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THE KURDS,
THE ARMENIAN QUESTION,
AND THE HISTORY OF
ARMENIAN-KURDISH RELATIONS

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This book elucidates the political and economic history of the Kurdish people who first composed a significant part of the Ottoman Empire, and later, of Republican Turkey. It goes on to explore the development of Armenian-Kurdish relations with its entire vicissitudes. It comprehensively illustrates manifestations of the Armenian and the Kurdish Questions at international diplomatic forums and the political interactions of the two neighboring nations in the last few decades. The Armenian Question is touched upon here only as much as it is closely linked with the Kurdish Question. This volume brings to the reader's attention that the Kurdish factor has had a negative impact on the development of the Armenian Question and was one of the reasons for the ultimate failure of the Armenian liberation movement.

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FOREWORD

Kurds belong to the Iranian branch of the Indo-European family. Their ethnogenesis has not been scientifically elucidated yet, nor has the exact land of their origin been identified.¹ A whole series of questions remain to be definitively answered through scholarship, including the following. When did the Kurds first enter the historical arena? When did they settle down in the region of the Middle East which nowadays is known by the name Kurdistan? What religion did they practice before conversion to Islam? What is the origin of the name Kurd (plural *akrad*)?

In literature, the concept of “Kurdistan” was used and to this day is still used not to refer to a specific state organization with distinct political borders, but to a geographical area where the Kurdish ethnos has lived. One of the first and the foremost reasons for this is the fact that the Kurdish people, throughout its historical development, have never been able to achieve statehood. As a consequence, the territory of Kurdistan has been identified by varying criteria during different periods of time. The name Kurdistan appears in history merely as an ethnic and geographic concept (Iranian Kurdistan, Iraqi Kurdistan, or Turkish Kurdistan) because no political unit has ever existed in history with those names. As a result, the term Kurdistan is a conditional one, constantly subject to change territorially throughout time.

Arab authors provide some information about the Kurds living in the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates. Arabs often called them Az-Zavzan (from the Kurdish word *zozan* which means summer pasture).² Another common term used referring to Kurds was al-Jibal al-Akrad, which means “Mountains of the Kurds,” or “Kurdish Mountains.”³ *Jibal* is the plural form of *jabal*, meaning a

mountain. This was the name given to the political-geographical unit of the Arab caliphate comprising the south-western regions of Iran or so-called "Persian Iraq," which was a part of historical Marastan in its structure.

It is an indisputable fact that in 640 A.D. during the Arab invasion of North Mesopotamia the caliph's army found Takrit, Holyan, Mosul, and neighboring areas densely inhabited by the Kurds. It is supposed that around the 630s, the Arabs started forcing Islam upon the Kurds.⁴ However, it was only in the ninth century that the process of Kurdish mass conversion to Islam began. In the Middle Ages, the major Kurdish settlements were Mosul, Jezireh, Jibal, Khuzistan (Khuzhastan in the Armenian sources; located to the southwest of Iran), Luristan, and Fars (within the territory of Iran).⁵

According to Nikoghayos Adonts, historical Kurdistan comprised the spacious plateau of the Zagros mountain chain from Lake Urmia and the Bohtan River up to the plains of Luristan. It stretched along the valleys of the Tigris River from the west, and from the Dizful River with its valleys from the east, and included the regions of Soujbulag, Ardelan, and the basin of the Dizful River up to Persian Arabia, as well as North Mesopotamia or Mosul province (*vilayet*).⁶ While mapping the borders of Kurdistan, Adonts took into account not only the dominant ethnic nature in a territorial unit but also its historical-cultural essence and the economy as a whole. He wrote: "Those borders embrace the land inhabited by the Kurds and their kindred mountainous tribes who mainly are of Iranian origin. Geographically the entire territory is perfectly suitable for the lifestyle of its nomadic inhabitants occupied with shepherding. The Alps of the Zagros with their picturesque highlands descending all the way to the river valleys have been inhabited by Iranian nomadic tribes since ancient times."⁷

In the tenth century a number of local dynasties of Kurdish origin developed, such as the Marvanid (Diyarbakir-Jezireh), Hasanwaihid (Daynavar and Shahrezur), Fadluyid (Luristan), Ayyubid (Syria), and Shaddadid. Even though these state formations spread their dominion over vast territories, the Kurds neglected establishing their own national state.

The Kurds were active participants in bloody wars, rebellions and other events in the Middle Ages. They gradually spread

through the entire Middle East as far as Egypt and Algeria. The Egyptian sultans used the Kurds to fight against the Mongols.

The terms "Kurdistan" and "Kurds" first entered into circulation in the twelfth century during the Seljuk dominion. Literary sources mentioned the Kurds for the first time much later, in Rashidaddin Fazlallah Hamadan's *Javan at-Tamrikh* and Hamdallah Mostoufi Khazvini's *Nuhzad al-kulub*,⁸ where the Kurds were described as nomadic and cattle-breeding tribes. Medieval Arab authors frequently used the name Kurd to mean "nomadic shepherd."

In more recent times, prior to World War I the territory understood to be Kurdistan was divided between the Ottoman Empire and Qajar Iran. After the war, the Kurdish-populated territories in the Middle East were divided up and placed under the control of Turkey, Iran, and Iraq, along with a small section in Syria. The last two countries had only been created recently. Since then, the terms Iranian Kurdistan, Iraqi Kurdistan, and Turkish Kurdistan, which had all existed even earlier, have been regularly used in historical literature. Hence, it can be concluded that the Kurdish people were scattered through the broad territory of the Middle East and divided by the state borders of Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria. Currently, besides the abovementioned countries there are a certain number of Kurds in the North Caucasus, the Russian Federation, newly formed republics of Central Asia, European countries, the United States, and many other countries all over the world.

It is a fact that throughout their long history of many centuries, the Kurds have never been able to establish their own statehood, partly because of their separation and dispersion in various countries, and this has surely obstructed their political and national solidarity. A lack of consciousness of national unity existed up to the twentieth century. Because of the existence of tribal organizations, the idea of collective independence was never a subject of concern, so that the Kurdish ideal and desired goal was only the independence of their tribal states. Karo Sasuni, an Armenian expert on the Kurds, wrote: "The feeling of ultimate independence did not receive a political form throughout the centuries, and the Kurds were not motivated to construct a national state and seek their security and independence in a collective homeland."⁹ Of course, at various periods of time, some Kurdish tribes were able

to establish large or small feudal principalities in various areas of the Middle East which by no means could be considered as national compact states.

Often the entire territory of Western Armenia is capriciously and forcibly included in the understanding of Turkish Kurdistan, even though Turkish Kurdistan is an entirely different region from a geographical viewpoint. The practice of concealing the name Western Armenia under the general name Kurdistan, and representing Armenia to other nations in such a way surely has a purely political subtext. This practice was born as early as the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the Turkish ruling class led by the logic of their anti-Armenian policy started referring in this fashion to the territory originally known to them as "Ermenistan" (Armenia) or even "Ermenistan-i kebir" ("Great Armenia").

British politicians concerned about the rapid increase in the Russophilia of the Western Armenians and having the protection of the Ottoman Empire status quo as the major principle of their Middle Eastern policy imitated the arbitrary expedient of Turkish diplomacy with pleasure. As soon as England was finally assured that the Armenians' Russian orientation was unwavering and irreversible, it "started directing its support and favor to the Kurds as an opposition to the Armenians who were considered Russia's allies and followers," according to Adonts.¹⁰ The idea of turning Kurdistan into a political body to create a buffer against Russia belonged to the English consul William Gifford Palgrave.¹¹

Thus, Western Armenia was called Kurdistan in the official documents of the British Foreign Office and in other diplomatic literature, and the consul of Erzurum was known as "the consul of Kurdistan." Undoubtedly, the Armenians were surprised to see how the Turkish view about Armenia won acceptance in English circles. Therefore, in 1879 they were obliged to loudly complain against such an unfriendly step through Nerses Varzhapetian, their Patriarch in Constantinople. Even after that, the Turkish ruling class kept calling Armenia either "Kurdistan" or the "Eastern Anatolian provinces," and sometimes the "Eastern provinces" (*vilayet-i sharkiye*).

Simultaneously, the Ottoman government initiated, wrote Adonts, "a planned and vigorous activity to set up the corresponding ethnic group under Armenia's new name or to strength-

en the foreign elements already present. They did this through their tried-and-true measures, through the massacre of the native Armenian population, its expulsion, the forcible confiscation of land, and the settlement of the Armenians' native dwellings with Kurds and other tribes often brought from faraway lands."¹²

It was odd that even the Russians imitated their political opponent Great Britain, and gradually started calling Western Armenia "Turkish Kurdistan," or simply Kurdistan, in their diplomatic correspondence. Russian military and regular maps were printed renaming the Armenian plateau the "Kurdish plateau." They termed the Erzurum zone North Kurdistan and the area of Bitlis and Van South Kurdistan. Adonts wrote: "A few Russians even went so far as to insist that the Kurds were the real natives in Armenia, and that Armenia had always been a Kurdish land."¹³ This prominent scholar justifiably found such a Russian position to be even more incomprehensible "because it was Russia itself that was the cause for the English mistrust towards Armenia. Instead of strengthening its position in Armenia Russia turned into a rival of England in a Kurdophile policy."¹⁴ In Adonts' opinion, the Russian statesmen evidently had one goal in mind - depriving England of Kurdish support.

These dangerous games against the cradle - ancestral land - of the Armenian nation were most evidently the expression of the long-term plans of the great powers which intended to determine the political destiny of the Middle East. In the mid-nineteenth century political conditions in this explosion-prone area of the world developed in such a manner that many would be pleased, according to N. Adonts, to:

move the Kurdish Question to the Armenian highland and search for its solution over there. According to an opinion of certain circles, turned into a currently widespread one, the Kurdish question is considered to be inseparably connected to the Armenian cause; moreover, some tried to give it a predominant significance in the Armenian motherland. The lamentable endeavors to turn Armenia into Kurdistan have drawn together Armenians' friends and adversaries. It is at least understandable that for centuries Turkish politicians tried to fill Armenia with

Kurds and change Ermenistan into Kurdistan, but if such a transformation of the Armenian land is connected with the unconcealed or disguised intentions of those European powers which were called upon to protect the Armenians from Turkish oppression, this is nauseating with its immorality.¹⁵

Nowadays as well, a number of Kurdish chauvinists in various countries who have become infatuated with the falsification of history or are carrying out certain political orders, designate Western Armenia without hesitation as "Turkish Kurdistan" or simply "Kurdistan" in their books, propaganda publications, and even maps. They, in particular, try to "justify" their action with the argument that currently no Armenians live in Western Armenia, and the area is heavily populated with Kurds. And so, the reality that the Armenian ancestral land was completely wiped clean of Armenians as a result of the devastating storm of genocide is completely ignored and forgotten. That is not yet all. These chauvinist Kurdish political adventurers try to trace back the roots of "Kurdism" to ancient periods about which no reliable data exist in general.¹⁶ These individuals who call themselves historians, having absolutely no argumentation or scholarly basis, take their ignorance to ridiculous levels in a capricious manner, and incessantly want to "prove" that the Kurds were the autochthonous population in Western Armenia, that their historical life started there from time immemorial, and that Armenia has been a Kurdish settlement since ancient times. Surely the subtext here is purely political and has no connection whatsoever with objective reality. As Adonts said, "these all are done simply to justify the Kurds' rights as equal to those of the Armenians to the Armenian highlands."¹⁷

In reality, until the late Middle Ages no substantial numbers of Kurdish people lived in Western Armenia. Neither Armenian nor non-Armenian sources contain records about the existence of a dense Kurdish ethnic population in that territory.

During his scientific research Nikoghayos Adonts, an outstanding expert on the medieval history of Armenia and Southwest Asia, found no significant Kurdish traces on the Armenia plateau and concluded unequivocally: "The Kurds have not lived in Armenia since time immemorial as insisted on by random visi-

tors, individuals with little or no knowledge about the subject, who are largely the political agents of various countries."¹⁸ He wrote on another occasion: "The Kurds have not lived in Armenia since time immemorial but were settled here by the Turkish ruling class."¹⁹ Of course, it is also not excluded that in the seventh century during the Arab invasions several Kurdish tribes which had converted to Islam, the new religion of the Arabs, came to Western Armenia with the invading armies and settled down in certain southern areas. According to the evidence of the sources, in the eleventh to thirteenth centuries during the Seljuk and Mongol invasions a part of the Kurdish aristocracy which entered into their service received littoral land near Lake Van and the eastern Euphrates River, and tried to establish independent or semi-independent tribal unions there. For instance, Kurdish tribal unions settled down in Bitlis, Akhlat, Sasun, and Chmshkatsag.

The Kurds moved to the north of the Taurus Mountains towards Western Armenia in the fourteenth to fifteenth centuries too. Hence, "except for the [Kurdish] ruling houses of Van and Bitlis which originated in the period of Tamerlane, the rest of the Kurdish territories in the abovementioned regions of Armenia along the Euphrates River and the source of the Tigris River originated during the period of the Turkish-Persian wars on the cusp of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries."²⁰

In the early sixteenth century the new powerful Safavid Iranian state entered the political arena, immediately turning into the opponent of the militaristic and feudal Ottoman Empire. It was to fundamentally change the direction of history in the Middle East, especially as it instantly began a policy of territorial expansion at the expense of the Ottomans.

From the beginning of his reign, Shah Ismail I (1502-1524), the new sovereign of Iran, became noted for the extreme religious and political intolerance of his Kurdish policy. We should take into consideration that at this period of time a large number of various Turkish tribes and tribal groups inhabited Iran (in Iranian Kurdistan), and they lived the independent lifestyle characteristic to nomadic tribes, ignoring the authority of any state. Naturally, Shah Ismail could not tolerate this because he had the ambition of establishing a powerful centralized state. In addition, the shah had declared the Shia branch of Islam as the state religion, and he was

concerned with the religious kinship of the Kurds with the Turkish Sunnis. Consequently, he forcibly converted the Kurds to Shia Islam, intending simultaneously in this way to subjugate them to Safavid statehood and law. The Kurdish persecution policy of the shah was extensive and multipronged. He wanted to administratively subjugate all the Kurdish independent and semi-dependent authorities, abolish the Kurdish tribal nobility, and give the property of the latter to his henchmen. In case of failing all this, as a last resort, he wanted to turn the Kurdish leaders into obedient Kizilbash. This filled the Kurds with an unbreakable resolve to resist Shah Ismail.²¹ At the same time, the Kurdish people in both the Ottoman Empire and Iran started to favor the Ottoman government in hopes of protection from Shah Ismail's persecution.

The Ottoman state did not delay in taking advantage of the Kurds' hostile attitude to the Safavids. In contrast with Shah Ismail, who expelled the Kurdish *bey*s (chieftains) from their land holdings, the Turks distributed land to them and tried to turn them into a hostile force against the Persians. At that period, the Ottomans considered the Safavid state as a power which was capable of obstructing the fervor of their attacks and becoming a serious obstacle for their empire's expansion to the east of the Euphrates.

Due to its important military-strategic position, Armenia was one of the major grounds for the hostile relationship between the two neighbors. Moreover, "the Armenian highlands overlook the plain of Mesopotamia" (Adonts). As the Armenian historian Leo [Arakel Grigori Babakhanian] expressed it, "the Ottoman state could not afford leaving the Armenian plateau in the hands of the Persians because it would mean hindering Turkish movement in the areas of Mesopotamia and Syria, keeping the natural Ottoman homeland [of] Asia Minor, and the coasts of the Mediterranean and the Black seas under perpetual threat."²²

In 1507, Shah Ismail became the first to attack, occupying a great part of Western Armenia, and reaching Babert (Bayburt) and Yorzinka (Erzinjan or Erzincan). Later, in 1508, he conquered Arabian Iraq together with Baghdad, which was one of the most important centers of the international caravan trade.

The Safavids realized their expansionist policy towards the Ottoman Turks under the slogan "war for the sake of the faith," which had a great effect among a part of the Turkish population

of Anatolia discontent with the centralizing policy of the sultans, particularly among Shia Türkmen tribes. The shah conducted energetic religious propaganda through his dervish agents who prompted the formation of Kizilbash secret organizations infused with military spirit. All this became extremely dangerous for the Turks, especially after 1511, when an extensive rebellion broke out in Asia Minor under the watchword of supporting Shah Ismail.

Selim Yavuz (1512-1520) succeeded to the Ottoman throne. He had planned to establish a cohesive orthodox (Sunni) Muslim world under the slogan "one state, one nation, and one religion." In order to expand to the east, he made his motto the defense of Sunnism against Shias, defined as heretics. In this way, the Ottoman Empire created a religious thesis in the name of the restoration of the belief "trampled on and profaned by the Kizilbash" to justify its wars against Iran. To give the war a dimension of religious fanaticism, and to prevent revolts of the Anatolian Shias from the rear, Selim Yavuz ruthlessly punished Shah Ismail's followers in Asia Minor and killed more than forty-five thousand people in accordance with lists prepared in advance.²³ The entire Shia population between the ages of seven to seventy was slaughtered. This cruel action was intended to cleanse the provinces near the Iranian border through which Selim Yavuz intended to lead his army against the shah.

In fact, these two most powerful military-feudal and theocratic states of the Middle East pursued absolutely clear political, territorially expansionist, and economic goals. The Ottoman-Iranian hostile confrontation inevitably pulled a number of peoples into its orbit. The two sides preparing for war vigorously tried to win allies from the peoples living in the potential theater of military actions. The aim of Ottoman diplomacy in particular was to recruit the Kurdish war-loving Sunni tribes to fight for them. The sultan made generous promises to their tribal chiefs about granting land, new offerings, and privileges, while fully protecting their previous rights and customs. As a result, the Kurds in Iran and Arabian Mesopotamia who were dissatisfied with Shah Ismail's Kurdish policy from both political and religious points of view, and were the target of the shah's persecutions, gladly agreed to support the sultan in the upcoming war and by doing so reestablish their independence.²⁴ As for the remaining population in the potential

battlefield, including the Armenians of Gharabagh (Karabakh) and Nakhijevan, they had an Iranian political orientation.²⁵

In 1514 under the guise of the false slogan "for the protection of the faith," Sultan Selim Yavuz levied war against, as he expressed it, the "schismatic and profaner of Islam" Shah Ismail. On August 22, a decisive battle took place on the plain of Chaldiran, northeast of Lake Van, where the sultan, having strong artillery at his disposal, utterly defeated the Kizilbash troops.²⁶ Shah Ismail fled for his life, leaving his throne, harem, and treasury to the enemy.²⁷ The Ottoman army quickly invaded and took control of Tabriz.

The victory on the plain of Chaldiran had profound political significance for the Ottoman Empire. First of all, it was the commencement of the invasion of the entire Armenian highland, which secured a natural strategic fortress against the invasion of Iran from the east and any other invasions in general, and thus radically changed the correlation of forces in Asia. In addition, the victory definitively determined the Kurdish position towards the opposing states: an Ottoman orientation became prevalent among a majority of the Kurdish tribes. The participation of a number of Kurdish tribal leaders in the battle of Chaldiran on the side of the Ottoman army became a decisive factor for the final victory. They proved through the shedding of their blood that they were ready to cooperate with the Ottoman Empire. Taking advantage of the war, and in part due to Ottoman instigation, the Iranian Kurds were inflamed with a rebellious spirit and tried to restore their prior rights and independence, of which they were deprived by Shah Ismail.²⁸ After the battle, twenty-five influential Kurdish leaders such as Malek Shah, the head of one of the powerful tribes, the *amir* of Hisn Kayfa, Ahmed Bey of Meyafarekin, Muhammed Bey of Sasun, Ghasm Bey of Agil, Jamshid Bey of Balu [Palu], the princes of Mosul, Kirkuk, and Sgherd [Siirt], and others who were previously neutral, started supporting the Turks²⁹ and reestablished their feudal rights. Certainly, there were some Kurdish leaders who remained faithful to the shah to the last, refusing to become the ally of the Ottomans or to participate in the battle. Ala ud-Dowleh, the ruler of Zulkadir was one of them. In order to punish him Selim Yavuz ordered the military leaders Sinan Pasha and Shahsuvar oghli Ali Beg to attack the Zulkadir principality

with their Janissaries and disciplined the noncompliant ruler. The Turks defeated Ala ud-Dowleh in a battle at the base of Turandagh (Turan Mountain) and captured him and his two sons. The sultan ordered the confiscation of his land.³⁰

After the battle of Chaldiran, Selim Yavuz decided to express his gratitude to the Kurdish leaders who helped him emerge from the war as a victor. To carry out that policy in practical ways, he appointed Idris Bitlisi, the representative from the Kurdish princely family from Baghesh (Bitlis), as their governor (*hakim*) and ordered him to arrange the allocation of newly conquered lands. Idris Bitlisi had previously served the leader of the Akkoyunlus and had a great deal of experience in administrative affairs of state. On the eve of the battle of Chaldiran, he had persuaded a number of Kurdish tribal chiefs to join the Ottoman army. During the battle, heading Kurdish military regiments, Idris Bitlisi joined the sultan's army and marched along towards Iran promoting a Turkophile policy in Kurdish areas and winning the Kurds over to the Ottoman side. Adonts noticed that "due to this Kurd's influence, the policy of Kurdish sponsorship was initiated. The Kurds were granted feudal rights partially over their conquered lands as well as areas conceded by the sultans. In the early sixteenth century, supported by the Ottoman authorities, the movement of Kurds to Armenia increased. By pushing the Kurds into Armenia ... the Ottoman government knowingly encouraged the establishment of Muslim domination over Christian rayahs."³¹

Idris Bitlisi, who cherished the idea of establishing a general alliance of Kurdish leaders and founding a great Kurdish principality with the help of Sultan Selim, dynamically began his work. As Gabriel Ayvazovski wrote, "Afterwards the order came from the sovereign to Idris to reform the country according to his good judgment, and with the order also came the gifts of twenty five thousand pieces of gold, five hundred robes, and seventeen banners to distribute among the Kurds. And Idris joined to the Ottoman province only eleven out of nineteen districts of the land of Mesopotamia and left the mountain strongholds for the Kurdish nobility to use as seen necessary."³² Idris Bitlisi, who in literature is also known as Molla Idris, had placed the protection of the interests of the small Kurdish tribal chiefs as the cornerstone of his policies, and worked to help the latter gain the rights of feudal landlords in the conquered provinces of Western Armenia.³³

Through Idris' mediation, in 1514-15 Sultan Selim Yavuz endorsed a military agreement with the Kurdish *emirs*, *beglerbegs* and *aghas*: (1) all the princedoms (amirates) could maintain their independence and their domains; (2) they would be hereditarily passed down from father to son; the sultan validated the legitimacy of the descendant with a *firman* (decree); (3) the Kurds had the obligation to participate in all the wars of the Ottoman Empire; (4) the empire, in its turn, was obligated to protect the Kurdish principalities from foreign attacks; (5) the Kurds were required to provide the caliphate with traditional religious gifts and to regularly pay taxes and dues to the sultan's treasury.³⁴ According to historian Sherif-ed-din, the firman was signed and validated by the sultan. However, there were blanks in which to insert the names of the Kurdish rulers, and *hakim* Idris was entrusted to write the names himself - in other words, he was given *carte-blanc*.

The agreement was first signed by the most influential twenty-five Kurdish leaders whose tribes were brought and settled down in places like Jezireh, Hakkari (Aghbak), Diyarbakir, Balu, Genj, Chapaghjur, Hazo (south Sasun), Chmshkatsag, and Bitlis (Baghesh). According to Kurdish historian Sharaf Khan Bitlisi, the Kurdish tribes of Semiran (or Nemiran), Mahmudi, Dumbuli, and Pazuki were settled in Van *eyalet* [province], occupying large expanses. He also mentioned the Hakkari, Belilan, Bilbasi, Kavalisi, Kisyani (Kesyani), Shekkaki and other tribes which settled in the south of Armenia.³⁵ The khans of Bitlis from the Ruzak tribe were distinguished by their position and influence, and in official state documents they were addressed with honorary names such as "Grand Prince," "Autocrat Prince," and "Secular and Spiritual Master."³⁶

As a result of constant encouragement by the Ottoman Empire and due to the vigorous activities of Idris Bitlisi, the Kurds started moving to Armenia primarily from three directions: from Diyarbakir, from Mosul through Hakkari, and from Iran through the area of Soujbulagh.³⁷ Thus, nomadic Kurdish tribes with their herds moved to Western Armenia from the areas to the south of the Taurus Mountains, the northern part of Mesopotamia (present-day Iraqi Kurdistan), and from Iran. Idris Bitlisi was also able to persuade around twenty Kurdish tribal chiefs allied with the Safavids to join the Ottomans, and the former moved to the Di-

yarbakir region to settle.³⁸ Idris united the huge territory between Nisibis and Dersim under the name of the province of Diyarbakir and in turn divided it into 19 *sanjaks* (banners), that is to say, military feudal units. He entrusted eight of those sanjaks to the control of Kurdish *amiras* (Kulb, Mihran, Terjil, Atak, Pertek, Chapaghjur, Ochermik, Saghman (Sakman)). In accordance with such administrative divisions, Van province (vilayet) was split into 37 sanjaks, and the Kurds received them by right of succession. In addition, Idris provided the Kurdish tribal chiefs with five small areas near the source of the Tigris River as their own property, the *hüküms* (*hukumats*). He relocated some of the Kurdish tribes to Erzurum, thus establishing the practice of Kurdish settlement in the "heart" of Western Armenia. He also settled a great number of nomadic, semi-nomadic, and sedentary Kurds in the regions of Vaspurakan, Kars, and many other places rich in pastures.

The leaders of the newcomer tribes conquered Armenian lands with the use of arms as well as by the rights bestowed upon feudal lords, declaring themselves as the sole lawful masters over those lands. At the same time, the Ottoman government deported the Armenians and presented the consequently vacant lands to the Kurdish tribal lords and their *ashirets* (tribes). A great number of Armenians in particular were exiled from the regions along the Iranian border on the eastern slopes of Mount Ararat, Bayazit, Diadin, Alashkert, and the districts north of Lake Van.³⁹ In the late sixteenth century, the Ottomans settled numerous Kurdish tribes in Transcaucasia, the Ararat valley, Sharur, Siunik and Artsakh with the intention of inserting a wedge and politically paralyzing the local Armenian population.⁴⁰

In brief, in the early sixteenth century the ethnic invasion of Kurdish tribes encompassed the whole of Western Armenia. The invasion continued throughout the following centuries, accelerating especially in the seventeenth century. Kurdish *hüküms*, *ojakliks*, *yurtluks*, *ekrad beyliks* and other similar units were founded in the territory of Western Armenia. Sultan Selim appointed Idris Bitlisi the supreme ruler or governor of the newly-formed *hüküms*, which were completely independent units and by no means were subject to Ottoman administration. However, it must be mentioned that the existence of large, independent Kurdish states and emirates on the conquered land did not correspond

to the sultan's plans about founding new administrative systems because in that case favorable grounds would be created for the separate entities to strive to establish their own self-governing autocratic principalities or completely independent states. The sultan and Idris Bitlisi had completely compatible views on that matter. Therefore, they constantly tried to prevent the formation of large administrative units and split the existing large units into smaller ones, into sanjaks managed by *sanjakeys*. Consequently the newly formed *hükümet*s, *ojaklik*s, *yurtluk*s, and *ekrad beylik*s were also not allowed to be or become large administrative units.

Ghukas Inchichian explained the essence of *hükümet*s in this way: "The *hükümet* is that land, which is the private property of a clan and its masters are princes who are inheritors from father to son from the same clan in accordance with the inheritance of similar principalities which are found in Germany and other parts of Europe. There are many such principalities in Anatolia among the Kurds, in the *pashaliks* of Diyarbakir, Van and Baghdad, some of which periodically revolt and fight against the *pasha*."⁴¹ The same author mentioned that the *hükümet*s as well as *ojaklik*s and *yurtluk*s were concerned with the protection of the borders, which was why, as a rule, they were formed in the areas near state boundaries.⁴²

Sharaf Khan Bitlisi gave a comprehensive idea about the enormous authority of the Kurdish tribal lords who possessed armed regiments. "Though they never laid claim to the title of sultan, they did have the power and the right to have a *khutbe* [honoring prayer] uttered after their names in the mosques and mint their own monetary units."⁴³ In Armenian literary sources, those tribal chiefs were identified as "the lords of families and houses and villages and meadows."⁴⁴

What goals did the Ottoman sultans pursue by populating Western Armenia with Kurdish people and what were the consequences? The first and the foremost reason for settling the newly conquered territories of all Eastern Anatolia with Kurdish tribes was to secure for the government the steadfast and reliable support of a new ethnic group which shared same religious faith as it, and to use this group against the Christian population, specifically against the Armenians, who composed the overwhelming majority in the region. The Kurds also were to keep the Christians

obedient to the government. It is obvious that since the sixteenth century, the policy of governing Ottoman circles concerning Armenian-Kurdish relations was based upon the principle of granting superiority to Muslims over Christians. Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, during the practically unending Turkish-Iranian wars, the Kurds formed a chain of impregnable fortresses against Iran, thwarting Iran's expansionist ambitions towards the west. "All the Kurds of Armenia," the historian Leo noted, "were driven to an obstinate war against Persia."⁴⁵

As Sultan Suleiman [Süleyman] I the Magnificent (1520-1566) put it, they were able to erect an invincible barrier made of flesh and blood which stretched from Georgia to Baghdad, and from Basra to Shahrizor. Each Kurdish leader was assigned to maintain the security of one section. For instance, Muhammad Beg, the Kurdish ruler of Shirvan, had to protect the fortress of Berkri, while Bahlul Beg, the emir of the Süleymani tribe, was responsible for the security of the Bayazit region. Entire confederations of numerous tribes were involved in this imperative activity; therefore the best lands and pastures were arranged to feed them, and their masters were declared masters of *ziamets* (a type of fief) and *sanjaks*. Besides being exempt from the taxation system, the Kurdish tribes living along the frontiers enjoyed other privileges and rights.

The Kurds became the allies of the Turks not only in invading Western Armenia and subjugating it to the Ottoman Empire, but also in conducting military invasions in the Middle East. Thanks to the military support of its Kurdish allies, the Ottoman Empire was able to invade the Arabian territories of Mesopotamia.

One of the goals of the Ottoman government's policies in Western Armenia was to secure "the priority of the Kurdish nobility and its dominant position."⁴⁶ As a result, the Ottoman rule "substantiated once again and fortified the Kurdish reality in Armenia."⁴⁷ Sultan Selim I tried to replace the old hereditary nobility with new military nobility which would be directly dependent on the sultan and therefore would faithfully serve him. In the sixteenth to seventeenth centuries, a sizeable portion of cultivated lands and pastures in Western Armenia already belonged to Kurdish tribal chiefs who possessed these lands as private property. They were not subject to accounting or redistribution, and their income was not taxable. There were no Ottoman officials or

troops on these estates. The Kurdish feudal lords governed their lands themselves with the help of their own armed regiments.⁴⁸ As a result of these policies of the sultans, the Akkoyunlu and Karakoyunlu Türkmen rulers of Armenia were replaced with Kurdish beys.⁴⁹

In a number of regions in Western Armenia where the population density of the Kurdish- and Turkish-speaking nomadic tribes was gradually increasing, entire areas became subject to nomadization, which brought about the collapse of trade, handicrafts, and economic life in general. By strengthening the Kurdish community in Armenia, the Arab community in Syria, and the Turkish community in Anatolia, the Ottoman Empire was consciously realizing the principle of Muslim supremacy over the Christians. Adonts remarked: "By the will of the sultans, the agricultural country was standing at the path to a return to nomadic pastoral life, to a regressive and prehistoric condition which would inexorably bring with it the degradation of cultural and economic life."⁵⁰ Such was the situation in the empire, with backward pastoral tribes at the top of the political structure, possessing the higher positions and enjoying the privileges of the upper class, while the population with a developed agricultural and industrial background was at the bottom of the social structure, struggling for simple survival. Ottoman policy was guided by that choice and directed at the constant weakening of the Christian population. Nikoghayos Adonts noted, "State interests correctly understood cannot tolerate an irrational situation in which uncivilized tribes stagnant at the stage of the pastoral lifestyle occupy the upper levels of the state structure, and the civilized farming and industrial populations are pushed down to the basement. Such a system is condemned to destruction; or, it may survive with the gradual degradation of the civilized stratum until it descends to the level of the savage upper stratum. Ottoman policy preferred the latter possibility, with the goal in mind to persistently impair and weaken the Christian population."⁵¹

The Christian population was considered to be *rayah* in the Ottoman Empire. This meant that compared with the Muslim population the Christians were people without rights, and were forced to pay *jizye* (head tax), which was a humiliating type of tax. The Christian church was also subjugated to the Islamic state. The

Ottomans created the system of *millets* for the religious minorities which, it is true, to a certain degree assured the preservation of national and religious identity. In essence, the millets composed a method of guaranteeing status for the religious minorities. They were self-governing communities with their own laws, and religious leaders who were responsible before the central authorities for their congregations. However, regardless of all this, the Ottoman government tried to hinder the development of the Christian peoples by all possible means, as it was feared that they might become a great danger for the state. Due to these reasons, the measures against the Christians "became a planning matter for the government."⁵²

Karo Sasuni wrote: "During the first centuries of its dominion, Turkey patronized and protected the Armenians as a constructive element, especially since they were politically harmless."⁵³ Sasuni immediately added that the patronage "reached only to the borders of Kurdistan and Armenia. Beyond those borders, the destiny of the Armenian population was left to the Kurdish tribal lords and the *beylerbeys* of Erzurum and Diyarbakir. The Turkish government was completely absent from those areas, and only appeared with its troops near the border (on the roads of Mosul and Erzurum) when the Turkish-Persian war drew Turkish troops to that region."⁵⁴ Sasuni consequently called the sixteenth century "the period of Kurdish independence with nominal Ottoman suzerainty." During that period the Armenians turned into the subjects of the Kurdish tribal chiefs and feudal lords, though from a legal viewpoint they were under Ottoman suzerainty. Sasuni concluded, "Though from a military and state perspective the Armenian provinces were under the banner of the Ottoman Empire, in real life they were subjugated to the Kurdish rulers."⁵⁵

Truly, another century was needed for the Ottoman Empire to establish real authority over its vast eastern territories, especially over Western Armenia. It could not tolerate the existence of Kurdish independent and semi-dependent states on this territory with its great strategic and economic significance, especially when the evident sympathy of its inhabitants lay with Iran. Beginning in the seventeenth century, the Ottoman government introduced a policy of administrative centralization in the east because the dominant control of the Kurdish tribes over the area and their in-

dependent and semi-independent subsistence had become an obstacle to the establishment of Ottoman administration in the area. Yet, this policy did not mean that the Ottoman ruling circles intended to substantially restrict the rights and the privileges of the Kurdish tribal chief landlords or to completely eliminate them. The Kurds were necessary for the sultans' state to solve a number of problems of vital importance. Moreover, those problems were not merely short term but were of strategic importance for the long term. For instance, from the rule of Sultan Selim Yavuz in sixteenth century to the last sultan of the Ottoman dynasty, Mehmed VI Vahideddin in the twentieth century, one of the core problems of Ottoman eastern policy was the prevention and elimination of the aspirations to liberation of the Armenian people with the help of armed Kurdish tribes. The cornerstone of the Ottoman Empire's policy in Western Armenia was the attempt to aggravate Armenian-Kurdish hatred, relying on Kurdish support to oppress and restraint the Armenians.⁵⁶ The Kurdish historian Nuri Der-simi shared this opinion: "Sultan Selim Yavuz was trying to incite the Kurds against the Armenians."⁵⁷

From the sixteenth century, influential Ottoman ruling circles consistently endeavored to change the demographic picture of Western Armenia to the detriment of the Armenian population. "For centuries Turkish politicians had tried to fill Armenia with Kurds, and change Ermenistan [Armenia] into Kurdistan,"⁵⁸ wrote Adonts. The settlement of Kurdish tribes in the regions inhabited by Armenians began the modification of the ethnic structure in the Armenian highland, and Armenia lost the homogeneity of its population. From that period, the numbers of the newcomer Kurdish element in the cradle of the Armenian nation started increasing significantly. Reflecting that fact, the Englishman Harry Finnis Blosse Lynch who had visited Western Armenia noticed that "a powerful colony of this people [Kurds] were brought to their present seats in Armenia through a definite act of public policy on the part of the Turkish Power."⁵⁹ The logical continuation of that policy was the gradual eviction of the Armenian nation from their native land. The Armenians started abandoning their motherland, trying to find refuge and comparably more secure living conditions in foreign countries.⁶⁰

The *vardapet* [celebrate priest who serves as a teacher] Grigor Kamakhetsi (Daranaghtsi), wrote about the depopulation of the country: "When we came from Kaffa to Istanbul, the whole land of Armenia left from the south of Theodopolis [Erzurum]. Some had come two summers ago, and many came with us, which was in 1605, and many others came later. They scattered about Anatolia and Rumelia, and in every city as far as Belgrade, and the lands of Poltavia [present-day Romania] and Poland."⁶¹

"As a result of the dreadful chaos in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, numerous Armenian districts were completely abandoned, and the number of the Armenians decreased to a negligible quantity. In general, we can say that by the early eighteenth century the [population of the] Armenian provinces largely migrated or melted away as victim of the brutal licentiousness of the Turks,"⁶² wrote Karo Sasuni. The place of the Armenian feudal lords who denationalized the Armenians again was mainly taken by Kurdish tribal chiefs. Only the Armenian churches and the monasteries, remnants of the Armenian feudal families, and the wealthy stratum of rural communities were able to preserve some of their lands and possessions. Sasuni continued, "The national ruling consciousness and ambitions of the Armenian nation dissipated and were superseded by petty personal ambitions and religious-ecclesiastical concerns."⁶³

The small Armenian feudal authorities of Western Armenia were able to maintain their existence only in the southern regions of the country, in the inaccessible parts of the mountainous provinces like Zeytun, Sasun, Savur, Isyan, Chapaghjur, Khnus, Moks, Shatakh, and mountainous regions in the north of Diyarbakir.⁶⁴ Those Armenian principalities were able to maintain their existence on their small portions of land mainly due to the decline of the Ottoman government and because of the Kurdish begs' constant anti-governmental revolts. The population of these semi-independent Armenian regions did not pay taxes to the Ottoman state. The historian Leo said, "Freedom, however, cost the mountain dwellers dearly. They were cut off from the entire world; they had to be cautious and suspicious, and constantly armed, with all their attention focused on their weapons and battles."⁶⁵ Remarkably, the Kurds respected the existence of the Armenian small principalities, which were limited to the boundaries of some

mountainous districts.⁶⁶ As for the rest of the Armenians, every attempt at resistance against the subjugation policy of the Ottoman administration and Kurdish tribal chiefs was suppressed with weapons.⁶⁷

Beginning in the sixteenth century, for two hundred years the stream of Kurdish tribal migration to Western Armenia never stopped. By the early eighteenth century, those tribes had spread to almost all the regions of Western Armenia.⁶⁸ There were five large Kurdish principalities in Western Armenia and neighboring Kurdistan: Bitlis, Hakkari, Amadia, Jezireh and Bayazit. From an administrative viewpoint, their territory nominally entered into the structure of eponymous vilayets or provinces; however, in fact they were principalities independent of the pashas of the vilayets.

“Did the alterations in the ornamental picture of superficial feudalism in Armenia change in a corresponding fashion its underlying ethnic makeup? Was the modification of the upper strata of society reflected in the structure of the lower strata?” Adonts asked and answered those questions himself: “Just as the Mongols were unable to turn the Armenian people into Mongols during their dominion, and just as the Türkmens did not succeed in changing the Armenians into Türkmens during their dominion, the Kurdish tribal chiefs too failed to make Kurds out of the Armenian nation during their rule. The heart, the soul, and the entire essence of this settled, industrious population remained Armenian as it had been for centuries, and it will remain so for centuries to come.”⁶⁹

Thus, in the Late Middle Ages the Kurds became the allies of the Ottomans in continuous wars in Europe and Asia, as well as in the invasion of Western Armenia and its preservation within the empire. Truly, the Ottoman state could hardly have succeeded in securing its dominion in the region if not for Kurdish military political support.

* * *

The Armenian and the Kurdish peoples lived side by side under the control of the Ottoman state for more than five hundred years. That was definitely the most dark and difficult period in the history of the Armenian people. As the Kurds shared the

same religion with the Turks, the Kurdish people did not become the subject of religious persecution. Moreover, it enjoyed certain privileges and rights that Christians did not. However, whenever Kurds made efforts towards the protection of their national identity and cultural traditions, they were severely punished by the Turkish government. It is a well-known reality that for centuries the only way of solving national questions in the Ottoman Empire was by physical extermination, assimilation, and changing the national identity of peoples or national communities. So, while the most common method of the realization of that policy against the Armenians was massacres, the best way for the Kurds was the policy of assimilation and Turkification, as well as their use in Ottoman battles, like fodder for cannons — in other words, to wear them down for centuries in unending wars of conquest.

Karo Sasuni wrote: “When recollecting the four hundred years of events in Armenian and Kurdish history, and we carefully observe the bloody march of these two unfortunate peoples on the stage of history, without hesitation we come to the conclusion that even though their political, economical, physical, as well as intellectual misfortunes were born of ruthless Turkish domination, they were nourished, grew, and turned disastrous because of Armenian-Kurdish strife.”⁷⁰

The Ottoman Empire, which for centuries had a despotic administrative structure, had as a cornerstone of its policies the inciting of the peoples living on its territories against each other. In particular, the Turkish government was fearful of the unification of the peoples inhabiting the farther eastern periphery of the country and their joint uprising against the Ottoman yoke, so the Ottoman Empire maintained a policy of “divide and rule” by keeping the Armenians and the Kurds in constant hostility.

Turkish ruling circles made continual efforts to eradicate the Kurdish sense of national consciousness. Using their religion, Islam, as a tool, they intended turning the Kurds into a pure Muslim community. For that reason they always engaged in propaganda on the false and unscientific theory about Turkish-Kurdish kinship.

Ottoman political figures made vigorous attempts to obstruct the formation of the national self-consciousness, as well as the political coalescence, of the Kurdish people. It is a well-known fact that the Ottoman Empire, which had a feudal system, and was led

by theocratic principles, endeavored by all means to impede the socioeconomic, political, and cultural development of the non-Turkish peoples living on its territory. It thus condemned them to collapse, hindering their natural growth and limiting their spiritual abilities. The result of that evil and hideous policy had its vivid expression in Western Armenia and Kurdistan, with the development and the progress of the Armenian and the Kurdish peoples being thwarted.

To be truthful, it must be noted that the national liberation movements of the Armenian and the Kurdish peoples almost always went in separate directions. Moreover, the Kurds, as a rule, became an instrument for the Ottoman government to paralyze and eliminate the liberation ambitions of the Armenian people. By playing the political ambitions of each people against the other, Turkey aimed to obliterate their dreams about liberation from Ottoman yoke and the establishment of their national states.

Republican Turkey generally kept faithful to the Ottoman traditions about the national question. The Turkish nationalists accomplished their mission of exterminating the Armenians in Western Armenia; as for the Kurdish Question, they straightforwardly expressed the existence of their chauvinism and political intolerance.

Despite the fact that the Kurdish factor has always had an essential impact upon the history of the Armenian people and especially upon the development of the Armenian Question, unfortunately scholarly research on this topic is lacking. Similarly, issues in the history of the Kurdish people, with their profound practical political significance as well as value for knowledge, have not become subjects of scholarly study among the Armenians. The parallel study of the historical development of these two peoples will contribute to the illumination of numerous historical questions.

Today the Kurdish Question retains its urgency and contemporariness. It has become one of the key problems of international politics, and has a certain influence on political developments and interstate relations in the Middle East. It is directly included in the framework of the Near Eastern policy of Western countries.

Presently, tens of millions of Kurds live in the countries of the Middle East -namely in Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Syria, and a number of other Arab countries. Many European and Asian countries have Kurdish diasporas. However, the Kurdish people have not been

sufficiently concentrated and united. The absence of a Kurdish state has inevitably slowed the process of Kurdish ethno-national development. As a consequence, the Kurdish people has fallen significantly behind in the levels of its socio-economic, political, and cultural development compared with the West Asian nations and peoples who enjoy their own statehood. It is pertinent to point out that up until the early twentieth century there was not a single Kurdish school in all of Kurdistan (Turkish, Iranian and Iraqi). The number of educated people in that area could be counted on one's fingers. No Kurdish books or newspapers were published because of the lack of a Kurdish alphabet. Regardless of all this, the logic of history tells us that this people, which currently is the only one with such great numbers throughout the Middle East and yet is deprived of its own country, sooner or later will be able to establish its own national state.

Consequently, in the near or distant future the destinies of the Armenian and the Kurdish nations as territorial neighbors will surely cross again. These neighboring peoples, connected to each other through past and present destiny, should be prepared for this in order not to repeat the painful mistakes of the past.

CHAPTER ONE

ARMENIAN-KURDISH RELATIONS IN WESTERN ARMENIA IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

In the beginning of the nineteenth century the Kurdish people were scattered from Iran to the depths of Asia Minor and in the south as far as Mesopotamia, and they did not have any territorial unification. They lived in tribes, the majority of which were united within tribal unions called *ashirets* in the great expanses of Qajar Iran and the Ottoman Empire. There were also numerous *taifes* or subtribes which maintained their existence independent of the tribal unions. Tribes were formed on the basis of blood relationship, though this was not always a compulsory factor.

Until the end of the nineteenth century, the majority of the Kurds led a nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyle. Animal husbandry, particularly sheep-breeding, was their main livelihood.¹ Aside from the nomadic Kurds, there were sedentary Kurds involved in agriculture, especially the cultivation of grains and vegetables, as well as cattle breeding.² They were called *rayah* or *rayat*, which basically means "subject" or "members of a flock."

The settled Kurds almost always were subject to nomadic tribes, which were considered to be superior in their society. Furthermore, sedentary Kurds were under the obligation to serve the tribal leader by joining his armed detachments.³ Nomadic Kurds undoubtedly had the most essential role in socioeconomic, military, and political life. Colonel A. Kartsev of the Russian army declared: "The rayats could by no means have any influence on the destiny of Kurdistan. The final decision always belonged to the nobles of the nomadic and semi-nomadic ashirets."⁴ Another commentator wrote: "The nomadic tribal leaders had strong armed detachments at their disposal to make the sedentary population carry out their economic demands. It was these groups that pro-

tected the latter from the attacks of other tribes and also carried out banditry against others' property."⁵ As a rule of thumb, the numerous leaders—khans, emirs, sheikhs, and begs—of the nomadic Kurds were always in hostile battles against each other over pastures, water sources, and many other major and minor issues.

The majority of the nomadic Kurds belonged to a particular tribal union. Some tribal leaders controlled numerous tribes. The constant fights for land between the tribes, the ambition to gain domination over other tribes, blood feuds, and other internal conflicts caused frequent splits and demoralization of tribes, which led to the formation of new tribal units. Each ashiret had its tribal nobility (*toruns*), the eldest member of which was recognized as the ashiret's leader, with an almost unrestricted authority over his tribesmen. Vasily Nikitin wrote, "The tribal leader was a real patriarchal tyrant... he was in full control of both the life and the property of each tribesman."⁶

The power of the tribal leaders was measured by the number of their armed forces (*gholams*), which were formed with ordinary tribesmen. The eagerness of the tribes to take up arms and fight was the result of the harsh conditions of their nomadic life and the peculiarities of clan and tribal customs. The nomadic Kurds were always armed and assembled around their tribal leaders. However, the ordinary members of the tribe were in a condition of semi-slavery and unreservedly obeyed their chieftains.⁷ It is worthwhile mentioning that the serf status of the common Kurds "became significantly alleviated due to the general development of feelings of kinship development and common tribal interests."⁸

Agriculturalist or *rayah* Kurds formed the poorest segment of society and were exploited both by their secular and religious upper class, and by the Ottoman government.⁹ Moreover, because of their socio-economic status, the *rayahs* were more dependent on the government than the ashiret Kurds.

