turkey] wasn't able to even accomplish something from its attack on Iran. If the Italians enter the fray in the area, Turkey not only will return Hatay, but it will also be obliged to hand over Cilicia.

Turkey was like a boat lost at sea. If it had joined the Germans it would have become a German protectorate and nothing more.

On the other hand, if it joined Italy, it would be under duress to hand over western Anatolia to the Italians.

And if it preferred to remain neutral, it would have been divided among several powers.

While the situation was such a dire one, democratic countries came to its [Turkey's] aid and also donated money so that it could float. France has always been like this; while the Greeks were on the verge of capturing Ankara, they [the French] gave Cilicia to the Turks under a secret agreement. Now, the French went a step further and gave also Hatay to the Turks. It's not impossible to think that if a new war erupts, they [French and British] will hand over Syria and Iraq to Turkey.

2. In reality, French gained by giving Hatay to the Turks. Thus:
  - a. By putting Hatay under Turkish rule, they showed the Arabs what would happen if they too were to be put under their rule. Even those Arab circles who were pro-Turkish are now changing their minds regarding Turkey and the Turks. They now see that Turkey is nothing but an unorganized country with a lawless population.
  - b. They [French and British] were able to reverse the Russo-Turkish friendship. This was accomplished due to the strategic fact that Russia—even if it kept friendly relations with Turkey—would never allow the latter to grow strong.
  - c. Moreover, they [French, British] also created anti-Turkish sentiments among the members of the Saadabad Pact.<sup>54</sup> Now, the signatories of this pact think that Turkey harbors bad intentions toward Arabia and its people. The reports that we received shows that the other members of the pact have protested the unification [of Hatay to Turkey].
  - d. They [French and British] were able to somewhat subdue the Arab awakening by instilling in them the fear of a strong Turkey that will take over their lands. Thus, Turkey is now dreaded all over Arabia.

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<sup>54</sup> The Treaty of Saadabad (or the Saadabad Pact) was a non-aggression pact signed by Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan on July 8, 1937. This treaty lasted for five years. It was signed in Tehran's Saadabad Palace [Hence the name] and was part of an initiative for greater Middle Eastern-Oriental relations spearheaded by King Mohammed Zahir Shah of Afghanistan. Ratifications were exchanged in Tehran on June 25, 1938 and it became effective on the same day. It was registered in *League of Nations Treaty Series* on July 19, 1938. See *League of Nations Treaty Series*, vol. 190, 22-27.

In case of a new war by the Italians on us, Hatay will receive the first blow. Knowing this very well, the French General Staff has thus made a strategic move so that in case of any disturbance Turkey will be obliged to carry the whole weight of any new conflict.

In Summary: the Hatay takeover is not considered a victory for Turkey but rather a burden.<sup>55</sup>

### **Closure of policy and its liquidation:**

In a letter Dated 22 April, 1942 Rupen Der Minassian writes to the Kurdish leader Qadri. Rupen tries to make Qadri understand that there is a limit to what the ARF can do regarding the Kurdish Cause. This seems to be the beginning of the end of the ARF-Kurdish cooperation. As shall be seen below, Rupen was to close the dossier of this cooperation a few months later.

Letter no. 279 22 April, 1942

Dear Qadri:

Those who engage in a business are partners, but those who engage in the same cause are brothers and comrades. Perhaps our present and future are intertwined as our past was. I, with all my abilities, want to be of help to the Kurdish people. This is not something that you should thank me for, but rather a responsibility that I take seriously....

Regarding your solicitation to the Allied powers let me say that the letter you have prepared should be accompanied by photos pertinent to what is discussed in the letter [Turkey's animosity toward Kurds]. You must do this in order for your application to them to have some weight, especially since it is clear that they [Allies] are now once again showing friendly attitude toward Turkey...

I want it to be crystal clear to you that the Soviets have a cautious and even reserved stance toward us [ARF]. It is for that reason that it is better to solicit them personally rather than through us...

Regardless, I promise that our organization [ARF] will do whatever is possible to stress the Kurdish Question to the Allied powers so that they might take your solicitation more seriously. Therefore, I suggest the following as an agenda for our continued relations:

- a. Kurds and Armenians had and now are targets of extermination policies [by Turkey].
- b. Both people have a case in terms of national determination principles; thus, they must be allowed to have their place among the free, independent, and democratic peoples of the world.

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<sup>55</sup> BCA, Archival document number 030-0-010-000-000-225-515-25, pages 1-2.

- c. Both people need help in order to organize themselves both militarily and politically so that they can work toward inclusion in the international democratic society.

It could be possible that some of these agenda points might be acceptable to the Allied powers.

I can't provide you with big hopes. Turkey's vague stance and the Soviets reticent position disturb our cooperation. We must be patient...

We are not pessimistic regarding our two peoples' future. We are sure that both our futures will be well if we continue to be vigilant and patient and to endure the present hardships.

