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Prepared for the conference on the Soviet Caucasus  
co-sponsored by the U.S. International Communication  
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East Armenia formally entered the Soviet Union in 1922, a year after the dissolution of the post World War I independent republic. Soviet Armenia is the smallest of the constituent republics of the USSR(30,000 km<sup>2</sup>). It has a population of 2.5 million, 88.6% of which is Armenian. This represents only 62% of the total Armenian population of the USSR, however. Another 1 million or 26% of the 3.5 million total live within the jurisdiction of Georgia and Azerbaijan, largely concentrated in major cities or historically Armenian districts. The remaining 350,000 are scattered in Soviet territories outside the Caucasus. In all, Armenians constitute 1.5% of the Soviet population.<sup>1</sup>

Soviet Armenians have lived, along with the other Soviet peoples, through the trials and tribulations that have characterized the history of the USSR since its birth: civil war and famine, forced collectivization and a quick pace of industrialization, the stalinist purges and great losses during the Second World War. Throughout many centuries of cohabitation, furthermore, they have shared with other Caucasian peoples political and military misfortunes that befell the region as well as cultural traits which have transcended frequent antagonisms. Finally, for the century and a half that the region has been part of a Russian empire, Armenian political thought and intellectual development have followed closely those in Russia. These general comments serve to set the framework within which Soviet Armenia's history has evolved. Yet the understanding of the problems facing its people requires consideration

of the peculiarities of the Armenian case: the consciousness of a political and cultural past forged over millennia; a history closely linked with the territory and people of the larger portion of the historical homeland, Western Armenia, now Eastern Turkey; the burden of that history placed on the survivors and descendants of the World War I Genocide that depopulated Western Armenia; the existence of a large Diaspora both within and without the Soviet Union, all of which is compounded by the realization that because of its small size what is left of Armenians might be unable to survive as a cultural unit.

Hence, Armenian perceptions of a Soviet Armenian state are based on the evaluation of the degree to which the current status constitutes a rampart against cultural assimilation and the degree to which it can bring the Armenian people as a whole closer to the goal of political and cultural survival, the two being mutually reinforcing.

There is justification in the often made assertions that sovietization of the republic provided the best available defense against Pan-Turanian imperialism and Turkish expansionism, which in 1920 could have resulted in the decimation of the Eastern Armenian population as well; that six decades of association with the USSR have provided the material means to a small land to develop a diversified modern economy, and to its people the conditions to develop culturally and acquire a decent standard of living.

Indeed the economic development of Soviet Armenia has been impressive, even by Soviet standards. Whereas the average increase

in production in the USSR has been 113 fold between 1913 and 1973 (117 fold in the RSFSR), Soviet Armenia's production has multiplied <sup>2</sup> 222 times. The unified transcaucasian energy chain has secured a steady supply of energy to the growing needs of the republic. <sup>3</sup> And participation in the economic development of the Union has allowed a diversification and provided markets which would have been difficult to acquire otherwise.

The rate of urbanization has been equally dramatic. Compared to a 10% urban population in 1931, 59% of Soviet Armenia's people now live in cities (All-Union average, 56%). Furthermore, Soviet Armenia has one of the highest rates of workers in the sciences and professions with higher education in the USSR. <sup>4</sup> One might also add that the Armenian SSR has posted a 41% increase in its population between the most recent census years, 1959 and 1970. The average of 3.72% annual increase constitutes the fourth highest in the USSR.

Gradual progress has also been marked in the cultural realm since destalinization. The quantitative increase in printed material has been accompanied by the tackling of wider and somewhat more liberal themes by artists and writers. The Soviet Armenian language has been gradually cleared of common words transferred from the Russian. Equally significant is the fact that during the last two intercensal years, of all the major ethnic groups in the USSR, the rate of increase in the use of the mother tongue as a first language was highest among Armenians (1.5%).

More important, perhaps, has been the more permissive attitude toward the attempts in Soviet Armenia to reintegrate the Soviet Armenian experience with the Armenian past. An early measure in this respect came in 1956 when the Soviet government allowed the election of a

Catholicos of All Armenians- the Supreme spiritual head of the Armenian national Church- to the vacant seat at Edjmiadsin in the Armenian SSR. Vazgen I, Catholicos since then, has enjoyed a wider margin of movement and easier access to his people than was allowed since 1921.