In the beginning of the nineteenth century, the majority of the Kurdish tribes residing in Western Armenia were still at the clan, tribal and patriarchal level of development. The majority of the sedentary Kurds were also at the same social development level as the Kurdish nomadic and semi-nomadic tribesmen. Yet, a part of the nomadic tribes was becoming sedentary. The transition from the nomadic lifestyle to a sedentary way of life was accomplished through a transitional semi-nomadic stage.¹⁰

In order to maintain their supremacy, the nobility of the Kurdish tribes was concerned about preserving patrimonial relations between the tribes "because the existence of tribal patrimonial links provided a firm guarantee for the preservation of its military and, consequently, its economic supremacy over the peaceful population of the nearby areas."¹¹ It is worthwhile mentioning that the existence of the Kurdish tribal structure was not only the result of socioeconomic relations among this people but also because of the weak centralization of the Ottoman Empire.¹²

The extent of the privileges and jurisdiction of the Kurdish tribal upper class was extremely wide. Hambartsoum Arakelian wrote in this respect: "Even though the Kurds are considered to be subject to Turkey and Persia, it is the Kurdish aristocracy which holds true authority over the people. Each Kurdish leader is the head of his own tribe; he is its independent governor and judge. The tribal leader simply pays some taxes to the state, and the arrangement of the internal affairs of the people, and their judgment, is under his control. Each leader or *agha* (a hereditary title) decides the amount of the taxes to be gathered, collects them from the provinces, and pays the state a certain amount, partly in cash and partly in kind."¹³

The Kurds had various religious convictions. The substantial majority of the population was Muslim or Sunni. It followed the Hanifi or Shafi'i schools of Sunnism. A certain percentage of the population followed Shia or Ali-Ilahi beliefs. Shia and Sunni Muslims had serious disagreements which often turned into irreconcilable hostility.

Some of the Kurds who were also known as *Shemsiye* practiced the Yezidi faith.¹⁴ The origin of the Yezidi religion still is not fully known to scholars. They sometimes connect it with different religious principles such as the doctrines of Moses, Old Iranian beliefs, Zoroastrianism, or sun worship. It also contains some features of Christianity and Islam. The Book of Revelation and the Black Book explain the main Yezidi principles about nature, the creation of the world, and the eternity of God. Their major sanctuary is the Yezidi prophet Sheikh Adi's tomb and mausoleum, located in the village of Lalesh in the Mosul district.

Some nineteenth-century Armenian authors considered that Yezidis were sectarians who separated from the Armenian

Church. In general the Yezidi religion is swathed in shrouds of mystery and that is the result of the Yezidis' habit of continually concealing the rituals and sacraments of their faith from outsiders.

According to some scholarly opinions, Yezidis have no connection with the Kurds but are a completely different nation. The Yezidi society is based on the principles of caste and is characterized by a reserved and isolated lifestyle.

The Yezidi community was relatively few in number, but was spread out over large territories. Yezidis mainly resided to the north of the Mesopotamian plains, in the mountainous areas of Sinjar, Mosul and Hakkari. There was a small number of Yezidis on the Van and Erzurum plateaus and in Iranian Kurdistan; later on they settled down in the Transcaucasus too.¹⁵ The Muslim Kurds treated the Yezidis with irreconcilable animosity. Russian observer Aleksandr Mikhailovich Kolyubakin noted: "The hatred of the Kurdish Muslims towards the Yezidis was really astonishing. The Haydaranli, Jelali, Zilanli, Hasananli (or Hasanan), Milanli, Toghuri, and other tribesmen tolerated Christians but they deeply hated and despised Yezidis, considering them their rabid enemies, and were ready to harm them at any possible opportunity."¹⁶ The hatred between Muslim Kurds and Yezidi Kurds was the main reason that the latter had special relations with the Armenians. Sometimes they joined the Armenians and fought against the oppression and tyranny of the Muslim Kurds.

It is worth mentioning the significant role of religion in the development of Armenian-Kurdish relations. Islam, in which nearly all intellectual and moral life of the Muslim world had been encapsulated over the centuries, would definitely have a great influence on people who led a pastoral lifestyle and were only on a tribal-patriarchal level of development. Both the Ottoman state and the Kurdish tribal upper stratum used Islam as a tool to preserve and strengthen their supremacy over the Armenian population.

In the beginning of the nineteenth century the Kurdish tribes worked within the structure of a natural economy. Even though in some areas their production had taken on the nature of commodities (for example, carpet-making, the production of woolen materials, sale of local raw materials), the natural nomadic economy was prevalent.¹⁷ Under these conditions, the Kurds were not

able to provide themselves with food and other necessary items without additional sources of income.

The aghas, begs and others who composed the Kurdish feudal aristocracy were the freeloaders of the society - labor was not for them. They were never involved in anything useful to society, not in agriculture, trade or handicrafts.¹⁸

The source of wealth for the Kurdish aristocracy was the land and the livestock it had concentrated in its own hands, the exploitation of subject tribes, wars, robbery, abuse, and raids against the neighboring settled populations. Mikhail Semenovich Lazarev, a Russian Kurdologist, wrote: "This circumstance was typical of other people of Asia (and not only of Asia) too who were on the same level of social development as the Kurds (like the Arab Bedouins, Afghans, and Türkmens). However, since the Kurds lived together with sedentary populations, the plunder of peaceful villages was more widespread than intertribal conflicts in comparison with, for example, the Bedouins of Arabia."¹⁹ The majority of the sedentary population at that time latter "was composed of Christians of the Armenian and Nestorian denominations, who, according to the testimony of English consul Taylor, who visited the region in 1860, were the only working and productive forces of the country."²⁰ Another foreign observer, Isabella Lucy Bird Bishop, wrote, "War and robbery are the business of Kurdish life."²¹

Along with the plunder and robbery, taxation was another way the Kurdish tribal nobility exploited Armenian farmers. As a rule, in Western Armenia, it was the Kurdish feudal landlords who had the right to impose a tax on land called *ashar* (duty paid in kind). In addition to state taxes, the Kurdish tax-collectors forced the Armenians to pay other arbitrary dues. The Kurdish feudal lords lent money or wheat to the Armenian peasantry only to receive multiple amounts back in the future. That system was known as *selem* or *selef*, and it brought great profit to the Kurdish beys. As a consequence, when the Armenian, Kurdish, or Assyrian rayah peasants borrowed money, seeds, draft animals, and other items from the *selefdar* or usurer, they turned first into *maraba*, which was a state of quasi-serfdom, and later on, losing their land, they became outright serfs only maintaining their personal freedom.

The occurrence of *maraba* varied from place to place according to local conditions, customs, and other factors. Moreover, the

conditions of the maraba could abruptly change depending on the fickle temper of the landlord, the time, and the place. There were marabas that cultivated the beg's (chieftain's) land, becoming his "man" or serf. Other marabas had their own agricultural tools and draft animals, worked on the beg's land, and thus paid the tithe or *ashar* tax to the state, as well as the required *noksan* tax to the beg by ploughing and sowing the land. This kind of maraba was obligated to work at the beg's household or farm with his family without getting any payment for his work.²²

And so, marabas were actually unofficial serfs without any rights or support from the government. A system of serfdom undoubtedly existed in Western Armenia and to it was attributed the most callous features specific to medieval times. The Turkish government tried to keep the relations between the Kurdish feudal lords and Armenian peasants unchanged because in a roundabout manner they received a portion of the money and the profit that the Kurdish landlords robbed from the peasants.

For an ashiret notable who possessed spacious land but was unwilling and unable to farm, the Armenian peasant was a source of endless wealth. Van intellectual and educator Hambardzum Yeramian said, "While the Kurds hunted or fought, the Armenian peasants labored to earn bread for them, served at their houses for free, taking care of all the aghas' domestic needs without payment, and went to Van or Karani to do shopping for the landlords. They were the aghas' messengers, on holidays they brought presents for their aghas, and they did other favors."²³

According to the evidence of German traveler Paul Müller-Simonis, the Kurdish aghas of Bohtan had imposed such heavy taxes in kind on the Armenian peasants that the only way for the latter to save themselves was to escape.²⁴ Besides the corvee (*olam* or *angarya*) and tax in kind, the Armenian peasants had to pay monetary taxes both to the landlords and the government.

The maraba system basically led to the deprivation of the peasants of their land, especially as an article of Ottoman legislation gave the right to own land after controlling over ten years. As a result of that law, the nobility of the nomadic Kurds gradually acquired the lands, pastures, and meadows which once belonged to the Armenian population.

The Armenian peasant serfs' dependency on Kurdish feudal lords was called "*kâfirlik*"²⁵ or "*khafirlik*," and this system was characterized by Ruben Bekgulyants as "lawlessness and violence."²⁶ He notes that in Western Armenia the Kurdish begs held on tightly to their *kâfirlik* rights, not wanting by any means to lose them.

Besides the economic exploitation of the sedentary farming population, there were also other ways of exploitation. Khachatur Abovian described one of them, the right of winter quarters or *ghshlagh* [*kışlak*]²⁷ in the following way: "after descending from the grassy mountains and valleys they [the Kurdish tribes] found shelter for their countless herds of sheep and cattle at Armenian households during the long and severe winter months without compensation. That was why the farmers had to store measureless food for the appropriate season of the year and winter supplies--so that they would remain free from their [the Kurds'] terrible vengeance. Neither the law nor the government could protect them from that oppression. The slightest resistance was met with the most ruthless brutality."²⁸

Aleksandr Mikhailovich Kolyubakin wrote, "Living for months in Armenian villages, and exacting numerous taxes and tribute from them, they were ready to rob the villagers at any suitable occasion, to drive away herds of animals, burn the grass, destroy the fields by letting the cattle graze there, and so forth."²⁹

Besides *ghshlagh*, there were other methods of non-economic obligation. The Armenian marabas had to work for begs without payment, carrying out a variety of services, transporting their goods and tents from one place to another, and providing them with horses and manpower to accompany them during their hunt. They had to pay ransom (*bach*) if they decided to marry a bride from the territory of the beg.

As another type of *khafirlik* dues, the ashiret chieftains demanded material for clothing from the Armenians; and they even demanded the cost of sewing their clothes.³⁰ No *rayah*, especially no Armenian *rayah*, could come to the beg or the agha without a gift. According to an account in an Armenian newspaper of Constantinople from 1872:

When the village lord or *khafir* had sons, the enslaved *rayah* had to take sheep or lambs, and cloth to the

master to wish him well, while Armenian women were such poverty that they had to cover their breasts with their hands. When he [the landlord's son] became an adolescent, they had to prepare a weapon for him; when he got married they had to pay dowry (ghalan or kalın; also called bashlegh or başlık) to the bride's parents and take care of the wedding preparations. If somebody died, they had to take sheep, butter, cheese and other things to console the khafirs. However, the insult for the whole nation was the fact that brides behind the curtain of modesty of the ancestral nation of the Armenians and girls raised under the veil of holiness, today uncovered for days in the house of the khafirs as concubines, do service, preparing cracked wheat, washing and mending clothing, in silent tears. For weeks they were sent to weed the fields of barley naked and barefoot, burnt by the sun and pricked by thorns, bewailing their young lives and cursing their dark star. The sanctifying hand of the married priest [kahanay] celebrating the mass of Christ must take out a portion for the khafirs from the mites of the donated alms. When priests visited villages that had no local priest to conduct the holy liturgy, he had to pay a share of the gifts he received solely for permission to officiate mass. If an Armenian peasant's wife was infertile or could not bear a male child, the khafirs would force him to take a second wife to bear him a boy and insure that a successor would be around to pay the yearly taxes.³¹

There was the *sureah* or conciliation tax that the Kurdish begs collected from the Armenians in order to allow the latter to live in peace.³² Another type of unlawful tax was the widely applied *giaour* [gâvur; unbeliever or infidel] tax, compulsory for everyone, so that even clergymen could not evade paying it. The justification for this tax was their view that the Armenians were "faithless" or *giaours*.

Another way of robbing the Armenian peasants was to assess a price to "protect" them from other begs. Generally the sedentary population and first of all the Armenians paid the Kurdish ashiret leaders a special tax for protection from the nomads' devastat-

ing raids. At the same time, the chieftains protected the maraba Armenians, whom they called *flah*, from the raids and robbery of other tribes just as they would care for any of their possessions or private stock. According to a regional Armenian source, "When a Kurdish agha attacked an Armenian who belonged to another Kurd, the latter would attack the Armenians of the first Kurd in revenge. Thus, in both cases it was the Armenians who suffered."³³ And it was the Armenians who had to supply the Kurdish warriors with food during the bloody fights between the ashirets; otherwise they would become the victim of Kurdish vengeance.³⁴

Without the right to carry weapons for self-defense, the Armenian peasants had no choice but to seek the protection of a Kurdish leader either by paying a "friendship tax," or if they had no money, by surrendering land in exchange for personal security. Moreover, each Armenian family had to choose a mosque or a *tekke* [dervish lodge] as its defender, and pay it a tithe from the harvest.³⁵

It is worthwhile mentioning that among all the Christian nations living in the territory of the Ottoman Empire, only the Armenians had the responsibility to provide the nomadic Kurds with free winter shelter.³⁶

Sometimes the Kurdish aghas sold or gave their serf maraba Armenians to each other as a present. As a local history of the Armenians of Charsanjak relates, "The begs being owners of property, also considered themselves the owner of their marabas' lives. They sold them, traded one for another, or killed them as they pleased. They had absolute freedom to do what they wished."³⁷

The kidnapping of Armenian girls was a very common custom among the ashiret Kurds. In some places the Kurdish feudal lords had the right of the first night.³⁸ According to the law of the Shariat every high-ranking official or Muslim traveler had the right to find shelter at a Christian household, which was obligated to keep the "guest" for three days, feed him and his companions, take care of their horses, and provide other services. In Western Armenia, the Turkish and Kurdish landowners, tribal leaders, sheikhs, begs, and military and police officials were not loathe to take advantage of that law. In the villages they behaved tyrannically, raped women, kidnapped girls, forcibly took livestock, and stole precious items.³⁹

The tribal chiefs made plundering raids on Armenian villages with their armed groups of *gholams* (*gulâm* literally in Ottoman means a boy or a slave). They captured hundreds of girls and boys and sold them in the markets of Erzurum and other cities.⁴⁰ This was true slave trading, a well-known practice in the Ottoman Turkey in the nineteenth century. There were slave trading markets (*esir bazaars*) in various parts of the Ottoman Turkey, and slaves existed in Western Armenia too, though not in great number.⁴¹ Azat Hambaryan confirmed this, writing: "In the beginning of the nineteenth century slave trading, that shameful act for the civilized world, was still in practice in Turkey and Western Armenia. Exploiting them chiefly as domestic labor, the ruling upper class continued to sell slaves, turning them into a source of wealth. In 1909 the Young Turks proclaimed a law about the abolishment of slavery but the law was never put into practice."⁴²

Russian orientalist Vasiliy Nikitin observed: "The Kurdish leaders called the Christians *zir khurli* which means 'bought with the yellow (gold).' That expression is extremely true as they were bought and sold as cattle."⁴³ Actually, nationality often made no difference for the exploiting Kurdish ruling class. One of the best Armenian Kurdologists, A-Do [Hovhannes Ter Martirosian], wrote: "The Kurdish agha robbed and tormented with the same untroubled conscience in addition to Armenians Kurds of their own nation and religion."⁴⁴

An Armenian building a school or a church was considered an act of rebellion (*mustashugh*) by the Kurdish ruling class and the Turkish government. There were, however, some Kurdish aghas who used Armenian churches for their own interests. It was profitable for them "to have a church and a priest in their village to preach love, unity, and obedience toward the authorities."⁴⁵

The Russian orientalist Vasiliy Bartoldt wrote: "Regardless of their indisputable innate abilities, the Kurds remained a brigandish people frequently acting hostile towards culture, especially in Armenia."⁴⁶ In the beginning of the nineteenth century, the majority of the Kurdish people had barely reached the tribal-patriarchal level. In this regard, Mikhail Semenovitch Lazarev, another specialist on the East and the Kurds, mentioned that in the beginning of the nineteenth century the Kurds "were at an inferior level of development compared with other neighboring peoples of the time such as Turks, Arabs, Armenians, and Azerbaijanis."⁴⁷

Tribal organization became a serious obstacle for the birth of national ideas, Pan-Kurdish patriotism, and the process of formation of the Kurdish people. Being a fellow tribesman and belonging to a different tribe were synonymous with the concepts of friend and foe. In addition, the existence of different economic modalities like sedentary or nomadic in the same land created certain contradictory and clashing situations.⁴⁸ For this reason, the relations and interactions between the Armenian and Kurdish nations living side by side in the same land remained extremely complicated and difficult in the nineteenth century.

The Russian diplomat and famous Orientalist Vladimir Fedorovich Minorsky [Minorskiy] made the following significant observation: "Life with more and less warlike elements (Turkish Shias and Armenians) undoubtedly spoiled the Kurds. Two types of morality were established: one for those who were ready to return blow for blow, and another for those whose weakness became a temptation for easy abuse and robbery. Only a strong state authority free from petty interests could keep in balance the relations between the Kurds and other peoples, but... In Turkey, the Kurds always abused the Armenians, and that crude political intrigue with the prospective of gaining wealth with impunity became a kind of temptation that many much more civilized nations could not resist."⁴⁹

In the nineteenth century not only did the Ottoman government not prevent the exploitation and abuse of the Armenian peasantry by Kurdish feudal lords, it actually encouraged it because part of the wealth gained would in one way or another go to the Turkish authorities. On the other hand, the latter also pursued political goals through this cunning and malicious stance. Surely, the exploitation and the violence of the Kurdish feudal lords generated hostility between two neighboring peoples, causing tensions in their relations. Thus it was a guarantee of peaceful and stable conditions for the Ottoman state in Western Armenia. Keeping the Armenians in fear, and practicing robbery and exploitation towards them was profitable for Ottoman Turkey because such conditions prevented the Armenians from uniting and insurgency. These motivations made the Turkish authorities encourage the destructive movements of the ashiret masters instead of restraining them.

Taking advantage of the fact that the Armenians played an essential role in trade, finance, and business life in general, the Turkish ruling class engendered and intensified hostility between the Armenian and Kurdish peoples. The Turkish administration tried to represent the Armenians as parasites and exploiters to the Kurdish masses.

Well aware of the imminent danger for Western Armenians, "the leaders of the nation" and especially the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople called for everybody to be alert and obedient to avoid aggravating the fervor of the fanatic Muslim mob.⁵⁰ The patriarchate encouraged the Western Armenian population to avoid involving themselves in anti-governmental movements because it could lead to dangerous consequences for them all. On April 27, 1821 Patriarch Poghos Adrianapolsetsi of Constantinople wrote in his letter directed to the leaders of the provinces: "Send my epistle and appeal to remind all your people not to revolt if they do not want to bring carnage to their families and a bad reputation to our nation inside the empire." The patriarch justified his address with the explanation, "We are rayah; our duty is to obey the state and all Muslims [*aylazgats*, literally, those of other nations], and constantly pray for the life of our sovereign..."⁵¹

In the beginning of the nineteenth century, Western Armenia and Turkish Kurdistan as well as the regions of Western Armenia inhabited by the Kurdish population were divided into eight pashaliks where the sultan had only nominal power till the late 1840s. These regions were actually ruled by Kurdish tribal chiefs whose dependency on the central government was expressed merely by paying annual taxes to the treasury of the sultan. The ruling feudal lords had absolute power over these areas and established their own legal norms, governing laws, and tax system. The areas where the Ottoman state had at least some influence, combined with that of the local autonomous feudal lords, had greatly varying legal and socioeconomic relations. Each district had its own laws and regulations according to the notions of the ruler.⁵²

For instance, the hereditary feudal house of the Balyul Pasha of Bayazit ruled the territory of his dominion as an absolute master without paying taxes to the sultan government. The central government also recognized the Kurdish principdom of the region of Baghesh or Bitlis, which extended its frontiers to Van and Di-

yarbakir, and comprised Baghesh, Mush, Sasun, Chitgan, Khizan [Hizan] and many other regions.⁵³ Until 1849, the region of Baghesh was ruled by the Kurdish feudal lord Sherif Bey who maintained a ceaseless armed struggle against the Turkish state to keep his independence.⁵⁴ According to Karo Sasuni's extensive history of the region, "This bey recognized neither the Turkish sultan nor the Persian shah. They both were interested in having a peaceful relationship with him because of the military strategic location of Baghesh situated on the line of communications between Aleppo and Tabriz."⁵⁵

Having an enormous number of armed forces at its disposal, Sherif's dynasty tried to expand its territory. Its unrestrained desire could only be accomplished by expropriation of the land and property of the Armenians and their addition to the ruler's estates.⁵⁶

The major Kurdish principdom in the Van pashalik was the principality of Hakkari (Aghbak), which was ruled by the emir of Julamerik. The latter also rejected Ottoman supremacy, and was in amicable relations with Iran.⁵⁷ This principality was able to expand its rule to adjacent Shatak.⁵⁸ Even though the representative of the Sublime Porte, the pasha, appeared to be the head of the state, his authority was nominal, and it was truly the Kurdish emir who had the real power. Before the period of the Tanzimat or Ottoman reform in the nineteenth century, the Armenian amiras called *hoja*, *chorbaji*, or *onikiler* also participated in the management of the city.⁵⁹

The majority of the population in a number of regions of the Hakkari emirate (e.g. Daprashen, Tiyari, and Tobi) was Armenian and Assyrian. In the beginning of the nineteenth century the district of Moks was under the domination of Hakkari's emir too.⁶⁰

Qajar Iran coveted the territory of that emirate. The royal heir of the throne Abbas Mirza, who was the ruler of Atrpatakan (Azerbaijan), was particularly interested in it, and succeeded in winning over one of the most powerful tribes of the region, the Baylam, which rose up against Mustafa Pasha, the emir of Hakkari. The latter was the legal vassal of the Turkish sultan, but in practice he accepted the supremacy of the Iranian shah.⁶¹

Jezireh, included in the Diyarbakir eyalet or province, was one of the largest and strongest Kurdish principdoms, and was ruled by the powerful family of the Bedirhans. The latter were trying to unite all the other Kurdish local authorities, annex Vaspurakan

(Van) province, Taron (Mush), and Bitlis to their territories, and establish an "independent Kurdistan" in that spacious area, separated from the Ottoman Empire.

The Ottoman state never recognized the principality of Dersim,⁶² which lay on the east side of the Euphrates River and in the southern part of Kamakh.

Numerous small and large Kurdish princedoms that were scattered about almost the entire territory of Western Armenia refused to obey the Ottoman authorities. In order to gain new territories and establish their control the latter started persistent and bloody conflicts that brought the country to the verge of economic crisis and collapse.

Consequently, in the beginning of the nineteenth century the Armenian people living in regions of Kurdish supremacy remained under the dictatorship of the Kurdish feudal ruling class. Armenians were able to preserve their own semi-independent principalities only in a few parts of Western Armenia. In general these were situated in inaccessible mountainous areas where the Ottoman administration and the Kurdish feudal lords were unable to establish their control. Arshak Alpayachian wrote: "Only a few mountains remained where the Armenians could protect their freedom by the force of weapons. As a result, Armenian semi-independent states were preserved in a few small mountainous districts."⁶³

The most significant principalities were in Sasun, Shatakh, and Moks in the province of Vaspourakan, the Savur area in Bayazıt pashalik, Isyan, Khnus, Zeytun, in the province of Diyarbakır, Tuzhik and Manazkert in the Erzurum pashalik, in Dersim, and Chapaghjur. For instance, Levon Chormisian wrote that the villages of the Sasun highlands "for centuries had a semi-independent life and refused to pay taxes to the Kurdish ashirets, even refusing the immediate and direct control of the state."⁶⁴

In order to resist the attempts of the Ottoman Empire at subjugation, the Armenian principalities had to enter into an alliance with their neighboring Kurdish princedoms. "The Armenians of several districts, as brave and warlike mountain dwellers, were able to maintain their freedom united with the Kurds," according to Arshak Alpayachian.⁶⁵

These independent and semi-independent societies that lived

in the high mountainous areas of Armenia accepted and were led by the principles of military democracy,⁶⁶ and formed an alliance with their neighboring Kurdish tribes against the common enemy so that both the Armenians and the Kurds could protect their freedom. As Ghazaryan has stated, "Probably such administrative structures and confederations existed in other Armenian principalities because everywhere, without exception, the Armenians and the Kurds lived intertwined. Independence and freedom were precious to both nations and they both stood united as brothers resisting the rule of the Ottoman Empire."⁶⁷

The meliks and the princes were the true masters in the Armenian principalities, with military and administrative power at their disposal. Some of them even created their own monetary systems.⁶⁸ For instance, Prince Miro from the Mirakian princedom of Dersim minted his own coins which bore Armenian letters and portraits of Armenian kings.⁶⁹

The land question was the most complicated issue in Armenian-Kurdish relations. In the early nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire was characterized by an agrarian military feudal system which had already become inadequate to meet the demands of the state. The Kurdish leaders who once had received their lands as a reward from the Turkish sultans for protecting the Turkish-Iranian frontier, for military or other services, had made these lands hereditary *hükümet*s, *ojaklıks*, or *yurdluks*, and became absolute *derebeys* ("valley lords"). The sultans could not control the process of the repartition of governmental property, namely, the land, because it was in the possession of the tribal notables. The state's authority was nominal and insignificant for the *hükümet*s, *ojaklıks*, and *yurdluks*. When throughout the Ottoman Empire centrifugal forces grew stronger, the *derebeys*' desire to secede from the central state, to become the unrestrained master of their own land, and to establish their own independent power attained unprecedented proportions.

Colonel Petr [Peter] Ivanovich Averyanov wrote: "Kurds were able to liberate themselves from Persian and especially from Turkish domination, and in the beginning of the nineteenth century a significant portion of Kurdistan [Western Armenia] enjoyed practically full independence, providing insignificant taxes and military units to the Persian and Turkish governments only under force."⁷⁰

Under such conditions, when the Ottoman state had not been fully established in Western Armenia and Kurdistan, the Sublime Porte had to conduct an evasive course of action. It "had to confirm and encourage that authority which appeared powerful, though it might revolt, and defeat or even kill its representatives," as the Armenian Hakob Shahpazian said.⁷¹

The Kurdish derebeys continued raiding and confiscating Armenian lands. Antranik in his work on Dersim said, "They had divided the Armenians [of Dersim, Charsanjak, Kharberd, Balu, Arabkir, Akn, Malatya, Diyarbakir and other places] among themselves so that we all turned into their slaves. There was no government... they were both the government and the king here. The country's land, water, houses, goods and property all belonged to the derebeys. If the derebey wished he would preserve us, and if he did not want to, he would not, just as now; if he wished, he would slaughter, and if he did not wish, he would not slaughter... We Armenians, with our families, worked and labored twelve months out of the year only for them. Very often when one derebey was hostile to another, they would make us—the Armenians belonging to the two sides—stand opposite one another and fight until one party was well beaten and defeated. When they saw a nice bride or a girl or a brave boy among the Armenians they would kill them or convert them into Muslims. In the end, we all lived and prospered for them...in short—I have sinned, I have sinned [*meghay, meghay*]—they were our gods."⁷²

In fact, the licentiousness, the violence, and the lawlessness of the derebys had no limit. They forced the Armenian villagers to sit in the holes of the fields so that they could play *jirit* over their heads. Even when they ate at Armenian homes for free they demanded "*dish kirasi*" (teeth payment).⁷³

The monthly magazine *Ararat* wrote that during the period of the derebeys' dominance:

a bey or a sheikh ruled over each district where the non-Muslim population called themselves his Armenians. There were no regular imperial tax collectors. The beys collected the taxes as they wished and gave only a tiny part of the taxes to the state treasury, keeping the rest for them.

The attacks were endless; each bey's raiders would ramble about and rob the Armenians of other districts.

That would bring about fights between different districts, and as a result the winning beys would turn the area of the defeated beys upside down and would enjoy themselves by robbing the others' Armenians.⁷⁴

The Kurdish beys and ashiret leaders even sold the right to office of the abbots of the Armenian monasteries.⁷⁵

The Englishman John McDonald Kinneir who traveled in Western Armenia testified that "the greatest portion of Armenia and Asia Minor is under the rule of a number of powerful pashas [Kurdish], who are but nominally dependent on the Porte, the mandates of which they not infrequently treat with derision and contempt." Kinneir in his same work also declared: "The Armenians are partly subject to the Turks, and partly to the Koordish beys, but equally oppressed by both."⁷⁶

During the derebey period the Western Armenians started to emigrate en masse from their country in order to escape from social and national oppression, exploitation, and raids. According to the monthly *Ararat*, with "a rope belt tied around their waists, barefoot and holding the hands of their miserable family they would wander from land to land, from Ayrarat and Artaz, to Caesarea, Jiddah, and Hijaz..."⁷⁷

As a result the Armenian nation gradually diminished and it was constrained to abandon its native land. The writer Leo cited the following data: the population of Baghesh was counted as 25,000 households, but it dwindled away, due to emigration, until there were only 500 households left. The wars were another cause for the reduction in the number of the Armenian population of Mush. Though once it formed the majority in the city, by the beginning of the century it had tremendously decreased.⁷⁸ The reduction of the population was obvious in the regions of Manazkert and Bulanik. According to the Armenian historian Leo, "There were more than 360 villages here primarily inhabited by the Armenians, but in the end of the century, the population was so effaced that there were hardly twenty villages remaining. The population of Basen province was in endless flux, constantly fleeing from place to place, as this was the only way to escape from the continual Kurdish and Turkish raids and abuse."⁷⁹

Thus, during the period of derebey domination Armenian-Kurdish relations were extremely tense. National and social op-

pression was practiced simultaneously, supplementing each other. It was at this period when the agrarian question became the inseparable and constituent part of the national question.

According to Turkish historians, the early nineteenth century was a period of degradation, collapse, and destruction for the Ottoman Empire.⁸⁰ The reign of Sultan Selim III (1789-1807) became known for the antagonism between the old and the new in all spheres of the social and political life. Conscious that the state was at a deadlock in 1792-1798, the sultan started the realization of some reforms which were known by the name of *Nizam-i Jedid* (new order). Selim III and his followers pursued the goal of reestablishing the prior military greatness of the empire. During the implementation of the military reforms it became obvious that major changes had to be enacted in the economy and commerce, and the central government needed strengthening; thus, there was an urgent need for serious reforms.

The Ottoman ruling class clearly observed that the crises and collapse had caused an unavoidable rapid growth in the desire of the oppressed nations to unite and rise in a liberation movement against Turkish tyranny. This process increased as a result of the general disintegration of the economy and the deterioration of the position of the central government in the regions.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the separatist efforts of the provincial pashas were another challenge the enormous Empire was facing in far-flung regions. For instance, European Rumelia had turned into a violent arena for the Kirjaalis' atrocious brutality. The pasha of Vidin, Osman Pasvantoghlu, had raised the flag of disobedience as a result of which the territory had actually gone out of the sultan's control. The *ayans* or notables of Anatolia also started insurgent struggles. Chaos, lawlessness, and robbery took on unprecedented dimensions throughout the entire area. The Kurdish autocratic derebeys were the most influential among the separatist feudal lords in Anatolia. The attempts of the government to "bring them to order" failed. The reforms of Selim III failed too.

All of Eastern Anatolia was under the control of ayans and derebeys who had become completely dictatorial and did not sub-

mit to the central government. The latter could manage to collect insignificant amounts of taxes and military conscripts from the autocratic derebeys of Western Armenia and Kurdistan only with the use of force.⁸¹ A Russian military observer in Turkey wrote: "As is known, the Ottoman Empire comprises extensive lands on which the Sublime Porte has no real influence, and naturally great conquests are expecting of the Padishah within the borders of his own state."⁸² Prussian officer Helmuth von Moltke, who was in military service in the Ottoman Empire, referring to the interactions of the government and the Kurdish princedoms wrote: "The Sublime Porte has never succeeded in depriving the Kurds living in these mountains of their hereditary power...The Kurdish notables have a strong influence on their subordinates. They are in constant dispute with the Sublime Porte, arguing, refusing to pay taxes, not tolerating any recruitment, and living in their castles on high mountains."⁸³ An official Ottoman imperial document stated that a close collaboration was formed between the state administration and the derebeys. The document also added "some of the *valis* [governors] having the support of derebeys abuse their authority, gain the property of their subordinates by aggression, and flood the provinces with blood, while the central government is unable to prevent these disorders."⁸⁴

The only way the government could fight against the Kurdish derebeys was to send mercenary killers after them. It was common for one of the mutineer derebeys to die after dinner or be found stabbed in the chest in the morning.⁸⁵ However, this manner of struggle was an evidence of the central power's weakness. The issue of the centralization of the state in the eastern regions of the country became complicated not only because of the geographical, economic and political isolation of these sections but also because of the fact that there were a great number of nomadic tribes, and their nomadic lifestyle made it utterly impossible to establish state control over them. European observers noted: "Establishing control over the tribes has always been and remains a continual problem for the central government."⁸⁶

Certainly the more farsighted statesmen of Turkey realized the dangerous consequences of that anarchic behavior for the future of the state. They comprehended the urgency of turning the nominal domination of the state real in the east of the country. During the

first decade of the nineteenth century, under the pressure of those prominent statesmen the government attempted to accomplish the policy of centralization through the use of armed force, which, however, met fierce resistance throughout the entire territory of the empire, especially in Eastern Anatolia. It became obvious that the Kurdish derebeys were determined to protect their independence even by means of bloodshed. In 1806, the Russo-Turkish war broke out, and it put the Ottoman Empire into a difficult situation, inspiring the derebeys and ayans with new ambitions.

The first to revolt, in 1806, was Abdurrahman Pasha, the leader of the Baban Kurdish tribe of Sulaymaniyah (Tr., Süleymaniye). He destroyed the sultan's detachment sent to restrain him. Having pretensions to Sulaymaniyah, Iran encouraged the Kurdish movement to the point of resolving to be ready to wage war against Turkey.⁸⁷ Turkey's situation was getting more complicated because it concurrently had to fight against the Wahhabi movement in the Arab lands.

The Ottoman army succeeded through great effort in destroying the dangerous movement of Abdurrahman Pasha. In 1815 that revolt was followed by the rebellions of the Kurds of the Van and Bayazit pashaliks, to which other Kurdish tribes from Iran joined. New outbreaks of Kurdish uprisings occurred in 1818, 1820, and 1822.⁸⁸

During the 1828-1829 Russo-Turkish war some Kurdish tribal chiefs of Rawanduz [also Rowanduz or Ruwanduz; Kurdish, Rewandiz], Bohtan, Behbehan, Hakkari, and other places refused together with their ashirets to participate in the fighting, and openly opposed the sultan. Furthermore, Balyul Pasha of Bayazit established relationships with the Russian military authorities.⁸⁹ Soon Emin Pasha of Mush followed Balyul Pasha's footsteps. General Paskevich, well aware of the attitude of those tribal chiefs, got his government's approval to spend one hundred thousand pieces of gold on buying presents for them.⁹⁰ During the war, the separate instances of Kurdish rebellion finally combined and turned into a huge revolt.⁹¹

The fierce anti-government movement of the Kurds led by Mir Ahmed Pasha in the mountainous Rawanduz area was particularly dangerous for the Ottoman Empire. Mir Ahmed Pasha had the clear aim of founding a Kurdish state under his control

which would comprise the whole of Iraqi Kurdistan and a section of the territory in Iran inhabited by the Kurds. He became allied with Daud Pasha, the Mamluk leader of Baghdad, as the latter also tried to be liberated from the sultan's supremacy. Ahmed Pasha established connections with Iran and especially with the Ottoman statesmen Muhammad Pasha Inje Bayraktar and Mustafa Reshid Pasha, who were inclined to be in the opposition to the Ottoman government.

The secret agents of the Egyptian ruler of Syria, Ibrahim Pasha, in their turn enthusiastically encouraged the rebels, "stirring up hopes about complete secession from Turkey" according to British diplomat Henry Trotter.⁹²

The eastern parts of the empire were actually outside of the sultan's control so Ahmed Pasha could easily establish his authority over the huge territories stretching from the Tigris River to the regions of Azerbaijan populated with Kurds, and comprising such significant military and economic centers as Nisibis, Mardin, Mosul, and Sulaymaniyah.⁹³ At the same time, despite the anti-government revolts led by the Kurds during wartime, the Ottoman Empire was able to influence a number of Kurdish tribes into participating in its war against Russia.⁹⁴

Interpreting the existing situation, French Orientalist Ludovic de Contenson wrote that "the Kurds desire to gain independence when it is time to pay taxes and provide soldiers; however they become obedient subjects of the sultan when it comes to attacking and oppressing Christian villages."⁹⁵

The rapid advancement of the Russian army bothered the Kurdish feudal lords with the thought that they could lose control of the territories under their dominance, as they could be lost to the Russians. This fear led them to obliterate and destroy everything they had. According to Karo Sasuni, "Those feudal lords stopped considering the Armenians as their private property. Consequently they had no motive any more to exert an effort to protect the peasants, at least for their own feudal benefit."⁹⁶

When the Russians were invading Erzurum "the Kurds [Maratsik] saw that they would be deprived of the land of Armenia, [and] they began to attack the Armenians and robbed many villages and monasteries. They entered St. Karapet Monastery of Mush and robbed it ruthlessly," testified Simeon Davtian, who lived in the village Hetink of Sasun.⁹⁷

The Ottoman army was defeated by the Russian troops, and the Kurdish ashiret regiments and irregular forces with the Ottomans took their revenge on the Armenian population, robbing Armenian villages and killing the people. As an eyewitness described, "the bandit groups advanced regiment by regiment, spreading like locusts among the Armenian villages to the borders of Bagrevand, Karin, Taron, Salnodzor, Vaspurakan and certain places of Persian Armenia, stealing all goods and property, kidnapping attractive brides and girls, taking some people captive to foreign lands without return, and covering the thatched huts and fields of flowers with the blood of the innocents whom they killed. ...Not only did the tent-dwelling Kurds do all this, but also their leaders, beys and even pashas."⁹⁸

The savage actions of the Kurdish feudal upper class reached such a degree that the government had completely lost its power over parts of the empire's territories. Istanbul was forced to understand that it was no longer possible to delay the eradication of the power of the derebeys. It was high time to abolish the feudal privileges of the Kurdish nobility and stop their lawlessness. The resolute forefather of that movement was Mustafa Reshid Pasha, the great statesman of the Tanzimat or reforms period. His ideas about reforms had inspired Sultan Mahmud II and his statesmen, who thought that the only way to bring the empire out of this critical situation was the enactment of reforms, in particular those concerning the improvement of the political administrative system. Remarkably, one of the Turkish statesmen, Halil Pasha, said; "If we do not hurry to Europeanize our country, we will have to go back to Asia."⁹⁹ One goal of Halil Pasha was to bond non-Muslim subjects, especially Christians, to the Ottoman Empire, blunting their receptivity to foreign influence with the help of minor concessions. Therefore he suggested "the idea of unity for all the subjects of the sultan," which actually was unachievable under the conditions of the Ottoman Empire.

The Hatt-i Sherif imperial edict, which was declared on November 3, 1839 in Gülhane, promised to guarantee the security of life, honor, and property for all the subjects of the empire. It proclaimed the equality of rights and duties for the Muslim and non-Muslim population, regardless of faith. However, this law proved to be impracticable because Mustafa Reshid and his co-thinkers

had underestimated the power of the anti-reform resistance of different classes in Turkey. The new regulations of the Hatt-i Sherif significantly contradicted the shariat and social traditions, so the reformers considered it necessary to preserve the main traditional Muslim institutions along with reforms of a bourgeois character. The Hatt-i Sherif, for instance, did not try to hide the reality that the basis of the state structure of the theocratic Ottoman Empire was based on the ideology of Islamism. Consequently, fanatically conservative Turkish and Kurdish elements were hostile to the programs of Mahmud II, which in their opinion would deprive them from the rights of ruling and conquering. They could not in particular tolerate the idea that the Christians could receive equal rights with the Muslims. Therefore they called Mahmud II "giaour [gâvur—unbeliever or infidel] Mahmud."

It is noteworthy that while Reshid Pasha was preparing the Hatt-i Sherif of Gülhane reform programs, his assistants were primarily Greeks and Armenians, peoples who were the most interested in the realization of such reforms. Mahmud II tried to make use of the favorable attitude of the Christian population. Before initiating the Tanzimat reforms, the sultan entirely obliterated the "hearth" (*ojak*) or corps of the Janissaries and their spiritual organization, the Bektashi Sufi brotherhood. The next step of the sultan after the extermination of the Janissaries and *sipahi* (cavalry soldiers) was to destroy the centrifugal and insubordinate groups of the empire.

Accomplishing the centralization policy of the state, Mahmud II subjugated the influential pashas of Janina, Vidin, and Baghdad, subdued Albania, and utterly defeated the Wahhabi movement in the Arabian peninsula. Finally, the turn of the Kurdish derebeys came. That was an urgent issue because the derebeys openly refused to pay state taxes or provide soldiers for the government, and many of them expressed their desire to gain complete independence. However, a number of international and internal problems such as the Turkish-Iranian war in 1821-1823, the national liberation movement of the Greek people in 1821-1829, the Russo-Turkish war in 1828-29, rebellions in Albania and Syria, the first Turkish-Egyptian war in 1831-1833, and the invasion of Algeria by France in 1830 delayed the rapid accomplishment of Mahmud II's project.

After the Turkish-Egyptian Treaty on May 9, 1833 and the Treaty of Hünkâr Iskelesi with Russia on July 8 of the same year, favorable conditions were established for the Ottoman Empire to deal with "Eastern" issues. The first task of Mahmud II was the eradication of the autocracy of the derebeys, and restoration of the power and authority of the central government that the derebeys had shattered.¹⁰⁰ It was an urgent issue on his agenda because the sultan intended to abolish the feudal-military system of landowning. A special declaration, a *firman*, was proclaimed about it in 1834. However, the execution of that law was limited to the territories of Central Anatolia. The government was powerless to maintain its control beyond that area, so that everywhere else, including Western Armenia, Kurdistan, the Arab countries, and the European part of the empire, everything would remain unchanged.¹⁰¹ The sultan could enforce the accomplishment of his order to the feudal lords of the aforementioned regions only by armed force.

In 1833, Mahmud II sent a powerful army to Western Armenia in two different directions. The first division marched towards Sebastia (Tr., Sivas) and Arabkir [Tr., Arapkir] led by Mehmed Reshid Pasha, the governor of Sivas; the second one was headed to Erzinjan and Erzurum via Vaspurakan under the leadership of the imperial bodyguard Sami Pasha. The additional forces of Muhammad Pasha of Baghdad were also to join them. In the summer of 1834, fierce and inexorable fighting unfolded between the forty-thousand-man Ottoman army and the armed detachments of the Kurdish derebeys around Diyarbakir, Bisherik-Slivan, Kharzan, Sasun, and Jezireh.¹⁰² The Ottoman army severely punished both the rebellious derebeys who strived to obtain independence, and the masses of people, who because of the severity of taxes took every possible opportunity to revolt against the violence and lawlessness of the Ottoman administration.

The military instructor Helmuth von Moltke, who was participating in the expeditions of the Ottoman army, enumerated an entire series of acts of cruelty performed by the army, remarking: "The subjugation of the Kurds was carried out in the Turkish traditional style, by torturing and obliterating thousands of peaceful people, included women and children, by destroying and burning entire regions inhabited with the Kurds."¹⁰³ The Ottoman army marched on, leaving only ruins behind it. Moltke concluded:

"Thousands of innocent lives were wiped out, thousands of villages were destroyed. Yet, the Kurds were not dispirited. Unless a good administration is formed for them, all this is condemned to only have a passing influence."¹⁰⁴

Speaking about the reasons for the dissatisfaction of the Kurdish masses with the government, Moltke wrote: "The Kurds are mainly discontented about two things, taxes and military service. The real reason for this malcontentment is not that the taxes are very high, but that they are arbitrary. The recruitment of soldiers in Kurdistan has become a ferocious foray against the local population. In some villages there are absolutely no young men left capable of working. Only one who has personally participated in such a man hunt, has seen the army recruits with their hands twisted on their backs, and the look of restrained rage in their eyes, can understand to what degree the government has ... turned that whole people against it."¹⁰⁵ Moltke noted that no Kurd could endure Ottoman military service for more than two years. He would get sick, die, or desert the army.¹⁰⁶

According to Moltke's data, the invasion of even the smallest insignificant mountain fortress lasted between thirty and forty days. He even called the Kurdish resistance a "popular war."¹⁰⁷

The Ottoman army defeated Ahmed Pasha of Rawanduz, who was the most dangerous rival of the Ottoman government. He was sent in chains to the tribunal of the sultan in Constantinople,¹⁰⁸ and soon was executed on Mahmud II's order. The Ottomans overpowered the Rawanduz emirate and forced the people to accept the supremacy of the sultan. The Ottoman army met a particularly fierce resistance in the regions of Dersim, Erzinka [Tr., Erzincan, or Erzinjan], Kamakh [Kemah], Hayni, and Haso, in Jezireh, at the base of Sasun-Motkan, and in the southern parts of Bitlis. Consequently the Ottoman army treated the defeated population ruthlessly. The soldiers set the Kurdish villages on fire, killing the peaceful rayah Kurds sheltered there. Oppressing the Yezidis of Sinjar and Viranshehir, Reshid Pasha ordered the slaying of the entire Mihran tribe.¹⁰⁹ Helmuth von Moltke wrote about this: "The corpses of men and women covered with wounds, breastfeeding infants, as well as children of different ages, cut heads and ears, all these were piled on top of one another, and the soldiers bringing more of them received from 50 to 100 piasters...

The silent suffering of the Kurds and the weeping despair of the Kurdish women truly formed a heartrending scene."¹¹⁰

As an answer to the bloody actions of the Ottoman army, the Kurds started a war of vengeance. An Ottoman newspaper later wrote: "Two parties were fighting against each other with fierce hatred. When the Kurds caught Turks they burnt them after digging out their eyes or pulling out their nails. In their turn the Turks would cut the heads of the Kurds and impale them."¹¹¹

During the period of derebey domination throughout the harsh years of Reshid Pasha's invasion of Western Armenia and Kurdistan with fire and sword, the Armenian people was moaning under the heavy yoke of the Kurdish tribal chiefs and feudal landlords.¹¹² It had to submit to its cruel destiny silently because every insurgent action was punished brutally. The existing scarce and incomplete information testifies, however, about the Armenian people's armed resistance in some areas and its attempts to liberate itself from the repression of the Kurdish derebeys and landlords. But the easiest way to find salvation was emigration. For that reason a lot of Western Armenian villages were deserted and desolate. The country turned into ruins. Agriculture, trade, and handicrafts that deteriorated during the 1828-1829 war, collapsed even further because of the Armenians' emigration. That fact bothered the Ottoman government because the Armenians had the reputation of builders, good laborers and tax payers. The government was also concerned that the nomadic Kurds settled at the localities abandoned by the Armenians, took large sections of land and strengthened their positions. It inevitably increased their ambitions for independence. Naturally, the Ottoman Empire could not hope to collect stable revenues for its treasury or recruit soldiers from those nomadic tribes.

Those factors prompted Reshid Pasha to initiate a "special" policy concerning the Western Armenians during the period of his involvement in military actions against the Kurdish derebeys. For instance, he intended to found separate homogeneous provinces for the Armenians alone rather than have the Armenians and the Kurds living intertwined. This would bring to a halt the Armenian exploitation by the Kurd derebeys, and allow the Armenians to develop trade and agriculture and become a steady source of wealth for the treasury. Reshid suggested that the Armenians of

Kharberd move to Diyarbakir, promising to evacuate the Kurds living there to Dersim and Charsanjak. In addition, he promised to distribute weapons to the Armenians, establish Armenian militia and appoint an Armenian leader in Diyarbakir. Probably one of the goals of that program was if necessary to pit the Armenians against the Kurdish feudal lords who were striving to gain their independence. The Armenians asked that they not be moved but remain living in their homeland.

This is why the Kurds named Reshid Pasha "giaour [gâvur] pasha" saying that "he was giaour and wants to become the king of the giaours."¹¹³

The Armenian peasantry, who composed the majority of the Western Armenians, the urban population, artisans, and the tradesmen, for whom the Kurdish yoke was especially difficult and who had security for neither their property nor their lives, were inclined to defend the policy of the Ottoman government to restrain the derebeys. Considering Ottoman administration the lesser of two evils, the Armenians approved the policy of Reshid Pasha and believed that the existence of the centralized state would create a relatively stable legal power. It would be able to protect the Armenians from the exploitation and lawlessness of the Kurdish landlords and grant the nation comparative peace and security. Moreover, the Armenians of many areas enthusiastically supported him. The high-ranking Armenian clergy and bourgeoisie of Constantinople not only enthusiastically supported this policy but had an interest in seeing the completion of the reforms in Western Armenia.