Regards,

Rupen [Der Minassian]<sup>56</sup>

In November of the same year, Rupen Der Minassian heralds in the closure of the Kurdish dossier in a letter addressed to Hamo Ohanchanian:

Letter No. 280

10 November, 1942

Dear Hamo [Ohanchanian]:

2. ...The following issue came forward from our "friend;" He is of the opinion that they don't need Hrach's [Papazian, who was an ARF liaison with the Kurds since late 1920's] involvement...I think that Hrach must liquidate all his operations as was decided before. Let me stress to you that, as of this moment, this operation [Kurdish insurgency] is not important for us as it used to be. Besides, we don't have enough funds to spend on such projects...Moreover, since this project involves risks, it is better that we be aloof. Thus, I instructed Hovgul [perhaps the reference is for Garo Sassouni] to liquidate the project.
3. I understood that the Mar people [reference is to the Kurds as this is their historic name] prefer personal relations. This is understandable, since they think that by cultivating personal relations they can get more benefits [funds]...If we liquidate the operation a huge responsibility comes off our shoulders...I truly hope that the Mar people succeed...However, if they don't then that would not become a burden for our souls...I think our passive and patient stance regarding them is preferable at the moment, because if they are involved in a risky situation we will be implicated too and that is not to our advantage...

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<sup>56</sup> NAA, fond 1048, list 1, folder 102, document number 5.

4. London once again has ordered its representatives to not acknowledge or help us. It seems that the reason is the same old issue of us being a dangerous element and are in animosity toward Turkey and Russia [Soviet Union] at the same time...It seems that London is playing a game and is signaling us to change our political stance. It wants us to sever any new ties we have with the Russians and to enlist on the side of the Allies. That, however, is what we must never do, even if they continue all the way and neglect us completely. Our political decisions were and are not taken to be agreeable to London. London is not the only representative of democracy; there is Washington and we should concentrate more on our work there.
5. ...Iran is in a very perilous situation. New internal complications are awaited....
6. There are basis to assume that the Axis [powers] could cause some problems to Turkey as was the case with Algiers and Morocco. We must be ready if this happens. We must take into consideration that regardless of the dual politics it plays, Turkey is considered to be emotionally and psychologically on the side of the Axis...
7. The writings of Iqbal Shah, which you had translated and printed in "Husaper" [ARF organ in Egypt], are not exaggerated. Eastern Caucasus [Azerbaijan, Mountain tribes] and Northern Iran are ready for the Axis [they will side with the Axis powers due to Turkish propaganda]. There are also other considerations from Maku all the way to Kermanshah; in fact, what I am stating is that this lawlessness is the norm in this area.

Best Regards,

Rupen [Der Minassian]<sup>57</sup>

## Conclusion:

The indication in Rupen Der Minassian's letter cited above that per London's opinion the ARF must not heed to Soviet overtures indicates that at the time there were some negotiations going on between the ARF and the Soviets. The issue was that the Soviet Union, as per what the ARF knew, was going to advocate a policy of annexing the Kars and Ardahan regions to Soviet Armenia at the end of the war, and, if possible, to grant the smallest of the Soviet republics with an outlet on the Black Sea. It was this shady understanding by the ARF of the situation that created the atmosphere of some sort of détente between the ARF and the Soviet Union.<sup>58</sup>

It could also be said that the closure of the cooperation dossier with the Kurds was also part and parcel of this détente. This also meant that the ARF was to utterly and willfully forget the issue of using

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<sup>57</sup> NAA, fond 1048, list 1, folder 114, document number 1.

<sup>58</sup> For a detailed account on the Soviet policies regarding Western Armenian lands being annexed to Soviet Armenia see Ruben Melkonyan, CCCP Archival Documents Regarding the Armenians of Turkey and Developments Surrounding Their Issue (1945-1965)[ԽՍՀՄ արխիվային փաստաթղթերը Թուրքիայի հայություննեւ նրանց շրջանում տեղի ունեցած որոշ զարգացումների շուրջ (1945-1965 թթ.)], <http://publications.ysu.am/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/4Ruben-Melqonyan.pdf>.



Armenians who still lived in the interior of Turkey to resurrect the Western Armenian Homeland. The new times demanded that they should be forgotten and considered part and parcel of the victims of the genocide Armenians still living inside Turkey and consider them to be the victims of genocide. After WWII and the coming forth of the Jewish case, The ARF was to concentrate its efforts on the international acknowledgement of the Armenian genocide and the condemnation of Turkey—the successor state to the Ottoman Empire—for such a crime against humanity. It was for this reason that my generation was raised within this taboo. That’s why, when I first wrote about Armenian-Kurdish relations and cooperation between 1920 and 1940 during the mid 1980’s, the issue of this “Hidden Armenians” never came up on my radar, so to speak; this means that the taboo was still in place and was working like a “clockwork orange.”