Similarly, in 1965, on the 50th anniversary of the Genocide of 1915, there were subdued official commemorations in the capital, Erevan, and a monument was erected in memory of the victims near the city. Since then republican leaders have institutionalized government participation in this most symbolic and emotional of Armenian ceremonies on each April 24. In recent years, the new first secretary of the CP of Armenia, Garen Temirjian, has led the official delegations, and masses of marchers, to the monument.

Since 1956, references to places, events and people tied to the history of Western Armenia have abounded in Soviet Armenian literature. Historians have dwelled at length on the human and political consequences of the Genocide. They have also taken guarded steps in rehabilitating selected moments from the Armenian Liberation Movement against the Ottoman empire before World War I, until now ignored because it was led by parties which communists have always regarded as nationalists and competitors for the leading role before the Revolution.

Nevertheless, the changes described above have not dispelled the more critical view of the Soviet Armenian state. It has been equally valid to assert, for example, that sovietization has forced Armenia back into an orbit where an independent pursuit of national interests is impossible; that the degree of autonomy it has allowed is conditional upon decisions made in Moscow; and that, finally, Armenian culture has fallen in the danger of being submerged by the dominant Russian one.

The fear of loss of national identity is even more real in Armenia

than in other soviet republics. Despite the many achievements and underlying the statistical evidence loom phenomenae which have created apprehensions in official and non-official circles.<sup>5</sup> The high rate of increase in the population and the large increase in the number of those using Armenian as a first language are due primarily to immigration from other soviet republics and the Diaspora. In fact since 1928 the birthrate among Armenians has declined steadily from 56 to 22.1 per thousand in 1970.<sup>6</sup> Also, of the 14 non-Russian "union republic" nationalities, Armenians rank lowest in their preference for marital endogamy within their own republic.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, the continuing creation of a Soviet Diaspora presents further problems. Although 97.7% of the Armenians in the republic use their mother tongue as a first language, only 71.5% of those in the province of Rostov do so, and 35.5% in Moscow. When one realizes that there are as many Armenians with higher education living outside as there are inside the republic-the trend among Armenian professionals, unlike the Georgians, is to move where opportunities arise-then the future of that Soviet Diaspora becomes more problematic. Most communities outside the Republic lack facilities for the preservation of the Armenian language and culture. Also, for reasons of cultural and political nationalism in Georgia and Azerbaijan, existing Armenian educational institutions have become subject to severe local pressures. Both neighboring republics, as seen earlier, account for large and old communities.

The USSR is the heir of the Russian empire and Russian is the lingua franca of the Union, as it was during tsarist times. To a large extent this is natural, given demographic and geographic realities.

More than at any given time, however, opportunities for recognition and promotion on the All-Union level require the use of Russian for most professions, while economic interdependence growing out of regional imbalances in natural and manpower resources mandate the universalization of values consecrated in Moscow. Yet the fear of loss of national identity, presaged by the use of Russian as a first language, is more than an unavoidable concomitant of industrialization.

It is, rather, a matter of conscious policy pursued <sup>through</sup> administrative changes in educational laws and an increasingly open campaign for the more efficient teaching and widespread use of Russian. As is well known, the draft submitted for final approval of the new Constitution of the Armenian SSR had deleted the provision in the previous law which had recognized Armenian as the official language of the Republic. The language provision was reinstated in the new Constitution (1978) only after massive demonstrations occurred against a similar proposal in Tbilisi for the Georgian SSR. Even then, the new law provides for the "protection" of Russian and other languages within the Republic (Article 72)

While the fear of assimilation seems real, it is not regarded as clear a shortcoming in Soviet policy as the status of Armenians in the Autonomous Republic of Nakhidjevan and the Autonomous Province of Mountainous Karabagh. Both were historically Armenian districts. The first continues to have a small minority of Armenians while the second has a 80% Armenian majority. These districts were causes of war between the Armenian and Azeri republics prior to sovietization. In 1921, its control of the Caucasus in the balance and its relations with Turkey at a critical point, the Soviet Russian government ceded both districts to the Azeri Republic; this, despite a decision in 1920 by the Soviet Azeris to return them to Soviet Armenia. Armenians have consistently