Meanwhile the Armenians of those districts who lived armed in free communities in mountainous regions were exempt from the yoke of the Kurdish notables, and did not pay taxes to the Ottoman government. They, like the Kurds, were subject to Reshid Pasha's attacks. Having common interests with the Kurds, such Armenians united with the Kurds and jointly fought against the Ottoman government which tried to deprive them both of independence, subjugate them to the central power and impose the payment of taxes.

No doubt, the support of the majority of the Armenians for the Turkish reforms and the restriction of the derebeys' licentiousness had inevitably aggravated Armenian-Kurdish relations. The

derebeys gave vent to their fury on the peaceful Armenian population. As Armenian historian Hayk Ghazaryan wrote, "Caught between two swords the Armenian nation was perishing physically and economically."¹¹⁴

In January 1837, after Reshid Pasha's unexpected and mysterious death in Diyarbakir, Mahmed Hafiz Pasha and Osman Pasha were commissioned by Istanbul to continue the mission of subjugating the Kurds.¹¹⁵ They exceeded Reshid in their cruelty. Moltke wrote that when the Kurds relented, Hafiz Pasha increased his severity, and Moltke's advice had no influence on him. His style was massacring the Kurds, confiscating their property, burning their villages and forcing migration to distant corners of the empire.

The eighty-thousand-soldier army of Hafiz and Osman Pashas crossed the spacious territory destroying and killing. It obliterated the independent Kurdish ashirets located in the Anti-Taurus mountains, Jezireh, Diyarbakir, Kharberd, Malatya, Kharzan, Sasun and other places and forced most of the inhabitants to obey the law, pay taxes to the Turkish treasury and adopt a sedentary lifestyle. Moltke enumerated a whole list of atrocities committed by the Turkish army. The army ruthlessly burnt villages to the ground, bayoneting the sedentary rayah Kurds remaining in the villages.

The Turkish army treated the Yezidis of Sinjar with particular cruelty. French geographer Élisée Reclus wrote that they, "who lived for generations in an autonomous republic in their mountain fortresses, were largely exterminated in 1838. They [the Ottomans] filled smoke into the caves where most of the population had found shelter, sold the women into slavery, and forced the miserable remnants of the nation to recognize the Muslims as masters."¹¹⁶

Moltke reported that the Turkish soldiers hunted Kurdish recruits for the army with dogs, making no distinction between sick or healthy, young or old. They tied them up and took them to the camps where the captives were watched after like prisoners. "The Kurds used every possibility to escape, so Hafiz Pasha promised to pay 200-250 piasters for each fugitive who was caught and brought back."¹¹⁷ The governor of Baghdad, Muhammad Pasha, was well known for his extreme brutality towards the Kurds. Returning from an expedition, he hung a great number of cut ears on

the city gates as a warning to all "troublemakers." He promised to impale everybody who would dare to cause trouble again.¹¹⁸

Regardless of his ferocity, Hafiz Pasha was not able to definitively suppress and crush the Kurdish ashirets. The latter took shelter in impregnable mountains and continued their resistance. At some places, like Sasun, the Ottoman army was met by the joint resistance of the Armenian and the Kurdish mountain dwellers.¹¹⁹

Unlike the Armenians residing in mountainous areas like Sasun, Kharzan, Shatakh, Moks, and Khnus who, like the Kurdish ashirets, relied on their weapons and did not obey or pay taxes to the Ottoman government, the remainder of the Armenians, farmers who experienced the exploitation of the Kurdish despotic derebeys, were in favor of the Ottoman government and "in every way yearned to see the Kurdish ashirets crushed."¹²⁰

Various Kurdish tribes and derebey groups were not united in their resistance towards the Turkish army and fought separately. As a result of the domination of the tribal feudal system, the Kurds completely lacked a consciousness of general or national interest. Many tribes had nothing in common and they were not connected by any social ties. Each tribe was isolated and lived a narrow, confined life. Each ashiret protected the lives, property and area under its control, and never supported neighboring tribes. Moreover, in order to dodge a direct Turkish blow, they very often allowed the Ottoman army to cross their land without obstruction to attack other tribes. Karo Sasuni said, "Almost all the powerful tribes were enemies of the Turkish state and fought against Ottoman troops within the peripheries of their pashaliks. However they never left their territory or supported other Kurdish pashaliks which were in battles of life and death."¹²¹ Furthermore, frequently the tribes would fight one other, making the work of the Turkish troops easier.

In 1839, while the armies of Hafiz and Osman Pashas continued to tread over Western Armenia and Kurdistan, new complications arose for the Ottoman Empire. This time it was the sultan's vassal, Muhammad Ali Pasha of Egypt, who was threatening Mahmud II with a new war. Following the sultan's orders, the punishment of the Kurds was discontinued, and the troops of Mahmed Hafiz Pasha were called back to prepare for a great war against the fierce and dangerous foe. The first period of "the con-

quest of Kurdistan" came to an end. Turkish political and military administration was established in numerous areas. The Ottoman Empire was greatly concerned about the stability of the rear in the upcoming battle. Although Hafiz Pasha was able to suppress most of the Kurdish derebeys he was not sure if the Kurds would revolt again while the Ottomans fought battles against the Egyptians.¹²² In order to neutralize the danger, in 1839 Hafiz Pasha had the idea of inducting the Christian Armenians into the Ottoman army. That unprecedented notion was contrary to centuries-old traditions and forbidden according to Islam. However, Hafiz Pasha was aware of the political inclination of most Armenians and their earnest desire to see the derebey authority crushed and exterminated. As an eyewitness, Moltke made the following observation: "The Armenians in Asia are a vigorous nation, copious in number, used to authority and active. Most of them live comfortably. It seems that currently they show evidence of greater faithfulness and devotion to the Sublime Porte than the Kurdish and Arab Muslim populations."¹²³ Hafiz Pasha's conception seemed an extremely audacious step for the Ottoman state which was based on theocratic principles. The Armenians were to be distributed throughout the Ottoman army at a ratio of twenty to one. The military councilor of Hafiz Pasha, Helmuth von Moltke, who considered Armenians to be a brave and disciplined people, proposed that every fourth battalion of a regiment be made up exclusively of Armenians, with an Armenian as the battalion commander. It is understandable that the government was not able to approve this suggestion, as Turkish statesmen believed that the existence of homogeneous Armenian military units could become threat for the security of the empire. Especially after the Russo-Turkish War, the Ottoman ruling class was more distrustful about the Armenians' loyalty and considered them as an undependable, Russian-oriented nation. From the very start, Helmuth von Moltke expressed his doubts about the possibility of accomplishing his plan because, he said, it would be "an offense to the prejudices of the Turks who, because of their blind arrogance, are unwilling to see how archaic their own regime has become."¹²⁴

In brief, Hafiz Pasha's program failed. Istanbul considered it very dangerous and contradictory to the principles of statehood of the Ottoman Empire. The necessity for the realization of this plan

disappeared because of some shifts in "the Kurdish policy" of the Ottoman Empire. It was obvious to Istanbul that even though the Kurdish derebeys had endured a heavy blow, they were by no means definitively suppressed. Kurdish armed groups had found shelter in the mountains and continued their resistance. The Turkish army could not even enter Bohtan and Hakkari. The forcedly recruited Kurdish soldiers deserted the Turkish army after one or two months and escaped either to the mountains or to Syria where they joined Ibrahim Pasha's army.¹²⁵ The Ottoman ruling class was well aware that without the support of the Kurdish ashiret leaders and their armed groups it would be extremely difficult for the government to establish absolute supremacy in Western Anatolia. Thus, alteration in the Kurdish policy became imperative. According to the new plan the Kurdish rival derebeys were to become allies. Shahpazian explained: "Sultan Mahmud sent an assembly of ulema to Armenia and Kurdistan; they marked the border of each derebey's rule and recognized those authorities as legitimate, each within his borders. It was in this way that the derebeys came to possess firmans [decrees] for their independence."¹²⁶

It was obvious that in Western Armenia the Kurdish derebey power was going to be replaced by Turkish administration allied with the Kurdish ashiret masters and the tribal elites. Characterizing the situation in Western Armenia, Russian observer Ilia Berезin wrote: "The patriarchal governing system of the native leaders was replaced with brutal satraps from Istanbul, who strived to get back the cost of the lease for their position in the shortest possible time."¹²⁷ Moreover, the defeated derebeys were replaced with the Kurdish ashiret masters, aghas and begs who had become or were in the process of becoming feudalized. In brief, the cherished hopes of the Armenians to liberate themselves from Kurdish brutality and exploitation vanished. By the will of the Ottoman government the Western Armenians were left in their previous condition.

On July 24, 1839 the decisive battle of the second Turkish-Egyptian war took place near Nisibin (Armenian Mtsbin, Turkish Nusaybin), where the army of Hafiz Pasha was completely defeated by the Egyptian governor of Syria Ibrahim Pasha. The Kurds were the first to abandon the battlefield.¹²⁸ Moltke recounted that they even began to fire on their commanders and the Turkish

soldiers, and rob military property. Countless Kurdish soldiers threw away their weapon and went to their villages; many of them joined the enemy rising against the Ottoman army. The retreating remnants of Hafiz Pasha's defeated army were obliterated by Kurds, Arab Bedouin and Türkmén in the mountains north of Aintab.¹²⁹ The behavior of the Kurdish soldiers at the Nisibin battle was a vivid expression of the Kurdish attitude towards the Ottoman government.

The crushing defeat of its army weakened the Ottoman Empire, challenging its further existence. The Egyptian army of Ibrahim Pasha conquered Syria and Cilicia and reached up to Konya. The Ottoman Empire was at the verge of destruction by Muhammad Ali, the pasha of the Muslim state of Egypt. In this situation, the Kurdish ruling circles hoped to reestablish their previous position. Derebeys became motivated and the Kurds became restless in Western Armenia and Turkish Kurdistan. The Kurds of Sulaymaniyah were the first to revolt. In order to help the rebels the Iranian army hastily crossed the border and penetrated into Mesopotamia in 1842. A Turkish-Iranian war became practically unavoidable after the incident that happened early in 1843. The governor of Baghdad Ali Riza Pasha and his deputy Muhammad Najib Pasha organized a vicious carnage in Karbala, the holy city of Shia faith, slaying between fifteen and eighteen thousand Persian Shiites.¹³⁰ In response, Iranian troops invaded the Bayazid region, intending to incite the Kurds and use their accumulated inflammable grievances against the Turkish government. Though the situation was resolved due to the decisive intervention of Russia and England,¹³¹ it was evidence that the Kurds were not definitely conquered.

Since 1842 the Sublime Porte had tried to fulfill the terms of the Hatt-i Sherif of Gülhane (1839) in Western Armenia. However, as in the rest of the empire, the reforms here either remained on paper or were unable to create serious changes in economic life or the relations of nationalities. For instance, though the system of serfdom was officially abolished, in practice not only was it retained, but in some cases it became more bizarre and perverse. According to the new rule of landownership, the lands of the begs and aghas were declared state (*miri*) land but the Armenian villages in the hands of semi-independent ashirets remained in

a state of serfdom, and had to pay taxes both to the Kurdish landlord and to the government.¹³²

The Kurdish serf or maraba system was actually left unchanged because the former maraba villager who had no land supposedly became a free farmer but in fact he still remained a serf. The Tanzimat reforms were profitable only for the Turkish and the Kurdish feudal lords, tribal chieftains, usurers and others who made the Armenian peasants' conditions of life even more unbearable. The serf system of *khafirlik* was preserved in several places.

All this attests that the Ottoman government attempted to keep the former derebeys under control with the help of the Tanzimat reforms, and to avoid tension with them and to seek new points of accord, even if at the cost of the Armenian peasants. There was nothing extraordinary and surprising in that policy as it was built on the basis of the theocratic principles of the Ottoman government. Karl Marx wrote, "But how is it possible to equalize the faithful and the Giaour, the Mussulman and the Rajah before the Koran? To do that it is necessary, in fact, to supplant the Koran by a new civil code, in other words to break down the framework of Turkish society and create a new order of things out of its ruins."¹³³

The Turkish government was not a bit interested in making changes in the structure of the Kurdish society either. Vasilij Nikitin said, "The hereditary rule of traditional leaders was shaken but at the same time nothing serious was initiated to replace it with another authority capable of including the population in the purview of a normal state structure."¹³⁴

After the adoption and execution of the Gülhane Hatt-i Sherif reform, L. Vaks wrote, "Turkish feudalism in its primitive form began to disappear, largely giving way to medium and large landownership in the provinces. The only exceptions were peripheries such as Kurdistan where the dominant property relationships essentially were not of a true feudal but a tribal type."¹³⁵

The transformations of the Hatt-i Sherif of Gülhane reforms were unable to improve in the least the situation in the Asian provinces of the empire and radically affect the interests of the Kurdish feudal class. Influential chiefs of large tribes greeted the Hatt-i Sherif with their bayonets, and in some places they did not even permit the representatives of the Turkish government to step foot on their territories and realize the imperial order. Arshak Al-

poyachian wrote, "All the tyrants who were fortified in the inaccessible Armenian mountains were against the realization of the Tanzimat."¹³⁶ The Kurdish tribal masters could not resign themselves to the idea that they would be deprived of the centuries-old custom of taxing the Armenian rayah, and these great revenues henceforth would go to the government.

The reform of the Tanzimat encouraged the Armenian nation whereas the Kurdish ruling circle considered it as a new violation of their rights. Its inevitable consequence was the escalation of tension between the Western Armenians and the Kurdish feudal leaders. Leo portrayed the relations between those antagonistic parties in the following way: "In order to protect his privileges of feudal serf-owner, the Kurdish beg uses force, not against the government, which he was free to do, but instead against that unarmed and voiceless farmer who yesterday was his serf but today through the tapu [property register] system is free. He forced the Armenian villager to ignore the new law and continue in his former serf status. Otherwise the landlord would expel him by force or other means from the land gained with his tapu. These were the type of new relations established now between the Kurdish landowner and the Armenian peasant."¹³⁷ Then, Leo continued, "the weak and powerless Armenian peasant could keep the position of state tenant farmer in this dangerous situation only in one way, and that was if the Turkish government protected the farmers' rights against their furious ex-masters for the sake of the protection of the state law. However, this never happened... Actually the peasantry was not free but caught between two fires. On the one hand the Kurdish landlords considered themselves the owners of the land the Armenian was cultivating and demanded that their former landowning rights be confirmed. On the other hand the government considered itself the owner of the same land and demanded rent. Thus, two exploiters relied on one single village plough."¹³⁸

As a result, the attempts to realize the Tanzimat in Western Armenia escalated tensions. The coexistence of the Kurdish upper class and the Armenian peasantry became unbearable and impossible. Expressing this attitude the leader of Taron, Bishop Petros Avrantsi told the Kurdish Aladdin Pasha: "Either you or we have to leave this land. We cannot live together any more...."¹³⁹

* * *

Despite the fact that the Turkish government had managed to strike a fatal blow to the Kurdish derebeys and consolidate its position in Western Armenia and Turkish Kurdistan, in the middle of the nineteenth century influential Kurdish leaders still existed who intended to unite tribes under their dominion, evade the central government's control and become the autonomous governors of their regions. A contemporaneous author wrote about such important leaders: "In their person, the people saw not only their judges and patriarchal masters, but also their protectors from the exploitation of provincial governors, and their leaders, who by concentrating the power and the strength of the tribe within themselves, force respect to be shown."¹⁴⁰ Bedirhan, the master of Jezireh-Bohtan, was one of the prominent landowners who was able to skillfully use the Kurds' "general discontent towards the Turkish tyranny."¹⁴¹

Bedirhan Bey was the descendent of the great emirs of Jezireh and Bohtan who had been independent since the seventh or the eighth century. In the beginning of the nineteenth century this family ruled over the Kurdish population in Diyarbakir, Sgherd [Siirt], and Paghesh [Bitlis]. In 1821 the hereditary right to Bohtan passed to Bedirhan. Even though he participated in the Kurdish movements of the 1830s, perhaps at that time he was not sufficiently influential and powerful to boldly undertake the accomplishment of his long-term political goals. However, according to the evidence of Feruh Khan Barunak Bey by the early 1840s he had large armed groups at his disposal and refused to provide the government with taxes and conscripts.¹⁴²

In the 1830s Bedirhan Bey was able to avoid direct conflict with Reshid Pasha's troops, thus preserving his military power intact. Even the pashas of Baghdad and Mosul took him seriously. He did not hide his desires for autonomy from the sultan's government either. Taking advantage of the defeat of the Ottoman army in the Turkish-Egyptian war, Bedirhan enlarged the borders of the areas under his power.¹⁴³ He succeeded in conciliating and arranging his relations with his former enemy Nurullah Bey, the

governor of Hakkari, and came to an agreement with him about joint action against the sultan.

In 1843, Bedirhan openly rebelled against the Ottoman government, striving to unite all the Kurds under his control and to establish a large and strong Kurdistan independent from the Ottoman Empire.¹⁴⁴

The Kurdish tribes under Bedirhan's authority were willing to accept the call for the revolt against the government because in 1843 the sultan's firman about the reconstruction of the Turkish army had replaced the irregular conscription with a general mobilization which caused massive protest in the Kurdish regions.¹⁴⁵

Interpreting the political goals of Bedirhan, French researcher Élisée Reclus wrote: "the Kurds were grouped in massive tribes on the mountain plateau, particularly in the basin of the Great Zab, where they formed a people so powerful that they could dream of establishing their free state against the Turks and the Persians."¹⁴⁶ Another European explorer, Paul Müller-Simonis shared this view, and noted that the movement led by Bedirhan put forward the pretension of creating a Kurdish state.¹⁴⁷

In order to realize his plan, Bedirhan started to subdue minor beys and occupy their lands. Those who refused to become his ally were severely punished. First of all, he began to subjugate the Kurdish principalities in Bohtan. Soon the prominent tribal chiefs of Jezireh, Zakho, Amadia and Hakkari followed him. In 1843, he attacked the Assyrian community in the mountainous province of Tiyari in Hakkari. The community stubbornly refused to accept the supremacy of Bedirhan's ally Nurullah Bey of Hakkari and resisted him.

In the 1830s American Protestant missionaries formed their center in Tiyari province to convert the Nestorian Assyrians. Immediately rumor spread about the intention of the "Franks" to spread Christianity throughout Kurdistan. Having shown a special interest in the wealthy Assyrian population from early on, Bedirhan attacked Tiyari under the pretext of the "protection of Islam."¹⁴⁸ The Assyrians had to turn to Muhammed Pasha Inje Bayraktar of Mosul with their protest which increased Kurdish hostility even further.¹⁴⁹

Conquering the Assyrian citadel Julamerik, Bedirhan and Nurullah Bey slew 10-12 thousand Assyrians. Henry Layard de-

scribed with shocking testimony the atrocities against the Assyrians, and wrote that they all "were slain ruthlessly."¹⁵⁰

Bedirhan forced many of them to recant their religion and become Muslims; many of them were taken to the slave markets or made join his armed forces.¹⁵¹ Vasiliy Nikitin wrote, "Led by religious arguments, Bedirhan was trying to realize his policy of assimilation. He considered himself to be the spiritual leader of the regions liberated from Turkish domination."¹⁵²

The sultan's government treacherously encouraged Bedirhan's brutal actions towards the Assyrians, hoping that war-like Assyrians would not get crushed and consequently an endless civil war would start to weaken both sides. The Sublime Porte used the same policy to provoke Bedirhan's allies against the Armenians and the Yezidis. Muhammad (Giritli Mehmet) Pasha of Mosul was particularly active in the realization of this strategy.¹⁵³

After settling accounts with the Assyrians, Bedirhan directed his arms against Abdul Khan, the Kurdish emir of Moks. Having the Armenian population as his ally the emir had found refuge in his fortress and persistently resisted the enemy attacks. However, under pressure from the overwhelming forces of Bedirhan, he gave way eventually and was forced to become his ally.

Later on many tribal leaders such as Khan Mahmud, the bey of Gavash, Dervish and Khalit Begs of Khizan, Sheikh Yusuf of Zakho, and the tribal chiefs of Shatakh joined Bedirhan. Arshak Alpoyachian noted: "The extensive authority of the Bedirhans subjugated the country from Van to Baghesh and all the small Kurdish principalities existing therein."¹⁵⁴ His influence spread as far as Mosul, Diyarbakir, Mehabad and Urmia.

Under pressure, not only the Kurds of the Ottoman Empire but also one of the great Kurdish governors of Iran, the vali of Ardalan,¹⁵⁵ joined the Kurdish tribal chiefs' "sacred alliance." In fact Bedirhan became an absolute ruler over large territories where the sultan had lost his authority. He started to mint his own coins bearing the words "Bedirhan Emir of Bohtan" on one side and "Hijreti 1258" (1842) on the other. Bedirhan declared Jezireh (Jizre) to be the capital of his realm, where he hoisted the Kurdish flag.¹⁵⁶

The sultan's government was in a panic. It was obvious for the Sublime Porte that the movement under Bedirhan's leadership was not merely a tribal conflict for supremacy but a serious

threat to it. After being convinced that the policy of dividing the rebellious forces through various plots could not deliver the desired results, Sultan Abdul Mejid in 1845 ordered the army to be sent out against Bedirhan. However, the Kurdish united forces defeated the Ottoman troops in Van, and Khan Mahmud, one of Bedirhan's allies in the battle, was appointed as the governor of the city.¹⁵⁷

In 1846, drunk on his victories, Bedirhan decided to subdue the province of Tkhoma which was populated with the Nestorian Assyrians of Hakkari. A fanatic Kurdish sheikh named Abdul Aziz incited Bedirhan against the Assyrians.¹⁵⁸ The callousness and cruelty of Bedirhan reached its peak here. He ordered everyone without exception to be put to the sword, sparing neither the elderly nor children.¹⁵⁹ Mar Shimun, the religious leader of the Assyrians, turned to the Russian government for help. To win the mercy of the Petersburg government he cut off the ears of the slaughtered Assyrians and sent them to the Russian capital.¹⁶⁰ The Assyrians earnestly entreated favors of Christian Rassam, the English consul of Mosul, as well.¹⁶¹ In order to save his life Mar-Shimun had to escape to Urmia.¹⁶²

While the European press and diplomacy were "angrily" condemning Bedirhan's brutality towards the unprotected Assyrians, without undertaking any practical actions, the new potentate managed to organize a massacre of the Yezidi Kurds in the Mosul vilayet because they refused to participate in his program.

Taking revenge on disobedient people, the Kurdish leaders of the "sacred alliance" came to an agreement about dividing the invaded land. Thus, Khan Mahmud would get Vostan, Gavash, Shatakh, Moks, Hayots Tsor and Norduz, Nurullah Beg would receive the region of Julamerik, Aghbak and a part of Iranian Kurdistan, the brother of Khan-Mahmud Abdulkhan would get Khoshab, Mustafa Beg got Van, and the rule of Bitlis would remain as before with its hereditary ruler Sherif Beg.

In 1847 the alliance of Bedirhan started new invasions towards Diyarbakir in order to realize their plan of a "Great Kurdistan." Being well aware that not only would he fail to achieve his goal but that he could not succeed in protecting the existence of the future Kurdish principality from Ottoman attacks without external support, Bedirhan decided to turn to Iran for help and accept its protection.¹⁶³

It is interesting to mention that the semi-independent Armenian communities in the mountainous areas, which had always been ambitious to maintain their longstanding rights and had always fought against the enracination of Ottoman authority in their region, accepted Bedirhan as their ally and even provided him with a sizeable number of soldiers. For instance, the Armenians of Deh in the Bohtan region were one of the communities that had supported Bedirhan's movement since its beginning. The population of the independent communities of Shatakh, Moks and some other mountainous regions joined his army too. The emir of Bohtan even organized a mixed Kurdish-Armenian army to support his ambitious political plans. Bedirhan tried to create not only an ashiret union but a political union comprising both the Kurdish states and the Armenian semi-automatic communities. In order to convince the Armenians, Bedirhan promised to allow them to establish their independent state in Armenian-populated areas under the protection of Christian Russia after obtaining independence from the Ottoman Empire.¹⁶⁴ He also tried to get moral and financial support from the class of wealthy Armenians of Van by promising them that if he was victorious and was able to create an independent Kurdistan, he would allow the Armenians "the administration of the economic division of the government."¹⁶⁵ In particular, he planned with the assistance of Armenians to create arms factories and found a port on the shores of Lake Van. Bedirhan also promised to include the Armenians in his army and reward them with high military ranks despite any obstacles in Islam.¹⁶⁶

The temptation was really great. Accepting Bedirhan's promises and persuasion, a great number of Armenians became soldiers, his political councilors, weapon providers and financiers of the army. Thus, Mir [Prince] Marto [Martiros] of Bashkale became a general of Bedirhan's army, while Stepan Manoghlian (with the nickname "Star"), Hovhannes Chalkatrian and others became the councilors of the emir of Bohtan.¹⁶⁷

As for the Armenian artisans and merchants, they showed no interest in his promises, which were backed by no guarantees. Those classes "needed the assurance of peaceful and calm prosperity and would never make such dangerous and uncertain moves,"¹⁶⁸ especially since Bedirhan was trying to make the Ar-

menian artisans and the tradesmen follow him not with promises of gain but through force. It must be taken into consideration that Bedirhan's actions caused the degradation of the villages, and the collapse of farming, handicrafts and trade. It hindered the development of productive forces, and obstructed domestic trade. In other words, it caused harm to the class of craftsmen and traders.

The Armenian farmers did not support Bedirhan's plans as he treated them like serfs. Hakob Shahpazian wrote, "In this Kurdish-Turkish war, the Armenian rayah peasants were forced to be with the Kurds as serfs, as often happened during intertribal Kurdish clashes, when they would be unwillingly subject to Armenian or Kurdish fratricidal bloodshed."¹⁶⁹

The Armenian peasantry was forced to fight in the intertribal conflicts, and often even against their kinsmen and brothers.¹⁷⁰ Thus, when Bedirhan attacked Abdul Bey of Moks, Armenians were forced to fight on both sides, some as attackers and the others as defenders. Shahpazian declared, "The Armenians suffered great losses during these battles of derebeys, putting to one side their crafts and agriculture and forced into the situation of being subject to raids."¹⁷¹

The emir of Bohtan terribly punished the Armenians who avoided serving him. Shahpazian continued, "They would make the *flah* go down on his hands and turn him into a four-footed animal. They would hang from his head a bag full of straw that would go on a donkey's head, and after tying it tightly, would start stabbing it with iron nails....they would torture him, and the flah bearing these blows would suffocate in the bag and die."¹⁷²

Besides the burden of high taxes, Bedirhan imposed hard labor on the Armenian peasantry without payment, such as the construction of fortifications and roads, and making weapons and ammunition. He considered the Armenian peasantry to be his own property, which was why he protected them from being killed or robbed by others in the areas he controlled.

Another complication in the Armenian peasants' lives was the fact that the Turkish authorities persecuted them for serving Bedirhan even though that service was completely against their will. Undoubtedly, Bedirhan's movement inspired Armenians as well as all the neighboring nations, especially the Assyrians, with terror.

Feeling themselves caught between two fires, the Armenian peasantry as well as the townspeople in the end preferred Turkish domination to the unpredictable actions of Bedirhan. For them the Ottoman government was "the representative of order in that chaos." Hayk Ghazaryan wrote, "Bedirhan's administrative and governmental methods, the amount and the manners of taxation, and his attitude towards subjects of other nations were worse and more dreadful than those of the Turkish state and its officials. That was the main reason why the Armenian population, having lost its statehood, like Assyrians, chose the lesser of the two evils and preferred subjection to the sultans to the absolute tyranny of Bedirhan."¹⁷³

The Armenian patriarchate of Constantinople, and Patriarch Matteos Chuhachian personally, the leaders and merchants of the cities, artisans and representatives of other classes submitted petitions to the government pleading and demanding that the rebellious Kurdish feudal lords be restrained and their lawlessness halted.

Patriarch Matteos wrote in one of his petitions to the sultan that "the callous and rebellious nation of Medes led by Khan Mahmud and Bedirhan Bey exploits the inhabitants of Van, Taron and nearby villages, robs the monasteries and the churches, [and] abuses and kills people."¹⁷⁴ The patriarch cautioned the Sublime Porte that "the population of Van, impatient, unable to tolerate the anguish which the Medes [i.e. Kurds] cause them, has decided to escape to Russia with their entire families."¹⁷⁵

Of course Avetis Perperian's view that the Ottoman government sent a disciplinary army against Bedirhan in response to the patriarch's request is an exaggeration. It was simply that the time for the government to undertake such a step had long ago been reached. Bedirhan's movement was unexpected for the sultan's government, with an insurgent leader openly subjugating major and minor feudal lords, joining their lands to his territory with the goal of creating "a homogeneous Kurdish principality"¹⁷⁶ independent from the Ottoman Empire.

At that given moment, the international situation was favorable for the Ottoman Empire to deal with the Kurdish problem. After the Turkish-Egyptian war the country began to come to its senses and had started the reorganization of the army. In addi-

tion, the English demanded that Sultan Abdul Mejid hasten the destruction of Bedirhan's movement. The English ambassador in Constantinople, Stratford Radcliff (also known as Stratford Canning), who had plotted a complex political and diplomatic game against Russia and France during his service in office, was troubled that Petersburg might take advantage of Bedirhan's movement to gain political concessions from the Ottoman Empire. The British government was greatly concerned about the danger of Russian commercial and economic penetration into Far Eastern markets, fearing that it could cause great damage to English business interests.

The Turkish ruling class suspected that Iran would also try to take advantage of Bedirhan's movement. They had reliable information that Bedirhan had sought the Shah's support and a Persian Armenian, Melikzadian by name, whose brother was Shah's courtier, became his mediator.¹⁷⁷ Istanbul considered it a possibility that Iran would take advantage of the favorable situation to try to solve its territorial disagreements with Turkey for its own benefit. Therefore the Ottoman ruling class saw the destruction of Bedirhan's movement as an indispensable step for the security and inviolability of state borders against both the Iranian and Russian dangers.

Before taking any decisive action, the sultan's government decided to try to solve the problem in a peaceful manner, and tried to persuade Bedirhan to change his course of behavior.¹⁷⁸ After this proposal was rejected, it decided to resort to force. In 1846, a huge army was placed under the Turkish marshal Osman Pasha's command in East Anatolia in order to lead the attack against Bedirhan. In mid-May 1847, the army was already prepared for military action.

The Ottoman government decided to involve Armenians in this initiative since it needed much help to strengthen its position in the territories occupied by the Kurds. First of all, the sultan wanted to use the Armenians as a fighting force against the Kurds and secondly, and most importantly, to create and deepen hostile relations between the two nations.

Led by these considerations, Osman Pasha started recruiting the local Armenians into his armed forces.¹⁷⁹ The government tried to assert as that the raid against Bedirhan was arranged purely for

the sake of protecting the Armenians. *Lroy gir metsn teruteann osmanean* [Newspaper of the Great Ottoman Power], an Armenian newspaper published in Constantinople which actually was the organ of the government, published a great number of proclamations and information in order to create the impression that the goal of the suppression of the revolt of Bedirhan and the other tribal chiefs was "to reassure a large number of inhabitants and subjects who were being oppressed."¹⁸⁰

Thus the Ottoman government was concealing its real motivation with dazzling promises to the Armenians, and was presenting its mission as a great favor that the "caring" government was doing for the nation. At the same time the Ottoman government wanted it to be clear to the Armenians that if they united with the rebels, they would automatically become its enemy and become (like the Kurds) subject to a direct blow of the Ottoman yataghan.

Patriarch Matteos was informed about the large number of Armenians in Bedirhan's army. Terrified by the imminent danger, he not only issued encyclicals calling "for the assurance of faithfulness" but also called upon his people to support the Ottoman "liberating" army, "which would obliterate the Kurdish prince-doms and free the Armenian people." Addressing the prelates of Diyarbakir, Bitlis, Palu and Van, the patriarch exhorted "the people to fill themselves with revenge for all the torment they suffered until now, to be supportive and serve the imperial army, and to show loyalty to the sovereign."¹⁸¹

It would not be surprising if the encyclicals of Patriarch Matteos were written at the behest of the Turkish government or for the purpose of flattering the authorities. However, undoubtedly, the patriarch was expressing the feelings of a certain part of the Western Armenians.

Having decided to obliterate the Kurds one by one, Osman Pasha divided his army into three parts and sent them in different directions, towards Van, Erzurum, Kharberd [Harput] and Mosul. First of all, the Ottoman army entered Moks, defeated and captured Abdal (Abdul) Khan, and exiled him to the island of Rhodes. The leader of the Van *kulis*, K r Mustafa Pasha, fearing the vengeance of the Turkish commander put down his weapons voluntarily and surrendered.¹⁸²

In order to punish the Armenians who refused to join his

army and fight against the Ottoman army Khan Mahmud surrounded Aigestan (in Van). The Armenians resisted the khan bravely, and then going on the counteroffensive, captured the tribal chief, handing him over to Osman Pasha. The latter slew the defeated Kurds and exiled Khan Mahmud to Silistre (today Silistra in Bulgaria).¹⁸³

Afterward the Ottoman army moved to their main destination, Jezireh, where Bedirhan had fortified himself in Bohtan province. At the very first clash Osman Pasha was defeated, which weakened the strength and enthusiasm of the troops. The fighting continued, bringing victory sometimes to one and sometimes to the other side. Osman Pasha decided to use one of the ancient Turkish weapons of treachery--the policy of rousing hostility among the tribal chiefs against one another, and through bribery and promises of high office attempted to find traitors among Bedirhan's allies. The attempt was fruitful. Osman Pasha was able to convince Bedirhan's nephew Yezdanshir to commit betrayal.¹⁸⁴ Yezdanshir had to protect the positions of the rebels at the left wing of the battlefield with his group and due to his disloyalty the way to Bohtan was opened for the enemy. Mirza Bey, an influential tribal chieftain who was the ruler of the Chkhur region in the plain of Mush, followed in the footsteps of Yezdashir, extending his influence up to Bitlis.

After these incidents, the success of the Turkish troops rapidly mushroomed. Though Bedirhan was stubbornly resisting the enemy with his five-thousand-man army in Orag (Arkuh) fortress, his allies started gradually abandoning him. Receiving a guarantee for his security from Osman Pasha, Bedirhan laid down his weapons and surrendered.¹⁸⁵ The Ottoman army turned numerous villages of the Jezireh region into ruins. Bedirhan's estates were sold. Bedirhan along with his family was sent to Istanbul accompanied by a strong guard party to be judged.¹⁸⁶ The Armenians and the Yezidis of the region showed great support to the Turkish troops in the suppression of the emir of Bohtan. Avetis Perperian wrote: "The Armenians of Vaspurakan united and attacked Jezireh province where the leaders of the barbarians had fortified themselves in inaccessible places. Defeated and desperate, Bedirhan had to surrender to commander-in-chief Osman Pasha, along with his entire family."¹⁸⁷

There is one version of the story in which the Armenians of Van had captured Bedirhan in his fortress Orag and handed him over to Osman Pasha.¹⁸⁸ The captured tribal chiefs were exiled to the island of Crete¹⁸⁹ and a great number of participants of the revolt escaped to Iran and the Transcaucasus. Others found refuge in inaccessible mountains.¹⁹⁰ Stepan Manoghlian and Hovhannes Chalkatrian were captured with Bedirhan and exiled at first to Caesarea (Turkish, Kayseri) and then to Kapan Maten [Keban Maden].¹⁹¹

Along with the Kurds, the Armenian semi-independent communities of Deh and Bohtan resisted the Turkish army. After the defeat many Armenians residing in these regions emigrated in order to avoid the persecutions of Osman Pasha.

After his victories, Osman Pasha divided his army into several smaller units to continue his punitive activities. He invaded all the independent and semi-independent regions of Western Armenia and Kurdistan that were not yet subject to Ottoman dominion. In 1848-1849, the Ottoman army suppressed the principalities of Khoshab, Mush and Bitlis, arrested the local Kurdish ashiret chiefs and appointed Ottoman officials of the Sublime Porte as the governors of those areas.¹⁹² Shortly thereafter a military unit was sent to the region of Bayazit and Alashkert to terminate the authority of the Kurdish ruler Balyul Pasha. In 1849, Mehmed Reshid Pasha (Gözlüklü) suppressed the last Kurdish resistance in Hakkari and definitively conquered the rebellious region. The Ottoman army destroyed the Chaurme fortress in Mush, and the fortresses of Moks, Bohtan, Bitlis, Gavash, Kharzan and Bayazit. The tribal rulers of the latter were exiled to the Arabian Peninsula and other places. Entering Sgherd [Turkish, Siirt], the Ottoman soldiers heartlessly slaughtered the local Yezidi population.

Administrative alterations were enacted to weaken the Kurds. Late in 1847 a number of Kurdish-inhabited settlements were united and placed under the general administration of former vizier Esad Mukhlis Pasha.¹⁹³ Soon afterwards the mountainous territories of the Kurdish tribal chief feudal landowners were turned into Turkish administrative units in which the tribal chiefs only preserved a nominal independence.¹⁹⁴

In order to consolidate their authority over the Kurds and to decrease if not completely stop anti-governmental protests in the future the government took an internationally significant political

step. Constantinople would be unable to keep the Kurds peaceful as long as Iran provoked the Kurds of the Transcaucasus to anti-governmental discourse, especially as no agreement about that matter had been concluded with the shah's government.¹⁹⁵ Therefore, Ottoman diplomacy insisted on inserting a special point about the Kurdish Question in the Turkish-Iranian treaty signed on May 19, 1847 (Hijret 1246) in Erzurum. According to the treaty, the Iranian government was obliged neither to permit Kurds residing in proximity to the Iranian border to attack Ottoman territory, nor to incite them against the Ottoman government. The treaty also stated that the tribes with uncertain citizenship status had to decide it "once and forever," along with where they would settle, either in Iran or the Ottoman Empire.¹⁹⁶

The victory against Bedirhan was so important for sultanic authority that a special medal was minted for the occasion.¹⁹⁷ The Armenians of Constantinople were delighted. By Patriarch Matteos' orders, prayers of thanksgiving were to be read and "Glory to God, savior of us all" sung in all the Armenian churches. Sultan Abdul Mejid expressed his appreciation by means of his chief eunuch Teyfur Agha to Patriarch Matteos for "the sympathetic position of the Armenians." The patriarch immediately informed his people of the "imperial great favor" with patriotic warm effusion, simultaneously reassuring that "the land of the Armenians, the paradisaical Armenia, again will blossom and flourish."¹⁹⁸ The patriarch sent his encyclical to Armenians living in all parts of the Ottoman Empire, calling on them to be thankful and to wish well for the sovereign and "his powerful state, and celebrate a holiday of joy for the freedom of the Armenian nation from the merciless abuse of the barbarians." Delighted that "the Armenian land has been liberated from this bitter situation, this unbearable captivity," he expressed his hope that subsequently a new period would start for the Armenians, a "feast of liberation," and Armenia "would be renovated, become brighter, and gain back its initial amazing appearance and beauty."¹⁹⁹

The Ottoman capital's official Armenian-language newspaper, the *Lroy gir*, was full of wishes of longevity for the "glorious" sultan for liberating the Armenians from Kurdish violence and raids, ending imminent danger, and bringing the criminals "chained" to Constantinople. These words expressed how grate-

ful they were for the "compassionate" government's boundless care.²⁰⁰ The patriarchate's newspaper *Hayastan* [Armenia] wrote; "At one time, we would always receive sad news from Asia. We would hear about the merciless misdeeds that various Kurdish tribes performed--robbery, destruction, disaster, capture, slaughter, and at last... every type of lawlessness that could be expected from a rebellious people. Who is the cause of our pitiful Armenia's misery if not the Kurds? Who distressed the face of those joyful fields of Armenia and who covered their face with a garment of mourning? Is it not the Kurds' revolt and independence? The glorious and merciful sovereign, desiring the happiness of his entire country, began one or two years ago to provide the care necessary for this wretched country too."²⁰¹

Hayastan was optimistic and even insisted that supposedly fear and despotism were eliminated from Western Armenia and peace reigned everywhere due to the "beneficial laws" of the Tanzimat. Unfortunately not much time was needed to be assured that the expectations of the Armenians would not be justified.

The dreadful violence of Osman Pasha's army kept the Kurds in constant fear for a long time. It is true that the bloody vengeance of the Turkish government massacred the Kurds, but at the same time it enraged them against the Turks.²⁰² In this regard the Armenian novelist Raffi noted that the Turks' cruelty against the Kurds during the suppression of the Bedirhan movement created "a terrible loathing towards the Turkish government and towards the Turks as a whole... The hatred towards the Turks brought them closer to the Armenians."²⁰³

It was very obvious in Istanbul that the Kurdish hatred towards the Ottoman government could inflame a new insurrection because "Bedirhan's idea still remained alive for a time in his tribe."²⁰⁴ The main epicenters of the rebellion were destroyed so that it was senseless to continue the severities. It was time to change "the policy of the whip" to the "policy of pie" especially as the Kurds were necessary elements for the government with which to "balance" or counter the Armenian masses of Christian population in East Anatolia. This policy was first implemented with respect to Bedirhan. On the way to exile in Constantinople, he was taken to Diyarbakir where he was treated as an honored guest by the local authorities. A wooden puppet statue of Bedirhan filled with powder was placed in the square of the city's

fortress, and in front of his eyes, "after several turns around its axis, it exploded with great thunder. At a slight distance, a voice arose from the audience--the criminal has atoned for his sin."²⁰⁵

By the will of the sultan's government the leader of the mighty Kurdish rebellion received such an unbelievable symbolic punishment that even Bedirhan himself was extremely astonished by the government's actions. The newspaper of Constantinople *Hay-tarar gir lroy* [Informing Newspaper] published Bedirhan's letter of gratitude towards the sultan who had demonstrated "paternal" care toward him. In his letter he had sincerely confessed: "I thought that if I were caught I would be asked to pay much treasure. On top of all this, there was not as much money with me as the inhabitants of those regions hoped. Then as soon as they find that I do not have money, they will take me and throw me into prison, and torment me, so that they will make me spend my life in prison with some water to drink and a little bread. Thinking these thoughts, I went on, but with the patronage of the autocrat, there was freedom both of self and of property. While I was thinking about drinking water, my goods and property that remained in Jezireh when I took refuge in asylum, with a genuine promissory note... to be written; as soon as I saw them placing a proxy on my behalf, I was amazed. And behold they brought me to the capital. May God bless your highness with a long life! They put me in such a place that my ancestors have not seen, and in which none of the latter could even stay in their dreams. Glory to the benefactor! They settled me and show me honor in this way too. Seeing this and thinking of the mistakes which I committed, I rebuke myself."²⁰⁶

The last sentence in this fear-inspiring Kurdish leader's simple and sincere letter was the most important. First of all, it clearly testified to how skillfully Istanbul served the "pie" policy and secondly, how Bedirhan was assured that "the hand that cannot be cut must be kissed and placed on the forehead." With such actions the Turkish government hoped to prevent the future development of "Bedirhan's idea," that is, the dream of creating a Kurdish state.

Indeed, the government allowed the heirs of this defeated Kurdish leader to inherit all his possessions. His son was taken into military service and rewarded with the title of pasha. The government also did not punish the organizer of the Assyrian

massacre, former emir Nurullah Beg of Hakkari (Hur Allah in the Armenians sources). On the contrary, he was granted a high administrative position.²⁰⁷

The essence of the sultan's Kurdish policy in that period was not only to keep the rebellious tribal chiefs obedient by gaining their favor, but also to divide and weaken as much as possible the large Kurdish principalities. In place of the old tribal chief, new ones would be elevated who would feel obligated to the sultan for their advancement. Karo Sasuni wrote: "A number of regions that previously belonged to one strong tribal leader were divided among several different tribal leaders. Inspired with their new rights, the chiefs were aggravated against one another. This network of treacherous tension turned to the advantage of the Turkish government, which began to feel secure from new Kurdish outbursts."²⁰⁸

The Armenian nation could clearly see that the sultan's measures against the Kurdish tribal feudal leaders remained incomplete. They could guess the real intentions of the government. The hopes and enthusiasm of all the Armenian clergy and statesmen in Constantinople, and the Armenians of the provinces disappeared, to be replaced by suspicion of the Turkish administration. Even the most optimistic were disappointed.

After the suppression of Bedirhan's movement, the Armenians who were familiar with its terrors needed only a short time to realize that the yoke of the new Turkish dominion--its system of taxation, the Ottoman court, the police, the corrupt officials, and in general the entire administrative structure--was just as cruel, despotic and exploitative as the Kurdish "administration."

In journalist Emile Joseph Dillon's words, Osman Pasha delivered a "coup de grâce" to the Kurdish derebeys in Western Armenia. He brought to an end the Kurdish independent or semi-autonomous emirates and the main feudal separatist centers. What is more, in 1849 the sultan invalidated all the privileges and rights of the derebeys. Nevertheless, the hopes that the Armenians had during Bedirhan's revolt were never realized. During Bedirhan's movement it is true that Armenian serfs in some places succeeded in obtaining a limited amount of land through the "tapu system." They took advantage of the favorable attitude of the Ottoman government, which in turn was the consequence of the Armenian support of government policy.

After Bedirhan's defeat the Kurds started their old practice of confiscating the land of the Armenians and reinstating the status of serfdom of the *rayah*, which had been abolished "on paper" according to the principles of the Tanzimat. It was simply astonishing for the Armenians that often the "partners" of the Kurdish beys and aghas were the local Ottoman authorities who were appointed to realize the principles of the Tanzimat in East Anatolia.²⁰⁹ The complaints from the Armenian villagers to the administrative and judicial bodies of the country were either not responded to at all or simply answered by the well-known Turkish "*olmaz*" [Impossible]. Such behavior of the Ottoman state and its administrative bodies destroyed the Christian population's belief about the "equality of rights for Christians and Muslims" that the Tanzimat had promised and which had been accepted with such enthusiasm and hopes initially by the Western Armenians. People could clearly see that the laws adopted by the Ottoman state either did not change their conditions or made them even worse. A clear example is the following: though in 1850 one of the most onerous taxes, the *kharaaj*, was eliminated, in its place the *bedel-i askeri*, which was collected from non-Muslims for exemption from military service, was immediately instituted. While the government tried to present this "reform" as a benefit for Christians and as a freedom from crushing taxation, in reality the new taxation system was more oppressive for the so-called "giaour" Christians.

Though the derebeys or valley lords were eliminated they were replaced with a number of lesser tribal chiefs who were more terrible and rapacious in their lesser regions. Those tribal chiefs were independent from each other, which made it easy for the government to stir strife among them whenever they wanted to and deal with them one by one. Russian officer Mikhail Dorimontovich Likhutin wrote, "If any of the tribal chiefs attained fame and authority in the eyes of his people, they would try to expel him, to drive him out or annihilate him. Sometimes they would turn him into a pasha, generously grant him privileges, invite him to Constantinople, give him a harem — and [then] he is lost in splendor and oblivion. If he is not satisfied with this, other more severe means are applied."²¹⁰

As the power of the great Kurdish tribal chiefs was destroyed, Karo Sasuni pointed out that after the events of 1848, "the Kurds

were flexible and tried to replace their lost political and military power with the religious element, which was not confined to the borders of any one tribal territory."²¹¹ In other words the derebeys were replaced with small-scale tribal chiefs and clergy--sheikhs, pirs, seyyids and others, who filled the vacuum in the Kurdish tribal ruling class which was obsessed with the power to rule.

Of course, the Kurdish Muslim clergy had great authority over the Kurdish Muslim masses even before the abolishment of the derebeys. However they used all their might and ability at that time to serve the strong and influential tribal chiefs and derebeys. Now they turned into a separate dominant force. The Kurdish sheikhs were the embodiment of their tribe's supreme spiritual and secular duties. They exercised an immense authority which went beyond local borders to reach all the Kurdish-populated areas in the Middle East. As religious leaders, many of the sheikhs also ruled different dervish brotherhoods, such as the Mevlevi, Nakshbandi, Kadiri, and Refai. The sheikhs were given the power to control customs and traditions, to settle arguments within the tribe, to declare war against their neighboring tribes, and act as arbitrators between the tribe and the government. They collected the taxes and handed them to the government, and they had the right to punish the disobedient members of the tribe even by the confiscation of property. In a nutshell, they wielded enormous authority.