However, and regardless of the above considerations, there still remains the question that was posed at the beginning of this narrative and that begs an answer; what was the real number of Armenians who were still living in Turkey at the time and what are their numbers today? One Armenian source estimated that the number of Armenians living within the areas affected by the Ararat and then Dersim Kurdish uprisings at the time was close to 35,000.<sup>59</sup> If this was a known number that the ARF leaders of the time knew—since the source in question is an ARF publication—then a real problem arises from Garo Sassouni’s dispatch to the ARF Bureau—which was cited above—where he states: “The number of Armenians [living in the interior of Turkey] is much bigger than what we thought [it was].” This means that the 35,000 number could not be valid. So what was the real number of Armenians still living in Turkey at the time under discussion? Estimates vary and the issue remains an unsolved one, until such time as it can be settled based on archival sources that are yet to be found.<sup>60</sup>

However, the main issue here is that these people, who weighed so big on the agenda of the ARF leadership from 1924 to the 1940’s were suddenly willfully forgotten, and talking about them was a taboo so strong that they never even existed. This new policy was hammered down into a strategic mechanism that became the official mantra of the part especially after the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the genocide in 1965. And what happened to those who were “left behind”? They kept on living it seems. Almost all assumed Islam as a religion and had Muslim names—even though in many cases they kept their Christian religion and Armenian names intact and in a very extreme secrecy within the inner family circle. They only resurrected once again in the 1990’s, when Hrant Dink made his famous declaration: “We are still here.”

Moreover, and as if to add insult upon injury, as soon as Hrant Dink was assassinated, all diasporan Armenian entities—and those within the Republic of Armenia—who had condemned him and his ideological construct regarding the “Hidden Armenians” of Turkey and his bringing back a taboo to life, suddenly morphed into a paradigm that aimed to cherish the man, and vowed to continue his mission. However, with one caveat: The mission, which was supposed to be bringing forth the issue of the “Hidden Armenians” to the forefront that Dink had espoused, was to be completely forgotten and instead, a new policy concentrating on his assassination by an ultra Turkish nationalistic cabal was to be advanced. In reality, and from this perspective, Dink’s assassination was a blessing in disguise to both Turkish and Armenian nationalists who were bewildered of his bringing forth a taboo that was supposed to never be resurrected. Today, the legacy of Hrant Dink, has transformed into something that has no

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<sup>59</sup> A. “Atan, Hay Gyanke; Amsagan Desutyun,” [Հայ կեանք.-, Ամսական տնտնութիւն, Armenian Life: A Monthly Survey], *Hayrenik* [Հայրենիք Ամսագիր], 6<sup>th</sup> year [1928], 173.

<sup>60</sup> For a detailed analysis of the number of “Hidden Armenians” see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hidden\\_Armenians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hidden_Armenians). Estimates vary from 30,000 to 5,000,000.

bearing with the original mission that Dink wanted to revive; mainly that Armenians—albeit “Hidden” or otherwise Turkified/Kurdified, are still living in their ancestral homeland and the world should know about this...

What is going to happen to those people and will they ever be reconsidered as part of the Armenian ethnos? For the moment no such policy exists and the Armenian Church vehemently opposes any such considerations. It seems also that diasporan political organizations as well as governmental and political entities within the Republic of Armenia are tacitly behind the Armenian Church in its stance vis-à-vis its strong stance regarding the issue. For now, the only way for those people to reassume their real identity is by getting baptized and thus coming forth as Armenians in a country that is unforgiving toward such “transgression.”

As I was writing this conclusion, something caught my eye on Face book that has immediate affinity to the issue we are dealing with. Dersim Armenian, Mihran Pirinc Gültekin, who still lives in Dersim, wrote this posting on his FB page:

### **What it means to be Armenian in Dersim...**

I don't think that what we are doing in Dersim is going smoothly. In fact, we meet huge difficulties here. The reaction of the populace here is not that different from other parts in the country [Turkey]. When the issue is the Armenian identity, everybody, including the democrats, Kurds, and Alevis, are keeping their distance and don't want to show any affinity to the work we are doing. Yes, it is true that the people in Dersim consider us close to them and are somewhat more sympathetic to what we are trying to achieve than people in other parts of the country; however, that doesn't make our work easier. Thus, this organization that we have established in Dersim is unable to achieve its set goals. One such initiative was to visit Armenia accompanied by the mayors of different cities in Dersim. At first, the plan garnered much enthusiasm and some ten mayors accepted our invitation. Later, when the project was propagandized, three of the mayors apologized that they can't go. I don't know what kind of pressure these people were under. However, it is evident that they were under extreme political pressure. Thus, it is clear that people are not able to act in accordance with their free will. It seems also that we are not organized enough. We are working against an establishment that is much stronger than we are. I wrote all this so that people who are on our side understand what the reality is on the ground...<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> [https://www.facebook.com/miran.pirgic?hc\\_ref=SEARCH](https://www.facebook.com/miran.pirgic?hc_ref=SEARCH) (See October 9 2016 posting on page)