

# Armenian Organization and Ideology under Ottoman Rule 1908-1914

Revised Edition



Dikran Mesrob Kaligian

Armenian  
Organization and  
Ideology under  
Ottoman Rule  
1908-1914

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Dikran Mesrob Kaligian

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In memory of

Mesrob Khaligian of Khoups

Vahan Tamzarian of Aleppo

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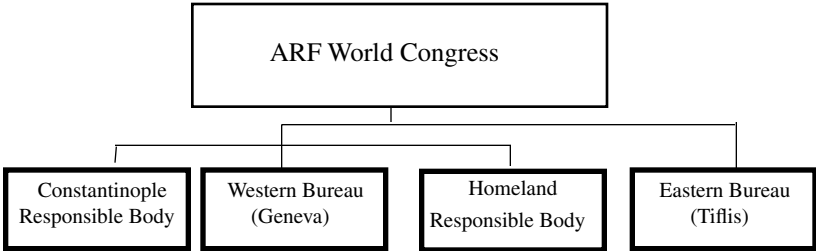
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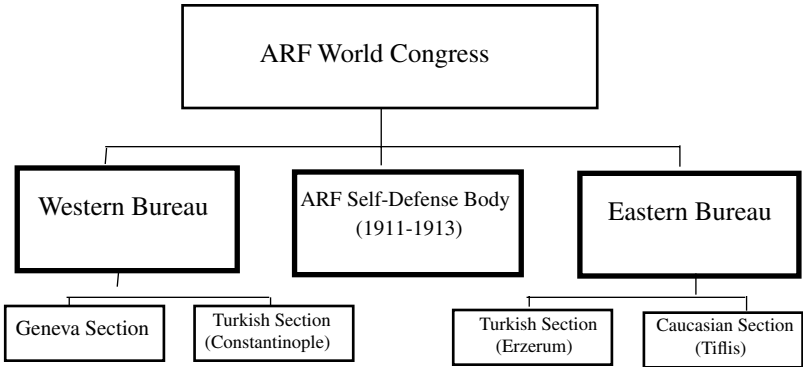
Finally, my family both supported me and contributed their talents. My first knowledge of the ARF, I received from my father. The assistance of my mother was invaluable, both in doing translations and in deciphering some nearly unintelligible handwriting. My sons, Keri and Rosdom, and my daughter, Yeraz, did not see as much of their father as they should have while this book was being written. I hope when they are old enough to read it, they will find it worthwhile and that the boys will learn of their namesakes within its pages. But the greatest part of the burden fell on my wife, Seda. Without her support and encouragement during the years it took to complete this work, these pages would have remained blank.

This paperback edition has been revised from the original hardcover to include minor changes at the end of the [first chapter](#). There are substantial additions to the end of the [sixth chapter](#) that correct some of the misinterpretations in the historiography of the ARF's stance in case of war and the ARF-CUP negotiations in Erzerum in the aftermath of the World Congress.

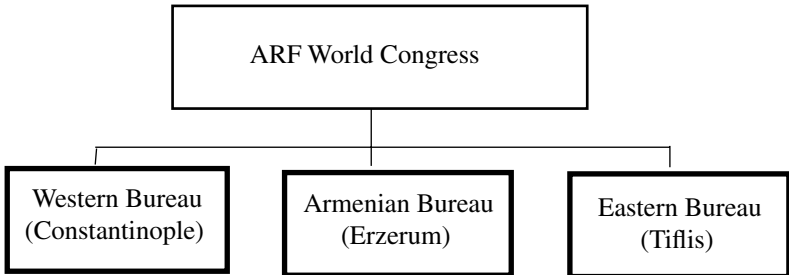
**ARF Structure Between the Fourth and Fifth World Congresses  
1908-1909**



**ARF Structure Between the Fifth and Seventh World Congresses  
1909-1913**



**ARF Structure Between the Seventh and Eighth World Congresses  
1913-1914**



# Introduction

At the start of the twentieth century, the territory of historical Armenia was divided between the Ottoman and Russian Empires. The Armenians were allowed a limited measure of autonomy under Ottoman rule. However, in governmental and judicial matters and in relations with Muslims, Armenians were clearly second-class subjects. When Armenian political parties began demanding improved conditions for the Armenian populace, amplifying decades of demands by the community, the government of Sultan Abdul Hamid II responded by initiating or encouraging a series of massacres from 1894-1896 that killed hundreds of thousands across the empire.

The Hnchak and Dashnak Armenian revolutionary parties entered into a dialogue with Ottoman liberals in Paris in 1900. Both parties took part in the First Congress of Ottoman Opposition Parties in 1902 along with Turkish, Arab, Greek, Kurdish, Albanian, Circassian and Jewish representatives. The resolutions of the Congress included local self-administration and restoration of the Ottoman constitution of 1876.

The Armenian Revolutionary Federation was founded in 1890. It is known by the initials ARF as well as the name Dashnak party or Dashnaksutiun (Armenian for federation). Thanks to its critical role in the popular resistance to the Tsarist policy of Russification and the attempted confiscation of church lands in 1903-4 as well as in the Armeno-Tatar War of 1905, the ARF was the leading political force among the Armenians living in the Caucasus.<sup>1</sup>

The prestige of, and support for, the ARF among the Armenians living in the Ottoman provinces grew with its work of arming and defending the population during the 1899-1907 period. ARF guerilla bands transported arms from Persia and Russia, often battling Ottoman or Russian troops en route. They trained villagers to defend themselves and conducted reprisal raids against Kurdish tribes that had massacred Armenians. The ARF became best organized in the Van and Muş-Sassoun regions. In 1905, the ARF unsuccessfully attempted to assassinate Sultan Abdul Hamid by exploding a bomb in a carriage on his regular travel route.<sup>2</sup>

The Hnchakian Revolutionary Party was founded in 1887. It initially merged into the newly formed Federation of Armenian Revolutionaries in 1890 but six months later withdrew and the Federation was renamed the Armenian Revolutionary Federation. The Hnchaks or Hnchakians were the leading Armenian

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party in the Ottoman Empire until being weakened by internal divisions over the relative importance to be given to the goals of socialism and national liberation. This resulted in the splitting off of the *Verakazmial Hnchakian* (Reformed Hnchakian) party in 1898.