The position of sheikh was hereditary, and in order to exercise or reinforce their authority many sheikhs declared that the first caliphs of the Ummayad and Abbasid Muslim dynasties were their ancestors.²¹² Thus the guarantee of the eternal power of the sheikhs was the hereditary transmission of their title.

As the sheikh was the embodiment of both a spiritual and secular feudal lord, he had profound influence in economic life too, and often pushed the secular feudal lords into the background. The source of the sheikhs' might was certainly their wealth. The sheikhs possessed thousands of cattle, the best pastures and many more things. They did not place any distinction between means to multiply their wealth, being well aware that the material factor was stronger than the moral factor for power and authority. Vasiliy Nikitin, an expert on Kurdish history, wrote: "In the past, the sheikhs were truly the heads of dervish brotherhoods. They

were satisfied simply with spiritual authority and lived on the donations of their followers and worshippers. As they gradually grew richer, gained more land, and enlarged the circle of their followers, they were pulled into secular affairs as well. They began to accumulate secular authority, and had at their disposition great means and numerous armed servants."²¹³ In fact, the sheikhs often obtained the rights of large tribal principalities by force because as *murshids* [guide or teacher], they had thousands of armed *murids* [disciple or student] under their control.

The major tribal chiefs negotiated with the sheikhs in order to strengthen their position in the Kurdish regions with the help of the sheikhs' influence and authority. It's noteworthy to mention that even Ottoman officials tried to befriend the newly-emerged sheikhs as they had great expectations of obtaining social support in Western Armenia and Kurdistan. Using the fact that the sultan was the spiritual leader, or caliph, of all the Muslims in the world, the Ottoman ruling class tried to keep the Kurdish masses under the ideological and political influence of the Turkish state with the help of Kurdish dervish orders, sheikhs and seyyids. That was why they won great honors from the sultans. The leader of the Mevlevi dervish order even was granted the honor of the ceremony of tying the Caliph Omar's sword on the sultan's belt.²¹⁴

How can we evaluate the Kurdish movements at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and what was their impact on Armenian-Kurdish relations? First of all, we need to mention that the Kurdish people despised and rejected the Ottoman yoke of the time, but at the same time blindly yielded to tribal authority. Consequently the Kurds' sense of independence remained focused on the independence of their own tribes, and the collective independence of the entire people not only was never a matter of concern but the Kurds were not even conscious of it. Here lies the mystery of the political development of the Kurdish people. Karo Sasuni wrote, "The feeling of extreme independence did not take political form over the centuries, and the Kurds were not motivated to create a national state and seek in a collective homeland their security and independence."²¹⁵

A Russian army colonel and expert on the Kurdish question, A. Kartsev, wrote: "Despite the inherent love of the Kurdish nation for freedom and a certain consciousness of nationality which

gave them the possibility to save their language and customs, they never had been able to create a stable state, and never even strove for it. The Kurds' patriotism never extended beyond the boundaries of their tribes (ashirets), and even if it happened that several tribes united for a common action, the first setbacks easily destroyed their alliance."²¹⁶ Vasily Nikitin summarized this: "If Kurdistan does not come out of the tribal period of its history, it will never be able to become a national state."²¹⁷

Undoubtedly, the forces leading the Kurdish movements of the first half of the nineteenth century basically pursued regressive goals: the perpetuation of their already spent tribal-patrimonial system and the preservation of absolute power over the settled and nomadic population of Western Armenia and Kurdistan. The Kurdish feudal lords had always found alien the concept of pan-national interest, and they preferred to collaborate with the Turkish authorities, betraying the common cause and accepting bribes.²¹⁸ All the Kurdish revolts against the Ottoman government, M. Pogorelov said, were "actually merely the revolts of leaders which did not work for the idea of establishing a united national Kurdistan, but rather pursued the defense of their personal interests, which the Turkish government threatened. Those revolts were quite distinctive in that they demonstrated the readiness of the Kurdish masses to follow their leaders in the most dangerous fights which could not offer anything to them personally, and even contradicted their interests."²¹⁹

Mainly because of the aforementioned reasons, during the entire nineteenth century peoples living in the same geographic region (Armenian, Kurds, Assyrians and others) fought for liberation from the Turkish yoke separately, each on its own, never crossing at any stage of historical development.

Due to the military organization at its disposal, the ashiret armed groups, the Kurdish ruling class was able to dictate its will to the Christian population of Western Armenia, which already had its rights limited both by the Ottoman state and by the principles of Islam.

During the derebey era the Armenians were under the unbearable and absolute yoke of the Kurdish tribal feudal lords. The source of antagonism between the two peoples was only economical. There were no political conflicts between them because both serfowner-derebeys and their dependent Armenian rayah popu-

lation were under the yoke of the same political power, that of the Ottomans.

However the collapse of the derebey movement led to certain changes in Armenian-Kurdish relations. After the defeat of Bedirhan, the Kurdish tribes were filled with hostility towards the Armenians, considering them, except for the armed communities of the mountains, as Turkophiles. Henceforth the Kurdish aghas started to view the Armenians as a mass of population belonging to others that could be robbed.

CHAPTER TWO

ARMENIAN-KURDISH RELATIONS ON THE EVE OF THE EMERGENCE OF THE ARMENIAN QUESTION

In 1853, right after the outbreak of the Eastern or Crimean War, Ottoman leaders had high hopes for using Kurdish armed groups on the eastern front against Russia. The sultan called upon the Kurds to take up arms for the sake of the defense of Islam. However, his call for holy war did not get the desired response from the tribal upper class or the Kurdish masses. The only exceptions were from some tribes residing near the borders of Russia (like the Haydaranli, Zilan, Sipki, Jemaldinli, Junuki, Milyanli, and Beziki) or some individual Kurdish feudal lords who had hitched their destinies to the Ottoman government. The rest of the tribes completely avoided participation in military operations, or when forced by threats to join the army, either escaped at the first opportunity or sometimes even turned their arms against the Turkish forces. Anti-governmental movements started in some Kurdish-populated regions. The insurgency was especially persistent in contumacious Dersim.¹ As for the Kurds in the Transcaucasus, they assumed a defiant anti-Turkish attitude. They were integrated in two different Russian regiments under the general command of Colonel Mikhail Tarielovich Loris-Melikov and exhibited good martial abilities throughout the war.²

The Kurdish upper class complained that the existence of the Turkish army in the Kurdish inhabited areas limited its "freedom," whereas the general public protested against matters like the military recruitment and taxation. Discontent multiplied because the governmental army accompanying the tax collectors behaved lawlessly and abused the people everywhere.³

Bedirhan's nephew Yezdanshir, who was given the prominent position of governor of Kurdistan for his service to the Sub-

lime Porte during the rebellion of the 1840s, tried to make use of the resentment of the Kurdish upper class and the general public. Displeased with the Ottoman government, this influential leader started secretly gathering all the Kurdish dissatisfied elements around him to rise in revolt at the first possible opportunity.

On July 17, 1854 the Turkish defeat on the heights of Chingil near Küchük Dere and the fall of Bayazit increased to an unprecedented degree the numbers of soldiers deserting their regiments and expressing their dissatisfaction towards the government.⁴

After some preparatory actions, Yezdanshir issued a special call for liberation from the Turkish yoke, which received a particularly enthusiastic response in Kurdish-populated regions like Bohtan, Jezireh and Hakkari regions. It is significant that Armenians and Assyrians from Western Armenia and Kurdistan also responded to his call. Yezdanshir considered the presence of the Ottoman authorities superfluous both in Western Armenia and in Kurdistan because the Kurds and the Armenians formed the majority of the population in those areas while the Turks were only a small minority.⁵

In December 1854 an overt mass insurrection led by Yezdanshir broke out against the Ottoman government. All of Kurdistan and Western Armenia seethed. The insurrection encompassed the huge area stretching from Van to Baghdad.⁶ Yezdanshir was able to conquer Bitlis without much effort, and the rebels punished the local kaymakam Ali Bey.⁷ The Kurdish population of Van and Moks under the leadership of Teli Bey as well as the sons of Bedirhan with their numerous troops joined the rebels.⁸

The Ottoman government was in a panic. Istanbul was anxious that the insurgency might increase to extreme proportions, and draw in "the Christian population of Armenia and even Anatolia."⁹ The Yezidis of Mosul joined Yezdanshir, and their emir, Hüseyin Bey, crushed an Ottoman five-thousand-soldier military unit and conquered the city of Sgherd [Siirt].¹⁰

Istanbul was seriously concerned about the revolt in the rear of the Ottoman army fighting against Russia, especially as Yezdanshir made attempts to enter into contact with the command of the Russian troops, particularly with the detachment of Yerevan, and suggested launching a united attack against the Ottoman army mobilized in Erzurum.¹¹ The anxiety grew even more

rapidly after the rumour about the possibility of the Assyrians and the Armenians joining the revolt. In 1855 the archbishop of Ardebil, Isahak Satunyants, was informed that the Armenian, Assyrian and Kurdish inhabitants of Hakkari district were ready to jointly resist the government once the Russian army advanced.¹² In May of the same year, the religious leader of the Assyrians, Mar Shimun Abraham, wrote to the commander of the corps of Russian troops active in the Caucasus General Vasilii Behbutov that the Armenians and the Kurds were ready to unite with the Russian forces.

Confirming that fact, Russian officer Petr Ivanovich Averyanov spoke about the amazing solidarity between the Kurds and the Christians against their common enemy, namely, the Turks.¹³

In January 1855, under the leadership of Kengam Pasha the Ottoman army moved from Baghdad against the forces of Yezdanshir. However the Kurds completely obliterated the Turks in the first battle that took place near Sgherd. As a result of this success numerous local Arabs and the Greeks joined the rebels.¹⁴ The number of the armed rebels increased to sixty thousand. They killed or forced the Turkish officials out from the conquered areas, establishing their control. The flames of the revolt spread through Western Armenia, including the regions of Van, Erzurum, and Bayazit.

In 1855, by a great exertion of force, the Ottoman government was able to put down the insurgency of Yezdanshir. This Kurdish revolt, which was unprecedented in its size, ended in failure, like all previous anti-Turkish movements.

Reflecting on the results of that rebellion Russian officer Mikhail Dorimedontovich Likhutin wrote: "The general discontent against Ottoman rule and the government of their pashas only needed an opportunity, a spark, as Yezdanshir's revolt showed, to explode and turn into an inextinguishable fire." Then he adds, "The discontent has not vanished. The people and their feelings towards the Turks have remained the same. Although Yezdanshir is no longer present, there may emerge dozens of new leaders in his place."¹⁵

Compared with previous Kurdish movements, one of the evident characteristics of this insurrection was the absence of violence and disorder against the Christians.¹⁶ With the exception of some individual tribal chiefs (e.g. Mahmad Beg, the son of Bah-

lul Pasha of the Alashkert region), all the feudal lords and tribal leaders participating in the rebellion remained neutral towards the Armenians.¹⁷

Of course, this was an unpleasant novelty for the Ottoman government, which became disturbed. Therefore after the Crimean War, Istanbul undertook some radical alterations in its Kurdish policy. If, as Armenian scholar Mkrtich Gegamovich Nersisyan wrote, "until the 1860s the Turkish government's main concern about the Eastern pashaliks was the question of the abolishment of the Kurdish people's independent and semi-independent status,"¹⁸ afterwards, when the empire faced new challenges, it realized the necessity of mitigating the pressure against the Kurds and stabilizing the situation in Eastern Anatolia.

The Armenian historian Leo explained the reasons for the Turkish change of policy about the Kurdish Question in the following way: "Instead of punishing and oppressing as it had done before, the Ottoman government started using the method of enticement in order to neutralize the fighting spirits of this people and to gain their support in case of possible war. And one of the best ways to gain their favor was by allowing the Kurds to oppress the Armenian farmers as they wished. The maintenance of the Kurdish traditional tribal military organization was desirable for the Ottoman government for purely military purposes. Since Tanzimat was destroying the bases of that organization, which would greatly decrease its military value, it was necessary to strengthen the Kurdish feudal system at the expense of Armenian landownership to the degree that the influence of the Tanzimat actually disappeared, though it was nominally preserved."¹⁹

That was not all. The unconditional political orientation of the Armenian nation towards Russia once more appeared during the Crimean war. It turned out that throughout Yezdanshir's rebellion some individual Kurdish statesmen also desired to establish ties with Russia. For Istanbul the most effective way to handle the situation and to entirely extirpate that dangerous tendency was to worsen Armenian-Kurdish relations by raising these two nations against one other.

The Turkish government was also aware of the increase in Armenian national sentiment and ideas of national rebirth. The idea of national liberation movements was spreading from smaller circles of progressive statesmen to the entire population.

The Empire was in a predicament about its Eastern policy: the Armenians or the Kurds? Measuring all the aspects and circumstances of the dilemma, Istanbul finally made its choice in favor of the latter. The sultan's government had to adopt an anti-Armenian policy as the logical continuation of that choice. Mkrtich Nersisyan wrote, "Suppressing the major Kurdish movements, at least temporarily, the sultan's government was directing its blows against the Western Armenians, considering them one of its dangerous enemies."²⁰

Turkey did not expect any resistance from the European states while it realized its new policy because the Crimean war made it obvious that the integrity and independence of the Ottoman Empire had an essential significance for the political balance of the European states. Consequently its anti-Armenian policy would not encounter any vigorous counterreaction from European diplomacy.²¹

Having these considerations in mind, the sultan ordered the valis and military representatives of the provinces not to use weapons but rather means of persuasion against the Kurds and to never irritate them.²² The local authorities made the tribal chiefs realize that from then on their actions against the Armenians would not be considered as anti-governmental activity.

Ludovic de Contenson considered that one of the reasons the Ottoman government adopted this hostile policy against the Armenians was the fear that European progressive ideas would spread in Turkey via the Armenians, becoming a threat to the security of the empire. He wrote: "Was it not the indisputed intellectual capability of the Armenians that inflamed the mistrust of the Turks, who were afraid that the ideas of freedom, equality, rights and legality ... can easily penetrate among them? These were the reasons why the Turks were convinced that the old classical system of the Eastern conquerors must be applied to the Armenians, meaning the massacre of the population, the mere existence of which posed a threat for them. And without hesitation the Turks resurrected this system in the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century."²³

Anti-Armenian policy had its ideologists. Thus, one of the greatest figures of Ottoman diplomacy, Fuad Mehmed Pasha, declared in his political will written to Sultan Abdul Aziz that "the

Ottoman Empire is in danger." He continued, "In particular, the Armenians have an inclination towards exceeding their boundaries, and it would be wise to moderate their enthusiasm, and to encourage only those who will respectfully accept the principle of the unity of our empire."²⁴

On February 18, 1856 the sultan government proclaimed its new reform plan, the Hatt-ı Hümayun, which made solemn promises before the law that the rights of Christians and Muslims would be equal. It included Christians in military service, and prohibited the discrimination and degradation of non-Muslims.²⁵ The Western Armenians accepted the Hatt-ı Hümayun with great enthusiasm. They believed that this new stage of the Tanzimat would radically improve their conditions but it did not take long for their enthusiasm to die. Though the Hatt-ı Hümayun pertained to all the subjects of the Ottoman Empire, the interior provinces of Asian Turkey were deprived of the sultan's "favors." The Russian scientist and traveler Petr Aleksandrovich Chikhachev who visited Western Armenia in 1859 wrote: "That notorious proclamation is better known in Europe than in the country where it must inaugurate a new era."²⁶

One of the goals of this plan was to make the developing national liberation movements of the non-Turkish peoples fail by means of new methods. The man called the father of the Ottoman Constitution, Ahmed Midhat Pasha, found that "in the first place, instead of forcible measures, the reforms are more fully appropriate to the problem of crushing the national liberation movement in the empire."²⁷

On March 30, 1856 the international treaty concluded at the Paris Conference completely disappointed the Armenians, and their bright hopes for the future vanished. The Armenians cherished high expectations of liberation with the help of Russia but the latter stood back from its promises of support to the Christian nations in the Ottoman Empire.²⁸ At the same time, according to Article 9 of the treaty, the powers expressed their positive approach concerning all the reforms of the Turkish new "Act."²⁹

After a short while, the influential religious fundamentalists of the empire joined the secular nationalists and caused the reforms of the act of 1856 to fail. The Turkish people in general refused the principle of equality with non-Muslims, indicating that

at this stage of the prevalent mentality, the realization of the Hatt-ı Hümayun was simply impossible. If the reform were to be accepted, it would challenge the principle of the "dominant nation" [millet-i hâkime] and be intolerable not only for the Turks but also for the Kurds, who considered themselves as one of the dominant nations of the empire.

The inclusion of the Ottoman Empire in the international capitalist economy after the 1850s and 1860s had its impact on the Western Armenians. New and major changes were made in the socioeconomic life of the Western Armenians. Specifically, the Armenian bourgeoisie gained a significant role in the commercial, economic and financial life of the Ottoman Empire. Consequently Armenian society progressed in comparison with the closed nature of Kurdish society.

All these factors, it would seem, would contribute to the improvement of the political atmosphere in Ottoman society. However, the complete opposite took place. Armenian-Kurdish relations deteriorated. Vladimir Aleksandrovich Gordlevskiy wrote, "Gradually the Armenians gained the influential positions of the country, while the Armenians' masters, the Turks and Kurds, unexpectedly turned into debtors to their serfs of not so long ago. It was on such the economic bases that a new source of misunderstanding was created to exacerbate the hostility between the Armenians and the Kurds."³⁰

Reflecting on the political changes in the Ottoman Empire as a result of the Hatt-ı Hümayun, the French observer René Pinon noted, "In the current stage of the Tanzimat, Turkey appeared more Muslim, more Asian, and in fact more powerful militarily, but more disposed to oppress its Christian population."³¹

The Iranian-Armenian writer Raffi objected to the views of those who supposed that the proclamation of the Hatt-ı Hümayun led the Ottoman Empire to adopt the path of Europeanization and enter the ranks of civilized peoples. He said, "No, the people blinded by personal interest who try to cover over the barbarities in Turkey, [and] proclaim its imaginary progress, say that it is relatively much better now than before, that they enjoy complete freedom, and so on... These are all empty words. Turkey has progressed only in one thing and that is to disguise itself as a European country outwardly, but with its heart, soul, nature and

behavior it remains the same Mongol, with the same nature, that it was before in the deserts of Turan."³²

Emile Dillon called the period of 1847 to 1891 the era of Ottoman "shameful misgovernment" over Western Armenia.³³ He of course meant that the period of Tanzimat reforms which was labeled as intended for the welfare for the Christian population did not contribute to the wellbeing of the Western Armenians. Moreover, it led to negative consequences, especially the worsening of Armenian-Kurdish relations. Viewing the Hatt-ı Hümayun as a reform adopted only for the Christians, and particularly for the Armenians, aggravated the Kurds further against the latter.³⁴ The sultan's government intentionally aggravated the Kurdish attitude. It took steps to worsen the tense relations between the Armenians and the Kurds. The government released the tribal chiefs from exile, granting them their rights even though it considered them as bitter enemies only a few years ago. For instance, Mirza Bey and his sons Musa, Rasim, Nho and Jaze Beys who were exiled from Mush valley returned, and receiving assistance from the local authorities became rulers of the Armenian villages of the area.³⁵ The Kurdish sheikhs and tribal chiefs started confiscating the Armenians' lands, which was ratified by the state through false witnesses or false documents (*tapu* or *gochan*).³⁶

As leaders of armed detachments, the Kurdish beys and aghas terrorized the Armenian villages while the Armenians were unarmed since, according to Ottoman law, none-Muslims were strictly forbidden to carry weapons. Sheikh Sabatullah, the father of the infamous Sheikh Jaleleddin covered his face with a veil, declaring that seeing Christians was sacrilege. Using religious fanaticism as a cover he started ruthlessly confiscating lands belonging to Armenians. As a result of his expropriations, the Armenian population of Hizan and the neighboring regions had to emigrate.³⁷ The example of Sheikh Sabatullah became contagious. Kurdish mollas, dervishes, sheikhs and seyyids, using religious intolerance or the poison of Islamic fanaticism as an excuse, started dispossessing, robbing and oppressing the Armenian peasantry.

In 1864, the *vardapet* Fr. Mkrtich Tigranian wrote: "As the Muslims of Kurdistan were Shiites, hearing the sound of Christians reading and praying was considered a great sin, so that even building openings for light in churches was forbidden. For this

reason, till now the Armenian churches have no openings for light or windows. They only have a small door, though if you enter with the sun at midday, you [still] cannot see any light."³⁸

Both the government and the local authorities were well aware of all this, but they merely observed and silently encouraged the lawlessness. It got to a point that in some districts such as Khuyt-Brnashen the Kurdish tribal chiefs started selling the Armenian villages and fields to one other. According to one source, "The buyer will come to the village and let the Armenians he wants stay, and expel the ones he does not want."³⁹ The former *kafirlik* system was back in practice again.

The Ottoman Empire unceasingly tried to make Eastern Anatolia free of Armenians. It even instigated Kurds in Iran to move to Western Armenia and take over Armenian lands. Lawlessness, abuse, exploitation, murder, arson, kidnap and other criminal actions became ordinary occurrences in all the provinces of this region and the situation became one of general calamity. According to the testimony of contemporaries the lawlessness had reached the point that when Kurds killed one other during bloody conflicts between tribes and they were unable to obtain blood money from their enemies, they would take it from Armenians instead.⁴⁰

Petr Aleksandrovich Chikhachev wrote, "In Armenia, the Kurds robbed and impudently abused the population in every way, and this grew worse daily. Their thievery was not only aided by the weakness of the local authorities...often their encouragement came from the same authorities."⁴¹

In 1864 the peasants of Mush valley wrote that Kurdish begs "devour more than fire the vitality of the poor Armenians around them because they rob the seed from the field, the plough and chain from the farmer, and the sickle from the reaper, and mercilessly kidnap women. Their barbarity dispersed our Armenians of the plains to all corners of the world more than a bitter storm." The letter writer added that in order to escape the abuse and robbery the peasants had to "gather everything they could carry and escape during the night, leaving their places in ruins."⁴²

A new routine started in Western Armenia. All Turkish officials were discharged after a short while if they in some way bothered the interests of the Kurdish ruling class. Thus, in 1869 the Sublime Porte ordered Ismail Pasha, the vali of Erzurum to arrest

and exile the el-aghasi or torun [tribal chiefs] because the Armenians had complained against the violence of the Kurdish ashirets. About one hundred of the tribal nobility were arrested and sent into exile in European Turkey or other places. However, soon Ismail Pasha was removed from his position, and the ousted chiefs returned--naturally, with vengeance burning in their breasts.⁴³

In 1875, the Kurdish aghas of Mush who were known for their violence against the Armenians were arrested in Erzurum by Ahmed Muhtar Pasha. But soon after the latter was removed from office, they were also set free.⁴⁴ In 1867, vali Hayreddin Pasha sent his report to the grand vizier asking the government's approval to protect the Armenians from the Kurdish aghas' raids. He recommended sending additional detachments to Van, Mush, Bitlis and other regions populated with Armenians specifically for that purpose. In support of his claim, the Ottoman official pointed to the fact that the Armenians had threatened to leave the country, which would be beneficial neither for the state nor for the imperial treasury. However, the Grand Vizier did not respond to this report, and when the pasha repeated his suggestion, he received the following reply from the capital: "You must not interfere with state policy, and must look at things from that angle. As for the Armenians – bon voyage if they want to migrate. I can populate the country with Circassians and others."⁴⁵

Sometimes in order to drive the Armenians out from a certain area the government moved Kurdish nomadic tribes there who then forced the Armenians to migrate. In this regard the newspaper *Hayastan* [Armenia], published in London, wrote, "In 1869, Ismail Pasha forced 5,600 tent-dwelling [nomadic] Kurdish families from the mountains of Mush, Patekan, Bagran, Ashekotan and Pinchioar (Sinjar) to the banks of the Tigris to settle there. Those Kurds became a calamity for the Armenians. They attacked more than 30 villages and by robbing and killing forced the residents to flee, and they took over those villages."⁴⁶ Moreover, as the Yezidis of Sinjar had resisted Ismail Hakki Pasha's forcible deportation policy, he ordered that every male from newborns to the age of 70 be circumcised by force and converted to Islam.⁴⁷

Petr Aleksandrovich Chikhachev wrote that according to the new state system the former derebeys had to return to the state all the land they had confiscated from the Armenians, and the latter

were released from the responsibilities of obeying the derebeys. The Armenians henceforth were dependent only on the government and had to pay the tithe tax and other state taxes. For nine years the Armenians cultivated and fully used the lands taken from the derebeys. However, all of a sudden the heirs of those formerly powerful tribal chiefs who currently carried the modest title of "agha," which meant nothing, were demanding that the Armenians and Assyrians pay "the fee of rent" for the land that their forefathers had confiscated, as if the new order of the Tanzimat had never existed. In addition, with the support of Grand Vizier Reshid Pasha, who considered the aghas' demand fair, the newly minted aghas received a new firman from the government which stated that the Armenians were subject to taxation and consequently had to pay nine years of back taxes to the aghas. Chikhachev called this "simply an unbelievable firman" and described how while they were collecting these arrears they beat the villagers with sticks, threw them into prison, and expropriated their property. "Chased like wild beasts, those miserable creatures were seeking justice from the government in vain," Chikhachev said.⁴⁸

It was quite obvious that the Kurdish feudal lords' brutality and lawlessness was encouraged and directed from Istanbul. In the 1850s and the 1860s Ottoman ruling circles already were pondering "the idea of being free of the Armenians."⁴⁹ On the other hand, the Armenians kept expecting the Ottoman government to take "severe measures" against the insubordinate population. Furthermore, every step Armenians took to protect their elementary rights, especially their claims and protests to the government, intensified the hostility of the Kurds.

The European states were exporting modern weapons to Western Armenia which were falling en masse into Kurdish hands, in other words they had the "means to disrupt and destroy their peaceful neighbors."⁵⁰

In order to save themselves from calamities, the Western Armenians not only migrated from one district to another or took the path of leaving the country, but often in order to find a way out of the situation even accepted Islam and assimilated into the Kurdish and Turkish masses. In one document we read that the inhabitants of several villages in the Mush plain held a meeting. The document continues: "We told the meeting that there is only

one means of salvation for our people. We accept Turkishness for 40-50 years or maybe a little longer. Perhaps this land will pass into the hands of another state. We will then be freed and return to Armenianness."⁵¹ A great number of Armenians were forced to convert to Islam. Numerous Armenians were forced to become Kurds and speak the Kurdish language in the regions where the Kurds composed the majority of the population.⁵²

Noting that through the responsibility of the Ottoman Empire Western Armenia became an arena for enduring hostility among various ethnic groups, Russian army general and political observer of the Middle East Mikhail Likhutin commented: "With such a diversity and mixture of peoples, languages and religions encountered here, and the existence of such tension and hostility, one cannot expect that peace and order can be established spontaneously... a new powerful authority is necessary in Asiatic Turkey because the revolution of class relations--that is, the relationship of different peoples--their equalization on the principle of justice, is a hard task for Turkey to undertake due to its nature and present weakness."⁵³

According to this military statesman who was the supporter of the colonial policy of Tsarism, only Russia was capable of solving such complicated problems. Then he went on to say: "Throughout the war we saw the ease and likelihood of such disorders, as well as the massacre of Armenians by the Kurds, perhaps not on a large scale, and when you look at those territories inhabited with people who are ready to storm and destroy each other, then you feel the necessity of the Europeans' [i.e. Russians] rapid, practical and dominating power which would either enlighten or smash those dangerous peoples, preventing the greatest calamities."⁵⁴

In 1863, the Ottoman government accepted the Armenian National Constitution, which surely was one of the results of Ottoman Turkey's domestic reforms that had started at the period of the Tanzimat. The constitution was expected to order and regulate Armenian national community life. Karo Sasuni wrote, "The National Constitution inaugurated an enthusiastic period in Armenian life. This internal autonomy could satisfy the anticipations of the Armenians about the announcements of public reforms to some extent. Besides, the Armenians thought for a while that they had found the way to their liberation."⁵⁵

As per the instructions of the constitution, Armenian provincial prelates were either elected, or appointed by the Constantinople patriarchate. Those prelates were empowered not only as the religious chief of the Armenians of a given region, but also as the leader of the administrative authority there. For that reason, they appeared to local Armenians, Kurds and Turks as Armenian governors alongside the Turkish valis and *mutessarifs*. While the Kurds thought they were deprived of that state favor,⁵⁶ actually that entire network of prelates was merely a religious and educational institution, and true power belonged to the Turkish government.

There is no doubt that those circumstances opened the way for more hostility between the Armenians and the Kurds. More and more Armenian lands were being confiscated, more people were banished from their native land, and bloodshed in the regions was increasing. In brief, the chasm between the neighboring peoples was growing. Many hundreds of entreaties were sent to the capital from the Armenian provinces with the request of stopping the violence, but nothing changed. We read in one of the supplication-complaints sent to the [Armenian] "National Central Board" of Constantinople from the Mush region the following: "You already know the barbaric Kurds who torture us. It is they who harm our goods and property, as well as our lives. But for years we have endured grief and deprivation from other places... We can complain about the Kurdish damage to the city of the state, but who will hear our complaints about the suffering inflicted by the city?"⁵⁷

The protest of the supplication was of course directed at the Ottoman authorities. However, the latter tried to inspire the Armenians by stating that after the proclamation of National Constitution a new better era had started for them. On this topic Jemal Pasha, for example, later wrote: "Instead of the Kurdish enslaving yoke, they [the Armenians] obtained the possibility of living in the best relations with the Turks and the Turkish government..."⁵⁸

In reality, Istanbul was step by step pursuing its plan of becoming "free of the Armenians." Thus, in 1867 the sultan's government published a law, "On Vilayet Administration," which stated that Diyarbakir, Mush, Van, Bitlis, Hakkari and Jezireh were going to be united in one administrative unit under the name "Kurdistan." The goal of that administrative-territorial re-

organization was the distribution of the Christian and Muslim population in such a way that the Armenian population would not form a majority in any of the provinces mentioned above.

That step triggered vigorous protest among the Armenian population.⁵⁹ In order to prevent undesirable complications, the government reconsidered its decision to join the regions of Van and Mush to Erzurum vilayet,⁶⁰ but the goal of that administrative division was apparent, and the Western Armenians correctly understood it.

Eventually the administrative unit of "Kurdistan" was established by the Sublime Porte, and Ismail Hakki Pasha, a convinced proponent of turning Western Armenia into Kurdistan, was appointed as its vali.⁶¹ He was instructed to establish the Ottoman government's authority in the most remote and disobedient sections of Western Armenia and Kurdistan, if necessary by the most severe means. Hakki Pasha's task was not that easy, as the Kurdish ashirets were armed to the teeth and the government had no intention of disarming them.⁶² In the early 1870s, when several statesmen of the Sublime Porte and even Sultan Abdul Mejid brought up the question of the general disarmament of the Kurds, Grand Vizier Ali Pasha announced "That is unnecessary; the Kurds are always a ready armed force for us."⁶³

One of the main problems for Hakki Pasha was making the Kurdish tribal chiefs provide the central treasury with the taxes "collected" from the Armenians, a thing that as a rule never succeeded. Bloody clashes periodically took place between the Kurds and government forces for this reason. The Kerkyanli, İsyanlı, Kchuri, Rzhgotanlı, Hasarli, Piroghli, Penekkenarli and numerous other Kurdish tribes were particularly known for their willful disobedience to the state.

As the government did not intend to take the Armenians under its protection, one after the other petitions of protest began to start flooding the capital. The Turkish bureaucracy used the weapon of *is'tilâm* [examination, investigation] against those *takrirs* [report, memorandum] being sent to Istanbul. That was only a way of postponing and condemning the case to oblivion. As for the governmental instructions to the provincial authorities or "emphatic" measures, as the author Raffi said, "the Sublime Porte prodigally sent them from its factory of trickery," but they remained unexecuted and ineffectual.

In 1869, assuming the position of patriarch of Constantinople, Khrimian Hayrik brought numerous documents about oppressions to the capital and based on them put together his well known "Report on Provincial Oppressions," describing more than five hundred bloody incidents. A special committee which presented the report to the Armenian National Assembly in Constantinople suggested some measures to limit Armenian oppression by the Kurds. In particular, it proposed either disarmament of the Kurds or granting the Christians the right to carry weapons too, as well as exiling the most oppressive tribal chiefs to Rumelia and other places.⁶⁴ Quite obviously, the ones making such suggestions were not familiar with the ulterior motives of the Ottoman government. In February 1872, when the National Assembly presented the report to the government, the latter pretended that it would seriously investigate it. A committee made up of Kurds and Armenians went to Armenia to investigate the complaints. It confirmed the contents of the report. The government promised to entrust an authorized committee to punish the guilty ones and to turn the recommendations into reality, but everything remained merely as promises.

On the day of his first visit to Grand Vizier Ali Pasha in Constantinople, Khrimian Hayrik depicted conditions in the eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire, equally passionately speaking about the harsh situation of Armenian and Kurdish laborers.⁶⁵ Later on, in the "Plan for Reforms" which he wrote in 1876 but published only in 1909, Khrimian again presented his meditations and views about the Kurds and ways to improve the conditions of their lives.

The members of the Armenian National Assembly and its central executive in Constantinople did not share his ideas about the possibility of realizing improvements in the life of the Western Armenians through complaints. There were even "national statesmen" who found no bases for complaints as, in their opinion, the living conditions of the Armenians were much better than that of the ruling Turkish people. They observed that "in Armenia if you enter a market or a store, it is the Armenians you see sitting and doing business... When you enter a village and hear roosters crowing or bells ringing, when you see meadows, trees and gardens, where girls bring water from springs, in brief, when you

notice sociability in that village, know that the village is an Armenian one. And on the contrary, when you enter a village without gardens or trees, which is silent, deserted and dry, know that it is a Turkish village."⁶⁶

Undoubtedly, Khrimian's unwavering beliefs and his position as a patriarch were a heavy burden on the National Assembly, so that consequently, after four years of service, in 1873, he was dismissed from his position. He declared bitterly: "You appointed me as the captain of a ship caught in a storm, and after entrusting the ship to me you all fled, leaving me alone. Wherever I look I do not see any sailors."⁶⁷

Naturally, the protests against the oppressions pertained to nationality, but at the same time they also had a social basis. For instance, in the 1860s Fr. Poghos Melikian, the Armenian prelate in Van, secretly collaborated with the Kurdish tribal chiefs and feudal lords of Vaspurakan to rob not only rayah Kurds and the Christian Assyrians but his own people, the Armenians, too. Raffi wrote in his article "Accusation against Poghos Vardapet of Van" the following: "Yuzbashi Ali Agha, Zaza Ömer, Shemski Trpo, and Kör [Blind] Ömer of Bashkala all obeyed him. Trpaz Agha of Nortuz who robbed Hogvots Monastery, Gül Mehmed of Shatak who robbed the local churches and turned them into stables for his animals, Avdal Beg of Moks, the brother of Khan Mahmud who shed the blood of thousands of Armenians, and Mehmed Ali Agha of Makurts who profaned the church of Satman all became the faithful friends of Poghos Vardapet... All these criminals made secret connections with Father Poghos and were dependent on him."⁶⁸

Fr. Poghos was also in contact with the pasha of Van, and that corrupt triplet mercilessly robbed and oppressed both the Armenian and the Kurdish villagers. Raffi wrote that "in order to save Mehmed Ali from his crime of profaning a church, Poghos testified in a government tribunal that the evildoer was an immature boy and so exempt from punishment, though he already had a big beard."⁶⁹

Besides taking up the paper weapons of protests and petitions, some individual Armenian intellectuals since the 1850s had come to the conclusion that as long as the Kurds lived in an ashiret or tribal system, and remained backwards and ignorant, deprived

of writing and literature and intellectual and cultural life, a Damoclean sword would always hang over the heads of the Western Armenians. This could be used by the Turkish government when necessary to realize their anti-Armenian inclinations. The intellectuals believed the only way to solve this situation was to educate the Kurds. Mkrtych Tigranian was one of the first of these intellectuals to travel in the Kurdish-inhabited regions in Western Armenia in 1850 with the intention of opening some schools for Kurdish children. In 1841, he composed "Rules for the Regulation of Monasteries and their Jurisdictions in Kurdistan and Armenia,"⁷⁰ in which he described his views about the enlightenment of the Kurdish youth. In 1860, he came up with the "Kurdish and Armenian Primer" based on the Armenian alphabet.⁷¹

As a result of his efforts, the Barekargutiun Arevelean [Eastern Welfare] Association was established. Its active members were Western Armenian progressive intellectuals inspired by ideas of Armenian national liberation, such as the editor of the periodical *Meghu*, Harutiun Svachian and Martiros Momjian. Through the efforts of this association a textbook titled *Lapter lusatu* [Light-giving Lantern]⁷² was composed in Kurdish with the Armenian alphabet and disseminated in Kurdish areas.⁷³

A primary objective of the Barekargutiun Arevelean association was to establish friendly relations with the Kurdish regions.⁷⁴ It is noteworthy that the Constantinople Armenian notables showed great interest in these activities of the Armenian intellectuals. For example, upon learning about the Kurdish textbook *Lapter lusatu*, some well known people like Mkrtych Mutafian, Vardan Vardanian, Hovhannes Hakobjanian, and Grigor Bagratunian made donations to support its publication.⁷⁵

A number of Armenian intellectuals continued the work of Mkrtych Tigranian later, even though their efforts were always opposed and obstructed by the Ottoman authorities.

Another group of Western Armenian intellectuals believed that the source of the problem was the nomadic lifestyle of the Kurdish tribes, and that if they were to choose to become sedentary, all the obstacles between the Armenians and the Kurds would come to an end. For instance, in 1869 Garegin Srvantstian recommended isolating the Kurdish military elite from the people and teaching the population the sedentary lifestyle. He said, "The

deadly spear in their hands must be pulverized, and instead the plough of fair work must be placed in their palms. The pitch-black tents with which they roam the mountains like packs of wolves must be destroyed, and instead they must be established in villages under tents. They must be brought down from their fierce steeds and drive oxen instead."⁷⁶

There is much evidence that in many Kurdish regions even the Armenian clergy paid special attention to the Kurds who had newly adopted a sedentary life. They patiently trained them to plough the land, to use agricultural instruments, to sow the fields, and to gather the crops.⁷⁷ Khrimian Hayrik established relationships with the Kurdish begs and aghas. He tried to persuade them to abandon the nomadic way of life, to abandon the sword and the gun, and connect their lives to the land. He promised to open schools in the Kurdish villages, to send them Armenian teachers and to create a Kurdish alphabet--in short, to give new bases for the progress of the Kurdish people. He explained to the influential Kurdish tribal chiefs that the Kurdish and the Armenian people share the same interests and the same enemy, which was the sultan's government, and that Armenian-Kurdish collaboration would be the only guarantee for liberation.⁷⁸

He suggested separating the Kurdish ruling class and isolating it from society to liberate the Kurdish working rayahs who were also the subject of exploitation by the *toruns*.⁷⁹ Khrimian Hayrik believed this was the only way to solve the problems of Armenian-Kurdish relations. Unfortunately these sincere impulses of the patriotic clergyman had no real basis, and were unrealistic dreams. Yet Khrimian was well aware of the role the Ottoman government played in Armenian-Kurdish relations.

In his "Plan for Reforms" he found the Turkish government to be the cause of both the Kurds' condition of regression and ignorance and the Armenians' exploitation. So he introduced his accusation to the government: "... we must truly conclude that the multifaceted Kurdish exploitation does not originate as much from their violence and force as from the local government's indifferent and incompetent state, and sometimes from the latter's purposeful permission in order to have the opportunity through great bribery, that is, through sheep, butter, cheese, horses, beautiful carpets and gold, to make the Kurds suffer." He continued:

"It is very true if we reason thusly, that the Kurds in a way have been mobile and profitable possessions in the hands of the local government."⁸⁰ He then said, "The free and unbridled life of the Kurds is a property of perpetual profit for the local government and its wicked goal is for that property to be longlasting."⁸¹

Western Armenian statesmen Matteos Mamurian, Harutiun Svachian, Grigor Chilinkirian and many others thought it was necessary to explain to the Kurdish people the true motivations of the Turkish government's sycophancy⁸² and to prepare it to rise against the unbearable Turkish yoke united with the Armenians. At the same time, during their secret meetings, several people spoke about obtaining weapons and personally organizing self-defense. The proponents of this idea were inspired by the Armenian people's liberation movements and armed struggles in Zeytun, Van, Mush, and Charsanjak.

Khrimian Hayrik called on all the Armenians scattered throughout the huge expanse of the Ottoman Empire to return to Western Armenia and take up arms to protect their property and honor.⁸³ He developed the same idea in his *Vangoyzh* [Grievous News from Van], written on the occasion of the arson of the Van market. He wrote: "We do not know what your fault is, oh unarmed and obedient people of Van. You neither had weapons nor revolted against the ruling staff. You have been faithful for five hundred years and your weapons were only the ploughshare and plough. Craft and commerce were your occupations. Was this the reward for your loyal citizenship? The reform constitution of Turkistan [i.e. the Ottoman Empire] needed a sacrifice and you became the glorious victim, people of Armenia."

In his *Vangoyzh*, Khrimian was summoning the Western Armenians to insurgency. Expressing the Western Armenian intellectuals' radical attitude, still adolescent Petros Durian wrote a poem dedicated to Mkrtich Khrimian:

We want our honor and the Kurd,
Or weapon against his weapon.⁸⁴

And Rapayel Patkanian was simply exclaiming in his poem "Gharib [Wanderer] of Mush":

I have brought a message from the Holy Cross of Varag
Have mercy on my Armenian nation and give each [Armenian] a sword.⁸⁵

Many well known Western Armenian and Eastern Armenian intellectuals such as Mikayel Nalbandian, Matteos Mamurian, Smbat Shahaziz, Petros Durian, Hakob Paronian, Mkrtich Peshiktashlian, Rafayel Patkanian, and Raffi advocated ideas of national liberation. A number of Western Armenian liberal public figures, who were usually very cautious in expressing themselves, also responded to the calls to arms. For instance, in 1863, the Armenian public figure and politician Gabriel Noradounghian (1852-1936) wrote in his letter sent to Khrimian Hayrik from Rome: "In order to prevent Armenia's scenes of terrible tragedy, we need to form a committee to run the foreign affairs of the nation and try to destroy the chains of Armenia by means of continual revolutionary activity."⁸⁶ Noradounghian also found that the Armenians should not complain against the Kurds all the time but should find bases for agreement. In his letter to Garegin Sravantsian he emphasized: "I am convinced that it is not a good policy to continuously complain about the Kurds and discourage relations with them. The Kurds form a body with their weapons and tribes; Armenians form a body with their nation and light. Before clashing with one another we need to seriously study the benefits we can gain from our communication and union. European jurisprudence respects first those with weapons in hand, and then the enlightened ones."⁸⁷

Gabriel Noradounghian even proposed in this context that Sravantsian become an activist among the Kurds: "I consider that the most significant issue for the Armenians is to become familiar with the Kurds and find ways to develop relations with the latter. Personally calling your special attention to this idea, I ask you whether it would not be the best and useful if the holy Hayrik sends you to them once on a mission, and through your work a report arises about statistics on the Kurds."⁸⁸

Later on, attaining high state positions in the Ottoman government (Minister of Trade 1908; Minister of Foreign Affairs 1912-1913), Noradounghian reconsidered some of his views and during the Balkan Wars he even objected to the reviving of the Armenian Question.

In general, the majority of the upper class Western Armenians, especially the notables of Constantinople, was completely against the revolutionary movements. According to Soviet Armenian his-

torian and diplomat John Kirakosyan, "The spirit of rebellion, of insurgency, was foreign to people living an easy life who continued to remain faithful to the tactic of petitions and supplication and saw in it the path to salvation."⁸⁹

However, the Armenians living in the real countryside who bore the heavy and humiliating yoke of the Ottoman government and the Kurdish feudal lords found the only path to freedom to be through battle. It was a path full of difficult and fatal dangers but there were still very brave people who chose it, preferring death to a dishonorable life with no future. In 1872, the first secret organization, Miutiun i prkutiun [Union for Salvation], was founded in Van and it chose armed revolt as its method of struggle. This surely could not escape the suspicious attention of the sultan's government. The Turkish authorities answered the Armenians' rebellious spirit either with open persecution or the frequently used chief weapon in their conspiratorial armory--that is to provoke the rage of the Kurdish ruling class against the Armenians.

Thus, in the late 1860s and the early 1870s, anti-Armenianism turned more and more definitely into the policy of the state.⁹⁰ That attitude gradually spread beyond governmental circles of the capital to the majority of the provincial authorities, who began to see the expulsion of the Armenians from Eastern Anatolia as the only solution to the Armenian Question, and one without any alternatives. Expressing such an attitude, the assistant governor-general of Sebastia [Sivas] said in one of his rare sincere moments, "If the natives [i.e. the Armenians] want, they can stay; if not, they can go to the pit of hell."⁹¹

In such an explosive situation, beginning in 1870 a number of Armenian-Kurdish conflicts took place in various parts of Western Armenia. The conflicts were not due to social causes as before. It became clear that the political motive was becoming dominant in these relations, and that was the result of the provocative anti-Armenian policy of the Ottoman government.

CHAPTER THREE

THE KURDS AND THE ARMENIAN QUESTION FROM THE CONGRESS OF BERLIN TO THE FIRST WORLD WAR

In the early 1870s, the Ottoman Empire was again in a profound economic crisis. The perfunctory reforms of the Tanzimat were unable to overcome the semi-feudal and in some places feudal systems to open prospects for the development of the country's productive forces. The government continued ignoring the new provincial bureaucracy's monstrous exploitation and capriciousness, hoping to overcome the financial strain on the empty treasury in that way.

Such was the situation in the empire when a new secret political organization, the association of Young Ottomans, was established in Istanbul to overthrow Grand Vizier Ali Pasha's government, secure economic progress and turn the Ottoman Empire into a constitutional monarchy.¹ The Young Ottomans revealed themselves to be one of the greatest adversaries of the empire's non-Turkish national liberation movements, and strove to oppose to that struggle the great-power notion of Ottomanism.

The Young Ottomans formulated an argument that the Tanzimat reforms had hurt the Muslims' rights and granted the Christians too many privileges. They called the Hatt-i Hümayun" of 1856 a "firman for Christian privileges"; in other words, they saw the policy of the Sublime Porte of the Tanzimat period as aimed at improving the circumstances of the Christians and placing the Muslims in the situation of an exploited community. Consequently, the Young Ottomans declared themselves to be the protectors of the "violated" rights of the Muslim population in the empire. They considered the reformist leaders Ali Pasha and Fuad Pasha as traitors to Islam because their reform edict which was proclaimed in 1856 granted the Christians too many rights.

It is noteworthy to mention that during that period the Young Ottomans expressed extreme intolerance for the heterodox population of the empire. For example, they considered the constitutions accepted for the Armenian Apostolic and Greek Orthodox millets as dangerous novelties. The ideologists of the Young Ottomans Namik Kemal and Ibrahim Shinasi at every opportunity glorified the military spirit of the "real Ottomans" and their victories over the *giaours*. In his writings Mustafa Fazıl Pasha advanced the point of view that "the glorious times" when "the creators of the empire," the Ottomans, and their subject nations lived together in "harmony," were all past. Constant provocations from the European powers and the Ottoman government's poor administration of its subjects were reasons for the Christian population to protest and revolt against the sultan. Basing himself on a great number of similar lengthy thoughts, Fazıl Pasha proposed to do away with all the privileges the Christians supposedly possessed compared to the Muslims. The Young Ottomans refined a theory about the "Ottoman nation" (*millet-i osmani*) and "Ottoman patriotism" into an ideological and political term. The concept of Ottomanism was to "solve" the national question in the Ottoman Empire. This teaching regarded all the peoples of the empire, irrespective of their nationality and religion, as an integral whole. That meant that there was only one nation in the empire and it was the nation of the Ottomans. The sultan's government united and directed it, the Turks were the dominant element, Turkish was the common state language, and the Shariat was its legislation.

Consequently, non-Turkish peoples were deprived of the right of sovereign existence. The goal of Ottomanism was to turkify the Ottoman Empire, and through "peaceful" means strike at the national liberation movements of the oppressed (Christian) peoples of the empire. Finally, it aimed at preserving and perpetuating Turkish dominion over all the non-Turkish peoples of the empire.