charged that Azerbaijani authorities have pursued a policy of cultural oppression, economic discrimination and ethnic depopulation against their Armenian inhabitants.<sup>11</sup> It is reported that in 1962 a petition signed by Nakhidjevan Armenians detailing specific charges was sent to Secretary N. Khrushchev with no apparent results. Similarly, discriminatory practices reached such proportions in Karabagh that in 1969 Soviet Armenian leaders were reportedly in Moscow to register their complaint and request the incorporation of the district in the Armenian SSR.<sup>12</sup> The request was denied. In 1975 many Armenians were ousted from the Party in Karabagh or imprisoned on charges of nationalist agitation contrary to "the principles of Leninist friendship of peoples and proletarian internationalism."<sup>13</sup> Having silenced all local opposition to the status quo authorities in Karabagh and Azerbaijan declared the issue resolved to the satisfaction of all concerned.<sup>14</sup> These declarations, printed in an official publication and including derogatory statements toward the Armenian SSR, prompted one of Soviet Armenia's most respected novelists, S. Khanzatian, to dispatch a letter of protest and indignation to L.I. Brezhnev. Khanzatian, a member of the Communist Party since 1943, reminded Brezhnev that "nothing hinders the development and strengthening of the solidarity between proletarian classes more than injustice against a people"; he reiterated the demand for the return of Karabagh in the name of the same principles which had been called upon to justify the current situation. A commentary which accompanied a copy of the letter to the Diasporan press asserted that the systematic policy of forcing Armenians to leave the region through social, economic and other forms of oppression is tantamount to genocide according to the definition in the U.N. Convention on Genocide to which the USSR is a signatory. The unknown author further revealed that according to

an official survey, Armenians in Karabagh wanted nothing more than to see their land under the jurisdiction of the Armenian SSR. <sup>15</sup>

Armenian territorial aspirations have been even more manifest against the Republic of Turkey. These entail Turkey's eastern provinces which were once inhabited by Armenians and where a large number of Soviet Armenians trace their roots. Soviet permissiveness toward the manifestation of strong feelings on this issue by symbolic gestures has been counter-balanced by an actual policy of improving relations with Turkey. Only twice in Soviet history have leaders of that state come close to reviving the historical antagonism between Russia and Turkey in 1917 and 1945-46. The more consistent pattern has been to win the trust and friendship of that government through continued assurances of non-aggressive purposes and economic assistance. Whether this policy has been pursued in order to discourage Turkish alliances with the West or accommodate the sizable number of Turkic peoples within its borders, the fact remains that Soviet policy has in no way reflected the expectations of one of its constituent peoples, the Armenians, that reparations be made for the human, material and territorial losses suffered during the First World War.

Unusual manifestations of Armenian nationalism in Soviet Armenia can be seen as the expected outbursts of long repressed hopes which are being exteriorized, but not reflected in actual policy. Such an outburst occurred in 1965 when the official commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Genocide was interrupted by young demonstrators in Erevan. They demanded action "to recover their lands" rather than ceremonies to honor the victims. <sup>16</sup> It is probable that the major reason for the removal that year of Y.N.Zarobian as first secretary of the CP of Armenia was due to his inability to prevent and deal effectively <sup>17</sup> with these demonstrations.

Subsequently, illegal activities have been carried on. In 1969, 1970 and 1973-74 Soviet Armenian courts tried, convicted and imprisoned a number of activists-grouped under a "National United Party"-for having advocated the idea of a united and independent Armenia and for having formed cells to achieve their goal.<sup>18</sup> Three of the leading members of that group were executed by a firing squad in January of 1979 after a secret and unpublicized trial in Moscow. They were charged with having planted an explosive two years ago in a subway in that city.<sup>19</sup>

Yet, to achieve a modus vivendi between official policy and Armenian aspirations the Soviet state has relied, as a general rule, on bureaucratic methods of oppression rather than the massive violence of the past. Still, the Soviet government has difficulty in determining the extent and form of nationalism that is harmless. Hence, it has not hesitated to press the full power of the state against such manifestations as it considers threatening. There has been a barrage of criticism aimed at Armenian chauvinism, nationalistic tendencies and disregard for Marxist-Leninist principles in the interpretation of Armenian history. The guardians of the faith have not spared writers and artists who have deviated from the norms of "socialist realism."<sup>20</sup> Others have been subjected to varying forms of censorship and silence. The interesting fact regarding this last wave of repression against intellectuals is that the works of these victims have displayed more humanism than nationalism. Moreover, a half century of oppression and abnegation within the new empire have strengthened that nationalist sentiment. As a consequence, there seems to be a growing cooperation between activists in Armenia and other parts of the Union, especially Russia and the Ukraine; and, at least for some, the national issue has been reintegrated within the larger sphere of problems faced by