The Hnchaks conducted a number of demonstrative activities, especially in Constantinople, during the 1890s. Their goal was to gain international attention for the condition and demands of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. The Hnchakian Revolutionary Party was renamed the Hnchakian Social Democratic Party in 1905 and the Social Democratic Hnchakian Party (SDHP) in 1908. During the period of Constitutional rule, the party had its greatest influence in Cilicia and Constantinople.

The Committee of Union and Progress<sup>3</sup>, ARF, and Prince Sabaheddin's League of Private Initiative and Decentralization organized the Second Congress of Ottoman Opposition Parties in Paris. The ARF hoped to create a tactical alliance to overthrow the Sultan. Prior to the congress an organizing committee of representatives met and agreed to a set of principles that each of their parties had to accept. These included recognizing the territorial integrity of the Ottoman state and maintaining the succession to the throne. Also, "The first goal of the congress should be the destruction of the present absolutist administration. The second goal is to be the convening of the national assembly." There was extensive discussion of the legal and revolutionary means that they would use. The ARF proposed urging the population to resist the government, not pay their taxes, resist the draft, and organize guerilla bands. It also proposed organizing strikes by police, railway employees, and government officials and collective and individual terrorism. While Prince Sabaheddin had agreed to the entire ARF proposal, the CUP representatives objected to three items. They strongly opposed resistance to the draft on patriotic grounds and called for strict regulation of the guerilla bands so that they would not degenerate into brigands. They also insisted that terrorism be limited to individual assassinations and not collective acts.<sup>4</sup>

The Congress met from December 27-29, 1907 and issued a declaration agreeing that the parties would force the Sultan to abdicate, drastically change the existing administration, and establish a system of consultation and constitutional government. The tactics to be used would be armed resistance against the government, strikes, non-payment of taxes, propaganda within the army so they would not move against rebels, and general rebellion. Although a tactical alliance had been created, few joint revolutionary activities were undertaken and it was the CUP, working with its supporters among army officers, that undertook the 1908 revolution.<sup>5</sup>

The successful Constitutional Revolution, initiated by a rebellion of the Turkish army in Macedonia, was greeted by jubilation by all these opposition parties and much of the population of the empire. The CUP was the driving force behind the revolution and, while it did not directly assume rule, its central

committee exercised significant influence over the government. On these points, historians are in general agreement. The course of Turko-Armenian relations in the following years, however, is a source of serious disagreement.

Some historians sympathetic to the Armenian viewpoint, such as Christopher Walker and Hratch Dasnabedian, portray the following years as follows. The ARF associated itself with the concept of Ottomanism by acknowledging the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire, including Turkish Armenia, within a structure of administrative decentralization. Even after the massacre of some 20,000 Armenians in Adana *vilayet* (province) in April of 1909, the ARF did not alter its policy of cooperation with the CUP. Rather, the ARF and CUP issued a communiqué which: declared their dedication to work together to prevent another such counter-revolution, countered the claim that the Armenians aimed for independence, and declared their agreement on the need to extend privileges in the provinces.<sup>6</sup>

Historians who agree with the Turkish point of view, such as Esat Uras and Justin McCarthy, blame the Adana massacres on a natural reaction of the Turkish populace to an Armenian uprising in the city. Likewise, according to this view, the ARF and Hnchak parties only made a show of solidarity with the CUP and, after the first few weeks of euphoria after the 1908 coup, resumed their “disruptive activities.” Their main aim was to “arm their supporters and prepare fortifications.” The ARF is seen as having infiltrated all Armenian churches and organizations as well as having both regular troops and guerrilla bands in its service and ready for rebellion. With the outbreak of the First Balkan War, the ARF took advantage of the situation, broke off relations with the CUP, and started again to demand that Europe, and especially Russia, intervene and force the Ottoman government to institute reforms that would benefit the Armenians. The one and only aim of the ARF was to incite a full-scale rebellion against Ottoman rule, the opportunity for which arrived with the Ottoman entry into World War One.<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, the position of the ARF regarding European intervention in the empire is a significant issue with conflicting interpretations in the historiography of the period. This study traces ARF policies and initiatives to answer the important question whether or not the party and Armenian community largely remained loyal to the constitutional regime and only resumed their appeals to Europe after the government’s repeated failure to implement promised reforms. This was a critical issue because the nationalists in the CUP and the government considered European intervention to be a significant blow to their pride and honor. Under the Sultan, appeals to Europe were often met by Muslim mobs being instigated to riot and massacre Armenians. By also analyzing European diplomatic and consular archives and studies based on them, a more complete picture of this issue will be drawn.

This study examines the circulars, correspondence, and minutes of the ARF, particularly its branches in Constantinople and Erzerum, which determined

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policy towards the Ottoman government and Turkish parties for the Western and Eastern Bureaus of the ARF, respectively. Letters between key leadership figures give vital insight into their thinking and analysis of political events. Correspondence from ARF bodies and fieldworkers in the eastern provinces and Cilicia provide reports of events, like the Adana massacres and attacks on and pillaging of Armenian villages. Reports by the bureaus to the ARF World Congress and their periodic letters to central committees overseas provide the analysis and rationale for the bodies' decisions. A limited number of minutes of the meetings of the responsible bodies exist and they illuminate the internal policy-making process. There are also a few letters addressed to the CUP that are significant.