The economic collapse of the empire brought with it a political crisis. Powerful national-liberation movements burst out in the Balkans, in Bosnia, Herzegovina and Bulgaria, which had international reverberations as they affected the interests of the great powers.

The position of Russia was particularly threatening for the

empire. Taking advantage of the favorable international situation created for it after the 1870 Franco-Prussian War, Russia announced its desire to abrogate the 1856 Treaty of Paris, and its intention to reestablish a military base on the Black Sea.

The Empire's political crisis finally caused a domestic explosion. On May 30, 1876 Sultan Abdul Aziz was dethroned through a firman issued by the sheikh ul-Islam, and like many other monarchs of the Ottoman dynasty before him, he was executed.

Though the Young Ottomans placed Murad V on the throne and feverishly labored to bring the empire out of its crisis by implementing new reforms, unfortunately the situation only deteriorated until it became quite threatening. The confrontation between the Turkish and Slavic peoples reached its apogee, and Russia loudly proclaimed that it could not remain indifferent towards the destiny of its Slavic brothers who shared the same blood and religion.

It was under these conditions that Murad V, after a very short reign, was proclaimed mad, and replaced on the throne by his brother Abdul Hamid II. In an attempt to prevent European supervision of the implementation of reforms, on December 11/23, 1876 the adoption of a constitution was announced. In the opinion of Midhat Pasha, who was called the "father" of this constitution, the promises about the legal equality of nations would serve as a shield against the Russian threat.

The constitution considered all the peoples in the empire as Ottomans, and it also contained a special clause stating that the government was allowed to proclaim martial law in case of any signs of revolt.

Although according to Article 17 of the constitution all the subjects of the empire were considered equal before the law, and their rights and duties were recognized without prejudice of religion and ethnicity,² in reality the true spirit of the constitution gave priority and supremacy to Islam. Article 4 directly stated that the "sultan as caliph is the protector of Islam." Article 11 more definitely emphasized that "Islam is the religion of the state."³ Consequently, the recognition of the principles of equality and religious freedom for non-Muslim nations was just a fiction. Even they were unfeigned, such declarations were unable to change the legal and political order which had been inculcated in the country for centuries.

A great number of Armenian public figures strongly believed that this constitution based on great power chauvinism and the Shariat was an unnatural and false law under the conditions of the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century, and could not in practice be implemented, let alone change anything in the empire. It was a veiled game against European diplomacy, and at the same time it was a trap for those elements in the country who would try to oppose the policies of the Ottoman Empire. They thought that the Armenians, in particular, should be cautious about the kindnesses it mandated.⁴

As if in confirmation to these calls of caution, practically simultaneous to the official declaration of the constitution early in December 1876, a terrible fire burnt the entire market of Van, destroying the economic position and wealth of the local Armenians. The newly-emerged Turkish bourgeoisie filled with nationalistic hatred wanted to remind the Armenians about its existence. Through this act, and in general through the wave of oppressions it incited against the Armenians, it intended to subject the Armenian people to economic annihilation and defeat the competition of the latter's bourgeoisie, still young but based on healthy, stable economic bases and full of great enthusiasm for work.

The fact that those responsible for the Van arson remained unpunished encouraged the Kurdish tribal chiefs of Bitlis, Mush, Motkan and some other regions to increase their plundering of the Armenians. The Turkish government considered this the conclusive stage of the Van actions.

The Balkan people, particularly the population of Bosnia, Herzegovina and Bulgaria, proclaimed to be rebels, soon were to become the next victims of constitutional Turkey's brutal revenge.⁵ Russia immediately decided to come to the defense of its "brother Slavs," and declared war on the Ottoman Empire on April 4, 1877.

Western Armenians cherished new hopes of liberation. Russian diplomacy, well aware of the Armenians' attitude, worked to strengthen these hopes and inspire the Armenians that the time for liberation from the despised Turkish yoke had arrived by means of powerful Russia. Russian publications from the other side of the border conveyed the Russian propaganda to Western Armenia.

The Ottoman state, as during all its previous wars against Russia, was using every possible opportunity to increase mistrust and

suspicion of the Christians of the empire in order to accuse them of treason. The Western Armenians, in particular, were seen as close allies of Russia and as a result were treated like enemies. Concurrent to military activities the Ottoman army was organizing devastating raids in Western Armenia, and provoking religious and tribal hatred against the Armenians among the Muslim population.

The sultan's government had great expectations for Kurdish participation in the war. Even on the eve of the war the Sublime Porte had gained significant success through its Kurdish policy. The majority of sedentary Kurds paid taxes and provided conscripts, although entire regions such as Hakkari, Dersim, Genj, Siirt, and Mosul still existed in which the Kurdish population practically did not recognize the government's authority.⁶

With the outburst of the war, the sultan's government made a special appeal to the Muslim Kurds, exhorting them to resort to jihad (holy war) in order to protect Islam from the unbelievers. In response to that call, numerous Kurdish leaders formed detachments and moved toward the Alashkert-Bayazit front in order to join with the Ottoman army. Influential tribal chiefs and religious leaders such as Sheikhs Obeydullah, Seredli Hamza, and Mosul Mehmed, the sheikh of Khizan Jaleddin [Jelaettin], Sheikh Nakhshabandi from the region of the Euphrates, Sheikh Dudari from Sasun, Khalife [Halife] Felmi Efendi, and Khirutali Mehmed Agha were among them.⁷ Their armed detachments were disastrous for the Western Armenians. Moreover, the government tried to provoke the religious fanaticism of the Kurdish masses as well as the instinct for plunder of the ashirets. Bribery of the tribal chiefs was widespread. Nevertheless, the Kurdish upper class, ashiret chiefs, sheikhs, beks and aghas, responded to the call for "holy war" not only or rather not so much due to feelings of Muslim solidarity or religious fanaticism as from the pursuit of material benefits. The Muslim Kurd considered it to be his duty to carry out the Ottoman orders, according to writer Hovhannes Grigori Inchikyan, because "the realization of the task provided him also with broad opportunities to take, rob, plunder--to receive his share."⁸

During the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-1878 the Ottoman government forcibly deported the Armenian population living near the Russian frontier to the depths of Anatolia, which led to massive numbers of deaths. In order to justify its actions before the

great powers, the government tried to disguise its persecution against the Armenians as a way of protecting them from the raids and harassments of local Muslims, especially Kurds. For example, commander of the Turkish army Müshir [marshal] Ahmet Muhtar Pasha, the main organizer of the atrocities against the Armenians, completely cast the blame for the latter on the Kurds, and in this way intended also to worsen Armenian-Kurdish relations and contribute to the mutual annihilation of the two neighboring peoples.⁹

Kurdish detachments were sent by Turkish especially to those Armenian villages where the population enthusiastically greeted the Russian flag. In Bayazit and Alashkert districts alone, Kurdish irregular bands killed 30 thousand Armenians and robbed their villages.¹⁰ One of the Russian servicemen wrote: "The actions of those bandits were ineffective against our troops; however, they were very effective in fighting against the Armenian population within the borders of Turkey. Those bandits... were huge groups of robbers for whom it was more advantageous to make the peaceful Armenian population the target of their actions."¹¹

The leader of the Haydaranli Kurds, Sheikh Jaleddin, killed thousands of unarmed Armenians and robbed their villages in the province of Vaspurakan, Basen and Bagrevand provinces and the plain of Mush. Bloodthirsty Kör [Blind] Hüseyin Pasha became famous for his brutality, robbing and exploiting not only the Armenian population but his enemy Kurdish ashirets (the Jalali, Zibtanli, Tortopli and others).¹²

Not all the Kurds responded to the sultan's appeal for "holy war." Several insubordinate tribes not only refused to participate in the war but also evaded paying taxes. Moreover, they attacked Ottoman military or administrative bodies and their officials. For instance, the Kizilbash population of Dersim revolted in the rear of the Ottoman army's positions.¹³ That insurgency became extremely dangerous for the authorities, especially when the Armenians from the surrounding mountainous regions joined the rebels, waging fierce battles against the Turkish troops.¹⁴

This Armenian and Kurdish military alliance fortified in the inaccessible mountains of Dersim turned into a real nightmare for the Ottoman government. In order to suppress the alliance, the commander of the fourth army, Dervish Pasha, forced the Armenian population of Baberd, Erzincan, Kamakh [Kemah], Akn and

Arabkir to sign a petition that supposedly the people of Dersim were oppressing the local Christians. Consequently, in order to suppress them, the Armenians would support the state army.

The Armenians of Van province collaborated with rebellious Kurds too, but they were severely punished for this and their leader Avo was hanged by the Ottoman military authorities.¹⁵ On their way to the military front, when the Kurds of Mosul vilayet passed through Van province, they tried to rob and destroy Armenian settlements, but the local Kurdish tribes enthusiastically protected their neighbor Armenians.¹⁶ Similar incidents happened in the pashaliks of Kars and Bayazit, and in a number of other locations. Such examples, and spontaneous anti-government revolts by Armenian and Kurdish villagers, were not widespread. For that reason the government was able to suppress them easily.

* * *

During the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 it became clear that Armenian national sentiment had matured. The majority of the urban and rural population was consumed by the desire to live free, enjoy basic human rights, defend its national honor, and overthrow the brutal Ottoman yoke. It is an indisputable truth that the Eastern crisis had intensified the Armenian national consciousness. Efforts to become free of atrocious social and religious persecution and achieve national unity, and finally, the desire to attain statehood, had reached a new stage. The concept of the homeland started spreading throughout the nation, affecting various classes of the population.¹⁷

The Eastern Armenians also expressed a growing interest in their brothers in Western Armenia. The movement "toward the country" became intense. Many Armenian intellectuals left for Turkey to have closer contact with the Western Armenians and "be useful for the nation." The idea of armed resistance against Turkish tyranny was ripening in Western Armenia. A movement of popular avengers—*hayduks* [haiduks] or *fedayis*--was becoming stronger and more popular. Secret organizations were established with plans for struggle.¹⁸

European states also gave impetus to the Armenians' desires for independence and freedom. Vahan Navasardian noted later:

"The idea of independence became the possession of the Armenian nation not only as internal necessity but also as external dictation. Not only do the Armenian people subconsciously strive for independence, but also it is pushed by external forces toward that destination because they strive for it."¹⁹

Naturally, under these conditions the bad news about the Kurdish tribal chiefs' barbarities was accepted by the Western Armenians in a completely different way than before. Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople Nerses Varzhapetian sent complaints to the Sublime Porte, the Sheikh ul-Islam and, personally, to Sultan Abdul Hamid II demanding the suppression of the Kurdish tribal and ashiret chiefs who were committing acts of violence against the Armenians.

The promises were more generous than expected. Even Grand Vizier Midhat Pasha promised to appoint Armenian governors (valis) in several provinces to eliminate the "obstacles to happiness" of the Armenians.²⁰ The sultan received the Armenian patriarch in the Yildiz Palace and said: "I am extremely remorseful for the bloodshed as I even feel sorry to step on an ant. However, as God knows, I am not responsible for this war." Afterwards he rewarded the Patriarch with the Osmaniye medal of the first rank, "and with it covered the graves of the victims of Sheikh Jaleddin and the other slaughterers."²¹

While the Armenian delegates and other national statesmen of Constantinople intended to send the sultan a note of gratitude for his "Armenophile" sentiments, Mkrtych Khrimian declared: "They made necklace from the bones of sheep and hung it on the shepherd's neck." Then he added, "though it was the Kurdish sheikhs who led their tribe to bloodshed and plunder, it was the malicious policy of the government which created the crime. The Kurd...adapted himself to the watchword of the state because his tribal instincts were going to be satisfied in that way."²²

The sultan and the Ottoman ruling class were of course aware that as a result of the Balkan national liberation movements, it was questionable as to whether European Turkey would remain in the empire. This forced the government to seek the future of the empire in Asia. Truly, the cornerstone of Sultan Abdul Hamid's politics was the preservation of the Asian territories. Convinced of the imminent loss of the Balkan territories, the Turkish ruling

class comprehended that their last refuge would be Anatolia. Istanbul also knew that the politically most mature people in Asiatic Turkey was the Armenian people, which directly expressed its desires for independence. At the same time the Armenians were the most exploited elements in the east of the country, deprived of rights and under social and national pressure. They produced a large number of statesmen capable of leading a national liberation movement.

The growth of the Armenian bourgeoisie in the Ottoman Empire--the capitalist *chelebis* [notables primarily in the service of the Ottoman state], the trading class which enjoyed leading positions in international and domestic commerce, manufacturers, and in general all types of businessmen, and the steady strengthening of its economic position were also dangerous and undesirable for Istanbul. Russian observer Aleksandr Mikhailovich Kolyubakin noted: "All the vast commerce with Europe and Persia, and nearly all the domestic trade and industry of Kurdistan [viz., Western Armenia] have long been under the control of the urban Armenians. In that field they are unrivaled. However, the wealthy Armenians were not satisfied just with trade and industry, but continually attempted to obtain large estates, and take control of the remaining more important sectors of the economy, agriculture and animal husbandry. In the process, they directly challenged the most vital interests of the Muslim population, and for this reason naturally encountered resistance from them and sometimes from the government."²³

It was not a secret for Turkey that the Armenian bourgeoisie had the ambition in time, either through the natural path of growth or with the assistance of the great powers, to dominate the commercial market of their ancestral homeland of Western Armenia.²⁴

It was also not a secret to anybody that the Armenians were a vital, dynamic, people always looking to what was new and progressive, and possessing great intellectual and educational internal strength. Frederick Davis Greene, who had visited Western Armenia, wrote that the Armenians "love their homeland and are called to play a prominent role in the moral and material revival of Western Asia."²⁵

The Armenians' increasing Russophilia had become a nightmare for the Turkish authorities. Throughout the previous wars between the Ottomans and the Russians, whether appropriate or not,

the Western Armenians always greeted the Russians with a cross in their hands, though they were well aware of the consequences.

The most alarming factor for the sultan's government was that regardless of its persistent and vigorous efforts (deportation of the Armenians from one province to another, attempts at assimilation and conversion, numerous attempts to declare them Ottoman and Turkify them, fiendish plans conceived to destroy the Armenian national spirit, and steps to change the ethnic balance of Western Armenia), the Armenian provinces continued to preserve their national features with the majority of the population remaining Armenian.²⁶

All this could lead Istanbul to only one conclusion: it was precisely this people which presented a danger to the Asian territories of the empire. Thus, the Armenian Question even before becoming the subject of international diplomacy was an important issue for Turkish statehood and would also determine in the end whether the Turks had a future in Asia Minor. Stepan Iosifovich Kishmishev was correct to write that the Turks "spared neither money nor other means to protect their Asian territories."²⁷ It surely indicated that Istanbul had concluded that keeping Western Armenia within the Ottoman Empire was one of the most urgent and significant issues of internal policy.

How could that problem be resolved? In the opinion of the Ottoman ruling class, the Kurds were the force which could help the government keep Western Armenia in the empire. Even the Kurdish tribal leaders unaware of the intricacies of the political games of the Sublime Porte well knew, according to the Armenian revolutionary Ruben Ter Minasian, that "if the Turkish government indulges the Kurds, it is only because it has not settled accounts with the Armenians yet."²⁸

Consequently exciting hostility between the Armenian and the Kurdish peoples became the cornerstone of the Ottoman state's Asian policy. It could also be a means to exhaust the Kurds and prevent danger from them in the future, especially because many Ottoman statesmen were convinced that "the Armenian-Kurdish alliance could snatch Asia from them."²⁹

In order to accomplish this large-scale project, the Ottoman authorities and their propaganda machine started an intensive activity. They attempted to convince the Kurds that the Armenians

were their enemies because the latter wanted to create an independent state with the assistance of the European powers, turn Kurdistan into Armenia, and subjugate the Kurds. In other words "yesterday's rayah wants to become the master of the country and turn the free Kurds into rayahs."³⁰ They worked to convince the Kurds that if Russia controlled the Armenian districts, the Christian Armenians would receive the priority and impose its will on the Kurds.³¹ Other efficacious ways to provoke irreconcilable hatred and antagonism between neighboring peoples was the exacerbation of the agrarian question, which was increasingly acquiring a political nature, or exciting religious antagonisms. Raffi wrote, "Promoting religious divisions and through them ... maintaining disunity and hostility between various tribes was a hereditary political science that Mongolian Turkey obtained along with the Byzantine throne."³²

The ruling circles of the empire, led by the sultan-caliph and the sheikh ul-Islam, using the ideology of Pan-Islamism as their weapon, started vigorous religious propaganda in Kurdish regions, inspiring the people with religious fanaticism and intolerance.

The result of this policy generated in Istanbul was the partial massacres of the Armenian population by armed groups of the Kurdish tribal chiefs in Alashkert, Bayazit, Vaspurakan, Mush, Erzurum and some other places. The Armenians residing in these regions were forcibly deported, and the abandoned villages were settled with Kurdish tribes. Some of the Armenians of Bayazit and Alashkert were forced to migrate to Iran and settle in the khanate of Maku and other places in Atrpatakan (Iranian Azerbaijan). The wave of massacres in Western Armenia acquired great momentum. The Armenian press of Constantinople published articles depicting the participation and complicity of Turkish provincial officials in the carnage.³³

Speaking in one of the sessions of the Ottoman Parliament, the delegate of Karin (Erzurum), Hamazasp Pallarian, discussed the Kurdish question. He cited much evidence about the ashiret chiefs' unpunished atrocities and other violent acts against the Armenians while many of the local governors collaborated with the Kurds. He wrote: "When I asked the governors why they do not punish the Kurds for which two battalions would be enough, and thus are permitted to continue their misdeeds without pun-

ishment, they replied to me that there was a *hikmet-i hükümet* [state secret] in this matter. Later on, I understood what this state secret was that they were saying. The *hikmet* [secret] was that the government kept the Kurds in such a condition so that if the Armenians revolted in Armenia, the Kurds would suppress them. Also, when war started against Russia, the Kurds would help the Ottoman army as volunteer forces."³⁴

Throughout the war the Armenians in Turkey devotedly fulfilled their duties to the Ottoman state. Twenty to thirty thousand people were used by the government to transport cannons and ammunition to distant places and in general do the heaviest labor. The government and local authorities plundered everything the Armenians possessed to pay for military expenses. As Armenian political party historian Mikayel Varandian said, "Though there was no insurrection, no Ottoman-Armenian volunteers in the Russian army, and no volunteer movement among the Armenians in the Caucasus, Turkish Armenia was subject to dreadful devastation, massacre, plunder, and oppression by the Turkish and Kurdish irregular troops, hundreds of burnt villages, desecrated monasteries and churches, anarchy, terror and fear, panic and migration... Whole districts emptied and a mass charge [took place] toward the Russian border, where ten thousands of refugees awaited the calamity of inevitable starvation and epidemics."³⁵

In 1878, wrote Nikoghayos Adonts, "the Armenian population near the border was driven to the interior of the country and condemned to perish from famine and the caprices of fate. During several months in 1878, the army crossed five times through the nearby areas of Alashkert, Bayazit, and Basen. Not only Turkish but Russian troops as well were involved in robbery and destruction. The attacks and retreats of the troops were followed by Kurdish bandit groups like famished and enraged wolves, through plunder and seizure providing food to their [people]."³⁶ The famous historian continued, "The anti-Armenian policy raging throughout the last half of the century devastated Armenia more than even the centuries of rule by robber tribes."³⁷

In order to strengthen the despotic regime and strangle the movements of people striving for liberty, on February 26, 1878 Sultan Abdul Hamid dissolved the parliament and interdicted the constitution, declaring, "I was mistaken to want to be like my

father Abdul Mejid, who wanted to reform by persuasion and establishing liberal institutions. Therefore I am going to follow the example of my grandfather, Sultan Mahmud. Like him I also see that it is only possible to move the peoples whom God has entrusted to me through brute force."³⁸

After the prohibition of Midhat's constitution, the insignificant "rights" granted to the Armenians were also abolished. The Armenians were truly at the edge of an abyss. The victory of Russia in the war and Article 16 of the Treaty of San Stefano signed on March 3, 1878 awoke new hopes in the Armenians. That article dealt with the issue of security for the Western Armenians from Kurdish oppression. The article stated: "As the evacuation by the Russian troops of the territory which they occupy in Armenia, and which is to be restored to Turkey, might give rise to conflicts and complications detrimental to the maintenance of good relations between the two countries, the Sublime Porte engages to carry into effect, without further delay, the improvements and reforms demanded by local requirements in the provinces inhabited by Armenians, and to guarantee their security from Kurds and Circassians."³⁹

Regardless of the responsibilities instituted by the treaty, the sultan's government not only neglected to prevent oppressions and violence against the Armenians, but began to provoke them itself more powerfully.

Moreover, Article 16 about the Armenian Question strengthened the conviction of Ottoman governing circles about the necessity of decisively adopting the policy of creating a counterforce to the Armenians from the Kurds of the empire in order to bury the Armenian Question and definitively demolish Armenian dreams about national liberation. Therefore, the sultan and the Sublime Porte persuaded Patriarch Nerses to turn to the European countries and complain against the Kurds, not against the Ottoman government.⁴⁰ Karo Sasuni wrote: "The Turkish government directly and indirectly suggested to the Armenian patriarchate that it would not look upon the Armenians with an unfriendly eye if they sent a delegation to the Congress of Berlin to raise the issues of reforms and security against the Kurds."⁴¹ With that cunning step, the sultan worked to further intensify Armenian-Kurdish hostility, anticipating at the same time convincing the European powers that the sole source of the insecurity and "disorder and unrest" in Armenia was the Kurds, not the Turkish authorities.

England and Austria-Hungary were discontent with the results of the Treaty of San Stefano, considering that they as two leading powers of the Concert of Europe were left outside the circles involved with the treaty. They saw it as a new provocation of Russia against Turkey. After becoming familiar with the text of the treaty, the English prime minister, Benjamin Disraeli (Lord Beaconsfield), exclaimed that it had completely made Turkey a country dependent on Russia. London and Vienna, after obtaining the agreement of the other European states, demanded that the preliminary Treaty of San Stefano be discussed at an international congress, reasoning that it touched upon pan-European interests and in addition that it was necessary to change some points to conform to Articles 9 and 12 of the 1856 Paris peace treaty. Under British pressure, on May 18/30, 1878 a secret treaty was signed in London, according to which Russia could not expand territorially in the direction of Western Armenia.

As an addition to that treaty, on June 4, 1878 an Anglo-Turkish defensive alliance was signed, as a result of which England took on the obligation of preventing Russia by means of military force from occupying any part of Asiatic Turkey. In this fashion, English diplomacy succeeded in creating a double restraining mechanism directed against its rival and adversary Russia. In exchange for the promise of defending the territories of the Ottoman Empire in Eastern Anatolia, England received from the sultan the island of Cyprus. In the West this great success of British diplomacy was assessed as the "masterpiece of all times," and Lord Beaconsfield was ranked among the "legends of history."

The sultan presupposed that England along with the Kurds would become a barrier against the desire for liberation of the Western Armenians. Noting that Cyprus was blood money for the Armenians, contemporary journalist and public figure Grigor Artsruni wrote: "It appeared that for both Turkey and England, the Armenians and Armenia had become obstacles. The goal of their secret alliance was to annihilate the Armenians in Armenia and exile them from their homeland."⁴²

Unaware of these diplomatic games, the Armenians had great expectations of the Congress of Berlin. Moreover, they considered the content and the guarantees of Article 16 of San Stefano as insufficient and decided to advance the idea of Armenian autonomy

within the borders of the Ottoman Empire. However, by the time of the opening of the Berlin Congress, the delegation of Archbishop Khrimian Hayrik, after visiting European capitals, became bitterly disappointed, realizing that "Armenia is beyond the frame of comprehension of the Western powers."

The Armenian delegation took along a plan for autonomy titled "Statutes for the Organization of Ottoman Armenia" to present to the Berlin Congress. It touched upon the Kurdish Question among many other issues. In particular, in order to achieve peace in the provinces of Western Armenia, it suggested the disarmament of the Kurds and other nomadic tribes who abused and exploited the Armenian population.

The Berlin Congress started on June 1/13 and ended on July 1/13, 1878. The delegation of the Armenian patriarchate of Constantinople and the Armenian National Assembly did not have the right to participate in it because it did not represent a state. On July 1, 1878, the Treaty of Berlin with 64 articles was accepted, in which Article 61 referred to the Armenians and the Armenian Question. It stated: "The Sublime Porte undertakes to carry out without further delay the ameliorations and reforms demanded by local requirements in the provinces inhabited by the Armenians, and to guarantee their security against the Circassians and the Kurds. It will make known periodically the steps taken to this effect to the Powers, who will superintend their application."

As we can see, Article 61 did not mention the name of Armenia, which was replaced with the term "provinces inhabited by the Armenians." The article also did not mention which measures the Turkish government could apply to secure the Armenians' safety from the Kurds and Circassians.

The Berlin Congress did not even discuss the question of granting the Armenians independence, which showed that this issue did not comply with the interests of any participant power. Article 61 did not contain any real guarantee to establish order in the Armenian vilayets and secure the Armenian population from possible massacre and violence.

The diplomatic history of the Armenian Question began with the Treaties of San Stefano and Berlin, and this question became internationalized. In other words, the Armenian Question turned from an internal Ottoman matter into an international question.

Undoubtedly the Berlin Congress made the "Armenian Question" more complicated and deepened the chasm between the Armenians and the Kurds. Reflecting on the decisions taken on the Armenian Question at the Congress, Vahakn Dadrian, a sociologist and genocide expert from the Armenian diaspora wrote: "By raising the consciousness and hope of the subject nationalities of the Ottoman Empire, without concomitantly enhancing their power leverage, international actors afforded the rulers of that empire both the incentive and the excuse to inflict greater harm upon these nationalities through an increase of the level of their oppression. This is how the Armenian Question originated and crystallized itself in the last decades of the nineteenth century, fueling with greater force the engines of the Turko-Armenian conflict, in which that Question had found its most concrete expression. Encouraged by the promises of the Treaty of Berlin, the Armenians experienced a new sense of national consciousness, which in turn engendered rising expectations."⁴³

Though it appeared that through Article 61 the European states were going to defend the Armenians from the Kurds and Circassians, in reality they pitted the Kurds and Circassians against the Armenians. Thus, Turkey no longer accepted responsibility for the "Armenian Question," and essentially it became a third party which "guaranteed" before the European powers the security of the Armenians not from its own abuse and persecution but from the Kurds' harassment. As a consequence, the Sublime Porte freed itself from all blame.

Hakop Shahpazian's assessment of Article 61 is very accurate. He wrote that the article "was considered to be in favor of the Armenians but it was merely a European diplomatic game to take control of the fate of Turkey after the Russo-Turkish war by pitting one nation against the other. After that article, religious, national, economic and political sparks under the ashes were kindled to inflame the whole of Turkey, a ruin of which became the Armenian massacres. In this way, Europe opened a political arena for the Kurds and the Circassians."⁴⁴ Karo Sasuni wrote about the same question: "Turkey was able to raise an agitated Kurdish world in Armenia and Kurdistan to show that the Kurds were irritated and would resist the reforms that the great powers had prepared for Turkey."⁴⁵

After the Berlin Congress, concomitant to the disappointment

in Armenian circles, a movement for Armenian autonomy was led by Mkrtych Khrimian and Nerses Varzhapetian. Simultaneously, Armenian intellectuals in the European capitals and in both parts of Armenia began to organize various unions and committees to articulate their protests against the violence and oppressions of the sultan's government as well as to use pressure to get the promised reforms carried out.

A complete and thorough analysis of the situation was presented in the report of the French ambassador in Constantinople Paul Cambon entitled "Historical Presentation on the Armenian Question," which was addressed to his superiors of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He wrote that the idea of Armenian independence did not exist before 1881. The masses only desired reforms, dreaming of normal lives under Ottoman rule, but the reforms were not accomplished. The scandalous extortion by Ottoman bureaucrats continued, while justice was not improved. The corruption of the officials, scorn for justice, and the security of life were growing. As a result, the Armenian diaspora started to call attention to accusations of the violations of rights and it succeeded in transforming ordinary administrative negligence into one way of persecution on the basis of racism. It began to call the attention of Europe to Turkish violations of the Berlin Treaty, thus awakening in the Armenian population the idea of Armenian self-rule.

France did not respond to the Armenians' initiatives but Gladstone's England did. As if it were not enough to provoke the Armenians' anguish, the Turks happily aggravated the situation and used their discontent as a pretext. The ambassador revealed that a Turkish official had told him, "The Armenian Question does not exist, but we shall create it." The Turkish assertions that the Armenians were organizing conspiracies caused the Armenians finally to come to secret agreements. The avowals that Armenia did not exist made the Armenians believe in Armenia's reality. Paul Cambon concluded: "In reality the Armenian Question was nothing but the expression of antagonism between England and Russia... Where does Armenia start and where does it end?"

The report of the French ambassador clearly revealed the internal motive of the Turkish policy about the Armenian Question, which was to drive the Armenians to desperate actions and use the latter as an excuse for retribution.⁴⁶

The Ottoman conspiratorial arsenal was not short of weapons to realize that plan. One of them especially well-known for its effectiveness was the Kurdish factor and its use coincided with British interests too. The British ambassador in Constantinople Austen Henry Layard wrote in his letter to Prime Minister Gladstone of April 27, 1880: "It must not be forgotten that they form the minority, and in many districts the very small minority, of the population. It is foolish and dangerous to seek to disprove this fact by ignoring the Kurds. The Mussulmans of Asia Minor have learnt the fate of their brethren in the autonomous Christian provinces of European Turkey. They would not be disposed to submit to a similar fate without resistance. A demand for autonomy in Armenia might lead to massacres, which would bring about the immediate interference of Russia, and its inevitable consequences."⁴⁷

Reflecting on the harmony of Turkish and English interests concerning the Armenian Question, Grand Vizier Kâmil Pasha wrote: "Now, at least today, the interests of England demand that in Asia Minor, England and we not only do not recognize the word Armenia, but we must break the jaws uttering it so that our lands remain free from foreign intervention and any occasion for interference. Thus it is necessary for that sacred goal, and state right commands, that we exterminate any suspicious element so that we safeguard the future. So, nothing is lacking for us to accomplish this; we have every tool ready--Kurds, Circassians, governors, judges, tax collectors, policemen—everything, in a word. We will declare a religious war, an easy war against a nation that has no weapon, army, or defender. We, on the contrary, have arms, an army, [and] one of the largest and richest states in the world is our military ally and guarantor of the Asian world. If that nation is annihilated and if Christian Europe seeks and does not find a coreligionist in Turkish Asia it will leave us in peace; and then we will occupy ourselves with internal affairs and reforms."⁴⁸

This was a monstrous plan arranged in detail to solve the Armenian Question by eradicating all the Armenians. In order to carry it out, as the plan demanded, the government extensively used the Kurdish ruling class and tribes by arming them and directing them against the Armenian population. For instance, during the war the government had distributed to the Kurds twenty thousand Martini rifles which were not taken back at its conclu-

sion⁴⁹ so that they could use these arms against the Armenians.

Meanwhile, when a group of Armenians came to the governor of Van and asked for fifty guns to protect themselves from the Kurdish chieftains of neighboring Archesh and Artske, the latter answered them with mockery: "I am surprised that you are not asking for some cannons too."⁵⁰

The economic life of Western Armenia, especially trade and agriculture, was paralyzed as a result of the fear of the Kurdish bandit groups which were increasing daily. The English consul Captain Trotter warned from Erzurum that the condition of the Christians in the entire region was been worse than it ever had been in recent years.

The Blue Books, English official publications, were full of evidence about Kurdish violence against the Armenians. For instance, they noted that Turkish officials, judges, police and others were accomplices to the atrocities.⁵¹

Analyzing the events of that period, the Russian Turcologist Vladimir Aleksandrovich Gordlevskiy, wrote: "After the 1877-1878 war, there was an acute change in the situation of the Armenians of Turkey. Their national consciousness intensified. Trying to oppress the Armenian national movement, the Turkish authorities started to excite the Kurds against the Armenians more strongly, and so that periodically brutal massacres took place. The Sublime Porte encouraged the slaughter and massacres as an effective measure to weaken the hated Christian element."⁵² A Russian eyewitness serviceman, Aleksandr Mikhailovich Kolyubakin, noted: "Many in Constantinople considered necessary to oppress the Armenian movement in the most resolute manner. On the other hand, the Muslim population, both Turks and Kurds, which were influenced by the extremist clergy and various dark forces..., was being extremely excited against the Armenians. Various unbelievable intentions were ascribed to the latter, such as the total massacre of the Muslims or their conversion to Christianity, the kidnapping of their women, and so forth."⁵³

In addition to resorting to a policy of massacres to throttle the awakening self-consciousness and national rebirth of the Armenian people, the sultan's government prohibited or dissolved various newly created Armenian organizations, arrested and exiled their leaders, and established control over Armenian schools,

publications, and the community life of the Western Armenians in general.

The understanding of the law in Western Armenia, which earlier had not existed either, was completely replaced by capricious will. The Armenians remained outside of the protection of the law. They were declared to be traitors and enemies of the state (*millet-i hain* [treacherous ethnoreligious community]). The Turkish prisons were full of Armenians. Thousands of people were exiled to the deserts of Arabia and Libya, from which nobody ever returned. The Muslim bands did their black deeds too by plundering and burning the houses, shops and markets of the Armenians. The brutality of those unbridled elements was generally accompanied with awful massacres. Furthermore, as usual the mob and the government acted jointly. The authorities goaded and directed the bestial passions and bloodthirsty instincts of the urban throngs and dregs. In short, the Turkish government had made the carnage a customary part of its political system. At the same time, the sultan paid little attention to the periodical anti-government uprisings of the Kurds, considering this only the mischief of people living free in the mountains. When the Turkish soldiers had armed clashes with rebellious Kurds and killed some of them, governors scolded the commanders, saying "How dare you slay so many Kurdish giants."⁵⁴

Step by step the sultan's government was accomplishing a complex program with the aim of thwarting the realization of the resolution of the Berlin Congress to enact administrative reforms in Western Armenia. In order to prove that the Armenians did not make up a majority in any province of Western Armenia, after the 1877-1878 war the sultan enacted some fundamental changes in the administrative structure of the country with the intention of distributing the Armenian and Muslim population in such a way that no province had the Armenians as a majority.⁵⁵ The Armenians did not possess the means to prevent or impede that policy, so they continued the strategy of protests and petitions, trying at the same time to attract European attention to this issue. Many of them placed their hopes on the Young Ottomans and their constitutional plans, presuming that they would bring an end to Abdul Hamid's policy of persecution against the Armenians. There were also prudent people who, calling the Midhatian constitution

trickery, predicted that "the day the Young Turks turn masters of the empire, and a general war arises in their time, their first task would be to obliterate the Turkish Armenians in order to establish a homogenous Turkey. Thus Russia, after liberating the Orthodox or Slavic peoples of the Balkans, with the intention of dismembering Asiatic Turkey, would not create pretexts for liberating the Turkish Armenians, who shared common borders and religion with the Caucasian Armenians."⁵⁶

In 1879 the sultan sent one of his loyal henchmen, the commander of the fourth Anatolian army Müshir [Marshall] Bekir Sami Pasha, to Western Armenia granting him great powers. Officially his mission was to stop the oppressions in the eastern provinces of Asia Minor. In reality his objective was to investigate and reveal the activities of the revolutionary elements in Armenia, and to take measures to prevent complaints when European reform commissioners visited there. In Van province, this pasha convened Kurdish assemblies and inspired them with such words as "the Armenians are their enemies and with the help of Europeans they want to obtain dominion over them, that is, the Kurds." Simultaneously he inspired the Kurds to drive away the Armenians and take their homes.⁵⁷ Bekir Sami Pasha personally participated in that activity, and encouraged the brutalities of the Kurdish bandit chiefs on the roads of Karin (Erzurum) and Van.⁵⁸

Layard, the English ambassador in Constantinople, reported in his telegram to the government on November 19, 1879 that Bekir Sami Pasha lavishly granted medals, honorary swords and subsidies to Kurdish leaders who "are more worthy of a rope."⁵⁹

In the late 1870s a huge Kurdish movement started in the regions of Hakkari and Nouché under the leadership of fifty-year-old Sheikh Obeidullah [also written Ubayd Allah] whose influence as a Kurdish religious leader extended from Western Armenia and Iraqi Kurdistan to Iranian Kurdistan and Atrpatakan [Iranian Azerbaijan]. One of the reasons for his great influence was the Kurdish belief that he was the "lawful heir of the caliphs."⁶⁰ During the 1877-1878 Russo-Turkish War, he assembled large numbers of Kurdish forces and actively participated in the war on the side of the Ottoman Empire.

In 1880 returning from his Mecca pilgrimage to his hereditary property of Shamdinan [Shamsdinan], a small rural town in

Aghbak region of Vaspurakan province, the sheikh became aware that anti-governmental outbursts had begun among the Kurdish population of that area. He immediately took over the leadership of the movement, hoping to use the favorable opportunity to realize his great ambitions. He in particular strived to unite all the Kurdish tribes under his power and become the complete master of Kurdistan and Western Armenia. He presented himself as the spokesman of the "national desires" of the Kurdish masses.

Obeidullah immediately united the leaders of all the Kurdish influential tribes who had reasons to be discontented with the sultan's government, as the latter step by step was limiting their privileges and "rights" about taxation, and depriving them of their "independent" condition.

In October 1879, Obeidullah sent his representative Yusuf Agha to the vice-consul of Van Kostandin Kamsarakan. Later on he sent Sheikh Sayyid Mohammed Sayyid who first introduced Obeidullah's goals to the Russian diplomats, and then asked for the support of Petersburg government for their movement.⁶¹ Most importantly, the sheikh through his representative suggested that Russia reconsider its Kurdish policy and accept the Kurds, instead of the Armenians, as Russia's main base of support in Asia Minor. He also asked that the Petersburg cabinet elevate the Kurdish Question into the international diplomatic arena as had been done with the Armenian Question.

However, after discussing the matter, the Tsarist government refused the sheikh's requests. Kamsarakan submitted a report to the Russian ambassador in Constantinople, Alexei Borisovich Lobanov-Rostovskii, stating that from the viewpoint of Russian interests it was very dangerous to foster the sheikh's objectives. He suggested that Russia should be faithful to its traditional policy, and continue to rely on the Christian population, not on the Kurds.⁶²

This view of the diplomat of Armenian origins about his nation was not merely an expression of emotions. Though Tsarist diplomacy did not mind using the "Kurdish card" in its Middle Eastern plans, Petersburg regarded it as undesirable in the contemporary international situation. Moreover, the Tsarist government possessed undeniable evidence that London and its political agents had already attained sufficient success in "cultivating" Sheikh Obeidullah, and had made notable progress in concentrat-

ing all the sources of influence of the Kurdish movement in his hand.⁶³ Great Britain considered the Kurds as a force which could be erected as a barrier to Russian advancement in Asia Minor.

Russian diplomacy was informed about the negotiations in Hakkari between Obeidullah and the British vice-consul in Van, Captain Emilius Clayton, under instructions from the English ambassador in Constantinople Lord Dufferin (Frederick Hamilton-Temple-Blackwood). During the meeting the sheikh handed to the vice-consul a special epistle entrusting the English to deal with Kurdish affairs.⁶⁴ Immediately after the meeting, the sheikh was delivered English arms and subsidies.

The sultan's government assumed straightaway that Obeidullah's movement would lead to serious complications for it in the eastern part of the empire. The mufti of Van was ordered to visit the sheikh without delay to find out his intentions. He promised the sheikh to "completely satisfy his lawful demands."⁶⁵

Russian ambassador Yevgeni P. Novikov reported from Constantinople that the sultan's government preferred the policy of winning over the affections of the sheikh, as it did not have adequate forces to suppress the upcoming Kurdish revolt. As a consequence, in spring 1880 the adjutant of Sultan Abdul Hamid, Colonel Bahri Bey, was sent on a mission to Obeidullah in Hakkari. He, as the Russian observers informed, handed over to him the sultan's presents--a sword and a medal, and notified him that the government had granted him a stipend.⁶⁶ At the same time, in order to deflect the Kurdish movement from its initial direction, the Turkish government started to suggest to the Kurds that the reform plans were intended only for Christians, the Armenians, and completely ignored the Kurds as "savage nomads." The goal of Sultan Abdul Hamid was to take advantage of Sheikh Obeidullah's movement and raise the Kurds against the Armenians in order to ruin the Armenian provinces and make the reforms fail.

Karo Sasuni said: "The sultan instructed the sheikh to set up a general Kurdish union, and call Armenia Kurdistan. He also granted Ibadullah [Obeidullah] the right, and ordered him, to invade the Armenian districts with Kurdish forces and put to the sword the Armenian and Assyrian population. The sultan took into consideration Kurdish customs, and knew that the authorization of plunder and robbery would bring forth many thousands

of irregular fighters who would make the reforms impossible. In the case of such disorder, the Ottoman government would justify itself before the European great states by casting the entire blame on the Kurds, as it had done previously."⁶⁷

The sultan intended to use Sheikh Obeidullah's movement and other similar ones for the realization of some other goals too. In particular, he planned to strengthen the Kurdish sheikhdoms against the Kurdish begs and create a theocracy, and with the help of Islam to bond the entire Kurdish population to the sultan-caliph. Thus, the sheikhdom would turn into an instrument to throttle the Christian peoples, especially the Armenians, pursuing liberty. Simultaneously, it would become a powerful religious base for the caliph. The sultan pursued another longterm goal too: to provoke internal fights between nations (or nationalities) under the leadership of sheikhs, who would inevitably direct the movement toward religious fanaticism, deprive the Kurds of national consciousness, keep the latter's minds far from the national liberation struggle, turn them into a purely Islamic community, and gradually Turkify them. Anon, Sultan Abdul Hamid II found that the Kurdish irregular forces were a necessary element which could replace the Janissaries of which he was deprived.⁶⁸

Leo wrote that the sultan's government "grabbed with two hands the Kurdish movement which began in 1880. The Ottoman press of Constantinople was delighted and it threatened Europe with the Kurdish movement. They did not find any concealment necessary, and openly announced that Turkey would destroy Article 61 with Kurdish spears, so the Armenians had to keep silent and not make any demands for themselves. Otherwise the entirety of the united Kurds would be roused against them."⁶⁹

Raffi expressed his opinion in his article entitled "Kurdish Union": "The Sublime Porte established the Albanian union to indirectly reject the resolutions of the Berlin Congress about Greece and Montenegro and to create difficulties for the demands of the European states. Likewise, now it is creating the Kurdish union in order to strangle the Armenian problem in its cradle." Raffi considered Layard, the English ambassador in Constantinople, as one of the initiators of the 'Kurdish Union,' while he also believed the source of that idea to be Beaconsfield's ministry.⁷⁰

The Russian press shared the view that the Sublime Porte had

founded the Kurdish union to end the Armenian Question. The Armenian newspaper *Mshak*, for instance, reprinted a piece of correspondence from the newspaper *Golos* which noted that the 'Kurdish League' was devised to make Article 61 of the Congress of Berlin impotent.⁷¹ The French-language official newspaper of Constantinople, *L'Osmanni*, wrote: "The inhabitants of Kurdistan are extremely confused by the 'Armenian Question' which Europe arouses under the name of reforms. And as soon as the Kurds see that they desire to subject them to the situation of the inhabitants of Eastern Rumelia, they will unanimously rise to their feet as a man and form their league." The author of the article cynically concluded, "A part of the Kurds lead a nomadic way of life; their residences and possessions are on the backs of their horses. Therefore, in order to get them to rise up, it is sufficient merely to order them to get on horseback."⁷²

Ottoman provincial officials provoked already inflammable passions. For instance, the chairman of the *adliye* [court] of Bashkale, Haji Mustafa Effendi, announced that principally three nations, the Armenians, the Kurds and the Assyrians, lived in the six vilayets or provinces of Eastern Anatolia. However, the Kurds were completely excluded from the reform plan, "with all rights being given only to those remaining two nations, and as this is extremely insulting and unacceptable for the Kurds, they in turn decided from the start with gun in hand to prevent the import of these reforms into the aforementioned parts of the state."⁷³

Interestingly, some Kurdish tribal chiefs informed the Armenians about the Ottoman government's machinations. Thus, the famous leader Hüseyin Agha told Arsen Tokhmakhian that Obeidullah's movement was "prepared against the Armenians to destroy the Armenian Question and show Europe that the Kurds do form a military power." And in that vein "much secret work has and is taking place."⁷⁴

It was obvious that it was necessary for the sultan to present Europe with a spurious force, a type of scarecrow, the role of which was played by "the Kurdish league." The Ottoman government changed its traditional policy; instead of dividing the Kurds it united them and sent them against the Armenians.

Abdul Hamid dispatched a great number of mollas, seyyids and others to Western Armenia to excite Kurdish religious hatred

in mosques against the “kafir” Armenians. He lavishly granted medals of high rank and military titles to all the Kurdish tribal leaders that were prominent in anti-Armenian activities. For example, former rebel Bedirhan’s son Bahri Bey was rewarded with the Mejidiye medal, the rank of commander of the sultan’s guard, and the honorary title of *ferik* [divisional general], after which he was sent to Western Armenia on “special assignment.”⁷⁵ All these people were ordered to interpret the Armenian Question as if “the Armenians wanted to establish their kingdom and enslave the Kurds. The Kurds had only one way to save themselves from this danger—to massacre the Armenians”;⁷⁶ or, they were told that the Armenians “will apply to the French and ask for troops and money with which to exterminate the Kurds, so for their [the Kurds’] defense, they must take up arms and resist the Armenians.”⁷⁷ *L’Osmanli* even wrote that the Armenians intend to disseminate Christianity among the Kurds and include Kurdish children in their schools. The article stated, “Though the Bulgarians revolted against the Turks and killed the Turks, the Armenians are more dangerous than them because they want to absorb the Kurds through culture.”⁷⁸

The Turkish press especially tried to persuade Europeans who were unfamiliar with the realities of Western Armenia that the Armenians exploit and oppress the “poor” Kurds.

One of the greatest schemes of the sultan’s government directed against the Armenian Question was the following. In the summer of 1880, six European powers gave the Sublime Porte a collective memorandum which demanded the immediate realization of Article 61 of Berlin Congress and the completion of the promised reforms in Western Armenia. The Sublime Porte had not sent the answer to the memorandum yet when some “Kurdish delegates” appeared in Constantinople “as if sent by Sheikh Ibadullah [Obeidullah], but actually arranged in the Turkish capital. They presented themselves to Abedin Pasha demanding autonomy for the Kurds and Kurdistan.”⁷⁹ Raffi wrote, “At that time Obeidullah was in Iran without a clue that negotiations were conducted on his behalf in the capital.”⁸⁰ It became clear a little later that the Kurdish demonstration was organized by Abedin Pasha himself, who also was the planner of the “Albanian Union” and now the author of the provocative ideas of “Kurdish autonomy” and the “Kurdish league.”

As if in accordance with the instructions of a skillful conductor, the Turkish press abruptly changed its tone about the Kurds after that “Kurdish demonstration.” It was not in its interest to show the Kurds as a “poor,” “civilized” and “peace-loving” nation any more. They had to be presented as ruthless animals, as barbarian fanatics who were ready to obliterate the Armenians in a moment if the latter raised the question of their autonomy or independence. This masterful intrigue could make people conclude that if the sultan’s government acted against the will of the Muslim population of Eastern Anatolia on the matter of the reforms, a great massacre of the Christian population could be perpetrated for which the Sublime Porte would not consider itself responsible.

Raffi’s article in the pages of *Mshak* assessed all this as pure deception because the Muslims in Asiatic Turkey were “as oppressed and exploited by the disorderly government as the Christians,” and the Kurdish masses had absolutely no idea about the machinations of Turkish diplomacy. Raffi said, “The wolves in the Armenian mountains have as much information about all those negotiations as the Kurdish people. All that is spoken, plotted and developed in Constantinople.”⁸¹

Thus, Sheikh Obeidullah’s movement seemed to turn from an evil to a blessing for the sultan’s government. The movement did not frighten them any more. On the contrary, the government encouraged it because “it thought that in this way, it would create a Kurdish union which with political power would turn into a tool in its hand, while the idea of independence could be easily made forgotten.”⁸²

During the days that this dreadful plot was being schemed against the Armenian people, Abdul Hamid II attempted to sway Patriarch Nerses Varzhapetian with false hopes and persuade him that the “benevolent” government was interested in the rapid realization of the Armenian reforms. To confirm the sincerity of his words, the sultan declared to the patriarch that he was granting the Armenians the right to found a shareholding company for the construction of roads, railways, factories and other structures in Armenia. He would gift to the company the port of Rize near Trebizond as “a definite foothold for direct communication with Constantinople for autonomous Armenia.” He granted the patriarch the privilege of using the Armenian coat of arms on his official letterhead, and “in a word, a great and happy future is

promised to the Armenian nation, in which it would forget all the pains and sorrow of the past."⁸³

Truly, the sultan's "game" was a masterful diplomatic game. If the Armenians believed in that game and calmed down in Western Armenia, not posing any problems for the Ottoman government, everything would "fall into place." Otherwise, the Ottoman government would look as if it had done everything for the Armenians but they did not follow the "fatherly" advice and had chosen the route of "treachery" and "revolt." Consequently they would be responsible for all possible future events.