Soviet society. An Armenian samizdat has proliferated in Erevan and a committee has been formed there to monitor the implementation of the Helsinki accords.<sup>21</sup> In addition, a number of Armenians have been involved<sup>22</sup> in dissident activities in the Soviet Diaspora. Even the "National United Party", once adherent of an exclusive nationalism, has eliminated from its program the strict ideological opposition to communism to pursue its goal of independence within the context of other forms of<sup>23</sup> opposition to the present Soviet state. Soviet Armenian nationalism embodies, then, an unwillingness to accept the injustices of the past and the oppression of the present and the fears of future assimilation. While the ethics of modernization and development has had a dampening effect on the political concerns, that nationalism remains less abstract and far less idealized than that among the Diaspora Armenians.

The Armenian Diaspora, itself largely the product of the events in the Ottoman empire, shares with Soviet Armenians the burden of the past as reified by the Genocide. And more imminently than in the Soviet Union, Diaspora Armenians live the agony of assimilation. Hence the national heritage, both cultural and political, have become the two factors which have brought the two segments closer after years of isolation, widespread anti-Soviet activity, the Diaspora and divisiveness there regarding attitudes toward a fragmented, sovietized fatherland. But the increasing communication and understanding within the Diaspora on the one hand, and between the Diaspora and Soviet Armenia, on the other, are due to three additional factors. Firstly, even the most anti-Soviet of the organizations, the Dashnaksutiune (ARF), has come to accept what was sensed by many on an individual basis: that given the alienation of Western Armenian lands, the lack of progress toward their liberation and the increasing reality of assimilation, cultural

survival and political nationalism needed more tangible concepts than abstract slogans and pride in a past. Soviet Armenia, despite its shortcomings is seen as that reality. Soviet Armenia's cultural viability has infused fresh blood into a stagnating and disintegrating Diaspora through tours in communities abroad by artists and writers; by the visit to Armenia of thousands of Diaspora Armenians yearly; and Soviet Armenian invitations to groups of teachers, students and eminent individuals to spend time in that country.

Secondly, to support the claim that Soviet Armenia is a homeland for all Armenians- a claim which is useful to leaders in Moscow as well- authorities have had to make serious concessions to Armenian cultural nationalism: Soviet Armenia has had to reflect its Armenianness at least as much as its sovietness. The Diaspora has become one of those tools by which Soviet Armenian leaders have been forging their unique brand of "national communism." In recent months they have gone beyond the exportation of culture and taken the unprecedented step of sending planeloads of material assistance to the Armenian community in war torn Lebanon.

Thirdly, the continued support of Western governments for the Republic of Turkey have undermined the enthusiasm of Diaspora Armenians toward the foreign policy of countries such as the U.S. Armenian national parties in the Diaspora, unlike Soviet Armenians, have been free to formulate political-territorial demands against Turkey. For a long time these policies were pursued within the framework of Western diplomacy. But now even the human rights campaign is seen as a foreign policy tool, since it is applied selectively and has even ignored the plight of the Armenian minority in Turkey. And although the

possibility that the Soviet Union might some day for its own reasons take up the Armenian cause is remote, political leaders in the Diaspora have one less reason to make anti-sovietism the basis of their policies. Without accepting the assumptions and values of soviet communism, Diaspora Armenians are sharing with Soviet Armenians the frustrations borne out of political impotence as well.

Soviet Armenia, like her Caucasian neighbors, displays a strong nationalism rooted in history and concerned with the future. This gives the region its unique position in the USSR. Although these nationalisms have clashed in the past and are at conflict at the present, they have become mutually reinforcing in their dealings with the higher authorities in Moscow. Furthermore, it is difficult to assess whether the selection of republican leaders with Soviet rather than local experience will reinforce or weaken these nationalisms. It is clear so far that because of the position of the Caucasus and the existence of the Diaspora, Armenian leaders have mastered the art of interpreting their actions as being beneficial to Armenia and the Armenian people as well as the USSR and the Soviet people. There is also no doubt that the limits of that duality are defined in places other than the Caucasus. The space within which these leaders have moved might be endangered when the struggle for the succession to the present soviet leadership is over.