Much of these documents require little more than a straightforward reading as they are private correspondence between individual party members, in most cases political allies. Additional interpretation is needed for correspondence to or from executive bodies of the party as they may be affected by internal party rivalries or disagreements over tactics or strategy. Some information regarding such intra-party conflicts is available in the ARF histories and memoirs available such as those by Mikael Varantian, Vahan Papazian, and Roupen Der Minassian. Reports and circulars written by executive bodies need more extensive interpretation to take into account attempts to deflect criticism or conceal damaging information from political opponents. Comparing the private correspondence with the slightly wider distributed circulars to local party committees and with published communiqués is instructive in identifying sensitive subjects and perhaps intra-party rifts. It should be noted that many of the dates on the ARF correspondence are in the old style, i.e. thirteen days behind. In some cases, both old style and new style calendar dates are given as can be seen in the endnotes.

Given that the population and lands of historic Armenia were divided between the Russian and Ottoman Empires, the ARF Second World Congress in 1898 decided to elect both an Eastern Bureau and a Western Bureau to oversee the activities of the party. The party operated under the principle of decentralization where elected central committees made all the decisions for their respective regions but coordinated their activities and communicated with other regions through their respective bureaus. The bureaus were responsible for implementing the decisions of the world congress and ensuring that all bodies operated within the guidelines set by it. The Eastern Bureau was headquartered in Tiflis and oversaw central committees in Yerevan, Karabagh, Kantzag, Baku, Tiflis, Batum, Northern Caucasus, Odessa, Alexandropol, Kars and two in Iran. Due to its relative proximity to the eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire, the Eastern Bureau also oversaw the central committees of Van, Muş-Daron, Erzerum, and Trebizond and the Bitlis-Paghesh *gomideh*. The Western Bureau was headquartered in Geneva and oversaw bodies in Constantinople, Smyrna (Izmir), Cilicia, Marsovan (Mersifan), Egypt, the Balkans, Cyprus, France,

Germany, and the United States. The Central Committees for Dikranagert (Diyarbakir), Kharpert (Harput), Sepastia (Sivas), Caesaria (Kayseri), and Samsun also reported to the Western Bureau. This division of responsibility remained essentially unchanged until 1913.<sup>8</sup>

The World Congress was the supreme legislative body of the ARF. It was comprised of delegates elected from each central committee and each organizational region of the party and was convened every two to four years. The ARF Fourth World Congress held in Vienna in 1907, in addition to electing the two bureaus, elected a Daron-Vasbouragan Responsible Body<sup>9</sup> and a Demonstrative Body. The former was charged with the responsibility of directing all military and revolutionary activities in the Armenian provinces of the Ottoman Empire. The latter was based in Constantinople and Izmir and was charged with carrying out assassinations and demonstrations to draw European attention to the autocratic rule of Abdul Hamid. An ARF *Khorourt* (Council) was established composed of the members of the two bureaus, the two responsible bodies, and members elected from the Eastern and Western *Rayonagan* (Regional) meetings of central committees. The ARF Council was meant to coordinate action and set direction between world congresses, but it would meet infrequently over the coming years. With the restoration of the Constitution, the two bureaus agreed to dissolve the ARF Demonstrative Body and have its members form the ARF Constantinople Responsible Body that would oversee relations with the CUP as well as the self-defense work in the provinces. As military and revolutionary work was no longer necessary, the Daron-Vasbouragan Responsible Body was reformed into the ARF Homeland Responsible Body to oversee ARF activities in those regions.<sup>10</sup>

In August of 1909, the ARF Fifth World Congress was convened in Varna, Bulgaria. It decided that the Eastern Bureau would be composed of eight members, three of whom would be based in Erzerum and would comprise the Eastern Bureau-Turkish Section. The Western Bureau would have seven members, a number of whom were already based in Constantinople, therefore establishing a Western Bureau-Turkish Section. This structure would remain in place until 1913. The ARF Sixth World Congress was convened in Constantinople in August of 1911 and decided to add an ARF Self-Defense Body to oversee efforts to arm and prepare the Armenian population for self-defense activities. The August, 1913 Seventh World Congress in Erzerum shook up the existing organizational structure and established three bureaus. The Eastern Bureau had jurisdiction over Russia and Iran and an Armenia Bureau, newly established in Erzerum, had jurisdiction over the six Ottoman Armenian provinces and Trebizond. The Western Bureau was moved from Geneva to Constantinople and had jurisdiction over Western Anatolia and the remaining provinces.<sup>11</sup>