Undoubtedly Sheikh Obeidullah was well aware of the ulterior motive of the Ottoman government, which was using the Kurds to counter the Armenians and the Armenian Question. So he tried to use that motive for his own political interests. His announcement at the Kurdish leaders' meeting in Shamdinan in 1880 was remarkable: "If until now the Sublime Porte has supported the Kurds in every way, it is done because of the desire to counter its Christian elements in Anatolia; and if the Armenians are eliminated here, the Kurds will lose their importance for the Turkish government."⁸⁴

If the sheikh did not want to become an instrument in the hand of the Turkish government in the undertaking of obliterating the Armenians or suppressing their desires, what was his purpose? Most probably the sheikh wanted to get the Kurdish issue, like the Armenian one, into the realm of international diplomacy, in pursuit of his ultimate goal, the achievement of an independent Kurdistan. This did not rule out his having a personal concern that the Kurds would suffer from a solution of the Armenian Question. Consequently, he opposed the Armenian Question to the Kurdish one, unaware that they were inseparably connected to each other. Intentionally or not, with this step he condemned to failure the solution of both.

Not only was Obeidullah unwilling to become a tool of the sultan, but he was filled with hatred towards his rule. This became clear from his speech early in August 1880 in the village of Nehri at a meeting of the most influential religious and secular leaders of the Kurdish tribes of the Ottoman Empire and Iran, where he stressed an anti-Turkish orientation. He drew the participants' attention to the fact that the Ottomans gained power in an unlawful

manner because, according to the Shariat, the sultan as a caliph had to be a descendant of the prophet Muhammad. As this was not true, the supreme power of the Ottomans over the Muslim world was illegitimate. Obeidullah blamed the Ottomans of apostasy, accusing them of rejecting the Shariat throughout their 400 to 500 years of existence and accepting laws from the *giaours*.⁸⁵

Obeidullah intended to realize the ideal of independent Kurdistan in two stages. He clarified his objectives at the Kurdish general assembly in Nehri: "As a part of Kurdistan belongs to Persia we can start a war with the weaker side and liberate our brothers. After gaining a land as rich and fruitful as Atrpatakan [Iranian Azerbaijan], we will have unlimited possibilities of fighting our other enemy, the Ottomans."⁸⁶

Obeidullah felt the successful accomplishment of this plan was realistic because Turkish-Iranian relations were notably tense then, especially concerning border issues. In particular, in order to satisfy Iran's request, the Congress of Berlin had returned to Tehran the region of Kotur, which had a great strategic significance. This incurred the sultan's fury. Consequently, Istanbul would not object if the Kurds invaded Iran and wreaked devastation there. Obeidullah also considered that as a sheikh he would have great authority among the Sunni majority of the Iranian Kurdish population. The Iranian Kurds were hostile towards Qajar rule because of the policy of heavy taxation and the lawlessness of the Persian authorities, as well as other reasons. The Russian chief consul in Tabriz predicted that the Kurds would accept the sheikh with happiness as their "liberator and in entirety would follow him."⁸⁷

In September 1880, Obeidullah's detachments invaded Iran. On the eve of the attack, the sheikh issued an edict (*fetva* or *fatwa*) which strictly ordered all the Kurds not to rob or kill the Armenians and Assyrians. He informed all the Christians that they should hoist blue flags over their houses so that the invading army would not hurt them. Despite these precautions, the Kurdish detachments, carried away by a lust for plunder, at first organized partial massacres of the Armenians. Later on, the expedition was accompanied by terrible massacre and robbery of the local Christian (Armenian and Assyrian) and Muslim (Persian, Ali-Ilahi Kurds, etc.) populations. Thus, the moral element of the sheikh's political case was interred, and Iran's population did not want to cooperate with him.⁸⁸

In spite of his efforts, Simeon Chilinkirian, who held the position of *sardar* (a high-ranking commander) in Obeidullah's army and was given important powers,⁸⁹ was not able to prevent the massacre and robbery of Christians because the "army" had turned into an uncontrollable mob.

As a result, Obeidullah's foray to Iran ended in complete failure, without any result. The ashiret chiefs enriched from the robbery willfully abandoned the sheikh.⁹⁰ The failure of the invasion proved once again that Kurdish desires about establishing statehood with self-determination, and gaining independence and unity, were still unrealizable dreams. The Russian serviceman and Kurdologist Petr Ivanovich Averyanov interpreted the situation in this way: "The Kurds have no national consciousness. Patriotism in a Kurdish national sense does not exist for them. They have only a love of freedom, and a bond to their tribal chiefs and the piece of land on which their tribe lives. The attempts of individuals to establish an independent Kurdish state have never succeeded; they remained purely local phenomena never encompassing the whole of Kurdistan. The national ideas in the name of which Bedirhan, Yezdanshir, Obeidullah and other famous Kurds acted were found to be powerless to encompass and elevate the entire Kurdish people."⁹¹

In November 1880, Obeidullah's detachments suffered a crushing defeat in Iran. The government of the shah persistently demanded that the Sublime Porte arrest and punish the sheikh and the other Kurdish leaders. England and Austria also supported the demand, so the English ambassador in Constantinople, George Goschen, called for Turkey to "either punish Obeidullah or hand him over to Persia."⁹² The Turkish government arrested the sheikh and took him to the capital to the judgment of the sultan. In Constantinople the sheikh lived with the status of "honorable captive." News spread in August 1882 that Obeidullah escaped from Constantinople. He got on a Russian ship and left for Poti disguised in merchant's clothing and with fake documents. Then after wandering through Tiflis, Yerevan, Igdir, Bayazit and Alashkert, he eventually reached Hakkari.

Apparently he learned important lessons from his unsuccessful movement. The sheikh ordered "his men to treat the Armenians well" and asserted "acting hostilely toward the Armenians

until now was the result of wrong policy."⁹³ According to some speculation, "perhaps Obeidullah again pondered about starting a new struggle for free Kurdistan through a Kurdish-Armenian alliance and similar projects,"⁹⁴ which of course were unrealistic in the circumstances of the Ottoman Empire.

After the failure of the revolt, Obeidullah in his letter to Sheikh Khalif of Alashkert wrote: "anyhow, I like the Armenians much more than the Persians and the Turks. It is better for us to join with the Armenians than the Persians and Turks because the Persians hate us while the Turks want to turn us into the tool of their politics." He went on: "My brother, I ask you to stop the persecution and unfavorable attitude against the Armenians. We Kurds live among the Armenians. Let them treat the Turkish government as they like, but do not listen to and believe anybody because the last attempt convinced me that we are just a plaything in the hands of the Turks, and nothing more."⁹⁵

After Obeidullah's defeat the sultan's government lost interest in him, convinced that he was not the right person in whom to trust the realization of its political schemes in the east of the country, especially for countering the Armenian Question. As a result an order from the highest level arrived from the capital about the arrest and exile of the sheikh.⁹⁶ Sultan Abdul Hamid acted with his characteristic brutality and inhumanity toward the sheikh. He handed over his harem to the caprices of Turkish soldiers and forbade him to wear the clothing of a sheikh. In 1883, on the road to exile, Obeidullah unexpectedly died, probably not without the assistance of the secret agents of the sultan.⁹⁷

Thus, the movement of Sheikh Obeidullah, like the previous Kurdish movements, ended with defeat. The sultanate drew clear lessons from it. Abdul Hamid started to persistently rally the Kurdish sheikhs around Pan-Islamism and the caliphate. The purpose was to estrange them from ideas of national self-determination and uniting them around Islam. In addition, the Sublime Porte began to follow the policy of provoking conflict and enflaming hostility among the Kurdish tribes more widely and more resolutely. Thus, in 1884 it embroiled in conflict the prominent Hasananli and Jibranlı (or Jibran) tribes of the Mush district, and in general many armed conflicts broke out because of this policy. In order to pacify disobedient Kurdish tribes, the government frequently sent dif-

ferent ethnic groups such as Chechens, Lezgians, Circassians, Laz, Ossetians and other mountain peoples and tribes against them.⁹⁸ The manipulative Ottoman policy of “divide and rule” was made easier because the numerous Kurdish tribes spread over the entire territory of the empire and neighboring Iran were divided from one another by tribal, religious (Sunni, Shiite, Ali-Ilahi or Kizilbash) and other characteristics, and often due to a variety of reasons they were in hostile relations with one another. The nomadic or ashiret Kurds were divided into large tribal units, tribes and clans. The comparably larger units included the Haydaranli (composed of the Zilan, Sipki, Jibrán, Milan, Zirkan, Adaman and additional tribes) which mainly inhabited the territory of Western Armenia, the Shekkak whose territory was near the Turkish-Iranian border, the Kurds of the Hakkari region in Van vilayet consisting of the Oramar, Shemdinan, Jelu, Kharki, Barzan, Bahdinan, Bohtan, Jelali and other tribes, the Kurds of the Mukri tribe who were the majority in the Sauj Bulagh region (today Mahabad), the Kelhor and Senjabi Kurds of Kermanshah (called Bakhtaran from 1986 to 1995), and the Baban, Hamavend and many other tribes living in Northern Iraq. The main occupation for these tribes was nomadic animal husbandry, especially sheep-breeding.

As before, the cornerstone of the government’s policy for the eastern parts of the country was the intensification of the antagonism in Armenian-Kurdish relations. Undiscouraged, Western Armenian statesmen faced that terrible and dangerous challenge, and kept on seeking ways for a solution to that complex problem. The movement for the enlightenment of the Kurds was revived. The followers of this movement believed that the Armenians should influence the Kurds by cultural means instead of fighting them with arms. In their opinion, this was the only way to prevent the Kurds from becoming an instrument in the hands of the Turkish government against the Armenians. A great number of intellectuals with this point of view were convinced that as the Armenians of Western Armenia were condemned to live with the Kurds in the same territory, and any separation was impossible, they had to find ways to become closer in lifestyle, culture, traditions and other features and try to smooth over national, religious, social, political and cultural differences and contradictions. They were aware that the only way to withstand the Turkish calamity

was to unite the Armenians and Kurds; otherwise sooner or later both peoples would become the victims of the Turkish government. Khrimian Hayrik was a convinced proponent of that view.⁹⁹

The newspaper *Mshak* [Laborer] in Tiflis also directly connected the liberation of Western Armenia with the united struggle of the Armenian and the Kurdish peoples. *Mshak* editor Grigor Artsruni noted: “The Armenian, Assyrian and Kurdish populations of Armenia finally are beginning to understand that they all are inhabitants of Armenia, with the same interests, that the oppression of Turkey equally troubles them all, and the autonomy that will occur will equally grant new life to all the inhabitants of Armenia.”¹⁰⁰

While this formulation of the issue was completely true, it was also far from reality. In any case, Armenian statesmen started feverish activity based on these principles. In the 1880s, they organized a number of associations in various districts of Western Armenia with the objective of opening schools for Kurdish children. The Tprotsakan Arevelean [Eastern School] and Khizani organizations in the province of Diyarbakir were among the most noteworthy. Thanks to them Kurdish schools were opened in the Mush, Bitlis and Alashkert regions.¹⁰¹ The Azganver Hayuheats [Armenian Women Devoted to the Nation] association opened a school in the city of Kghi where more than one hundred Kurdish women had applied to get schooling.¹⁰² Later on educational associations were established in Constantinople with the goal of opening Armenian-language schools in the Kurdish areas. The Tprotsasirats Engeroutiun [School-Lovers’ Association], with the objective of enlightening the Kurdish population of Khizan [Hizan] and Sgherd, was particularly notable.¹⁰³

Insufficient information exists on such endeavors but it is clear that “no nation has done as much for the enlightenment of the Kurdish people or concerned itself as much in this sense as the Armenian people.”¹⁰⁴

When evaluating the work of enlightenment carried out by Armenian activists among the Kurds, one should remember that until the early twentieth century there was not a single Kurdish school in the Kurdish areas of the Middle East, and no Kurdish books or periodicals had been published.

Of course, in the 1880s there were also some Armenians who found it hopeless and unlikely to seek arrive at a relaxation of

Armenian-Kurdish tensions through teaching the Kurds. In their opinion, "Kurds should be punished and it is impossible to use any other language with them." Another common view stated that the Kurds should be converted to Christianity in order to be saved from harm. The supporters of this view found that religion was a separating and estranging factor among people of various faiths living in the theocratic Ottoman state. According to the adherents of that view, belonging to Islam inspired in them the sense of being exceptional and a dominating force. In general the Islamic essence of Ottoman theocracy had a fundamental role in the state legal structure and could not be ignored. Thus, belonging to two different religions when the followers of one were considered the dominant nation [*millet-i hakime*] and the other rayahs deprived of their rights, or "tolerated unbelievers," would in and of itself generate a situation of conflict. *Mshak* wrote about it: "For a long time the Armenians could have accepted the children of Assyrians, Kurds, Yezidis and other peoples at their schools, influenced them, morally spread Christianity among small Muslim nations..."¹⁰⁵ Grigor Artsruni discussed the same question with more emphasis in his article "The Armenians and the Kurds": "the Armenians do not try any more to spread Christianity and civilization among their oppressors in order to civilize them, moderate their customs and behavior, and in this way assure their own peaceful existence in the future..." Then he continued, "The Armenian nation was unable to Armenianize the Kurdish barbaric bandits."¹⁰⁶

However, those suggestions about spreading Christianity among the Kurds, as expected, did not go beyond newspaper articles and individual speeches. Leo was not justified when he wrote without a thorough study of the case: "It was a pity that the Armenian nationalists did not understand Armenian-Kurdish friendship as the rapprochement of equal members of two centuries-old neighboring nations, and that unique national values would be respected. No, they subjected the Kurds to Armenian culture in order to denationalize them and assimilate them to the Armenians."¹⁰⁷

There were also activists who entered into direct contacts with the Kurds and tried to diminish the tension of Armenian-Kurdish relations. For instance, Deacon Hakop from Mush plain wore a sheikh's outfit, visited Kurdish regions, and preached Armenian-Kurdish brotherhood.¹⁰⁸

However, none of the attempts of Armenian activists and statesmen to find ways to live with the Kurds and, through education, to make them politically mature and ready to fight against sultan's tyranny led to any concrete results. As Arshak Alpoyachian justifiably noted: "If an understanding had been reached between the Armenian and Kurdish peoples, both their destinies would have been different."¹⁰⁹

There were people among the Kurds too who understood that it was the sultan's government which inflamed hostility between the two neighboring peoples. This idea had often found its vivid expression in the rich Kurdish national folklore. The famous tribal chief Hüseyin Agha shared his thoughts with one of the Armenian activists, Arsen Tokhmakhian, in a conversation: "The Kurds have been an instrument in evil hands. Cut those hands and the Kurds will remain the everlasting friends of the Armenians."¹¹⁰

Expanding on this idea, Hüseyin Agha expressed his opinion that the Armenians should not have to "beg for mercy" from the European powers in order to solve the Armenian Question, because "in order to place one's hope on the European powers, strength again is necessary. In my opinion only he has the right to place his hopes on foreign power who has strength himself. Loaned capital is entrusted not to the capacity of a borrower's person, but to his possessions." Then he continued, "I cannot believe the possibility of an affair advancing, and victory taking place, without any blood and arms." He also found that "the Armenians should place their hopes chiefly on themselves, and then on the Assyrians and the Kurds. That is a natural alliance because the Armenian Question is at the same time the question for the Kurds and Assyrians. The more the Armenians work for the advancement of the Assyrians and the Kurds, the more they will aid their case."¹¹¹ Hüseyin Agha considered it to be the duty of the Armenians to open schools among the Assyrians and the Kurds.

Unfortunately the number of tribal chieftains and feudal lords with a similar mentality was not great. Another misfortune was the lack of a Kurdish press, publications, and the like, which was why the views of individuals could not spread and turn into the views of the entire nation. On the other hand, the extreme backwardness of the Kurdish masses, their religious fanaticism, the existence of tribal ashiret structures, and other factors did not allow

the Kurdish people to understand the goals the Ottoman government pursued by provoking hostility between the Armenian and Kurdish peoples and what consequences this policy would have on the historical destiny of these two neighboring peoples.

* * *

In the 1880s, the social and national oppression by the Ottoman government of the Western Armenians was increasing. The ways chosen to realize that policy were numerous, including the expropriation of the Armenians' land through confiscation. The government guaranteed the Kurdish begs, aghas and their ilk exemption from punishment for seizing the lands and possessions of the Armenians or for persecuting them. Inspired by the exhortations of the government, numerous Kurdish ashirets came down en masse from the mountains to the valleys and settled in Armenian villages. The land registration administration, or Tapu Dairesi, had instructions from the government to support the Kurdish feudal lords with any necessary means in their usurpation of the land of the Armenian peasantry. One Turkish official from the capital who had visited Western Armenia confessed that the work was done "in accordance with orders from Constantinople."¹¹²

Vrtanes Papazian, who visited Western Armenia in 1887, wrote from there: "Three-quarters of all the land in Vaspurakan belongs to ... Turks and Kurdish aghas whose laboring marabas are the inhabitants of the village on the condition that after giving the tithe to the government, the rest of the harvest is divided between the landlord and the marabas. However, it will be seen how the landlord, accompanied with groups, unceasingly comes to the maraba's house, descends, and eats, drinks, takes, and obtains promises of presents. And alas to the maraba who would dare to refuse to give what his Kurdish landlord wanted."¹¹³ In Leo's words, "The government had unleashed the Kurds in the provinces and had placed the Armenians outside of the law, in unbearable conditions."¹¹⁴

The journal *Hayastan* [Armenia] published in London described the conditions of the Western Armenians in the following way: "At the moment that the problem of the abolishment of the slave trade of Africa becomes a subject of general interest, it

is impossible not to call attention to the sufferings of Armenia, where slavery every day is carried out against a Christian people by Muslim beys and aghas."¹¹⁵

In the second half of the 1880s, the notorious Kurdish chief of the Jibran tribe Musa Bey, "the plague" of the plain of Mush, was particularly well known for his evil deeds. The Russian Turcologist Gordlevskiy wrote about him, "As many as eighty thousand Kurds worked for him who unconditionally were subject to him. He kept the entire district in terror."¹¹⁶ The dreadful doings of Musa Bey were so dishonorable that they even attracted the attention of the European powers.

The Sublime Porte had to arrest and try Musa Bey. His trial in the capital was a real legal circus because even prior to the trial, the sultan declared to the English ambassador that Musa Bey was innocent. Abdul Hamd's representative tried to persuade the Russian ambassador in Constantinople that the information about the deprivation of Armenian rights and Kurdish misdeeds was extremely exaggerated, and that there was no grounds on which to charge Musa Bey. A hidden motive of the Sublime Porte's attitude towards the robber-assassin was explained by the following reason. When the police were taking the arrested Musa Bey to the capital, he showed one of the local Armenians of Erzurum a number of letters he had acquired from Constantinople. The letters ordered the governors of Erzurum, Bitlis and Van "to oppress and persecute the Armenians by all means."¹¹⁷ During the trial, Musa Bey threatened the Turkish authorities that if the court found him guilty and condemned him, "he would publish all those letters in which district provincial governors instigated him to commit those raids against the Armenians."¹¹⁸

Finally, Hamidian justice declared Musa Bey to be innocent and set him free. After the trial "Europe's opinion was ... the Armenians could not have any expectations from the Turkish government any longer, which placed them outside of the scope of the law."¹¹⁹

Even the German press which was known for its pro-Turkish positions did not approve of the sultan's action, and found that the release of Musa bey would have great political consequences. First of all, Gladstone's government would pass up the opportunity to use this incident for its interests, and secondly, it would play into Russia's hands.

The European interference in Musa Bey's trial made the sultan more irritated against the Armenians. The government portrayed the latter as "traitors," "a nation sold out to the foreigners," and so on. One of the Russian military agents in Turkey informed his supervisors that the Turkish government had worked out a detailed plan intending to deprive the Armenian people of the protection of law, to bring them to a state of economic exhaustion which would force them to flee from their homeland, to periodically organize massacres of the Armenians, to confiscate the lands of the Armenian peasants ... and the list went on.¹²⁰ Sheikh Said Ali of Khizan, Haji Fero and Bshare Chato [Bişare Çato] were infamous for their anti-Armenian brutalities in Bitlis province.¹²¹ Shah Hüseyin was the scourge of the Armenians in Kozichan [Kozican] *kaza* or subdistrict of Kharberd vilayet.¹²²

In order to protect themselves from the violence of the Ottoman government and the Kurdish landlords and to withstand their lawlessness, the Armenian peasantry started spontaneous defensive fights in a number of regions (e.g. Van, Mush, Sasun, Khnus, and Bulanik-Manazkert).

In 1881 a secret association, Pashtpan Hayreneats [Protector of the Homeland] was organized in Erzurum with the goal of struggle against the lawlessness and the atrocities of the Kurdish begs and Circassian feudal lords, using hayduk revolutionary methods.¹²³ They were convinced that letters of complaints against the unpunished violence and unrestrained anarchy were useless, and they had to take up arms.

The government assumed that the Armenian spirit of defiance was provoked by an outside source—in particular Russia, via the Armenians of the Caucasus. Nevertheless the national liberation movement of the Western Armenians was actually spontaneous and not the result of imported ideas. A Russian military officer, R. I. Termen, wrote: "The condition of the Armenian population, the continuous oppression under which it finds itself, the lack of rights, and the injustice of the Turkish government against Armenian society created the bases for the acceptance of revolutionary ideas. Everywhere discontented elements were formed, among whom the revolutionaries from abroad found a response."¹²⁴ Raffi noted that "the despot makes his enemies himself... If the Turk had not treated us in this way we would have even loved him though he was not of our flesh and blood."¹²⁵

Grigor Zohrap wrote that "The Turkish government did not exercise its policy of massacre for the first time on the Armenians - it did the same to the Hellenes, Serbs, Bosniacs, and Bulgarians... Not knowing this historical fact means ascribing the massacres to the Armenian revolutionary movements."¹²⁶

The Armenian national liberation movements in Western Armenia did not arise as the result of the emergence of national political parties, as the Turkish falsifiers of history insist; on the contrary, those parties were formed as a consequence of the movements.

After the formation of the Armenian national parties, the idea of an Armenian, Kurdish and Assyrian union in the east of the empire and a united revolt against the throne became a nightmare for Sultan Abdul Hamid II and his government. There were real bases for this fear because that question was discussed in the plans of the new Armenian political parties. For instance, the program of the Hnchakist Party found it necessary "to earn the affection of those inhabitants of Armenia, who share the same destiny as the Armenian people, such as the Assyrians and the Kurds, toward revolutionary work, and to earn their assistance in that same work, which simultaneously is revealed to them as people oppressed by the same tyranny, as the work of liberty." The "most fervent desire" of the Hnchakist Party was declared to be the "general independent alliance" of all the small nations in the East.¹²⁷

The program of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, a political party organized in 1890, noted that the party had to wage a continuous armed struggle against the Ottoman government and the general conditions "which oppress both the Armenians and foreign elements such as the Assyrians, Yezidis, a part of Kurds, peaceful Turks and others. This approach, in addition to its general significance, can, if not unite, at least neutralize the resistance of the foreign elements."¹²⁸

Of course the Ottoman government took measures to frustrate the possibility of cohesion among these neighboring peoples. However the usual means were no longer sufficient. It was necessary to find more effective and productive measures. Thus were born the notorious Hamidiye regiments, which were the idea of Armenophobe Shakir Pasha.

In November 1890, the Turkish newspapers published an of-

ficial government report about the formation of a special military organization which was called Hamidiye in honor of Sultan Abdul Hamid. Zeki Pasha, müshir [marshal] of the fourth army in Western Armenia, was in charge of its organization.¹²⁹

What goals did the sultan's government pursue through the creation of the new military organization? In this respect, it is interesting to learn the opinion of the Russian observers who naturally attentively followed the events. Colonel Petr Ivanovich Averyanov, for instance found that "recently having to deal with the Armenian Question, in order to counter it the Turkish authorities decided to use Kurds who were Sunni like they were, and who politically were the most promising population. It was only among the Kurds that the Turks could find support in the east of Asia Minor."¹³⁰ The Hamidiye regiments were supposed to serve the Ottoman government both for external and internal purposes. Istanbul intended to create an additional military bulwark against Russia with this military force, and make it an instrument to fulfill its aggressive policy against Iran.

Some factors made the involvement of the Kurds in the new military organizations easier. For instance, the Kurdish feudal ruling class perceived the Armenian national liberation movement to be against its interests. Moreover, the sultan's government constantly inflamed those feelings. The journal *Anahit*, published in Paris, wrote: "Abdul Hamid spread the rumor among the Kurds that the Armenians joined Russia and intended to massacre the Kurds."¹³¹ Russian officer A. Kartsev confirmed that this rumor found fertile soil among the Kurds, stating: "The Armenian disturbances drove the Kurds away from us."¹³² Besides, Kurds despised prolonged service in the regular infantry (*nizam*). Now they were going to serve in special ashiret regiments, and not in random places but in the familiar ones of their own regions. Service in the new regiments was well paid and, best of all, the soldiers received exceptionally great privileges and rights. A Hamidiye officer could be tried only by a military court, never by a civil one. The local authorities did not even have the right to arrest the officer without the permission of his military supervisor. In other words, the Hamidiye Kurds were outside of the control of the civil authorities, and only under the command of the Turkish military authorities.¹³³ A tribal chief having several regiments

under his control received the rank of ferik [divisional general] and the title of pasha. Another privilege was that the Hamidiye regiments were organized according to ashiret. For instance, all the Kurds of the Jelali tribe were organized into two regiments.¹³⁴

Of course, by establishing the Hamidiye military organization, the sultan's government intended to keep constant control over the strongest, most cohesive, and best armed ashiret tribes, as well as end the willful, independent state of the Kurdish tribes, completely subjecting them to the Ottoman government.¹³⁵

After the declaration about the formation of the Hamidiye regiments, the sultan invited all the influential Kurdish tribal chiefs of Western Armenia and Kurdistan to the capital where Abdul Hamid granted them great honors and medals, promising them salaries, uniforms, arms, and ammunition.¹³⁶ In addition, the government decided to provide the soldiers of the regiments with land, and their families were to be free from all kinds of taxes.¹³⁷ In essence, the servicemen of the Hamidiye regiments received the right of inviolability before the law.

In 1892 "schools for tribes" (*ashiret mektepleri*) were opened in Constantinople and Baghdad, the latter city being the headquarters of the sixth army corps. The government presented the schools as a way to provide education in Kurdish areas, but the main purpose of those schools was to prepare literate officers for the Hamidiye regiments.¹³⁸ They also would inculcate in both Kurds and Arabs the sentiments of loyal subjects of the Ottoman state.¹³⁹ The sultan allocated eight million Turkish liras from his personal treasury alone to open military schools in the Kurdish regions.¹⁴⁰

Although the official press announced that the goal of the government was "to train the nomadic Kurds to lead civilized lives and to make their bands disciplined,"¹⁴¹ the sultan's main intention was to destroy the Armenian national liberation movement with the help of that military organization and to end the Armenian Question, which had become a Gordian knot for the Ottoman Empire. Leo said, "No matter how much this enterprise is camouflaged by general military considerations, it is not a secret for anyone that the main--if not the only--goal of the organization of the Hamidiye regiments is to restrain the Armenians."¹⁴²

Khoren Ashagian, the Armenian patriarch of Constantinople, informed Catholicos Makar in a letter that perhaps in 1889 the sul-

tan spoke about his intention as follows: "It is impossible for me to concede the self-rule of which the Armenians dream; and I place an anathema not only on me but on all the sultans who come after me to not give the Armenians such things, especially the elimination of all Muslims from the face of the country, and to make a vow to battle against the independence of the Armenians."¹⁴³

The Russian consul-general in Erzurum A. Dennet unequivocally stated that the goal of the formation of the Hamidiye regiments was to use the Kurds to suppress the desires for liberation of the Christian population in the eastern provinces of the empire.¹⁴⁴ Orientalist and diplomat Vladimir Fedorovich Minorsky shared his opinion, stating that "the Turks chose the Kurds as a crude instrument to counteract the Armenian national movement."¹⁴⁵

English and French statesmen and observers shared this view. For example, William Gladstone declared in his speech during a mass meeting in Chester on July 25/August 6, 1895 about the Kurds: "These the Sultan and the Government at Constantinople have enrolled, though in a nominal fashion, not without military discipline, into pretended cavalry regiments and then set them loose with the authority of soldiers of the Sultan to harry and destroy the people of Armenia."¹⁴⁶ The French writer Ludovic de Contenson objected to the view circulated by the sultan's government that the primary goal of the formation of the Hamidiye regiments was to fortify the defensive capability of the country, and he stated that those regiments were in reality exclusively created for persecuting and robbing the Armenians.¹⁴⁷ The French ambassador in Constantinople, Paul Cambon, shared the same opinion.¹⁴⁸

The contemporary English historian Edmond Taylor believes that the sultan intended to use the Kurdish tribes first as an auxiliary police force "to put down the Armenian unrest," and "track down nationalist revolutionaries," which would unleash "a religious and race war" in the east of Asia Minor.¹⁴⁹

Some contemporary Turkish historians do not deny that view. For instance, Altan Deliorman wrote that the sultan had formed the Hamidiye regiments to protect the fifteen thousand Muslim civilians of Sasun from "the Armenian revolutionaries."¹⁵⁰ Ayhan Yalchin shares his opinion.¹⁵¹

The establishment of the Hamidiye regiments contradicted not only the spirit of Article 61 of the Berlin Congress but also

the principles of the Hatt-i Sherif of Gülhane (1839) and the Hatt-i Hümayun (1856) because both of the latter acts declared the principles of the equality of rights of non-Muslims and Muslims in the empire. The sultan organized the Kurds militarily, and concurrently forbid the Armenian population to carry arms, even for self-defense. That was an expression of obvious hostility of the government against the Armenians.

French scholar Frédéric Macler regarded another goal of the Hamidiye regiment formation to be the thwarting of the natural process of rapprochement of the Armenians and Kurds, two peoples living side by side in the Middle East.¹⁵² This was the continuation, or a component, of the policy Abdul Hamid's government widely used to pit one nation against the other. As Karo Sasuni wrote, "In that way the sultan strived on the one hand to exhaust his subjects' revolutionary energy in struggle against one another, and on the other, to prevent the possibility of the union of nationalities against the despotic regime which oppresses them all. In other words, the Kurds would not only strangle the Armenian uprising, but at the same time would themselves be strangled to the degree of becoming completely harmless."¹⁵³

Abdul Hamid had great expectations of the Hamidiye regiments economically exhausting the Armenians and depriving the Armenian national liberation movement of its economic support. That was why the government persistently placed the regiments in Armenian villages, and the Hamidiye leaders gradually became the masters of these villages.¹⁵⁴ Another task the Kurdish military had to accomplish was to draw the "unreliable" Armenians away from the territories bordering Russia so that those areas would become populated by Muslims and a solid "defensive security zone" would be created.¹⁵⁵

With the formation of the regiments the Kurdish feudal rulers and a good number of the ashiret tribes became definitively connected with the Hamidian regime and turned into a ready instrument in its hands to solve the Armenian Question through massacres.

The government viewed the Hamidiye regiments as a promising means through which to subordinate the Kurds to the Turkish state and to gradually assimilate them. In the late nineteenth century, though it appeared as if the Kurdish tribes were mostly obedient to the government, minor and major unrest still occurred

occasionally, and the government had to periodically organize military punitive expeditions. This kept a significant part of the military forces of the empire in constant tension. Ottoman authority over the ashiret Kurds remained illusive because at peacetime the Kurds refused to pay taxes or provide conscripts for military service, while during wartime they were practically indifferent toward Ottoman defeats, frequently deserted the army, and did not obey commanders.¹⁵⁶ Hence, the sultan assumed Kurdish service in the Hamidiye regiments would contribute to a closer relationship with the ruling people of the empire, teach them to obey the local government, and aid in their adoption of the Turkish language. Aleksandr Mikhailovich Kolyubakin observed the gradual Turkification of the Kurds in some parts of Western Armenia. He wrote: "The process of Kurdish absorption by the Turks is progressing quite slowly at the moment; however it certainly exists and recently has achieved great success."¹⁵⁷

The formation of the Hamidiye regiments was also expected to weaken the large and disobedient ashirets, and break them up into smaller units. To assure the accomplishment of this goal, many insignificant people possessing no influence were appointed as commanders. As a consequence, the number of Kurdish leaders grew and internal antagonism increased. Kurdish ambitions for independence were replaced with the "independence" of their small ashirets, and Kurds found satisfaction of their political ambitions in receiving minute privileges from the sultan.¹⁵⁸

It is noteworthy to mention that this policy became a double-edged sword for the government. Numerous disobedient tribes, receiving their own military organizations, became more independent and stubborn, refusing to obey the government and to pay taxes.¹⁵⁹

Furthermore, the process of formation of the regiments was not an easy and peaceful one. Right from the beginning, it started breaking down. First, not all the tribes were willing to get involved. In numerous regions, the government had to use violence and intimidation to recruit Kurds, and armed conflicts frequently occurred.¹⁶⁰ For example, in order to subdue the people of Dersim, the sultan ordered that considerable quantities of oil be brought to Dersim to set the forests on fire and deprive the people of any chance of resistance.¹⁶¹ Only after this did a number of trib-

al chiefs join the Hamidiye regiments (*alays*), but as a whole, Dersim remained unbowed. Some tribes residing along the Turkish-Iranian border fled to Iran¹⁶² to avoid serving. The Daudiye, Diza, Shekkak, Gukferikh and other tribes in Sulaymaniyah, Rawanduz and other regions were not only completely hostile to recruitment into the Hamidiye regiments, but also gave a political nature to their defiance by declaring that they refused to acknowledge the Ottoman sultan as the true and legal heir of the caliphs.

In some places, forcible recruitment for the Hamidiye regiments led to resistance and rebellions. Military discipline was poor in the regiments. The Kurds, who were used to a free and independent lifestyle in the mountains, had difficulty in submitting to such discipline.¹⁶³ The journal *Anahit* wrote: "Even the widespread and magnificent Hamidian banner was not able to completely bring the Kurds under it. Lots of ashirets did not recognize it at all, a few only showed only nominal submission, and those who were thought to have become confirmed followers were frequently persecuted by their neighboring ashirets... And the inhabitants of the Aratsani valley speak with rifles to those family members who had gone to Constantinople and had become Hamidiye, betraying their freedom."¹⁶⁴

The Russian consul of Basra K. Ivanov provided extremely significant information about the Turkish government's policy towards the tribes which were stubborn and avoided joining the regiments. He wrote: "If the Kurds refused to obey, the Turks first ordered another regiment or other Kurdish tribes to subdue the obstinate. If they avoided carrying out such tasks, the Turks provoked bloody scores between tribes which never were resolved, or they would intensify hostility between their begs by rewarding one of them and humiliating the other. If that also did not work, they would patiently wait till winter when the cold would force the Kurds to descend from the *yaylas* [summer mountain camps] to the villages and, when the possibility of hiding in the mountains became impossible, the Turks without difficulty punished the recalcitrant. This was how the Turks were able to keep all of Kurdistan obedient, basically keeping there a limited number of troops, which were spread throughout the country in small detachments. For instance, five *taburs* [Turkish for battalion] of infantry and a regiment of cavalry were situated in Bayazit sanjak; at the same

time the sanjak maintained twenty Hamidiye regiments in addition to the entire population, which was completely armed."¹⁶⁵

The Hamidiyes began to carry out the function of military police in the regions of Western Armenia. The abuse, atrocities, robbery, illegal taxation, theft and all kind of lawlessness towards the Armenian population in Western Armenia became beyond measure. The situation of the Armenians was simply unbearable. "When yesterday's servant and shepherd becomes a captain, he kills not only the Armenian but his father as well," the journal *Anahit* wrote.¹⁶⁶

Kör Hüseyin Pasha, one of the commanders of the Hamidiye regiments, was a real nightmare for the Western Armenians. The Armenian writer Atrpet [Sargis Mubayjiyan] wrote, "What Hamid was for the whole of Turkey, Hüseyin was for Erzurum, Van and Bitlis provinces."¹⁶⁷

As the English consul in Erzurum, Charles Hampson informed the British ambassador in Constantinople that many of the Kurds openly said that "they have been appointed to suppress the Armenians" and had received guarantees that they would not be held responsible judicially "for any acts of oppression committed against Christians."¹⁶⁸ Resisting a Hamidiye member "was equal to revolting against the sultan."¹⁶⁹ The local courts had the order not to investigate cases of Hamidiye officers and soldiers conducting abuses against the Armenian population.¹⁷⁰

Governor Hasan Hayri Pasha of Erzurum invited the Kurdish tribal chiefs of his province to reward them with honorary medals and monetary gifts on behalf of the sultan. He expressed the sultan's satisfaction and appreciation for their devoted service in "obliterating the dangerous element" and presented to them the circular of the Minister of Internal Affairs about the methods and the manners of oppressing the Armenians. Instructions, in particular, were given to rob and kill all the wealthy Armenians, the educated class, and influential people in general, so that the populace would be left impotent.

Local authorities recommended that the Kurds apply other methods of persecution and abuse towards the Armenians in addition to the usual methods such as plunder, murder, and kidnapping. The Kurds were ordered to always bother the Armenians, initiate lawsuits against them for minuscule or even imaginary

reasons, and get them sentenced to imprisonment and exile. The courts were instructed to protect the Kurds under all circumstances, and in order to condemn the Armenians, to make use of their "revolutionary inclinations to overthrow the sultan's regime."¹⁷¹ Consequently, the Ottoman court and the system of justice in general, encouraged the Kurds' predatory behavior. It was strange and absurd that in order to protect themselves, the Western Armenians turned to Ottoman law and courts, which in fact assisted in the organization of all the abuse.

After his travel in Western Armenia the English journalist Emile Dillon came to the conclusion that there was "a system of horrors in the five Armenian provinces compared with which those of Negro slavery in the Southern States [of America] were literally light blemishes."¹⁷²

The consequence was a new wave of migration surpassing even the previous ones. Thousands of people had to sell the Kurds their land and possessions for pennies and escape to Russia, Iran and other nearby or distant countries.¹⁷³ Western Armenia was rapidly being emptied of its Armenian population.

The Turkish authorities were using a strategic policy of provoking the desperate Armenians to revolt and act openly, which would offer an opportunity for the Turks to accuse them of revolution and massively persecute them. Every attempt at Armenian legitimate self-protection was considered as a crime by the authorities and led to new persecutions.

It is clear that social movements were common occurrences in the Ottoman Empire. However, if the participants were Armenians, they were invariably given a political coloring and viewed as political unrest. It happened in Sasun, which for a long time had been considered as a citadel of political danger for the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman government devised the theory of the "Armenian revolution." Hence, an ideal pretext was found for general massacres of the Armenians, and all that was left was to start the work.

The governor of Bitlis Tahsin Pasha, following state instructions, exhorted the Kurdish tribal chiefs and sheikhs to raise the ashirets against "rebellious" Sasun. Driven by the passion for robbery and the slogan of "holy war," the Kurdish tribal chiefs who already for a long time could not tolerate to be deprived of their

“rights” over Sasun and tribute from its population, moved to Talvorik, Antok and Tsovasar with their armed groups. The Sasun Armenians stubbornly resisted from 1891 to 1894. In the summer of 1894, the population in despair raised the banner of revolution. The sultan’s supreme order followed—spare nothing and no one in Sasun.

By the order of Abdul Hamid, Zeki Pasha, the marshal of the fourth army, was in charge of suppressing the people of Sasun. He invited to Bitlis Ottoman high-ranking state and military representatives and 17 influential Kurdish tribal chiefs for special consultations.¹⁷⁴

The government sent Osman Pasha’s three-thousand-man corps from Diyarbekir, all the troops of Bitlis governor Hasan Tahsin, and the troops of Genj governor Mustafa Pasha and Ferik Abdullah Pasha to join the twelve-thousand-man force of Zeki Pasha.¹⁷⁵ State troops were also sent to Sasun from Mush, Erzurum, Kharberd, and even Aleppo and Baghdad. Kurdish ashiret detachments and the Hamidiye regiments under the leadership of Behaeddin Pasha, Mahmud el-Aghasi and other commanders were to join them. Sasun would be the experimental field to test the fighting efficiency of the Hamidiye regiments.

The Ottoman government was preparing to show off its muscles to the Europe states and domestic rebellious forces, and make them understand that Turkey was not constrained by anything to “solve its internal questions as it pleased.” The sultan also wanted to give a strict lesson to Sasun, whose rebellious spirit was becoming contagious for all Western Armenians.

With this terrible danger looming over Sasun, Armenian activists were making efforts to find common grounds with the Kurds. Mihran Damadian, Ruben Shishmanian (“Yerznkatsi Keri”) and other members of the Hnchakist Party were preaching in Kurdish circles the urgency of Armenian-Kurdish solidarity and joint resistance against the Turks. They tried to explain that the Armenian liberation movement was not directed against the Kurdish people, who had been their neighbors for centuries. They also established ties with those Kurdish political exiles in Europe who were inclined to work with the Armenians. Unfortunately these efforts produced no results, and a storm of mass murder started in Sasun.

The Turkish army had adopted the traditions of the Janisaries. Ashirets and ruffians contributed to the army with their barbarity. Among the Kurdish leaders Khalil [Halil] Agha, Kör Sleman agha and others were especially known for their brutality.¹⁷⁶ The population of Sasun was slaughtered, and numerous villages were destroyed and burned.¹⁷⁷ Arshak Alpoiyachian wrote, “The Armenians of Sasun were slain without distinction of age and gender.”¹⁷⁸ On December 25, 1894 Adam Block, the head dragoman of the British Embassy in Constantinople, wrote in his telegram that the major organizers and responsible parties of the Sasun massacre were Sultan Abdul Hamid, the commander of the fourth army corps Zeki Pasha, the sultan’s first secretary Sureyya Pasha, and Abdullah Pasha, known for his fierce behavior.¹⁷⁹ The sultan rewarded Müshir Zeki Pasha with the Nishan-i İmtiyaz order for his “great service” in the Sasun massacre.¹⁸⁰

Though a regular state army with artillery was sent against Sasun, the sultan placed all the responsibility for the massacre on the Kurds. The European representatives who were in Sasun to investigate the case were informed that regular troops were not sent there, and the carnage against the Armenians supposedly was accomplished solely by the Kurds. However, the Armenians declared to the European representatives that “the carnage was committed by the army more than by the Kurds.”¹⁸¹

The heroic resistance of Sasun shook the Hamidiye regiments. Emile Dillon noted that “the massacre of Sassoun sends a shudder to the hearts of the most callous.”¹⁸² As they suffered great losses, they started suspecting that the government might have deliberately let them get killed.¹⁸³

The accredited European ambassadors of Constantinople had instructions from their governments to jointly work out a reform plan for the six Armenian vilayets. This plan was submitted to the Sublime Porte in May 1895, leading it to be called the May Reforms. The European ambassadors believed that it would be impossible to realize the reforms without disciplining and restraining the Kurdish feudal class, ashirets, Hamidiye regiments and generally the Kurds living an “unrestrained life.” As a consequence, the ninth chapter or section of the ambassadors’ memorandum was entitled “Control of the Kurds.” It stated the following:

For the government of the nomad Kurds the Vali shall have under his orders, in each vilayet, an Ashiret-Memuri [*memur* means official]. This official shall have the power of arresting brigands and other malefactors, and requiring their appearance before the ordinary Tribunals.

He shall have under his orders a sufficient escort, and may, further, demand the assistance of the local police.

A certain number of his officials, placed under his authority, shall accompany each tribe in its annual migrations. These officials shall exercise over it a power of police, order the arrest of all malefactors, and bring them before the ordinary Tribunals. The boundaries of the encampments and pasturages of the nomad Kurds shall be exactly defined. The migrations must not be allowed to cause injury to the inhabitants of the districts traversed or occupied temporarily by the nomad tribes. If these latter commit any encroachment or excess against the property or the persons of the villagers, their migration shall for the future be prohibited.

The existing Regulations with regard to carrying arms shall be strictly applied to all the Kurdish population, sedentary and nomad. Efforts shall be made to impress upon the nomad populations the principles of a sedentary life by accustoming them to agricultural labour, and, with this object, land shall be allotted to them in localities where their installation cannot interfere with the tranquility and welfare of the sedentary population.

Persons belonging to non-sedentary population, or who are not finally and permanently established in the territory of a nahie [*nahiye*, or commune], shall not be qualified to take part in an election or to be elected.¹⁸⁴

Abdul Hamid pretended that he did not want to limit the realization of the administrative reforms only to the six Armenian vilayets, but instead have it in all the provinces of the empire.¹⁸⁵ Simultaneously the sultan craftily brought up the Kurdish Question against the Armenian Question to avoid the solution of both. Vladimir T. Maevskiy, the Russian vice-consul in Van wrote: "Without a doubt, it was entirely advantageous for Turkey to oppose the Kurdish movement to the Armenian one. It is possible to

cite several facts which prove that the Turkish authorities... took advantage of this opposing movement of the Kurds."¹⁸⁶

The Hungarian Orientalist Turkophile Arminius Vambéry testified that as early as December 22, 1889, Abdul Hamid in a conversation with the former declared that "I will sooner allow to severe [*sic*] this head from my body than to permit the formation of a separate Armenia." Six years later, Abdul Hamid exclaimed, "What is the Armenian question? One blow will suffice to stamp out the entire movement."¹⁸⁷

Abdul Hamid II decided to turn his words into action. In 1894-1896, mass massacres were perpetrated in Bitlis, Kharberd, Diyarbakir, Erzurum, Trebizond and other places in Western Armenia. In 1896, taking advantage of the seizure by a group of Armenian Revolutionary Federation members of the Ottoman Bank, the Turks perpetrated a bloody massacre of Armenians in the capital as well. During 1894-1896, over 300 thousand Armenians were killed by the Turkish yataghan.

English historian Christopher Walker noted that the massacres were organized and realized in a classical manner, and were based on the following scheme. Lawlessness, licentiousness and terror reigned over Western Armenia. The population demanded reforms but the government made no efforts. Political organizations appeared, and as an answer to the governmental inaction, they resorted to terrorism. And this was followed by the reaction of the government, "believing that it can destroy the challenge by destroying the people themselves."¹⁸⁸

The Europeans described the method of realization of the Armenian massacres as "a true manhunt." The organizer was the Turkish government and the implementers were the government troops, the Hamidiye regiments, the Kurdish tribes, the Circassians, and the mob. The Kurdish feudal upper class closely collaborated with the Turkish military authorities during the massacres. There is much evidence about this in the collective memorandum of the representatives of the foreign consulates who were sent to investigate those events. As they noted, the fanatic sheikhs had preached that the slaughter of the *giaours* was an act pleasing to God, and the sultan-caliph also approved of it.¹⁸⁹ Zeki Pasha had obtained "a supreme edict" for the Hamidiye regiment commanders which freed them from the responsibility of appearing before courts for their criminal acts.¹⁹⁰

In order to put all the responsibility of massacre on the Kurds, Turkish troops frequently acted dressed in the Kurdish traditional costume.¹⁹¹ During the massacres, Ottoman propaganda inspired the Kurds that by killing the Armenians they could become the complete master of both Kurdistan and Western Armenia.¹⁹²

On October 20, 1895, during the days of the bloody Armenian massacres, in Constantinople Abdul Hamid ratified the May Reforms and assigned Shakir Pasha to realize them. The latter understood this to mean the organization of the mass massacre of Armenians. Russian diplomat R. I. Termen noted that, "instead of improving the life of the Christians, Turkey wanted to eliminate them."¹⁹³ In announcing his intention of realizing the reforms in the Armenian provinces, Abdul Hamid tried to influence European opinion, since the opinion of his countrymen was of no value for him. Regardless of periodical warnings that he was risking "losing the Armenian vilayets as he had lost Bulgaria"¹⁹⁴ by continuing his policy in the eastern regions of the country, the cunning and ruthless Sultan Abdul Hamid II was assured by his own experience that neither England and France, nor Russia, had any intention of taking resolute action to stop the oppression against the Armenian population. This inspired confidence in the tyrant that he could with impunity continue his policy of persecution against the Armenians. The mass massacre of the Armenians was a great blow to the national liberation movement in Western Armenia. As this movement met with the mass resistance of the Kurdish population, it could not achieve significant results. The massacre of the 1890s deepened the conviction among the Armenians that not only would the Ottoman dictatorial government resist the Armenian national liberation movement, but also the Kurdish feudal class, tribal notables, Hamidiye regiments, ashirets and a great part of deceived Kurdish peasantry, since the movement was against their national interests.