## Notes to Libaridian

1. Unless otherwise indicated, statistical information regarding Armenians in the Soviet Union and Soviet Armenia is derived from the latest All-Union Census in the USSR in 1970. As usual, one must approach any statistical information, particularly from the USSR, with caution.
2. Sovetakan Hayastan Amsagir [Soviet Armenia Monthly] (Erevan), no.6 (1976), p.4
3. Ibid. , no.7(1978), p.37
4. For these and other comparisons see B.D. Silver, "Levels of Socioeconomic Development Among Soviet Nationalities" American Political Science Review, vol. IV(1974), pp.1618-1637
5. See M.K. Matossian, "Communist Rule and the Changing Armenian Cultural Pattern", E. Goldhagen, ed., Ethnic Minorities in the Soviet Union (New York, 1968), pp. 185-197
6. Khodjabekian, "HSSH Bnakchutiune..." p. 48
7. L.V. Chuiko, Braki i razvodi (Moscow, 1976), p.76
8. See, for example, F.P. Filin, ed. Russky yazyk kak sredstvo mezhnatsionalnovo obshchenia [The Russian Language as a Means of Communication between Nationalities], Moscow, 1977
9. Sovetakan Hayastan (Erevan daily, April 15, 1978; Christian Science Monitor, April 28, 1978. On the question of minority languages see also S. Grigorian, "A Note on Soviet Policies Toward the Armenian Language" The Armenian Review vol. XXV, no.3 (Autumn 1972), pp. 68-76. For two contrasting views on the impact of language reforms in 1958-59, see H. Lipset, "The Status of National Minority Languages in Soviet Education", Soviet Studies, vol. XIX, no.2 (October, 1967), pp. 181-189; and B.D. Silver, "The Status of National Minority Languages in Soviet Education: An Assessment of Recent Changes", Soviet Studies, vol. XXVI, no.1 (January, 1974), pp. 28-40.
10. Pravda, December 4, 1920
11. New York Times, December 11, 1977
12. AzdaK Shabatoriak, no.6(1969), p.95
13. New York Times, December 11, 1977
14. Sarada Mitra and Adel Haba, "We Saw the Brotherhood of Nations", Problems of Peace and Socialism, vol.XX, no.6 (June, 1977), esp. pp. 18-19, 25

15. Both documents were first published in Zartonk (Beirut daily, organ of the Armenian Democratic Liberal Party), October 15, 1977.
16. V. Dadrian, "Nationalism in Soviet Armenia..." p. 247. Less violent nonetheless unusual demonstrations occurred in Moscow as well; see V.N. Dadrian's "The Events of April 24 in Moscow-- How they Happened and under What Circumstances", The Armenian Review, vol. XX, no.2 (Summer, 1967), pp.9-26
17. M.K. Matossian, "Armenia and the Armenians", Z. Katz, ed., Handbook of Major Soviet Nationalities (New York, 1975)p.158
18. Cited in Azduk Shabatoriak, no. 17 (1971), pp. 272-274; no. 26 (1974), pp.419-421. For a statement by the leaders of this group containing the objectives and by-laws of the party, see "Le Parti National Unifié en Arménie soviétique" Hafastan (Paris, monthly), no. 391-392, April-May, 1978 pp.38-40. The renewed national fervor might have caused the removal of yet another first secretary of the Communist Party in Armenia, A. Kochinian; see "Soviet Armenian Chronicle" The Armenian Review, vol. XXVII, no. 1 (Spring, 1974), pp. 102-103; no. 3 (Autumn, 1974), p. 325; no. 4 (Winter, 1974), pp. 435-37.
19. The news of the opening of the trial, the verdict and the execution were announced in one report by the Tass Agency on February 1, 1979. According to A. Sakharov, the charges against the three were false since none of the accused were even in Moscow during the bombing incident.
20. The most vehement criticisms have come so far from the first secretary and secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in Armenia, K. Demirjian and K. Dallakian, in speeches delivered to the Central Committee on January 30, 1975 and October 19, 1975; see Grakan Tert [Literary newspaper] (Erevan), February 7, 1975 and Sovetakan Hayastan, October 21 and 22, 1975.
21. Hafastan, no. 381, May-June, 1977, p.19
22. P. Reddaway, ed. Uncensored Russia--The Human Rights Movement in the Soviet Union (London, 1972), pp.103, 151 passim; idem, The Trial of the Four, comp. P. Litvinov, (New York, 1972), pp. 399-405; and G. Sanders, Samisdats --Soviet Opposition (New York, 1974), pp. 368, 372.



23. "Le Parti National Unifié...", Hafastan, pp. 38-40

24. See, for example, Azduk Shabatoriak, no. 2(1979), p.17-18.