To understand the role played by the ARF, it must be placed within the context of the Armenian *millet* (community) in the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman government followed a policy of indirect rule in governing its non-Muslim

communities. Most scholars consider this indirect rule to have been administered since the fifteenth century through the *millet* system. This assumption has been challenged by those who find that the term *millet* referred to Muslims until the eighteenth century and thus there wasn't an overall administrative system for dealing with non-Muslims.<sup>12</sup> The general view is that: "Each *millet* was a self-contained religious entity, enjoying autonomy in its internal affairs. For its governance, it was allowed to maintain traditional customs, laws, and institutions dealing basically with personal status ... [and] freedom of worship within certain bounds ..." The *millet* system was needed to administer the multi-religious and multi-ethnic empire and especially tax collection. The system worked well as long as the non-Muslims accepted their inferior status, but began to collapse once they refused.<sup>13</sup> The Armenian Patriarchate in Constantinople was created by the Ottoman government with the Patriarch recognized as the civil and spiritual head of the Armenian *millet*. Although Armenian Catholics and Protestants were formed into their own *millets* in the mid-nineteenth century, the vast majority of the Armenian population was part of the Gregorian *millet*. Although all Armenians were legally *dhimmis* (non-Muslim subjects), they were not all considered equals by the government. The clergy was considered a separate class as were the *amiras*, who enjoyed a privileged status. The honorific *amira* was given to less than 200 individuals in Constantinople and Izmir based on their great wealth and influence within the Ottoman government. Although they included merchants and goldsmiths, the majority were bankers or moneychangers and thus played an important role in the tax-farming system. However, they had little political power outside the Armenian *millet*. Within the *millet*, they had been all-powerful for much of the nineteenth century and were in effective control of the patriarchate and could have patriarchs elected or dismissed at will. Their hegemony was challenged by an alliance of middle-class guild representatives and young intellectuals, eventually leading to the approval of an Armenian National Constitution in 1860. The drafting of such a document was made possible by the promulgation by the Sultan of the 1856 Imperial Rescript (*Hatt-i Humayun*) that categorically declared the equality of all Ottoman subjects. The constitution stipulated the organization and hierarchy of the *millet* administration and curtailed the powers of the patriarch. It also set forth the composition of the Armenian National Assembly, reducing the clergy to one-seventh of its members. While it was a step forward because it codified liberal and democratic principles within the *millet*, the Assembly was set up to be dominated by representatives from Constantinople and gave the vast majority of the Armenian population in the provinces a small minority of the seats.

Due to their position, the *amiras* were by nature conservative. In order to preserve their wealth and declining power, they opposed the emerging revolutionary movements, both the Hnchaks and the Dashnaks. They were also greatly threatened by both parties' professed commitment to socialism. They therefore used their influence to ensure that the Patriarch hewed to their own positions

and obstructed the revolutionary parties. Christopher Walker has described “a significant new division ... among the Armenians between the old, clerical, Ottomanized leadership and the new revolutionary elite. Both strove to win the allegiance of the mass of the people ...” The ARF and the Patriarch also competed to be recognized as the leader of the Armenian community in the eyes of the government. The ARF used its contacts with the CUP and certain ministers while the Patriarch used his position as leader of the *millet* and the influence of the *amiras*. This competition and their disagreements over tactics most often came to a head during the run-up to parliamentary elections and when reforms for the Armenian provinces were being considered. The *amiras*, since they had had minimal contact with the population of the provinces and often looked down on them, had little influence outside of Constantinople and Izmir. The ARF, on the other hand, had gained credibility with the population of the provinces through its years of addressing the issues of land deprivation and insecurity. Its *fedayi* bands had delivered arms to the Armenian population through most of the first decade of the twentieth century. By undertaking raids and expeditions, they had driven Kurdish tribes off seized lands and carried out reprisals for murders of Armenian villagers. Although most of the peasantry was not yet ready for the idea of socialism, they were willing to follow the lead of a party that had defended their lands and persons. The proof of this lay in the fact that the *fedayis* would not have been able to operate had they not received food and shelter from the villagers.<sup>14</sup>

The late Roderic Davison, the well respected historian of the late Ottoman Empire, presented Armenian disillusionment with the CUP as springing only in part from the massacres of 1909, “for which the Young Turks must bear a goodly share of the responsibility.” The lasting troubles were due to Kurdish depredations against Armenian villagers in Greater Armenia. The government was held responsible in that it had only succeeded in disarming the Armenians, and not the Kurds, and because many of its local officials took actions to favor the Kurds. Then, when the CUP turned from equality and Ottomanism to Turkification, there was even more evidence that the Armenians were receiving little benefit from the constitutional regime. The ARF limited its actions to pursuing reform within the Ottoman Empire after 1908. It did not favor separatism or Russian occupation but autonomy. It was only at the beginning of 1913 that relations between the ARF and CUP became seriously strained.<sup>15</sup>

From the beginning, the Ottoman opposition movement had both liberal and nationalist currents. The struggle between the two took place first within the CUP. Later, as the nationalist wing became dominant, the liberals left the CUP and continued the struggle as an opposition party. The liberals, led by Prince Sabaheddin, believed in the ideology of Ottomanism and in a decentralized form of government. The nationalists believed in a strong central government with ethnic ‘Turks’ ruling at all levels of the empire. Thus, the CUP faced growing domestic opposition. A number of opposition parties were formed from 1909-

1911, including not just the liberals but also monarchists and reactionaries. After the CUP used violence and intimidation during the 1912 elections to ensure that they won an overwhelming majority in parliament, the CUP was forced out of power by the “Savior Officers” and replaced by a cabinet which included moderates and liberals. The First Balkan War discredited this cabinet, however, and the January 1913 coup d’état brought the CUP back to power.