The Armenian massacres of the 1890s were a mortal blow to Western Armenian economic life. As L. Vaks said, "As a result of the massacres almost all the trade and reprocessing industry of the central provinces, formerly belonging to the Armenians, passed into the hands of the Turkish bourgeoisie."¹⁹⁵ After the massacres, the Armenian bourgeoisie began to be pushed out of the markets of its own land. The new Turkish bourgeoisie, unable

to compete with the economically stronger Armenian bourgeoisie, was able to enter the economic sphere of Western Armenia after the massacres. With its anti-Armenian policy, the government was smoothing the way for the Turkish bourgeoisie. Reflecting on that issue, Russian observer Termen noted that after the Armenian massacres of the 1890s, "the economic destruction of the Armenians began, slowly, unnoticeably but persistently... Numerous minor, inconspicuous actions systematically impaired the vitality of the Armenians, killing them by a slow economic death, while in their stead and at their expense the Muslims got richer and flourished."¹⁹⁶

The Armenian political parties and individual activists realized that the Kurdish factor was gradually gaining a decisive role in the Armenian Question. Therefore even the statesmen who were the most pessimistic about an improvement in Armenian-Kurdish relations tried to find ways out of the situation. As the lesser of two evils, finding ways for collaboration with the Kurds became a priority. Some individuals even decided to leave for Constantinople or Europe to meet with Kurdish nationalists and "engage in propaganda to draw closer to the Kurds, and providing the necessary weapons, collaborate in opening a united front."¹⁹⁷

Special attention was paid to finding a common language with prominent tribal chiefs, as they wielded great influence on their tribesmen. Observers familiar with Kurdish life noted that "truly, the local beg or sheikh always had the authority to restrain the restless elements of the Kurdish population, and now perhaps has an even greater significance than the sometimes completely nominal rule of any kaymakam or *müdiür* [director of a nahiye or commune]."¹⁹⁸

Leo was incorrect when he said that the Kurdish question was ignored by Armenians. The famous historian wrote: "The Kurdish question was completely ignored, though it had been a matter of life and death for the Armenians for centuries. The contempt of Armenian revolutionary nationalism towards the issue went so far that it declared war against the Kurdish people."¹⁹⁹ That view does not hold up to historical investigation because both Armenian individual statesmen and political parties were repeatedly involved in the Kurdish Question, though it must be confessed that there were little or no results. For instance, in August 1898 the Hnchakist Paramaz (Matteos Sargisian) declared at his trial

in Van; "Our demand is that the population of Armenia, namely, the Armenians, Kurds, Arabs, Laz, Circassians, Assyrians, Yezidis and even the Mutrup Gypsies elect its governor with its vote, and be governed by the people and laws it nominates, which is the short way to welfare. We demand Armenia for all the peoples living in it."²⁰⁰

While discussing past developments in Armenian-Kurdish relations, we should take into account that though in the 1880s and 1890s a significant part of the Kurdish feudal upper class and ordinary members of tribes were an instrument for the sultan's government to solve the Armenian Question by massacre, there were tribal chiefs and even entire tribes which not only refused to participate in the Armenian massacres, but frequently took the Armenians under their protection. To ignore this fact will mean to elucidate the history of Armenian-Kurdish relations one-sidedly or tendentiously as a result of nationalistic narrowmindedness and political short-sightedness. Here are a few of the numerous examples. Though the Kurdish leader Mustafa Agha, who controlled the Kurdish tribes north of Jezireh up to the slopes of Mount Arnos, had received the title of pasha of the Hamidiye regiments from the sultan and an invitation to participate in the Armenian massacres, he rescued the Armenians of the region by taking them to his winter shelters near Jezireh during the autumn of 1896.²⁰¹ The Kurdish tribal chief Murtula [Mehtula] Bey did the same and rescued ten thousand Armenians from massacre. Murtula Bey declared that "Moks is not a massacre ground for the Turks." Sheikhs called him "giaour" and mocked him, saying that if he was given the opportunity he would convert to Christianity.²⁰² A great number of Armenians found refuge in the province of Van with Kurdish assistance.²⁰³ Various Kurdish tribes refused to participate in massacre in some villages of Taron.²⁰⁴ Some tribal chiefs such as Hüseyin Pasha in Adiljevaz, Haji Khan in Norduz, and Ibrahim Pasha in Shehriveran did not allow massacres in their territories either. The Yezidis in Sinjar, Bohtan, Khizan, Jezireh and some other places also refused to participate in the massacres.²⁰⁵

As for the Kizilbash of Dersim, they not only refused to help the Turkish army sent against Zeytun but resisted it. Due to the support of these same Kurds, the Armenians of Malatya were successfully protected from attacks.²⁰⁶ Incidentally, the Armenians of

Dersim like their Kizilbash neighbors took up arms because, as they said: "we do not recognize that *hikmat* [government] because it is lawless and does not know how to do justice. We recognize only weapons."²⁰⁷

In some places, the Kurdish tribes not only remained neutral or supported the Armenians, but joined them to fight the government's troops and the Hamidiye regiments.

There is evidence that after the Armenian massacres of the 1890s, individual Kurdish statesmen recognized that the Turkish government was also threatening the Kurds, and that they were deviating from their main national goal, which was the struggle against the Turkish yoke. The Russian consul of Van, Aleksandr Grigorevich Tumanskii [Toumansky], wrote: "There is no friendship between the Armenians and Kurds, but their shared hatred of the Turks may unite them over time. The issue of such reconciliation and alliance has been brought up more than once by both the Armenians and the Kurds."²⁰⁸ Ludovic de Contenson found that "the Kurdish and the Armenian questions are connected with one other," and supposed that sooner or later it would create a crisis in Turkey and the intervention of the powers.²⁰⁹ In his opinion, the Kurds threatened "to cause the Ottoman government the most serious difficulties in Asiatic Turkey."²¹⁰

Certainly the idea of an Armenian-Kurdish union was a nightmare for the sultan's government. As a consequence, it did anything possible to hinder that fairly improbable union.

It is worth mentioning that in the early 1890s, the sultan assured the European ambassadors that he would take measures to restrain the Kurds, take hostages from them, partially disarm the tribes in the Hamidiye regiments, and allow the Kurds to be subject to the authority of general civil courts. Yet in the second half of the 1890s, when the Armenian massacres became a reality in Western Armenia, and the Kurds eagerly participated in it, expressing their utmost devotion to the sultan-caliph, the latter was not loathe to declare to the European ambassadors that "the Kurd has always been the ruler and the Armenian the servant. Consequently the reforms demanded by the powers are unrealizable."²¹¹ Moreover, he even dared to refuse the ambassadors' demand to prosecute Hüseyin Pasha, the leader of the Haideranli tribe and kaymakam of the 25th Hamidiye regiment, who slaugh-

tered the Armenian population in the provinces of Van and Bitlis. On the contrary, he was rewarded with the Liyakat gold medal. The sultan's rewards and medals were granted to such prominent bloodthirsty slaughterers such as Emin Pasha, Haji Teymur Pasha, and Darvaz Khan,²¹² whose inhumane actions shocked the readers of European newspapers.

In response to the European ambassadors' collective and individual demarches "in the name of justice and civilization" demanding the immediate punishment of those guilty of the Armenian massacres, Turkish diplomacy craftily used its traditional "soft pillow" policy, never objecting to their demands, agreeing with what the ambassadors said, but doing nothing and continuing its bloody work as before.

The Ottoman opposition Ittihadists or Unionists, who called themselves revolutionaries, also tried to justify the Armenian massacres. For example, *Mechveret* [Meşveret], a Young Turk journal, was angry with the European press for its protests concerning the massacre of the Armenians in Spaghank, questioning why England and France could slay the natives in Africa but Kurds and Turks were not allowed to inflict reprisals on Armenian "bandits" as they liked.²¹³

After the massacres of the 1890s, the local authorities of Western Armenia on Istanbul's instructions confiscated the abandoned land and possessions of ten thousands of Armenians who had fled the country, granting their property, with the right of private ownership and the formalities of registration, to the Kurdish feudal lords, the ashiret chiefs who had participated in the massacres, and the commanders of the Hamidiye regiments. The widespread dispossession of the Armenian peasantry and other landowners of their land led to the formation of new territories for the Kurdish aghas, begs, sheikhs and ashiret chiefs. Throughout Western Armenia, the Turkish government consistently worked to confiscate Armenian land and give it to the Kurds.²¹⁴ This unavoidably strengthened Armenian dependency on the Kurdish feudal class. The behavior of the new landlords who were enjoying governmental support reminded people of the period of the derebays. The Russian ambassador in Constantinople Ivan Alekseevich Zinoviev noted that the Kurdish aghas and begs treated the Armenian peasantry like their slaves.²¹⁵ The English scholar and trav-

eler H. F. B. Lynch similarly wrote: "Between these Kurds and the petty officials and the hungry zaptiehs, the Armenian cultivator hovers on the margin between life and death. From time to time a *revolution* is invented by an ambitious functionary, and the village becomes the scene of bloodcurdling deeds."²¹⁶

The density of the Armenian population was constantly decreasing because of the mass emigration from Western Armenia. With the permission of the government, the "freed" or abandoned areas were occupied by nomadic tribes or other people from Muslim ethnic groups (e.g. Circassians, Laz, and Turks).²¹⁷ As a consequence, Western Armenia gradually lost its former ethnic composition. R. I. Termen described one of the goals of the state policy: "The government tried to settle the Kurds among the Armenians in order to counter the revolutionary propaganda."²¹⁸ This meant crippling the Armenian national liberation movement by means of Kurdish elements.

The Hamidiye regiments gradually became more unrestrained. They no longer were satisfied with plundering only the Armenian villagers, and started robbing and abusing the Turks, Arabs and other Muslim nationalities of the empire. Ruben Bekgulyants wrote that the major bandits of Mush valley, Musa Bey, Kasim Bey and others, "equally robbed both their kindred and the Armenians."²¹⁹ In the spring of 1900, a petition with the signatures of hundreds of Turkish villagers of the region of Vaspurakan was sent to the local governor as a complaint against the abuse of the Hamidiye regiments.²²⁰ However, the government responded that it had no desire to hear any complaints against them. The Turks in Van also sent a petition to the Sublime Porte demanding that they immediately either be given satisfaction as well as guarantees for their future security, or the opportunity to emigrate from their homes. The ashiret chiefs of the Haydaranli, Hamidiye miralay [colonel] Kör Hüseyin Pasha, Haji Teymur Pasha and Emin Pasha, seeing that the situation was getting more complicated, decided to calm down the Turkish population by promising not to harm it.

Even the warlike Bedouin tribes in the Arabian provinces of the empire were unable to resist the devastating acts of the Hamidiyes. They demanded that the Kurds be driven out of the provinces of Mosul and Aleppo and transferred to other places; otherwise, they threatened to take drastic measures.²²¹ In 1900, the

Shammar Arab tribe launched an armed counterattack against the Hamidiye regiment of Ibrahim Pasha. The situation came to such a point that in the summer of 1900, the Turks and non-ashiret rayah Kurds sent a petition to the local Russian consul expressing their wish to seek justice from the "Russian shahanshah" concerning the violence and robbery of the Hamidiyes because "our government never asks [about], never seeks and never even governs us." Then they wrote that if the Russian government "says it is willing to help us in our present miserable condition, to watch over us and free us from this misery and straitened circumstances, we shall all become its subjects under its flag."²²²

Naturally the Ottoman authorities were aware of all the savagery of the Hamidiyes. Their greatest supporter was Müshir Zeki Pasha, who was nicknamed "the executioner of Armenia." It was not only that Zeki Pasha was fulfilling a policy thought out and planned in advance by the government, so that no disciplinary actions were taken against the massacres and plundering of the Hamidiye commanders. What is even more shocking was that he kept a big portion of the stolen goods for himself. There was even more to it. As Russian observers noted, "the money sent to Erzingan [Erzincan] (where Zeki Pasha's military base was) were sent from there to the Bosphorus, to the houses of pashas and those at even higher levels."²²³

Thus, brute force, anarchy and chaos reigned over Western Armenia, and security of person, property, and, especially, honor did not exist. Wherever the Hamidiye regiments set foot quickly turned to ruins.

The sultan's government, which ignored all this, was worried by only one thing. After the Armenian massacres of the 1890s, income from Western Armenia had drastically decreased. The population of the exhausted territory had difficulty in paying state taxes. Besides, the new landlords who had confiscated lands from the Armenians refused to pay taxes. The state treasury suffered especially from the abrupt reduction of income from the *aghnam* [tax on livestock]. After the massacres, almost no cattle remained in the Armenian villages as the Kurdish, Turkish and Circassian feudal lords and tribal chiefs, and local officials stole most of them. As a result, the herds of the Kurdish landlords had rapidly increased in size but, as mentioned before, they refused

to pay the *aghnam* tax or greatly reduced the official quantity of their livestock. Though the state taxes were intended to oppress Christian subjects, the steep reduction in treasury income forced the government to touch Kurdish profits and make them also pay state taxes.

In the spring of 1900, the government sent officials to the provinces, but facing strong Kurdish resistance, they returned empty-handed. Actually the Kurds had never paid the *aghnam* tax and there was no corresponding law for it. In 1904 the government proceeded to issue a special law about it which aroused the Kurds, including even the commanders of the Hamidiye regiments, considered to be so loyal, to rebellion. In certain regions the Kurds came into armed conflict with government troops and gendarmerie, leading to great loss of life on both sides. The Kurds of Bohtan, Khizan, Jezireh and Sinjar demanded that the officials, and especially the judges, of their districts should be Kurds. Initially the sultan decided to send large military units against the rebels but after understanding the probable serious consequences, stepped back and settled it peacefully.

The recurrent Kurdish anti-governmental rebellions troubled Abdul Hamid. He was convinced that if he used violence and arms to confirm his rights, all the Kurdish beys, even his most faithful subjects, would revolt against him. It seemed to Abdul Hamid that he had completely "bought" those feudal lords by granting them high positions and honorary medals. Most importantly, he thought that by organizing the Armenian massacres in the 1890s and getting the Kurds involved in these bloody activities, he had completely made Kurds his loyal minions and that he had already stabilized his position in Western Armenia. He thought that through fear, the Armenian people had lost its ability to resist and submitted to his will, that the foreign states had finally given up and had no intention to seriously protect their coreligionists. In fact everything turned out to be the opposite. After the massacres, hundreds of thousands of Armenians became the irreconcilable sworn enemies of the Turkish state.²²⁴ Kurdish discontent was obvious too among the masses. In the late 1890s, the first Kurdish "political criminals" appeared. The Kurds were in unrest and many of them were arrested in Anatolia and even in the capital. In 1897 a political trial started against some prominent Kurdish activists who were accused of provoking their kindred against the Turkish government.²²⁵

The journal *Kurdistan* published by Kurdish nationalists abroad (at first in Cairo and later in Geneva) expressed the thoughts of Kurdish intellectuals. It opposed the anger of the Kurdish people against the Armenians and demanded collaboration with the latter instead.

Kurdistan raised political issues too. It called for resistance to the Turkish government's policy of dividing the Kurds. The articles of Abdurrahman Bedirhan, the publisher of the journal, attempted to prove that the only reason for Kurdish backwardness and ignorance was the Turkish government which benefited from this situation. When the Armenian monthly *Anahit* published in Paris asked Abdurrahman Bedirhan to explain the direction of his journal he answered: "I know that both Armenians and the Kurds share the same interest; that is why I want to abolish the hatred which exists between these two nations... the articles of *Kurdistan* published in Kurdish are evidence of this. I will make all kinds of sacrifices to eliminate the hatred that Abdul Hamid has stirred up between them."²²⁶

Kurdistan found that the Kurds were a completely different nationality than the Turks in Asia Minor.²²⁷ That was a very dangerous formulation for the Turkish government, which had tried for centuries to convince the Kurds that they were not a separate nationality, but as Muslims belonged to the same Islamic *ummah* or community along with the Turks. Reflecting upon this question, the German intelligence officer Waldemar Belck, who traveled in Western Armenia as a reporter of the journal *Frankfurter Zeitung*, wrote: "What would happen if one day the Kurds thought they actually were an Iranian ethnic group and had no kinship with the Turanian Turks?" In his opinion a motivating force was lacking for the awakening of the Kurdish sense of nationalism and the desire to overthrow the yoke of Turkish rule—perhaps an individual who could appear at any moment and unite the peoples who had become enemies.²²⁸

Despite its political Anglophilia, *Kurdistan* did not place its hopes for the future welfare of the Kurdish nation on a European state, or on any state, but only on "an alliance with the neighboring Armenians" and the Kurds. That was why it "made every effort to uproot the Kurdish-Armenian hatred and hostility sowed by the Turks until now, and to join them [Armenians and Kurds]

with the friendly ties of fellow residents and sharers of the same fate and interests."²²⁹

One of the issues of the newspaper published an article signed by Molla Saleh from Jezireh who said the sultan "provokes all the Kurds against the Armenians and makes them attack them. We now understand the Armenians are upset and sob from their torments, and now we also understand the sovereign's aim. He wants us to fight with the Armenians all the time. However, let him come to his senses and believe that we henceforth having sworn on our honor ... we will be friends with them. We understand that the sources of all our harms are the divisive and malicious souls of the 'palace.'"²³⁰

The ideas of the journal *Kurdistan* were enthusiastically accepted among the Armenians. For instance *Anahit* wrote: "If they [Armenians and Kurds] who are under the same tyranny do not collaborate with each other, with whom will they collaborate?... It is necessary that Kurdish and Armenian newspapers through studies and articles begin to make the two neighboring nations understand each other and try to extinguish, in their real 'colors' with their 'real' profits, those bloody conflicts, which were useful only for the interests of Turkish tyranny until now. Efforts in this vein to eliminate Kurdish-Armenian fighting are more practical and reliable than the anti-Kurdish attacks of the Armenian revolutionary groups. The Armenians need to direct all their means—arms, power, money, [and] wisdom—against their sole enemy, against the Turkish regime, for the sole goal of national liberation."²³¹

Anahit assured that "the real enemy of the Armenian is not the Kurd. The Armenian enemy is the Turkish despotic regime to which Kurds and Armenians are equally captive."²³²

This attitude was characteristic of the majority of the Armenian press regardless of their political party affiliation or political orientation. In 1898 *Droshak* [Banner, or Flag], the organ of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, published (in Armenian and Kurdish written in the Armenian alphabet) an anonymous article entitled "Call to the Kurds."²³³ Its Kurdish author appealed to his people to revolt, to stand in solidarity with the Armenians, to recognize the real enemy, to avoid the intrigues of the Turkish government, and to not participate in the Armenian massacres.

In 1901 Abdurrahman, the son of Bedirhan, sent his message to

the Kurdish people through *Droshak*. The article noted that “so far the Kurdish aghas have served the Padishah instead of their motherland. It is high time to turn back from that road, to stop being an instrument in the sultan’s hand and to end the divisions, inter-tribal conflicts and anti-Armenian activities. You must realize that with all that, you destroy your motherland and your home and place.”²³⁴ Then, he continued: “The Armenians are ready in every way to aid you. Do not falter in solidarity and concord. In such a situation, God’s success is with you.”²³⁵

However, neither these steps of written propaganda nor the practical measures of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) to find terms for cooperation brought about any concrete results, and they were more frequently left unanswered. The attempts of the party to collaborate with Kurdish tribal chiefs, ashiret leaders, religious leaders (sheikhs and pirs) and other leaders of the Kurdish community also failed. *Droshak* wrote that “persuading a tribal chief (el-aghasi) or a religious leader (sheikh) was the same as persuading the entire tribe, which in its ‘clerical concord’ knew only how to submit to its rulers and fulfill their will.”²³⁶

Mikayel Varandian evaluated the results of the party’s efforts: “The preaching of our diligent activists among the Kurds remained a voice in the wilderness. The Armenian Revolutionary Federation made boundless efforts and sacrifices for the solidarity of the two centuries-old neighbors but was unable to bring about fairly serious and ongoing activity. It was unable even to neutralize that powerful neighbor’s aggressive instincts, and failed to persuade it not to become a blind instrument in Turkish hands with the task of abusing the Armenian case and annihilating the Armenians.”²³⁷

The Hnchakist Party also made numerous attempts to realize Armenian-Kurdish understanding. The idea had even found its expression in their program of 1887, which stated: “If conditions permit, it is necessary to try a joint revolt against the common enemy, which is the Turkish government.”²³⁸ However, after a number of failures, the Hnchakists also concluded that this was “in practice in the realm of impossibility.”²³⁹

If formerly the idea of the establishment of Armenian-Kurdish solidarity was created and developed by the Armenians, afterwards, in the late nineteenth century, a number of Kurdish statesmen discontented with the sultan government also shared this idea.

The following fact testified about the changes in political attitude of some Kurdish leaders. During the negotiations with Sheikh Obeydullah’s son Sheikh Mehmed Sadik, ARF member Malkhas aimed at gaining the sheikh’s support and his authority to facilitate the transferral of weapons and revolutionary literature between the Armenian *fedayis* [revolutionaries] and ashirets near the border. The sheikh agreed and declared, “The Turk kills and the Kurd is blamed for it. The government persecutes and again it is the Kurd who is responsible. There is no harm whose author is not the Kurd, and there is no oppression that the Armenians have not experienced ... We know you have been on this land as long as we have; the Turks are the newcomers and neither of us has any reason for feeling amiable towards them. Our land is spacious and will be enough for both of us. The territory from Bashkala and Norduz to Mosul is ours, and beyond that is yours. This is what we have to think about.”²⁴⁰

Of course, the sultan’s government was aware of such attitudes among the Kurds and was seriously concerned about it. To eliminate this dangerous situation it again turned to a tested tool in its armory, provoking the two nations against each other. However, this time it chose a new variant. Instead of inflaming the Kurds against the Armenians, it started inciting the latter against the Kurds. As improbable as it seems, this time the Kurds were announced as the “common enemy” for both the Ottoman Empire and the Armenians.²⁴¹ Arshak Chopanian wrote an article in this regard, stating: “The lawless situation which we observe in Armenia is the repetition of what has already happened in Greece, Syria, and Bulgaria, and presently is similarly occurring in Macedonia... It has always been the Turkish government which has loosed Muslim society against the Christians. It is Turkey which has given the order for massacres... Kurds have been and still are nothing more than an instrument in the hands of the Turkish government which is the sole culprit.”²⁴²

In autumn 1903, the Istanbul government decided to empty defiant Sasun of its Armenians and settle it with *muhajirs*, Muslim emigrants who left Russia for Turkey. It came as a surprise for the government to find out that the Kurdish tribes which it had succeeded in exciting against the Armenians in the 1890s and turned into participants in massacres, not only did not want to partici-

pate in this affair, but possibly would help the population of Sasun to resist the aforementioned decision of the government.²⁴³ In response to the state's invitation to attack Sasun, a number of ashirets declared: "You prompted us to do such a thing in the past too, but when the European inspectors came, you cast all the responsibility upon us, as if we had done this independently. The Europeans would have annihilated us by now if the Armenians had not testified that it was the troops, not the Kurds."²⁴⁴

Reflecting on the failure of the Turkish machinations in Sasun in 1903, the English consul of Erzurum noted, "In recent months a new tendency has appeared in the general situation - that is the collaboration of the Kurds with the Armenians. It is obvious that one of the reasons why the Turkish government declined to attack Sasun this summer was the unexpected position of the Kurds, who refused their assistance in the proposed attack.²⁴⁵ The sultan's government, however, did not lose heart because of this failure. All the tribal chiefs who were suspected to have secret ties with the Armenian fedayis of Sasun were captured and thrown into prison. Simultaneously, a new organization called Janbezar was formed of bloodthirsty, unrestrained Kurds who were religious fanatics. Its objective was to disarm and terrorize the disobedient Hamidiyes and all the Kurds, in general, who did not submit to the will of the government.

After preparatory work, in January 1904 Ottoman troops again moved against Sasun. The sultan had decided to finally realize his old idea of "Sasun without Armenians." Sasun was surrounded, and the peaceful and unarmed population was massacred.

Though the government finally managed to send some ashirets against the people of Sasun using bribery and threat,²⁴⁶ the state troops played the decisive role in the massacres, robbery and other crimes. "It was not the Kurds who were the chief authors of the crimes in Sasun," Murch wrote, "but rather the regular army, which was subject to discipline and the demands of the law. The massacre was not perpetrated by the Kurds' primitive *sheshkhanes* [six-chambered old type of rifle] but by new and improved state rifles and cannons."²⁴⁷

The population of Sasun tried to avoid clashes with the Kurds as much as possible. Andranik Ozanian, who was with the fighters of Sasun, ordered that they "not deal with the Kurds and try

to win their friendship," promote the idea of union, open their minds to the exploitation of the government and begs, and explain that their struggle was for the defense of the interests of the Kurdish laborers as well as the Armenians. This effort of persuasion combined with the Kurdish discontent with the government led some tribes, and even Hamidiye soldiers, to refuse to fight against the Sasun inhabitants.²⁴⁸

Destroying the rebellious area, the government built military barracks in Tapik, Semal, Talvorik, Geliguzan and other places in order to station troops and prevent future uprisings of the people of Sasun.

The events of Sasun made European political parties and diplomacy concentrate on the Armenian Question again. The French minister of foreign affairs, Théophile Delcassé, declared that Turkey continued to have a regime "with respect to which rebellion is the only refuge of the desperate population."²⁴⁹ Francis de Pressensé declared in France's parliament: "They [the people of Sasun] did not want to be martyred as in 1894 without at least trying to defend themselves and protest. They have defended themselves since April without attaining victory, which is impossible..."²⁵⁰

In the early twentieth century, national liberation and social movements began in the Ottoman Empire against the dictatorial regime of Abdul Hamid. The struggle against national and social oppression was particularly strong in Western Armenia, the Balkans and the Arabian provinces of the empire. Factors such as the constant economic crisis, famine, increasing taxes, the violent system of tax collection, the abuse of the officials, and the oppression also roused the Muslims--Turks, Arabs, and Kurds--from their passive state and turned them against the government.

In autumn 1905 the banner of revolt flew over Dersim again.²⁵¹ The Armenian population of the nearby regions joined the armed resistance against the government's punitive forces. At the end of 1905 and the beginning of 1906 Kurdish revolts started in Diyarbakir, Bayazit, Bitlis and Erzurum. The Armenian population also supported those revolts.²⁵² Kurdish attacks on Turkish soldiers took place near the Ottoman-Iranian border. In order to escape the oppressions of the government, large numbers of Kurds moved to Iran.²⁵³ In April 1906 the members of the Bedirhan family killed the head of the Istanbul police Ridvan Pasha. Investigation

revealed that some terrorists and a group of influential Kurdish leaders such as Abdurrezak Bey and Ali Shamil Pasha (both from the unruly Bedirhan family) attempted to assassinate the sultan. The terrified tyrant punished the participants in the conspiracy with extreme cruelty, exiling them to the deserts of Tripolitania to taste the horrors and perversions of the Turkish prisons.²⁵⁴ The investigation also discovered that the Kurdish leaders secretly had prepared political demands. Their objective was the complete abolishment of the interference of the government and local authorities in the internal affairs of the tribes, and the internal self-rule of Kurdistan.

Alarming news was reaching the capital from the east about new actions of the Kurds. A revolt led by Ibrahim Pasha, the head of the Kurdish Milli tribe, started in 1901 and reached its zenith in 1907 to 1908. The authority of that powerful tribal chief extended over a vast territory which formed a triangle encompassing the area from Diyarbakir to Jezireh, Mardin and Viranshehir.²⁵⁵ Ibrahim Pasha had received the epithet of "uncrowned king of Kurdistan." His movement undermined the sultan's authority in the provinces of Diyarbakir, Aleppo, Urfa, Mardin and Derik.

The collaboration of the revolting Kurdish tribes with the Armenian population became more frequent, especially with the Bakuri, Hasanali, Yeznan, Mirani, Duderli, and Alani ashirets. Under the leadership of Jahangir Agha, Yezidis collaborated with the Armenians in armed confrontations with the state troops in Vaspurakan. An alliance was created between the Armenians and Kizilbash of Dersim when in 1907 they again rebelled against the government. The news about the insurrection irritated the sultan so much that he ordered that the population of Dersim be killed to the last man.²⁵⁶ The organizers of the revolt asked the Armenians for support. Hnchakist activist Ghumrikian and the leader of the uprising Sheikh Seyyid Ibrahim reached an agreement according to which the Armenians were to supply the army with food, weapons, and ammunition and send some armed forces to Dersim. Seyyid Ibrahim took the responsibility of leading the the tribes under his influence along with other friendly tribes against the Turkish government. Although in accordance with the agreement the Hnchakist Party distributed some weapon to the people of Dersim, the plan could not be completely realized because of lack of financial means.

Until 1907, the Yezidi population in Ottoman Empire was exempt from military service because of its heterodox religious beliefs. However, a newly adopted law of 1907 also conscripted Yezidis. As they were unwilling to serve in the army, they took refuge in neighboring Armenian villages in order to avoid chase by the police and the army.²⁵⁷ The joint fight of the Armenian and Kurdish peasantry against the exploitation and robbery of their begs and aghas became more frequent in Western Armenia. One Russian observer noted that in 1907 the Armenian peasants fought for forty-eight hours straight against the Kurdish robbers who had stolen a large number of the cattle of the Kurdish rayah in the Shatak region of Van province. Retrieving the cattle, the Armenians returned them to their Kurdish owners.²⁵⁸ Certainly, such incidents contributed to the rapprochement of the Armenian and Kurdish populations and the creation of reciprocal trust. It is an interesting fact that in early 1908 part of the Kurdish population of the villages of Derjan became members of the Hnchakist Party. The government conducted mass arrests of both the Kurds and the Hnchakist activists of the region in order to prevent this dangerous development.²⁵⁹

In 1907, four thousand Kurds attacked the Turkish villages near Bayburd sanjak and destroyed them.²⁶⁰ In 1906-1907 and in early 1908 Armenians, Kurds, Greeks, Turks and others participated in large anti-government protests in Erzurum, Bitlis, Kastamuni and other cities.²⁶¹ The Millet Mejlisi was organized in Erzurum which led the Muslims' movement.²⁶² State troops refused to open fire on the rebels, announcing that they were "ready to protect their homeland with their lives but they cannot raise their weapons against their brothers."²⁶³

The government tried to blame the Armenians as the provocateurs and organizers of the revolts and unrest in a vain attempt to sow the seeds of dissension between the Armenians and the Muslims. *Droshak* described the situation:

Black days are coming for Abdul Hamid... It seems as if revolutionary fever has spread throughout Asia Minor. The glass is being filled; all peoples are now revolting against the regime of famine and oppression. The sultan's present counterattack and reaction is directed against all the people.

The times have changed. The time has passed when he would only see the Armenian nation, few in numbers, against him any more. It was in the past when he ... could drown long Armenian uprisings in a flood of blood ... To-day as an executioner, he is already forced to attack his fellow Muslims. And against the masses... Until the present day, Turkish and Kurdish individuals have been the subject of that attack; their strength was easily broken without noise in dark, mysterious corners, and they went to rest either in far away places or in the abyss of the Bosphorus.²⁶⁴

These lines in *Troshak* expressed optimism about the near future of the Armenian people because the Armenian Revolutionary Federation cherished the hope that the destruction of the sultan's throne would be realized due to the joint struggle of all the peoples of the Ottoman Empire.

The sultan's government took resolute measures to subdue the revolting centers. Istanbul viewed Kurdish participation in anti-governmental movements as a deadly threat because the entire system which was to keep East Anatolia in the empire was breaking down. Thus Istanbul put into action a complex plan to suppress the Kurdish unrest. Additional troops were sent to Anatolia, while Kurdish nationalists who were accused of anti-government activities were expelled from the capital.²⁶⁵ In April 1907, according to the sultan's orders, "the imperial school of tribes" [ashiret mekteb-i hümayun]²⁶⁶ was shut down in Istanbul. While the goal of that school was to train officers for the Hamidiye regiments, it had actually turned into one of the most important centers of activity of the Kurdish nationalists.

The Kurdish feudal class played the role of the "black hundreds" (an ultranationalist Russian movement in the early twentieth century) in the suppression of the national liberation movements of subjugated nations in the Ottoman Empire. While individual Kurdish activists may have been sympathetic to the new ideas of cooperating with the Armenians, and the Kurdish laboring villagers or rayahs revolted against their oppressors together with neighboring peoples, the Kurdish feudal landlords, ashiret chiefs, aghas and begs were the loyal supporters of sultanism, and always worked with the Turkish authorities and ex-

plorative bureaucracy. They fiercely protected "the sacred rights of the caliph," launched expeditions against the Armenians who were called "troublemakers and revolutionaries" by the authorities, and tried to provoke national hatred in every possible way. An officer from the Erzurum cell of the Young Turk committee wrote about the brutality and unrestrained behavior of the Kurdish aghas and begs:

Ordinary, poor people in particular are disgusted and tired of tribal leaders who are miniature versions of Sultan Hamid, and their continual conflicts. Only he, Abdul Hamid, does not get disgusted and tired... How many times have governors and men of conscience written to the necessary place that the situation of the Kurds needs improvement. But Constantinople silenced those conscientious people, considering that they were cursing the benevolent Hamidiye organization. In brief, there is no security in the country. The land is uncultivated, the people are poor, and there are ruins everywhere. Each tribal chief ignores the existence of the government, scorches the country and storms so tyrannically that he even makes people yearn for the old *derebeys*.²⁶⁷

In 1907 Catholicos of All Armenians Khrimian Hayrik wrote a letter to Tsar Nicolas II describing the hopeless and tragic condition of the Western Armenians. He noted that during the last decade the number of those Armenians killed, arrested, exiled, dead from starvation, and forcibly Islamicized had surpassed the number of losses in the 1895-1896 massacres.²⁶⁸

The usurpation of Armenian land continued. Most of the cultivable lands in the Armenian villages were taken by Kurdish and Turkish begs. The lands and possessions of Armenians who emigrated or fled the country were put up for sale by the Ottoman government. On the other hand, the Ottoman agricultural bank used various machinations to seize the lands of the Armenian peasantry and sell them to Turkish and Kurdish officials. In 1907, the sultan's government initiated the confiscation of the property of the Armenian Church too; the Kurdish feudal lords understood this to mean permission for new plundering and violence against

the Armenians. The licentiousness and brutality of the Hamidiyes and Circassian refugees reached such dimensions in Bitlis province that the Russian, English and French ambassadors attempted to intervene diplomatically with the Sublime Porte in June 1907.²⁶⁹ The latter was forced to send a committee to Bitlis headed by Lieutenant-General (Ferik) Ahmed Pasha, the commander of the Hamidiye regiments. It demanded bribes from the commanders of the Hamidiye regiments to end the case; after receiving them, the committee prepared a report stating that the complaints of the Armenians were false and exaggerated. Those who were more persistent were thrown into prisons by Ahmed Pasha to rot.

The Armenians became exhausted and impoverished en masse in all the provinces of Western Armenia. For instance, most of the villages in the province of Van were destroyed and their inhabitants, both Armenians and rayah Kurds, were deprived of all means of existence.²⁷⁰

The government settled a large number of Circassians in various regions. The Kurdish ashiret chiefs were extremely dissatisfied with the presence of the Muslim Circassians near them because it was very difficult to rob them. They also were armed and skillful in robbery. Deprived of revenues, the Kurdish ashiret chiefs began to submit appeals to the government demanding that it remove the Circassians and return the Armenian population.²⁷¹

Speaking about the desolate condition of Western Armenia, Dr. George Reynolds, an American missionary in Van, noted: "The annihilation of the Armenians through poverty and oppression is taking place in such a noticeable degree that in ten to fifteen years the Armenian Question will lose any meaning in Turkey."²⁷² *Mshak* noted the same thing: "The Armenians are unable to form a majority in places where a decade ago they were a great multitude. In order to realize this goal, the Turkish government, among other measures, annually settles large groups of Muslim refugees in the Armenian provinces. The following evidence shows with what fervor this policy is carried out. So far 9,000 Muslim refugees have reached Erzurum province, of whom 8,000 were settled in the areas of Mush, Bulanik, Terjan, Namervan and Alashkert through the efforts of the refugee committee. The same policy is systematically applied in other provinces. In addition, neither the life nor the property of Armenians is safe from robbers who are officials or professionals."²⁷³

Thus, the Kurdish movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries did not fuse with the Armenia national liberation movement. As the Kurds were in a period of patriarchal, tribal and feudal relations, the Kurdish feudal class was able to lead the majority of the Kurds and separate them from the Armenian people being exploited by the same despotism.

The Kurdish aghas and begs were not interested in alliance with the Armenian people or national liberation movements because their interests were contrary to the overthrow of Ottoman despotism and the national liberation movements of the oppressed peoples of Turkey since this "would mean the pulverization of their various imperial privileges." "It's a fantasy, a crazy fantasy," the Armenian periodical *Yerkri tsayne* [The Voice of the Country] wrote, "to endeavor to involve the Kurdish feudal lords in such an enterprise, to stir them up with enthusiasm about such an idea which is diametrically opposed to their vital interests."²⁷⁴ "In this situation, it will be like 'preaching in the desert' to preach freedom to people who are content with their specific freedom."²⁷⁵

While discussing Armenian-Kurdish relations, we must take into consideration that the Armenian population was an object of exploitation for the Kurdish feudal class and an abundant source of wealth for the begs and aghas. Consequently the Kurdish feudal class was vitally interested in forever preserving such a situation.

Another obstacle for the development of the Armenian-Kurdish relationship in connection with the struggle for liberation from the sultan's dictatorship was that the Kurdish people were not a monolithic and homogenous entity. "Then with which ashiret will we ally and for whose structure of independence will we lay the cornerstones?" *Yerkri tsayne* asked. It immediately answered itself: "Friendship and alliance with one would arm against you the deadly hostility of the others."²⁷⁶

Another difficulty was that although the interests of the tribal chiefs and the ordinary members of the tribe were not the same, but actually completely opposed, the economically, politically and culturally backward, superstitious, conservative and illiterate Kurdish masses which were governed by tradition accepted their tribal chief as their sole authority, obeying him unconditionally and without hesitation. Rayahs or ordinary tribesmen were deprived of the chance to decide their destiny and future through

their own wills. As mentioned earlier, the alliance with the Armenian national liberation movement was against the interests of the tribal chiefs who represented the Kurdish feudal upper class. Consequently, all attempts at collaboration ended in complete failure.

Yerkri tsayne wrote: "Are the Kurds as a whole condemned to be a negative phenomenon for revolution, a worthless social class? Does the Kurdish *rayah* not have an interest in establishing and realizing his basic human rights by destroying his tribal chief's absolute rights? The Kurdish *rayah* will become revolutionary only when ... he sees his tribal chief as his enemy and the executioner of his fortune instead of an idol and guardian angel."²⁷⁷

Thus, the possibility of the Kurdish people becoming companions-in-arms with the Western Armenians was problematic. The Kurds, being divided into mutually hostile tribal groups, did not have the prospective of a collective existence, which would oppose them to the Turks, and turn them into friends and allies of the Armenian liberation movement based on the identity of interests.

Despite the efforts of Western Armenian activists, political parties and in part individual Kurdish activists, in the 1890s and the beginning of the twentieth century it was impossible to realize an Armenian-Kurdish alliance against Ottoman tyranny and the oppressive regime of Abdul Hamid II. The anti-Turkish, anti-government movements of some Kurdish tribes (with some exceptions) did not find support among the other Kurdish tribes. In turn, the Western Armenian national liberation movement remained isolated from the liberation struggle of the neighboring Kurdish people. This had serious consequences for the historical destiny of the Armenian nation. Kurds also greatly suffered as a result.

* * *

In December 1907, all the revolutionary organizations of the Ottoman Empire participated in a congress in Paris known as the second congress of the Young Turks. There the leaders of the *Ittihad ve Terakki* party (commonly known in English as the Committee of Union and Progress) declared: "All the nations of the empire in turn became victims of the villainous rage of Abdul Hamid, who successively pitted one against the other, provoking an artificial hatred between nationalities and religions. The Turks,

Armenians, Greeks, Bulgarians, Vlachs, Arabs, Albanians, Jews, Druze, and Kurds experienced persecution, exile, deportation and massacres, while the Armenian massacres, as the crown to all the previous crimes, earned its author, who still continues his crimes in Arabia, the epithets of Great Assassin and the Bloody Sultan."²⁷⁸ The motto of the Congress was "Long live solidarity among the hitherto disunited nations."²⁷⁹ Naturally, these words of the *Ittihadists* inspired the oppressed nations of the empire and filled them with great anticipation.

In 1908, the revolution of the Young Turks and the reestablishment of the 1876 constitution aroused high hopes among the people suppressed by the Turkish tyranny. The Armenian people expected that the "revolution" of the Young Turks would open the way to salvation and freedom. So the Armenian political parties and activists imagined, as if in an intoxicating dream, that the nightmare of the sultan's dictatorship had already vanished.

One of the *Dashnak* statesmen, Mikayel Varandian, confessed: "We accepted the Ottoman constitution with delight, without any separatist ambitions and not a word about European intervention and Article 61. We halted *Pro Armenia* and European propaganda, joining with our Muslim neighbors to spread progress and welfare throughout the entire Empire with united efforts."²⁸⁰

The joy was particularly great in Western Armenia where demonstrations for "universal brotherhood" were held everywhere. The Kurds and the Turks paid their respects to the memory of the Armenian warriors who fell in the fight against despotism. According to the Armenian newspaper *Biuzandion* [Byzantium], "in Baghesh [Bitlis] the Turks and Kurds went on pilgrimaged to the grave of the hero of Sasun Serob Aghpiur and decorated it with flowers. In Van the Armenians and Turks organized joint meetings and glorified the Armenian *fedayis* ... In Karin [Erzurum] the Armenians exalted the Turkish revolutionaries, those who had bravely refused [to pay] the personal tax (*vergi-i shahsi*)... had the governor who was the obedient instrument of the Palace fired, [and] shot the head of police and the chief judge."²⁸¹ Armenian and Kurdish delegates defended the same viewpoints together on a number of issues in the new parliament in Constantinople.²⁸²

This made the Western Armenians trust that Armenian-Kurdish and Armenian-Turkish relations had entered a completely

new and unprecedented stage. Biuzand Kechian, the editor of the newspaper *Biuzandion*, published an article titled "The Armenians and the Kurds" in which he wrote: "Now in the new constitutional situation, the policy of the Armenians will be to live with the Kurds like brothers in order to show through experience that it is much easier to earn a regular living with peace, legality and justice. Kurds ... are a sharp-witted nation; they will immediately understand the significance of the changed conditions, or whence the wind blows. When they realize that a constitutional enlightened and serious government does not intend to massacre and torture an innocent nation any longer, and it has determined to preserve the peace of the country, the Kurds will not delay in adjusting to the new conditions. The Armenians too have every interest in accommodating the Kurds by all means and on all occasions."²⁸³

Armenian statesmen tried to be extremely cautious in their relations with the Kurds, never allowing incidents which reactionaries could use to aggravate Armenian-Kurdish relationships. Thus, when the newspaper *Arev* (published in Egypt) printed an article with the suggestion that the Miatseal Engerutian [United Association] which restarted its activity in Turkey also undertake the task of the education and edify the Kurds, *Mshak* immediately responded with an article written by Hambartsum Arakelian. It said:

In the present situation, we find such exhortation and proposals not wise or rational, and impractical. First, it hides within it a chauvinistic desire to Armenianize the Kurds. It is a senseless, harmful desire. Let the Kurds advance themselves, in their own schools, with their own language. Let them create their alphabet and be in charge of their cultural situation. The Armenians can only, as good neighbors, as citizens of the same country, support the Kurds financially with donations when they undertake to open schools, or help them with advice about the organization of schooling.²⁸⁴

In the late nineteenth century, on the eve of the Young Turk revolution, the Kurdish nationalist movement with its mouthpiece, the newspaper *Kurdistan*, already participated to a certain degree, though not actively, in the bourgeois revolutionary move-

ment against the sultan's dictatorship. Placing their hopes for the Kurdish people's future on this movement, Kurdish nationalist activists participated in the Ittihadist congresses of Paris in 1902 and 1907.²⁸⁵

In 1908, after the Young Turk revolution, the leaders of the Kurdish nationalist movement, Emin Ali Bedirhan, Sherif Pasha, Ahmed Dul Kafil Pasha and others who were persecuted and exiled by Abdul Hamid were released. The new rulers of Turkey also heartily received back from exile Sheikh Obeydullah's son Abdul Ghader [Kader or Kadir] and even made him a member of the Ottoman parliament.

The representatives of the Kurdish nationalist movement accepted and supported the Young Turks. They hoped that the latter would in turn support their demands, including autonomy for the Kurds within the Ottoman Empire and the recognition of Kurdish national distinctiveness.²⁸⁶

In the autumn of 1908, Emin Ali Bedirhan, Sherif Pasha and Abdul Ghader founded the Taali ve Terakki Kurdistan [Elevation and Progress of Kurdistan] center in Constantinople. Through the initiation of Abdul Ghader, the new organization Kurd Taavun ve Terakki Jamiyati [Association of Kurdish Mutual Aid and Progress] was established, which aimed to develop cultural, educational, industrial and commercial activities among the Kurds. These structures did not represent large groups, and had extremely fluid and indefinite political plans.

The Kurdish nationalists published the periodical *Kürt Teavün ve Terakki Gazetesi* [Newspaper of Kurdish Mutual Aid and Progress]. Kurdish centers were opened in Mush, Bitlis, Erzurum, Baghdad, Mosul, Diyarbakir and other places, and the Kurdish nationalists named them Ittihad ve Terakki local clubs. This meant that the Kurdish nationalists had entered into close relations with the Ittihadists. Later on, in 1913, they founded the association Kiva Kurd [Kurdish Union] which published the weekly *Rozhe Kurd* [or *Roja Kurd*, meaning Kurd's Day]. In 1914 this was renamed *Khatavi Kurd* [Kurd's Sun].

Babanzade Ismail Hakki, Saidi Kurdi, Abdul Ghader and others published their articles in the abovementioned newspapers stressing the necessity of developing Kurdish national unity, Kurdish culture, language and education, as well as the necessity of acknowledgement of one's own nationality.²⁸⁷ They also

tried to modify the atmosphere surrounding the Kurds so that they were not seen as a tool of the sultan, or as anti-constitutional elements. They demanded that the government respect the Kurds to the same degree as other nations.

Taken as a whole, the matters discussed in the newspaper did not go beyond the general constitutionalist talk, and desires for cultural revival and placing the Kurds on a political path.

Before the revolution, the watchword of Kurdish nationalist activists was the struggle for independence, but after the revolution they changed direction and stopped advocating independence. They connected the issue of Kurdistan with the development of constitutional Turkey and ended their anti-Turkish speeches. A sizeable number of statesmen devoted themselves to the state and their personal lives, becoming senators, assemblymen, officials, officers and so on. As Karo Sasuni said, "These few voices of Constantinople barely found a weak response in a few provinces, and the movement died."²⁸⁸

It must be mentioned that the influence of the first nationalists was not great on the Kurdish masses, and consequently their role in the Kurdish movement remained practically unnoticed. On the other hand, the Kurdish masses because of their political backwardness were not quite ready to accept the ideas of nationalism.²⁸⁹

Besides the Kurdish nationalist tendency, there was another grouping among the Kurds. It mainly consisted of high-ranking officials and officers who had practically been Turkified and were largely the faithful servants of the sultan during the previous regime. After the declaration of the constitution, with the wave of national revival, the awakening of a certain degree of national feeling was noticed among them. However, after enrolling in the Young Turk party, they followed the direction of the state in order to keep their positions and offices, thus becoming Ittihadists.