According to historian Stepan Astourian, it was in 1911 that the ARF broke its alliance with the CUP and adopted a stance of mild opposition due to the Unionists’ broken promises and the worsening condition of the Armenian peasantry. But it was two changes within the CUP that would make the break permanent and set the stage for genocide during World War I. The first was the final defeat of the liberal movement of the Ottoman Empire as noted by Davison. The second was the rise of two ideologies that legitimized government policies: Turkism and *Milli İktisat* (National Economy). The implementation of Turkism would exclude ethnic minorities from the definition of the nation. Implementation of *Milli İktisat* would eliminate them from the Ottoman economy. The defeat of Ottoman liberalism ended the only policies, which had support in political circles, that could handle the problems of the multi-national empire by means of reform rather than repression. The development of national awareness by the non-Turkish citizens of the empire meant that ideologies and policies that placed ethnic Turks in a superior position to others in every sphere of life could only be implemented by force. Without political, cultural, and religious rights, as promised by Ottomanism, non-Turks would have no positive reason to wish to continue as Ottoman citizens.<sup>16</sup>

The leading historian of modern Armenia, Richard Hovannisian, believes that the ARF remained loyal to the constitutional regime through the many crises from 1908-1912. Although the ARF chastised the CUP leadership in 1911 for retreating from constitutionalism and interethnic cooperation, it called on Armenians to join the army and defend the empire during the First Balkan War. This caused a number of ARF guerrilla veterans to quit the party and organize detachments within the Bulgarian army to fight the Ottomans. But after the January 1913 coup, all central policies of the Ottoman Empire were formulated by a small clique of CUP ultra-nationalists. Any chance of cooperation with the ARF was ended.<sup>17</sup>

By analyzing the policy formulations of the ARF, this study hopes to resolve many of the conflicting conclusions in the current historiography. The party’s level of commitment to the Constitution and to cooperation with the CUP may be gauged from the debate that took place in the party at the time. The government’s inaction on land reform, and especially in recovering lands confiscated by Kurdish tribes, may have been a determining factor in the decision to end cooperation. For this reason, Armeno-Kurdish relations and its impact on security conditions in the provinces must also be examined. Finally, the course of European diplomacy and the sequence of events that led to renewed

Armenian calls for European intervention will complete the picture of the ARF and its course—from being part of an alliance of Turkish and Armenian revolutionaries pursuing constitutional reform to being the primary defender of a vulnerable, ethnically and religiously distinct people facing a radicalized, nationalist regime about to enter a world war.

There has been no in-depth examination of the internal documents of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation in the Ottoman Empire for the years following the Constitutional Revolution. It is impossible to obtain a true picture of Armeno-Turkish relations in this period without an accurate analysis of the activities and relations of their two leading political parties. The loss or destruction of the papers of the Committee of Union and Progress will always limit how much we will discover from that side. However, by examining the observations and views of the ARF leadership, fieldworkers, and parliamentary deputies, we can shed light on some dimly viewed areas. While we may not have a record of the deliberations of the CUP on the issues of the day, we do have a description of its actions and an analysis of its motives by individuals who had worked closely with some of its leading lights. The analysis is not limited to the CUP's actions that directly affected the Armenians, but also its internal political struggles and role and influence within the government.

The ARF archives, located at the Hairenik Association in Watertown, Massachusetts, have been accessed by several scholars. This research has resulted in a number of monographs, articles, and dissertations that reference ARF archival material. None of these studies, however, have examined more than a fraction of the thousands of documents that discuss ARF activities under constitutional rule. Hratch Dasnabedian's books provide an overview of ARF activities for its first thirty years and a detailed description of changes in its structure, based largely on the decisions of the world congresses. Gerard Libaridian describes ARF-CUP cooperation to provide necessary background to his article on the Armenian Genocide. Stephan Astourian's dissertation uses documents describing inter-party activities abroad to trace worsening Armeno-Turkish relations in Cilicia. Most studies that have drawn upon the ARF archives have had a different chronological or geographic focus than this one. Richard Hovannisian's four volumes examine the activities of the ARF during the period of the First Armenian Republic. The topic of Hourri Berberian's book is ARF participation in the Iranian Constitutional Revolution and Jacques Derogy's, the ARF assassination of the CUP leaders responsible for the Armenian Genocide. Work in the archives by historians from Armenia have resulted in two monographs, one on historical geography by P.H. Haroutunian and another on the Nagorno-Karabagh region by Hamlet Gevorkyan.<sup>18</sup>

There is a dearth of publications that examine the activities of the ARF in the years prior to World War One. Those writers who do refer briefly to this topic almost invariably do so in the process of buttressing their position on their

primary topic of interest, the genocide that began in 1915. This study provides an analysis of the policies of the ARF regarding the government, the CUP, the issue of European intervention, and administrative, land, judiciary, and security reforms for the Armenian provinces. It also gives the reader a look at the events, and the interpretation of events, that influenced the policy-making process. These policies must be analyzed, not in the shadow of later events, but within the context of political developments in the period of constitutional rule.

There is also the issue of sources used. The handful of historians of the ARF depends almost entirely on the published documents of the party and published memoirs. Ottoman historians who have touched upon this topic have largely been limited to published materials and the archives of the Ottoman central government in Istanbul. Even Sükrü Hanioglu, who has analyzed the private papers of prominent CUP members, has only published the history of that party up to the year 1908 thus far. Therefore, the internal documents of the ARF are a critical primary resource that has remained untapped. This study integrates this resource with the existing research on the last years of the Ottoman Empire that has been largely based on Ottoman and European sources. The documents include detailed descriptions of the activities of, and interrelationship between, the ARF and CUP in most of the important towns and cities in which the two operated. This Armenian viewpoint is integrated with the large number of reports by European consuls located in the provinces. The consuls' ongoing reportage of security conditions and provincial administration has not been utilized to any great extent for the 1908-1914 period. The British reports are the most informative, due to both their detail and their geographical breadth; there were British consuls and vice-consuls in more locations than any other diplomatic corps. They provide a description, sometimes week-to-week, of unrest, robberies, and assaults, as well as relations between and within the Armenian, Kurdish, and Turkish communities. They are not limited to the provincial capitals, but include information gathered from persons arriving from, or the consuls' inspection tours of, outlying areas. While personal or professional biases must be taken into account while using such reports, they may be considered to be frank for the most part as they were meant to remain confidential and were written during peacetime while the Ottomans were neither an ally nor an enemy.

Together these sources provide a much fuller picture of events and political developments during the period of constitutional rule. By reducing the over-emphasis on the official policies of the Porte and events in the imperial capital, and by utilizing sources that describe unofficial contacts and political relations and which expose events in the country at-large, this work may contribute to the scholarly analysis of this key period in Ottoman and Armenian History.

## Notes

1. Hratch Dasnabedian, *History of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation Dashnaksutium, 1890-1924* (Milan: Oemme Edizioni, 1989), 81.
2. *Ibid.*, 77-83.
3. The Committee of Union and Progress is referred to as the CUP and also by its Turkish name Ittihad ve Terakki, as the Ittihad, as Unionists, and as the Young Turks.
4. M. Sukru Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution: The Young Turks, 1902-1908* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 191-2, 194-7. Prince Sabaheddin was a member of the imperial family who moved to France in 1899 with his father, the sultan's half brother Damad Mahmud Celâlettin Pasha. Upon his father's death, he became the leader of the liberal faction of the Young Turk movement and split the movement when he formed first, the Society of Ottoman Liberals, and then in 1906, the League of Private Initiative and Decentralization. He was a firm believer in administrative decentralization, minimal government, and the free enterprise system.
5. *Ibid.*, 203-5, 209.
6. Dasnabedian, *History of the ARF*; Christopher J. Walker, *Armenia: The Survival of a Nation* (London: Croom Helm, 1980).
7. Justin McCarthy, *Muslims and Minorities: The Population of Ottoman Anatolia and the End of the Empire* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1983); Esat Uras, *The Armenians in History and the Armenian Question*, Second Edition (Istanbul: Domentary Publications, 1988).
8. Hratch Dasnabedian, *H. H. Tashnagtzutian Gazmagerbagan Garooytzi Holovooytuh* [The Evolution of the Organizational Structure of the ARF] (Beirut: Hamazkain Press, 1974), 25-29. The evolving structure of the party is shown graphically in charts in this source, which have been simplified and translated near the introduction to this book. Seven or more Dashnaks in a village or town would form a *khoup* (group). Three or more *khoumps* in a particular region would require that a *gomideh* (committee) be elected to oversee their operations. Each central committee would oversee 5-30 *gomidehs* in their geographical area.
9. Daron and Vasbouragan are the Armenian names for the regions surrounding Muş and Van respectively, the two regions with the highest concentration of Armenian population in the Empire.
10. *Ibid.*, 53, 57-8, 60-1.
11. *Ibid.*, 63, 71-74, 82-85.
12. Benjamin Braude, "Foundation Myths of the Millet System" in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society*, Vol. I: *The Central Lands*, eds. Benjamin Braude & Bernard Lewis (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1982), 69, 73-4.
13. Hagop Barsoumian, "The Eastern Question and the Tanzimat Era" in *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times*, Vol. II: *Foreign Dominion to Statehood: The Fifteenth Century to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 182-3.
14. *Ibid.*, 182-190, 195-8; Hagop Barsoumian, "The Dual Role of the Armenian *Amira* Class within the Ottoman Government and the Armenian *Millet* (1750-1850)" in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society*, Vol. I: *The Central Lands*, eds. Benjamin Braude & Bernard Lewis (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1982), 171-3, 176-181; Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 116; Walker,

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132, 177-8. The word *fedayi* is Arabic for one prepared to die for his faith. It is supposed to have been given to the Armenian guerilla units by Turks and Kurds in recognition of their bravery.

15. Roderic H. Davison, *Essays in Ottoman and Turkish History, 1774-1923: The Impact of the West* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1990).
16. Stephan H. Astourian, "The Armenian Genocide: An Interpretation," *The History Teacher* 23:2 (February 1990): 130, 134-5.
17. Richard G. Hovannisian, "The Armenian Question in the Ottoman Empire 1876 to 1914" in *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times. Vol. II: Foreign Dominion to Statehood: The Fifteenth Century to the Twentieth Century* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 231-2.
18. Dasnabedian, *History of the ARF*; Dasnabedian, *Garooytzi Holovooytuh*; Gerard J. Libaridian, "The Ultimate Repression: The Genocide of the Armenians, 1915-1917" in *Genocide and the Modern Age: Etiology and Case Studies of Mass Death*, eds. Isidor Walliman and Michael N. Dobkowski, 203-235, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987); Stephan H. Astourian, "Testing World-System Theory, Cilicia (1830s-1890s): Armenian-Turkish Polarization and the Ideology of Modern Ottoman Historiography," (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, UCLA, 1996); Richard G. Hovannisian, *The Republic of Armenia*, Vols. 1-4, (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1971-1996); Hourì Berberian, *Armenians and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1911: "The Love for Freedom has no Fatherland"* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001); Jacques Derogy, *Operation Nemesis* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1986).

# I

## **Triumph to Tragedy: From Constitutional Restoration to the Adana Massacres, July 1908-April 1909**

The July 23, 1908 revolution, by restoring the 1876 Constitution, promised many opportunities for the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire and for the ARF. Both greeted the revolution with joy because of the promise of equal rights for all Ottoman citizens and because it meant the end of the absolute rule of the man known as the Red Sultan, for all the Armenian blood he had spilt.

At the same time, others would take advantage of the change in government. Within days, Austria-Hungary would announce the annexation of the Ottoman provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Soon Bulgaria would declare itself an independent kingdom and Crete would unite with Greece. The CUP expected that restoration of the Constitution would win it support from the liberal states of Europe; instead the Constitutional regime was struck a blow before it had even begun to rule.<sup>1</sup>

The ARF would throw itself into Ottoman political life, pursuing cooperation with the CUP and taking a most active role in the first parliamentary elections. It would no longer have to work underground and so, began publishing newspapers and sending fieldworkers into the provinces to organize ARF bodies and mobilize the Armenian population in support of the Constitution. But ARF and Armenian support for the Constitution would be gravely shaken by the Adana massacres the following April.

### **The Constitutional Revolution**

The fear of losing large parts of Macedonia spurred both the CUP and its supporters in the military to more urgent action against the Sultan's regime. There were popular uprisings in support of the Constitution in Monastir, Gribava, Elasma, Kosovo, and other cities in the region and assassinations of officers and government officials who were supportive of the Sultan. Unrest among the Third Army in Macedonia soon turned into open rebellion and when troops

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were sent from Constantinople to suppress the rebellion, they refused to fire on their comrades. On July 22, the CUP in Monastir proclaimed the restoration of the Constitution followed by similar proclamations in Üsküp, Köprili, Presova, Serres, and then Salonika. Abdul Hamid had been forced into a corner and on July 23 he announced the restoration of the 1876 Constitution.<sup>2</sup> According to Mikael Varantian:

The Red Sultan, with a sweet smile, went before the Young Turk leaders and swore his allegiance to the constitution. The doors of the prisons were opened and thousands of Armenian, Turk, and other prisoners ... were released from their cells. Huge processions took place where Moslem and Christian embraced and in some locations celebrations were organized. The Turkish leaders loudly proclaimed their fervent sympathy for the oft-tortured Armenians and their ideological brotherhood. They publicly confessed that the Armenian revolutionaries were their instructors and educators on the road to freedom...<sup>3</sup>

Varantian was the main theoretician of the ARF and an active political commentator. He was born in Karabagh and educated there and in Germany and Switzerland. He was a member of the editorial board of the party organ *Troshag* and was a member of the ARF Western Bureau from 1904-1915. He was the party's representative to the Second International and wrote a number of books, most notably *The History of the ARF*. Agnoui (Khachadour Maloumian) was born in Karabagh and educated at the Nersesian College in Tiflis. He was part of the editorial staff of the *Mshag* newspaper and later took part in the negotiations leading to the founding of the ARF. He became part of the staff of *Troshag* in 1899 and was a member of the Western Bureau from 1901 until 1914, when he was elected to the Armenia Bureau. He was one of the organizers of both the 1902 and the 1907 Congress of Ottoman Opposition Forces in Paris. He moved to Constantinople when the Constitution was restored where he was a prolific political commentator, publishing many works and giving public addresses.<sup>4</sup> In a letter to his comrades in Geneva, which he closed with the words "from a free Constantinople," Agnoui described the celebrations:

You can't imagine how happy I am to write to you from this city without fear of being spied on. A city where mouths that had been silenced for 32 years together cry "freedom." The masses are intoxicated with emotion. After 30 years of silence, it is possible to yell and get drunk for 30 days.<sup>5</sup>

The ARF greeted the Ottoman Constitution with joy. It ended all its demands for European intervention and the enforcement of Article 61 of the Treaty of Berlin. It stopped publishing *Pro Armenia* and other propaganda efforts in Europe because: "We were yoking ourselves with our Muslim neighbors so our combined forces could aid the progress and welfare of a healthy empire."<sup>6</sup>

In the provinces as well, the constitutional events made a very good impression on the Armenian population. While the Armenians were holding public

events to celebrate, the Muslim and Kizilbash (Alevi) population were indifferent to the restoration. The local ARF body in Pingian (near Agn) believed that they were so backward and uneducated that they couldn't understand the effects that the revolution had brought and would bring. It would mean eliminating bribery, the firing of corrupt governmental and municipal officials, less military taxes, and the lightening of the 10 percent Aghnam tax.<sup>7</sup>

With the success of the revolution, members of the CUP Central Committee went from Salonika to Constantinople to take charge. The military element in Salonika had played a decisive role in the revolution, but there was a large civilian element as well. It was these elements that would become most prominent initially, rather than the party ideologues or founders.<sup>8</sup> But although the CUP seemed to be politically invulnerable, Hasan Kayali has observed that it:

lacked self-confidence and organization. Having operated as a secret body in the capital and the provinces it did not draw on a popular sociopolitical base or avail of a structured and disciplined empire-wide political network. Therefore, it was not prepared to make a bid for exclusive political power, and very soon the general population's rising expectations began to haunt it.<sup>9</sup>

The CUP did not feel able to remove the Sultan, even though they distrusted him. It used its influence on the government but inserted few ministers as its leadership were junior officers and bureaucrats and age and seniority had long been the precondition for authority in the empire.<sup>10</sup> Its confidence could hardly have been helped either, when Austria-Hungary took advantage of the political situation to annex the Ottoman province of Bosnia.

Although it was still a committee and not a political party, it operated on policy issues like a party with its political and social program. However, by failing to create a participatory political organization, it entrenched its existing leadership who were predominantly Turkish-speaking and from the same geographic area. Thus:

It admitted few newcomers to its inner circles despite its ambition to rally all segments of the population behind it. At the end of August the merger of Prince Sabahaddin's Paris-based League for Private Initiative and Administrative Decentralization with the CUP was announced. Since the Committee subscribed to a program of centralization, the merger might have been viewed as a reconciliation of the two principal currents of Young Turk ideology. In fact, it was an unsuccessful maneuver to neutralize the decentralist faction, which reasserted itself within days by forming a rival party. The CUP failed to accommodate even the centralist old guard in exile. Ahmed Riza was one of the few to be recognized.... Like other prominent Young Turks of the pre-1908 period, however, he was gradually distanced from the inner councils of the Committee. The CUP's exclusionism derived from the social insecurities and administrative inexperience of its members and plagued it in its relations with different political and social groups ... in the years to come.... The CUP's admitted lack of political acumen and social standing necessitated that it rely on statesmen outside the Committee to occupy the top government positions. Its insistence on manipulating the

government from outside to conform to its political aims compounded the typical problems associated with legitimacy in revolutionary transfers of power. Not until the spring of 1909 did the Committee create the beginnings of a formal political organ and prepare to take on the responsibility of governing the empire.<sup>11</sup>

The election law for the 1908 parliamentary elections had first been drafted by the 1877-8 parliament. It called for a two-stage election process. In the primary election, all male Ottoman citizens over twenty-five years old who paid taxes were eligible to vote for secondary electors. These electors then voted for the actual deputies for each *sancak*. The two-stage process favored the election of local notables. The political and economic influence of landowners in the provinces usually resulted in their success in the primary election.<sup>12</sup>

The CUP made deals with Greek and Armenian parties before the elections but also allotted seats to the Jewish community because they knew that their representatives could make a real contribution to the Parliament. In fact, they were depending on the expertise of the better educated non-Muslim groups "to further their own program of reform and progress.... The non-Muslim deputies in the assembly were expected to play a vital role in the introduction and passage of legislation designed to bring about the modernization and economic revival of the empire." They "tended to be better educated and more open to the ideas of change and modernization than Muslim deputies. Many of them were professionally qualified (engineers, agronomists, etc.) and were expected to provide expert opinion when matters related to their professions were discussed in the Chamber."<sup>13</sup> To quite an extent, this became the case, as in the example of the Armenian deputy Krikor Zohrab. He was a renowned lawyer and law professor and also a leading figure of Armenian literature having published many short stories. He was born in Constantinople and educated at the Shahnazarian School and Galatasaray Lycée. He became one of the leading voices of the Parliament, looked to by both Muslim and non-Muslim deputies, and the key figure on legal matters as he had personally trained most of the other lawyers in the chamber.

In all, ten Armenians were elected to the Parliament. Armen Garo and Vartkes representing Erzerum, Kegham Der Garabedian from Muş and Vahan Papazian from Van were ARF members. Hagop Babikian from Rodosto and Bedros Halajian from Constantinople were CUP members and Krikor Zohrab was a liberal voting with the Ahrar (Liberal Union) Party until later moving closer to the positions of the ARF. Murad Boyajian representing Kozan in Cilicia was a Hnchak and Nazareth Daghavartian from Sivas and Stephan Ispartalyan from Izmir were independent.<sup>14</sup> The ARF recognized the critical role it had to play in the Parliament, considering its deputies' abilities and its position as perhaps the most fervent supporter of the Constitutional system. It therefore moved quickly to prepare a platform of reforms for Armenian deputies to introduce in the inaugural sessions of the Ottoman Parliament and released it to the public on September 1, 1908:

Convinced that for every government, and especially a multi-lingual country like the Ottoman Empire, the best form of government is a decentralized federation; when each of the regions with their distinct geographic-economic-ethnographic character will enjoy internal administrative autonomy, which in addition will harmoniously strengthen and confirm the whole governmental structure;

Similarly, knowing that it is possible to reach those goals gradually, through fundamental, liberal reforms and *joint* cooperation with neighboring peoples and the other political parties, moreover hoping to secure the new regime from undesirable shocks;

The ARF presently, and for the first sessions of the Ottoman Parliament, proposes the following demands, which are necessary and suggested by current realities:

- 1) The independence and territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire will be recognized because it has a liberal, constitutional regime.
- 2) Turkish Armenia composes an inseparable part of the Empire and it runs its internal affairs, based on the system of decentralization, from which all peoples living in the country will derive equal benefits.
- 3) The Ottoman central government, founded on the democratic representative system, runs the government's general affairs—foreign affairs, military, currency, customs, railroads, post-telegraph, etc., while conceding the other local functions to the regions.
- 4) All parliamentary, judiciary, and local administrative bodies will be elected on the principle of universal, equal, secret, and proportional voting. This principle is implemented for all peoples and religions equally.

The program also called for ministerial accountability to a parliamentary committee; “complete equality for all nations [i.e., ethnicities] and religious communities” and the elimination of class privileges; freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, of conscience, and the right to strike. Further the party called for “universal, free, compulsory elementary education” and the fundamental reorganization of the judiciary. Other planks addressed tax reform and workers’ rights including limited work hours and no work on Sundays, improving dangerous and unhealthy working conditions, and the elimination of child and women’s labor at night.<sup>15</sup> The fifteen planks of the platform were consistent with liberal democratic or socialist demands of the day in Europe.

### **ARF-CUP Relations**

Rosdom (Stepan Zoryan) was one of the three founders of the ARF and perhaps the most influential figure in the party for the rest of his life. He was born in the Caucasus and educated in Tiflis and Moscow. He edited the party organ *Troshag* until 1895. He engineered ARF-Macedonian cooperation in 1901 and fought in the Iranian Constitutional Revolution. He had a leading role in resistance to the Czar’s anti-Armenian policies and in the Armeno-Tatar war in the Eastern Caucasus in 1905. He played a key role in reconciling the left and right wings of the party at the 1907 ARF World Congress and would become the most important figure in the Eastern Bureau-Turkish Section from 1909-1914. He lived in Erzerum during the Constitutional period and attended