Babanzade Ismail Hakki, one of the most prominent figures among these statesmen, published *Tanin*, the official organ of the Ittihadists, with Hüseyin Jahidi. He was closely connected with the Turks in his life and actions, and "sometimes scattered crumbs to the Kurdish people to which he belonged."²⁹⁰

As a matter of fact, Kurdish statesmen belonging to different groupings not only did not agree about the major issues concerning their people, but often quarreled and fought with one other. For instance, after the Young Turk coup, in order to gain promi-

nence in Kurdish society, a fierce conflict accompanied by plots and acts of terrorism started between the clans of the Bedirhans and Said, who was an influential leader of Nehri.²⁹¹

However, these Kurdish statesmen and a small number of nationalists who mainly lived in the capital, in fact had no influence on the tribal chiefs, ashiret masters, sheikhs, and begs who lived in Western Armenia and Kurdistan, let alone on the Kurdish masses. Consequently, it was not the Kurdish intellectuals, community leaders and officials who played an essential role in the fate of the Kurdish people, but the tribal chiefs, who were, as before, the true masters of the situation.

As for the Kurdish feudal class in Western Armenia and Kurdistan, they took an emphatically hostile position toward the Young Turk revolution and the constitution. The Kurdish feudal lords, who supported Abdul Hamid's tyrannical monarchy, sensed the imminent end of their own despotism and accepted the news about the coup in the capital with undisguised hatred.²⁹²

Russian observers noted that the Kurdish tribal chiefs "refused to submit to the new regime, while the Hamidiye regiments, continuing to rob the people, manifested armed resistance to the tax collectors, declaring that they do not recognize the present government."²⁹³

The British ambassador in Constantinople, Gerald Lowther, informed the Foreign Office that while the people of the empire celebrated the reestablishment of the constitution, the Kurdish beys and aghas considered the new order to be deadly for them, so they complained, threatened and took other actions. They supposed the new regime could end their lawlessness and anarchy, and thus "make difficult the task of keeping their people in subjugation and exploiting the defenseless Armenians."²⁹⁴ *Droshak* wrote, "Behold a Vendeian howl is heard also from the Armenian highland ... It is the Kurds... not, of course, the Kurdish people but that parasitic and criminal class which learned over the centuries to seize unpunished the [product of the] labor of blood and sweat of the subject 'rayah'... How could it be reconciled with such a dreadful reality, that henceforth the written law will forbid it to live by robbery and plunder but instead, it had to get used to honest, constructive work? ... That was unheard of violence against its cherished ancient, 'sacred' rights; it was a terrible revo-

lution in its lifestyle, psychology and entire worldview. So it complained and threatened."²⁹⁵

Speaking about the conditions in Western Armenia, even the Young Turk newspaper *Shura-yi Ümmet* confessed that "the system of derebeys continues to the present" and "the areas with ashirets show no sign of discipline and peace... Many district kaymakams could lose not only their positions but even their lives if they dared to act against the ashiret chiefs' will. In such places, neither military conscripts nor taxes could be collected, and everything depended on the graces of the tribal chiefs. Was it ever possible to speak about freedom, justice, equality and brotherhood in such places?"²⁹⁶

Since the autumn of 1908, the Young Turk government began to take several measures to weaken the positions of the Kurdish sheiks and aghas, and strengthen the influence of the government on the Kurdish masses. First of all, in September 1908 Istanbul ordered the disarmament and dissolution of the Hamidiye cavalry and the absorption of its members in the regular army (*nizam*).²⁹⁷ The motive for the Young Turk government was not to end the brutalities of the Hamidiye regiments against the peaceful population but because the regiments had already completely lost their fighting capacity. Their main occupation had become the robbery of the peaceful population, especially the Armenian villages. The Hamidiye regiments were not satisfied with only robbing the Armenians, so they started attacking Turkish villages as well, and refused to comply with the local authorities. The command of the Turkish army expressed itself negatively many times about those regiments, considering them not to even be bandits, but just outright thieves.²⁹⁸

The commanders of the Hamidiye regiments reacted with rage to the declaration of the law. They revolted everywhere and openly spoke against the Young Turks.²⁹⁹ The greatest revolt took place in September 1908 under the direction of Ibrahim Pasha, the Milli tribe leader and commander of a Hamidiye regiment. He was able to extend his authority over the spacious territory between Erzinjan and Deyr-ez-Zor [Der Zor]. The Young Turk government sent a large punitive army led by Neshad Pasha against the rebellious tribal chief and completely destroyed his movement.³⁰⁰

Using as a pretext Armenian complaints against the Hamidi-

ye regiment commanders who in the 1890s participated in the Armenian massacres or seized their lands, the Young Turk government arrested and tried the tribal chiefs who were engaged in robbery and raids.³⁰¹ The leader of the Grav tribe Shakir Agha, Hüseyin Pasha, the master of Khizan, Sparkert and Mamrtank Seyyid Ali, the brothers Musa and Kasim from the plain of Mush, Mir Mhe from Norduz, Bshare Chato and his brother Jamil from Kharzan, and many other prominent leaders were arrested. The Young Turk government also started pursuing the tribes which refused to pay taxes or recognize the new authorities. The punishment was especially severe towards the Jaf, Kherki [Herki or Harki], Hamavend, Artoshi, Bohtan, and Slevani tribes.

Thus, the prediction of the Kurdish beys and aghas that the formation of the new political regime in Turkey would limit their rights came true.

The Young Turk authorities began to returned lands seized by Kurdish feudal lords to their former Armenian owners. Istanbul instructed local governmental bodies to gain popularity by all means among the Armenians, and in this way not only counterbalance the Kurds but also "break the Armenians' faith" in Russia.³⁰²

This political course of the Young Turk government not only affected the vital interests of the Kurdish ruling class, but was understood as a "pro-Armenian" policy which trampled on Kurdish rights "sanctified" through the centuries. In 1909, the atmosphere became heated in the Kurdish populated regions in Western Armenia and the outbreak of anti-government revolt was imminent. After the partial disarmament of the Hamidiye cavalry, the Young Turk parliament adopted a law about the conscription of non-Muslims in accordance to which Armenians received the right to serve in the Ottoman army. The Kurdish ashiret chiefs interpreted this law as an incremental state step toward making the role of the irregular Hamidiye cavalry insignificant. This conclusively angered the Kurdish notables.

Being well aware of the Young Turk government's resolve to carry out its adopted policy and laws, and being discontented with the Kurdish policy of Istanbul, many ashiret chiefs from Van, Bitlis and Erzurum moved to Iran with their tribes. For instance, the leaders of the Haydaranli tribe Hüseyin Pasha, Emin Pasha, Haji Teymur Pasha, and Mehmed Sadik, the major feudal lord Kôr Hüseyin Pasha, the famous robber Mir Mhe, the leader of the

Mazrik tribe Sharaf Beg and many others settled in the khanate of Maku, Khoy, and Salmast [Salmas], with the goal of fighting against the Young Turk government from the other side of the border or at least creating difficulties for it with their raids.³⁰³

The Russian vice-consul in Bitlis Shirkov declared that according to information he had received, some Kurdish tribes intended to immigrate en masse to Iran in order to support the "reactionary movement" in Turkey.³⁰⁴

Soon the Young Turk authorities learned that the Kurdish tribal chiefs who had moved to Iran had started to seek Russian patronage. In their letter to the viceroy of the Caucasus they suggested raising a general Kurdish revolt in Turkey and establishing Russian dominion over all of Kurdistan, which, in their understanding, included Western Armenia and Turkish Kurdistan.³⁰⁵ The secretary of the Russian consulate in Tabriz S. P. Golubinov reported, not without sarcasm, that "Abdul Hamid's former loyal servants, the Turkish Kurds who were ready at his first command to attack the Transcaucasus, in the person of their leaders Hüseyin Pasha, Amir Khan and Haji Teymur, turned to Sardar Murteza Ghuli Khan of Maku, asking for his mediation to have them accepted as Russian subjects."³⁰⁶

In February 1910, the sardar of Maku left for Yerevan to discuss the question with the Russian authorities. However, the offer of the Kurds was refused with the argument that Russian patronage could cause undesirable international consequences since it would be direct interference in Turkish internal affairs.³⁰⁷

Soon the military authorities of Van found out that the Kurds who had moved to Iran had assembled their forces along the Iranian-Turkish border and were preparing to take their vengeance on the Turkish government. Moreover, Hüseyin Pasha conducted anti-government propaganda in Turkey by means of his fellow tribesmen, and most importantly, united the major tribes of Erzurum province in an anti-constitutional and anti-Ittihadist union which had a great quantity of weapons, ammunition and finances at its disposal.³⁰⁸ The Turkish military authorities discovered from secret sources that the Haydaranli ashiret leaders were exhorting the sardar of Maku to conquer the rich valley of Abagha (Berkri Kaza) with their united forces, justifying their actions by declaring that the area always belong to Iran and was violently and illegally joined to Turkey.³⁰⁹ It could not escape the notice of the Turk-

ish military authorities near the border that the previous bitter hatred between the Turkish and Iranian Kurds had been replaced through steps toward reciprocal rapprochement and unity so that the border clashes between them had completely ceased.³¹⁰

The Sublime Porte got more alarmed with the rumor about Abdul Ghader, the sheikh of Shamdinan and a member of the senate of the Ottoman parliament, about whom there were already suspicions that he was the head of the anti-government opposition movement of the Kurdish tribal chiefs. It was said that he intended to unite all the Kurdish tribes against the Young Turk government. There were also rumors that he was attempting to come to an agreement with the Armenians and the Arabs of Iraq and Jebel Druse for joint action.³¹¹

It could be concluded from all this that the preconditions existed in Turkey for the eruption of a general Kurdish revolt, and this seriously concerned Istanbul. The governor of Van, Bekir Sami Bey, ordered that reinforcements be sent to the troops in the area of the Turkish-Iranian border.³¹²

After the proclamation of the constitution, the Armenian peasantry naturally attempted to reinstate its property rights and repossess the lands which had been confiscated by the Kurdish feudal lords.³¹³ This led to an unprecedented increase in tension between the two groups. In 1909 the French consul in Van, Stéphan Eugène Thadée Joseph Zarzecki, testified that a real war was begin waged between the Armenians and Kurds about the agrarian question.³¹⁴

The Young Turk government annulled the kafirlik (khafirlik) tax, and the corvée for the Kurdish feudal lords (*olam*). In individual places the Armenian peasantry took up weapons and attempted to free themselves from the yoke of the kafirlik. However, they met with the resistance of the armed groups of the ashiret chiefs and were defeated, ending up in worse conditions of serfdom than before. The Kurdish aghas held on tightly to the right of khafirlik, and did not want to be deprived of it in any way.³¹⁵ The Armenians of Western Armenia informed the patriarchate of Constantinople in a telegram that "the begs and aghas forcibly seize the Armenians' property and throw the owners out of their houses, gardens and fields. What will be the end of this?"³¹⁶ Meanwhile Kurdish armed tribes started threatening the Armenians with massacres.³¹⁷

The Young Turk government had newly appointed Yaver Pasha as the governor of Van. He created "mixed committees" as if to resolve the agrarian disagreements between the Kurds and the Armenians,³¹⁸ but these were unable to resolve anything because the Kurds refused to even listen to any mention of returning the confiscated lands.

The Ittihadists were not consistent in their policy about the eastern provinces. They did not even attempt to apply the laws they had adopted. They were merely satisfied with ostentatious recommendations and declarations. Fearing domestic complications, the Ittihadists step by step conceded to the demands of the Kurdish feudal lords. In 1909, the disarmament and reorganization of the Hamidiye regiments stopped because the Ittihadists became convinced that after some organizational restructuring, that military structure could be useful to them as a defensive force at the Russian and Iranian borders, as well as for domestic police issues. The only change was that henceforth, instead of being named after the sultan, these regiments became known as the Ashiret Light Cavalry Regiments [Ashiret Hafif Suvari Alaylari].³¹⁹

Simultaneously, the Young Turks started to win over the Kurdish ruling class. Finally Istanbul decided to make some "corrections" in its Kurdish policy. In March 1910, the Minister of Internal Affairs issued an order about delaying the solution of the agrarian question between the Armenians and the Kurds "until the creation of a favorable moment for it."³²⁰ In fact, it meant shutting down any work on the question in order to deflect Kurdish discontent. In this fashion the government "smoothed over" the Kurdish question. A Turkish court released Kör Hüseyin Pasha from prison and instead had the Armenians who protested against him arrested, accusing them of being "troublemakers."³²¹ The governor of Van, Yaver Pasha, proposed to the local Armenian prelaty that it sign a letter together with Hüseyin Pasha and other criminal tribal chiefs stating that the province was peaceful and that "Armenians, Turks and Kurds lived together like brothers."³²²

The massacre of Armenians organized in Adana in May 1909 left the Armenians with no doubt that the Young Turks were continuing Abdul Hamid's work on the Armenian Question.

In 1910, the government promised to pardon all the Kurds who had left for Iran, if they returned. Otherwise they were threat-

ened of being deprived of all their ranks and titles. In addition, all their land and possessions in Turkey would be confiscated.³²³ The return of the rebellious Kurdish feudal lords commenced, and with the permission of the authorities, they immediately reinstated their previous "rights." By the special arrangement of the Minister of Internal Affairs, the begs and aghas were even returned the lands which had been confiscated in favor of the Armenians during the early period of the Young Turks' rule in the days of the Armenian-Turkish "honeymoon."³²⁴

After their return from Iran, the Kurdish aghas started persecuting Armenians even more severely.³²⁵ Alarming telegrams were sent from Western Armenia to Istanbul, informing the diplomatic and consular representatives of the powers that the Armenians were threatened everywhere by great danger.³²⁶

Ottoman parliament deputy Vahan Papazian demanded in vain the application of the new law about bandit groups to the Kurdish armed groups.³²⁷ He presented a detailed report to the Minister of Internal Affairs in which he proposed the immediate employment of measures which he found extremely necessary to subject the Kurds to the authority of the government.

Specifically, he noted that it was necessary to increase the number of the troops in the province of Van and on the Turkish-Iranian border, and to demand that the Iranian government immediately expel the Kurdish tribal chiefs and their armed groups, which, accused of various misdeeds, were hiding in Maku. As soon as the tribal chiefs returned to Turkey, they were to be judged according to their deeds, while the rest of the Kurds about whom there were no accusations, were to be dispersed all over the empire as regular soldiers.³²⁸

Neither the Armenian delegates of the Ottoman parliament nor Western Armenian statesmen in general were aware of the twofaced game the Young Turk authorities were playing in connection with Armenian-Kurdish relations. Outwardly pretending to desire to "bring to order" the "anti-constitutional" lawless Kurdish elements, they in reality were provoking the Kurds against the Armenians. Already in 1909 the Ittihadists sent a great number of agents to Western Armenia to provoke discord and hostility between the Kurds and the Armenians.³²⁹ The Russian vice-consul in Van Sergei Petrovich Olferiev informed his ambas-

sador in Constantinople that in order to aggravate Armenian-Kurdish hostility, the Turkish agents tried to persuade the Armenian population that the Kurdish actions "are the consequence of Russian plots." The Russian diplomat noted that the propaganda was also designed to extinguish the sympathy of the Armenian population toward Russia.³³⁰

Though the law of June 20, 1909 about the military recruitment of non-Muslims was accepted by the Armenians with great satisfaction, as mentioned above, it exacerbated Armenian-Kurdish conflict. According to that law the Muslims of the state would no longer have the right to declare themselves the ruling nation, or *millet-i hakime*, any more. As a further development, on March 1, 1910 the Ottoman parliament confirmed the law on the removal of the military tax for Christians (*bedel-i askeri*).

Hence, according to the aforementioned laws, for the first time in Ottoman history the Armenians were to be conscripted into the army as part of universal military service. This caused great discomfort and displeasure among the Kurdish upper class³³¹ since from then on the right of the Armenians to carry weapon would rob them of the opportunity of unpunishable actions against the latter. The Kurdish feudal lords and tribal and ashiret chiefs declared it to be as a violation of their "ancient customs" and "historical rights."

A number of ashirets of Erzurum, Mush and other provinces demanded that the law about Christian military recruitment be annulled; if not, they threatened to cause the government trouble, or in the worst case to move to Iran or Russia.³³² Though the Young Turk government did not satisfy these demands and allowed the law to remain in force, they were not consistent in this matter, fearing open conflict with Islamic reactionaries.

To comprehend the internal mainsprings of the Ittihadist government's policy on the Armenian Question and the Kurdish issues, it is necessary as a starting point to accept that the Young Turks were Turkish nationalists. Led by the slogan of "Turkey for the Turks" they acted as ferocious adversaries of all desires for independence on the part of the non-Turkish peoples of the empire. The Young Turks were constrained by the prejudices created by their ancestors' narrowmindedness. That is, they believed that the various nationalities living in Turkey were its misfortune, not only nationalities of different religions, meaning non-Muslims,

but also Muslims of different nationalities, such as Kurds and Arabs. That was why the Ittihad ve Terakki party decided to employ every effort to make the Turkish state homogeneous.³³³

The Ittihadists were filled with particular hatred towards the Armenian national liberation movement, regarding it as one of the most dangerous enemies of the empire. The short period of bright hopes and expectations for the Armenians after the Young Turk revolution was replaced with a period of bitter disappointment. The Western Armenians realized that the Young Turk regime was the old despotism with a new mask. The chauvinism of the Ittihadists against the Armenians was becoming more and more open. It was especially obvious during the congress of the Ittihad ve Terakki party in Salonica in September 1911, when the motto of "dominating nation" (*millet-i hakime*) was promoted. That meant to henceforth subject the Christian element to such conditions that it would be forced to Islamify, or only nominally maintain its national identity.³³⁴

As early as in 1910 radical changes took place in the central committee of the Union and Progress party, when people of extreme nationalist views became its members. For example, one of them was the founder of the Pan-Turkist ideology, Ziya Gökalp, whose political philosophy excluded the inclusion of national minorities, particularly the Armenian, in the political plans of the Young Turks. While Pan-Turkism found the assimilation and Turkification of the Kurds possible, its racist principles condemned the Armenians to annihilation. Ziya Gökalp believed it was impossible to assimilate the Armenians because they had ancient traditions of language, religion, and culture and distinctive national attributes.³³⁵

This meant that the corresponding "corrections" would be carried out in the Armenian and Kurdish policies of the Young Turk government. In this spirit the central government sent instructions to the provincial authorities of Western Armenia for immediate realization. For instance, in 1911 the müshir of the fourth military region Osman Pasha gave a provocative speech in Khasgiugh, a village in the Mush region, in which he maliciously attacked the Armenians and incited the Kurds by stating things such as the Armenians were demanding that the government expel the Kurds from Western Armenia. He did not even feel it re-

pugnant to declare that he considered the atrocities of the Kurdish feudal lords towards the Armenians to be lawful.³³⁶ Practically at the same time, one of the famous Ittihadist statesmen, Javid Bey, during his trip through Western Armenia, ostentatiously visited the executor of the Armenians, Kör Hüseyin Pasha, and expressed his respect. During this visit, he and his companions, the member of the Young Turk Salonica committee Ömer Naji Bey and the governor of Bitlis province Ismail Hakki, delivered speeches in various cities about the necessity of cooperation between nationalities, but on the other hand, they incited the Kurdish feudal lords against the Armenian population.³³⁷

The Young Turks as extreme nationalists treated the Kurdish nationalists with jealousy. They carefully observed the behavior of the Kurds in order to strangle and annihilate them at any sign of danger. For instance, in 1911, accusing the Kurds of intending to found an independent principality (beylik), the Young Turks disbanded the the Kurdish nationalists' associations and centers, shut down the newspaper *Kürt Teavün ve Terakki Gazetesi*, and arrested a number of influential leaders. Many Kurds had to flee abroad. These were the first cases to indicate that Turkish bourgeois nationalists, like the feudal landowners, were the fierce and resolute enemies of the awakening of national feelings of the non-Turkish peoples, and the national renaissance of all of the oppressed nations of the empire who were deprived of rights.

In summary, certainly Armenian-Kurdish antagonism continued during the period of Young Turk rule. For various reasons, even after the adoption of the constitutional system, the Armenians and the Kurds in the Ottoman Empire were in a fierce, hostile struggle over different issues, though it initially seemed the constitution would unite the efforts of all oppressed peoples on the path to liberty. Karo Sasuni expressed his opinion: "Under the leadership of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation [ARF] the Armenian people was satisfied with the political freedom given. The solution to the Armenian question was pursued by means of the state, in accordance with the A[rmenian] R[evolutionary] Federation program, which demanded broad autonomy for Turkish Armenia, federatively connected to Turkey."³³⁸

Undoubtedly civil liberties, the security of Armenia, and of person and property, and consequently the preservation of the

constitution were of great importance for the Western Armenians. Nevertheless, in essence all this was against the interests of the Kurdish people, or more precisely, of the Kurdish upper class, which had over the last thirty years strengthened its position and become wealthy due to the prevailing insecurity. Furthermore, Armenian political thought of that period did not consider independence as an issue, but only discussed the autonomy of Armenia within the structure of the Ottoman Empire. The whole problem was that the idea of Armenian administrative autonomy also was against Kurdish interests because first, the Kurds considered Western Armenia as a Kurdish territory, and secondly, the establishment of law and rights in that territory, as mentioned above, was inconsonant with their interests.

A vivid example of the existing situation and dominant mentality was a special clause of the decision taken at the ARF Fifth General Assembly in 1909 which stated: "The remnants of the feudal regime as well as the privileged classes which enjoyed its benefits, considering the constitutional order as a threat to their existence, await opportunities to create a reactionary movement."³³⁹ The same decision also stressed that the Muslim masses, neighbors of the Armenians, misunderstood the essential meaning of the constitutional order, regarding it only as a privilege granted to the Christians. Therefore, they observed the changes taking place with hostility.³⁴⁰

Thus, from the day of the proclamation of the constitution, the Kurds, and especially their upper class, remained reserved concerning the proclaimed freedom, and did not even want to hear any mention of the agrarian question.

Karo Sasuni gave the following persuasive analysis of the situation: "Those feudal understandings had taken root in the minds of the feudal lords over many years, even centuries, and their violation seemed impossible. This was a life-and-death matter for them. To yield to the Armenians would mean to refuse the political and economic rights of the ruling class, to become a laboring peasant and live through one's own work. This already would be a great socioeconomic revolution, which could be realized either through state compulsion or by a powerful revolt of the Armenians."³⁴¹ He continued: "This anti-constitutional orientation kept the Kurdish elements in an anti-Armenian stance, considering the

fact that the Armenians were fervent constitutionalists and simultaneously were in concurrence and collaboration with the young and ruling Turkish element."³⁴²

In this circumstance, the Armenians, being in a helpless state, clung to the "constitutional government" with the hope of overcoming the countless difficulties in front of them and fending off the Kurdish danger. Of course, the constitution would be a meaningless freedom for the Armenians, if they were not able through it to gain back their lands, possessions and livelihoods. The Kurds, on the other hand, considering the constitution temporary and unstable, relied on their weapons. They fought to uphold their absolute control over the Armenians and to continue to live under the "blessed" conditions Sultan Abdul Hamid had granted to them.

In 1911, the Young Turk regime was thrust into an internal and external political crisis. The Italian-Turkish war started in September 1911. Italy aimed to seize Turkey's last African territories, Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, and this was a new ordeal for the Ittihadist regime. The Young Turks' devastating defeat in the war placed them in a desperate situation. The situation was further complicated because Turkish armies were simultaneously fighting serious battles in Yemen and Asir against the autonomy-seeking and separatist movements of Imam Yahya, Seyyid Idris and the Zeydi sheikhs. A revolt broke out in Albania, while disturbances were taking place among the Kurdish tribes near the Turkish-Iranian frontier.

Taking advantage of all this, in July 1912 the Young Turks' political opponent, the Hürriyet ve Itilaf [Freedom and Entente] Party, was able to remove the Ittihadists from power and take control of the state. The new government declared that it would take measures to solve the land disputes between the Armenians and the Kurds, and end the lawlessness in Western Armenia. As a supplement to this announcement, in September 1912, the council of ministers of the Itilaf government decided to buy the so-called "disputed" lands and distribute them free to the landless Armenian peasantry.³⁴³ However, that decree met with the fierce resistance of the Kurdish feudal lords, who threatened to take up arms to protect their "rights." Truly, in certain places armed conflicts took place between the Kurdish groups and government troops.

The Kurdish feudal lords spread the rumor among their tribes that the new government took the side of the Armenians against the Kurds. In reality that was not true. The Itilafists simply intended to discipline the Kurds and thus stabilize the situation in Eastern Anatolia.

However, the Itilaf government eventually abandoned the course it had taken, fearing that the ashiret chiefs' protests could gradually turn into a general anti-government movement. Thus, at the end of 1912 it gave up enacting its land reform. One reason was that during the Balkan war the Itilaf government was forced to send a great number of Kurdish soldiers to the battlefield to shed their blood in the Ottoman army "for the sake of the common homeland." The weakness, irresolution and inconsistency of the Itilaf government encouraged the Kurdish tribal and ashiret chiefs to strengthen their anti-Armenian brutalities. Hovhannes Arshakuni, the Armenian patriarch of Constantinople, showered the government and minister of justice with his *takrir* [memorandum] protests, describing the violence of the Kurdish feudal lords towards the Armenians, and asked the Sublime Porte to take immediate measures for the protection of the Armenians.³⁴⁴ However, not only did these complaints give no results, but the Turkish press presented them in a distorted fashion. Therefore during an interview with the editor of the Constantinople newspaper *Osmanischer Lloyd*, the patriarch was forced to make the following declaration:

My words were given a malicious interpretation. I did not condemn the entire Kurdish people indiscriminately, but only that part of the Kurds which is known for its criminal exploits at the expense of the part of the Armenians who are peaceful and laborers—that is, the tribal chiefs, feudal lords and Kurdish bandit gangs. Who does not know that among the Kurdish people there is a class which, living by the fruit of its labor as farmers, is subject like the Armenian working people to the same sad situation, and is found under the same iron yoke of the feudal lords, beys and aghas, with this exception that the Kurdish villager only suffers economically and socially, whereas the Armenian villager suffers socially and economically, and politically? Just as we have never disguised our disgust

towards the Kurdish *mütegallibe* [oppressors] and have constantly criticized and condemned them, similarly we have never hidden our affection toward the Kurdish oppressed. To be convinced of this it is sufficient to glance through the Armenian press which has always defended the working and peaceful Kurds. Under these circumstances, how could I discriminate between the Armenians and Kurds, and revile the Kurdish nation as a whole?³⁴⁵

Andranik interpreted Armenian-Kurdish relations from practically the same point of view when he wrote: "All these tribes will join us when the sultan's brutal regime comes to an end, and very soon they will join us and protect the country from future enemies. Today we fight alone and suffer in their hands; tomorrow when the country improves as a result of our hard work and blood, they will join us and possess equal rights, as they too say."³⁴⁶

The Western Armenians were soon convinced that the Itilafists who proclaimed themselves to be supporters of decentralization for the different peoples of the empire also pursued nationalistic plans and in particular attempted by means of the Kurdish element to "cleanse the land of Armenians."³⁴⁷

Taking advantage of the Itilaf government's defeat in the Balkan war, the Ittihadists carried out a coup d'état on January 10, 1913 and reestablished their power over the empire. The military dictatorship of the Young Turk Ittihadist triumvirate of Enver, Talat and Jemal was established.

After the disastrous defeats in the Balkan wars, the dominant mentality in Turkish ruling circles was reflected by the watchword "Anatolia is in danger."³⁴⁸ Turkey was turning its gaze more decisively from the west to the east. The Balkan wars constituted a historical turning point. Its consequences transformed the initial academic movement of Pan-Turkism into a political movement and the official ideology of the Ittihadists. The spirit of fanatical nationalism, chauvinism and aggressive revanchism spread through the entire Empire. Zarevand (the pseudonym for Zaven and Vartouhie Nalbandian) gave an example: "Enormous and terrifying processions, with flags during the day and flaming torches at night, were wandering the boulevards of Constantinople with drunken cries."³⁴⁹

In the eyes of the Young Turks, the Armenian reforms were

nothing more than "one new blow prepared by Russian imperialism after the Balkan one." Consequently the issue of reforms was identified for the empire with the loss of Western Armenia; and for this reason, the Ittihadist government did all it could to make them fail.

Thus, Jemal Pasha summoned one of the statesmen of the ARF, Vardges Serenkulian, and said, "If you insist on European control, we will be forced to accept it. However, its result will be that the Muslim population of the six vilayets [the six provinces where the Armenian reforms were to take place] will revolt and three to four hundred thousand Armenians will be massacred. And it is likely," he added, "that the Russians, taking advantage of the situation, will come and invade those provinces."³⁵⁰

Talat Pasha proposed that the Armenian members of the Ottoman parliament "aid the Turks to eliminate the Armenian Question." He tried to persuade them that "it was better to settle that matter through direct negotiations between the Turks and the Armenians" and that Russians were untrustworthy because they also were in relations with the Kurds. He advised not to turn to the mediation of the European powers.³⁵¹

In general, the intervention of the powers in the Armenian Question complicated and obstructed the problem more. The activation of Germany's Middle Eastern policy, in particular, had its immediate negative impact on that question, especially because Berlin was absolutely against solving the Armenian Question with the help of Russia. German diplomacy believed that the Armenian people, whether in Turkey or in Russia, were the blind tool of Russian policy and Russian interests. The Pan-Germanists in particular elaborated the view that "Turkey would lose its economic and political vitality as soon as it was deprived of Armenia, especially if it lost it in favor of Russia."³⁵² The famous Pan-Germanist Paul Rohrbach considered it necessary to deport the Armenians from Western Armenia and resettle them in the Baghdad Railway zone, while inhabiting the emptied lands with Muslims to deprive Russia of its base of support of the Christian population in the border regions.³⁵³

Germany represented Russia to the Ottoman government as its merciless enemy which ferociously wanted to destroy Turkish rule in Asia as it did in Europe.³⁵⁴

During a meeting of the German-Asian Association, Paul Rohrbach declared that Germany must not hinder the obliteration of the Armenians by the Kurds because it was interested in pacifying Armenia, the loss of which would end Turkey's existence.³⁵⁵ The German undersecretary of state for foreign affairs, Arthur Zimmermann, found that the Armenian people was the source of Turkey's weakness.³⁵⁶ At the same time German diplomacy reminded the Sublime Porte in a provocative tone that if Russia took decisive measures to protect the Western Armenians, then Germany in turn would take measures to protect its interests in Anatolia, and would occupy the territories through which the Baghdad Railway ran.³⁵⁷

In order to make the Armenian reform issue fail, Germany opposed to the Armenian Question the Kurdish Question. German secretary of state for foreign affairs Gottlieb von Jagow declared that the Armenian reforms seemed rather a delicate question for him, and if the powers were thinking to support the Armenians, then "it is not possible to forget the interests of the Kurds too."³⁵⁸

Though England and France supported the realization of the Armenian reforms they did not evidence any consistency in this matter. England's sole concern was not to permit Russia to be established alone in Western Armenia. France found the realization of the reforms in Western Armenia to be the lesser of the evils, and that only in this way would it be possible to prevent Russia from occupying the area. France was worried not only about the Armenian Question but also about the Arab problem. "The threatening bloody blaze of the Armenian Question rises," Ludovic de Contenson wrote, "but besides the Armenian Question there exists the Syrian or more precisely the Arabian Question."³⁵⁹ French diplomacy immediately connected the question of the Armenian reforms to the Armenian-Kurdish problem. Stéphan Zarzecki, who worked in the French consular service in Western Armenia, a convinced Russophobe and at the same time a follower of the traditional Turkophile line in French diplomacy, found that if the reform plan would not quickly be realized in Western Armenia, Russia's occupation of the eastern provinces of Asia Minor, namely, Western Armenia, would unavoidably occur.³⁶⁰

The fiercest enemy of the Armenian Question was naturally the Young Turk government. The Russian ambassador in Istanbul

Mikhail Nikolaevich Girs [also, de Giers] informed his superior, the minister of foreign affairs, on October 1913: "The Young Turks generally try to bury the Armenian Question, considering it one of the most dangerous matters for Turkey's present state."³⁶¹ The method of the Ittihadists in dealing with that question was either through various procrastinations to abrogate the reforms, or bring forth the notorious view inherited from Abdul Hamid of "reforms for the entire state." The editor of the Young Turk journal *Tasfir-i Efkâr* in an article dated May 10, 1913 pretended to be naive and wrote that he could not understand why the Armenians demanded separate reforms, separate control and separate security for the eastern provinces of Anatolia because if the reforms were applied they would refer to both Eastern and Western Anatolia.³⁶² The other Turkish journals published articles in the same spirit.

The Young Turk government did not exclude that the realization of the Armenian reforms in Western Armenia could prepare realistic grounds for an Armenian-Kurdish alliance. Reflecting on the question, Sepuh Akuni, an ARF public intellectual, wrote: "In the Ittihadists' view, after the loss of Rumelia the realization of reforms in Anatolia by foreigners meant the loss also of the 'eastern provinces' because if the Armenians live in peaceful conditions, they will prosper and one day raise the flag of revolt and declare independence, perhaps with the collaboration of the Kurds. This is the nightmare of the Ittihadists."³⁶³ The Russian consul in Erzurum, Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Adamov, informed the Russian ambassador in Constantinople Girs in his October 26, 1913 reports that "the Turkish government, which for a long time has been suspicious about Armenian-Kurdish friendship and has never stopped provoking one people against the other, is making special efforts to direct the arrow of that [Kurdish] movement against the Armenians."³⁶⁴

On the instigation of the Young Turks, Abdul Ghader, who was a Kurdish deputy in the Ottoman parliament and one of the leaders of the Young Kurd movement, introduced to parliament a plan for an autonomous Kurdistan, the real goal of which was to counter the Armenian reforms.

He exhorted his fellow party members of the Association for the Rise of Kurdistan [Kürdistan Teali Jemiyeti] to leave for Western Armenia and work there against attempts to establish an

"Armenian national state," assuring them that the government would keep its promise to the Kurds to grant them autonomy.³⁶⁵ Undoubtedly Abdul Ghader was deluded in supposing that the Young Turks would grant autonomy to the Kurds. The prominent historian Nikoghayos Adonts pointed out a significant fact in this regard. He testified that in 1913, during his conversation with Petros Halachian, an Ottoman state official in Constantinople and member of the ruling Ittihad ve Terakki party, as well as Minister of Public Works in the government, Halachian, reflecting on the possibility of the Young Turks granting autonomy to the Kurds, noted: "The Turks, and especially the Young Turks, as convinced proponents of centralization and Turkism, are not particularly yielding, and are implacable towards non-Turkish Muslim peoples such as Albanians, Arabs and Kurds. Attempting to create a numerically powerful and consolidated and united Muslim nucleus in the state with a Turkish attitude and consciousness, the Young Turks hoped to convert all non-Turkish Muslims into Turks without special efforts due to the closeness of religion. Therefore any recognition of independence or autonomy of these peoples which directly contradicted the policy of Turkification of the Young Turks was consistently and unwaveringly refused by the latter. For this reason, they would rather grant autonomy to the Armenians than to the Kurds. They would never agree to separate the Kurds, though of course they tried in every way to attract and pamper them, in order to win them over."³⁶⁶

It must be mentioned that the Kurds did not have a united viewpoint concerning the Armenian reforms. Different groups, even individuals, expressed various viewpoints. Of course, the majority found that the reforms radically contradicted Kurdish interests and that as a counterbalance it was essential to form a Kurdish state in East Anatolia (that is, Western Armenia), or in the worst case, to pressure the Turkish government to refuse the realization of the reforms. However, there were also those people, although few in number, who thought the Armenian reforms were also beneficial for the Kurdish people.³⁶⁷

The representatives of the Kurdish nationalist viewpoint supposed that the realization of the Armenian reforms could become a direct threat for the Kurdish case. For example, the famous Kurdish nationalist statesman Abdurrezak in one of his public

appeals said, "When the autonomy to be given to the Armenians is ratified, then the Kurds can do nothing but to sit and cry." He continued: "If we are not able starting now to secure our rights and the success of our case, I predict that the first step in the realization of the Armenian privileges planned by Europe will be to collect our arms, [and] the obliteration of the seyyids, sheikhs, ulema, begs and aghas."³⁶⁸

Abdurrezak called on the Kurds "to arm themselves and protect the Kurdish nationality and homeland at the price of blood in order not to become rayah-slaves" to the Armenians. He urged them to unite around the Kurdistan society which he had organized in order to expel Ottoman officials from vilayets, livas, kazas and nahiyes [village groups] and appoint officials elected by the Kurds in their stead; to form a temporary government of Kurdistan; and to send a delegation to appeal to European diplomatic circles and ambassadorial conferences.³⁶⁹

Abdurrezak informed the Russian vice-consul in Van, Sergei Petrovich Olferiev, that "it is more advantageous for Russia to have Kurds as their neighbors than the questionable Armenians."³⁷⁰ In case Russia did not support his plan, he threatened to turn to another great European power and ask for its patronage as well as aid to create a counterforce to Russia's sponsorship of Western Armenia.³⁷¹

Though the Tsarist government had no confidence in Abdurrezak's plans, considering them as the result of Turkish intrigue and cunning, and Abdurrezak as a Turkish emissary, provocateur and adventurer, nevertheless there were some Tsarist diplomats and political figures who suggested relying on the Kurds instead of the Armenians in Western Armenia. The same Olferiev even found that an autonomous Kurdistan was more preferable for Russian interests than an autonomous Armenia. Shirkov, Russian vice-consul in Khoy, tried to persuade his superior that if they refused Abdurrezak's demands, there would be no guarantee that the Kurds in the not-so-distant future would not fall under the influence of Russia's rivals, Germany or England.³⁷² At that period of time the Russian government unreservedly preferred the Armenians, so it did not take this step.³⁷³

Naturally, Abdurrezak was not the only one among the Kurds who held such views. Famous ashiret chiefs such as Musa Bey of

Karchkan and the leader of the Zilan tribe Selim Pasha demanded the abolition of the Armenian reforms and the establishment of a Kurdish principality in the territory of Western Armenia. The leader of the Haydaranli tribe, Kör Hüseyin Pasha, called on the Kurds to revolt "against attempts to create an autonomous region in Kurdistan [i. e. Western Armenia] under the protection of Russia."³⁷⁴ The well known tribal chief of the Mazrik tribe Sharaf Bey threatened to carry out Armenian massacres in case "Armenian autonomy" was realized.

Kurdish historian Kemal Mazhar Ahmed [Kamal Madhar Ahmad] interpreted the issue in this way: "The Armenians' just national liberation struggle under different circumstances and at various periods of time in various ways contradicted the political programs of the Kurdish separatists." He explained the attitudes of various Kurdish classes toward the Armenian national movement by social and political reasons. In his opinion, the main reason for the opposition between the Armenians and the Kurds was territorial issues—whether this or that region or city should be considered as part of Armenian or Kurdish territory.³⁷⁵

Many Armenian statesmen were also aware of this and tried to persuade the Kurds that the Armenians did not raise the issue of dividing territories, and that the Armenian reforms could be beneficial for the Kurdish people too. For example, Poghos Nubar wrote a special piece in the London *Times* newspaper in which he noted: "These reforms will grant Christians and Muslims equal justice, peace, and security of life and property, which will allow everybody to advance and prosper." In order to refute the malicious and provocative rumors spread by the Turkish government Poghos Nubar once more clearly formulated the demands of the Armenians: "The Armenians demand neither separation, nor independence, nor political autonomy, which under the current ethnographic and geographic conditions of the Armenian provinces we consider simply a fantasy; but they demand only the realization of the reform plan promised in Article 61 of the Treaty of Berlin and formulated in the May 11, 1895 memorandum of the ambassadors of the great powers."³⁷⁶

The French press poured oil on an already burning fire, turning the Armenian and Kurdish Questions into objects of political speculation. For instance, the journal *Bulletin du comité de l'Asie*

Française stated that not only the Armenian element should be concerned about conducting reforms in Armenia. Talking about the Armenian problem and the Armenian reforms without ever mentioning the Kurds deeply wounds the national and religious self-esteem of the latter. The periodical concluded: "There is no true Armenian Question, but only the Armenian-Kurdish Question, which has matured and demands its urgent solution."³⁷⁷

Despite the Young Turks's policy of winning over the Kurdish upper class, Kurdish anti-government revolts and protests did not stop on the eve of World War I. Thus, in April and May of 1913, the Artush (Artosh) and Grav tribes had fierce armed clashes with government troops in the region of Van, Seray, and Bashkala.³⁷⁸ A more powerful anti-government revolt broke out under the leadership of Yusuf Kamil Bedirhan in the regions of Ridvan, Midyat, and Jezireh, reaching as far as the banks of the Tigris River.³⁷⁹

Though the Ottoman authorities tried to direct the Kurdish anti-government movement against the Armenians, and partially succeeded,³⁸⁰ on the whole, their policy did not produce tangible results. The revolting Kurds declared that they would not harm the Armenians and other Christian peoples because their movement was solely directed against the Turkish government.³⁸¹ The Young Turk governing circles were seriously concerned about the consequences of such movements. So Istanbul sent the famous It-tihadist activists Naji bey and Feyzi Bey³⁸² to Western Armenia and Kurdistan on a special mission. They were considered experts on the Kurdish Question and had repeatedly worked in the Kurdish regions on "special assignments" of the central committee of the Union and Progress Party. It did not take long for the result of their activities to become obvious. The authorities began to decisively crush the Kurdish movements in the places in which they were purely anti-governmental in nature. For instance, in August 1913, the Turkish army organized a punitive expedition to Jezireh against the Ilali tribe which had revolted and declared it refused to submit to the Turkish government any more. Fierce fights took place. Fifteen villages were destroyed and burnt. Then the governor of Diyarbakir, Ismail Hakki Pasha, began punitive activities against the Kurds in his province. To subdue the leader of the Raman ashiret Ömer Bey, he took hostage the latter's eleven-year-old brother.³⁸³ Troops were sent against the Yezidis of Sinjar and

they destroyed numerous villages with their artillery. Taha, the sheikh of Shamdinan, was accused of political double-dealing between Russia and Turkey, so the authorities attempted to punish him too.³⁸⁴ Kurdish and government troops clashed in bloody battles in the Bohtan region. The Kurds could not resist the regular army so they were forced to ascend the inaccessible mountains to begin partisan-style fighting. The retribution against the rebellious tribes was callous; the troops leveled the villages to the ground with cannons, conducted mass atrocities against the peaceful population, confiscated their livestock and goods, and raped the women.³⁸⁵

At the same time in order to mislead European diplomacy, the Ottoman government started persecuting a number of famous Kurdish bandit chiefs. Thus, the newly appointed governor of Van Tahsin Bey eliminated the leader of the Grav tribe Shakir Agha and his partner, the infamous robber chief Mir Mhe, who was an outright calamity for the Armenian, Kurdish and Turkish peasantry. In the summer of 1913, army and gendarmerie units wiped out the Kurdish bands active in the Erzurum and Erzinjan regions, and in September they exterminated the bands of Shakir Agha's sons Lezgi and Abubekir.³⁸⁶ However, these punitive actions were a performance, and were soon stopped,³⁸⁷ while the local authorities of the Young Turk government encouraged all the anti-Armenian actions of the tribal chiefs, begs and others. On May 13, 1913, the Russian consul of Bitlis Shirkov sent a telegram to the Russian ambassador in Istanbul informing that the Kurdish feudal lords terrorized the Armenian and Assyrian population, the condition of the Christians was unbearable, and Kabanli Mameh from Khizan, Mehmed Emin of Erun, the famous bandit chief Chatoye Bshari [Bshare Chato], and their ilk should be hanged. Peace would never return to the provinces without strict measures.³⁸⁸

Of course, while in some places the Armenians were able to successfully organize their self-defense or eliminate the more wild aghas and begs, naturally these actions could not completely prevent calamities.

On the eve of World War I, the increasing activity and organization of the Kurdish nationalist movement became noticeable. Many of its representatives were aware that Armenian-Kurdish confrontation was advantageous only for the Ottoman govern-

ment, and that the Kurdish people needed Armenian support to realize their dreams. They were also aware that the Armenians politically were fairly mature, while the Kurds had just started on their way to political development.

Seyyid Ali, one of the famous sheikhs of Khizan, shared this view. He was the grandson of Sheikh Jalaeddin, who won his "fame" through his brutalities in Western Armenia during the 1877-1878 Russo-Turkish war. Before the Young Turk revolution, Sheikh Seyyid Ali was hostile towards the Armenians and actively supported the government in crushing the Armenian national liberation and revolutionary movements. However, the Young Turk revolution in 1908 became a turning point in his political views; his feudal mentality and ideology gave way to nationalistic ideas, and he developed an anti-government attitude. In 1911, Sheikh Ali became one of the organizers of the movement "this land is our land" [*ev khulli-khulli yammaye*].³⁸⁹ Finally, he came to the conclusion that Turks were totally unfit to govern in Western Armenia and Kurdistan.

In 1913 Sheikh Seyyid Ali assigned Molla Selim, one of the influential Kurdish leaders of the Bitlis region, to leave for the monastery of St. Karapet in Mush, meet with Armenian leaders there, and propose an Armenian-Kurdish union on behalf of the sheikh. After the initial negotiations, the molla met a second time with Vardan Vartapet, Koriun and Ruben, ARF activists of that region which was historically called Taron, with a letter of recommendation from Seyyid Ali, and made the following proposal: "The country belongs to the Armenians and the Kurds, and it is they who must govern it." They made a political decision based on this principle, to declare the eastern provinces independent with Kurdish and Armenian united forces.³⁹⁰

These events coincided with the unprecedented increase in the severity of the taxation burden by the Young Turk government in Western Armenia and Kurdistan. It was especially hard for the population to pay the *aghnam* tax on livestock. The tax collection was accompanied by the atrocities and lawlessness of the gendarmerie regiments and soldiers. Consequently it stirred up great discontent among the population, which at any moment could break out into revolt. Indeed, mass disturbances started in some places. Bitlis province covered an area of 29,850 square

km. and had a population of approximately 400 thousand.³⁹¹ The province had more than three million head of smaller horned live-stock. Obviously the great increase in the aghnam was a crushing blow for the peasants of the province.

The government increased military taxes and duties too. Moreover, the governor of Bitlis strictly and threateningly demanded the immediate payment of the taxes not only for that year but for back taxes of previous years too, as well as military recruits to serve in the army.

Sheikh Seyyid Ali and his follower and partner Molla Selim decided to take advantage of the favorable situation and in spring 1914 began preparations for a revolt. In order to prevent the government from misrepresenting the movement as an anti-Armenian uprising, Molla Selim first sent a letter to the Armenian patriarchate of Constantinople assuring that the revolt would be only against the Young Turks.³⁹²

Shocked by the unexpected outburst of the insurrection, the governor of Bitlis sent a regiment of gendarmes against the "troublemakers," but it fled even before encountering the rebels. The government had to send regular troops which were also unable to suppress the movement which was gaining momentum. The rebels succeeded in occupying Bitlis³⁹³ and demanded that the Ottoman authorities leave the city. The governor of Bitlis and the other local officials fled in panic.³⁹⁴

The Austrian eyewitness Wohlfart testified that though the Turkish troops were armed with canons and machine guns, they were defeated by the poorly armed Kurds near Bitlis, and retreated in a disorderly panic to the city, finding refuge in the fortress. This demonstrated their complete inability and cowardice.³⁹⁵ The Young Turk government hastily declared the Bitlis revolt to be a reactionary anti-constitutional movement with the supposed goal of reestablishing the Shariat. In order to prove to the foreign states, the initiators of the reforms that the movement was against the government's intent to reform or against the Armenian reforms, Turkish agents, including the traitor Sheikh Rashid, the brother of Sheikh Seyyid Ali, who had slipped into the ranks of the rebels, chanted: "We do not want *giaour* reforms."³⁹⁶

The Turkish periodical *Ikdam*, flattering the European powers and intending to lead them astray, wrote bombastically: "Our

major goal is to be reformed according to Europe's fundamental demands, to regularize our affairs, and, instead of repairing our administrative mechanism as in other times, to reconstruct it."³⁹⁷

The famous Pan-Turkist Ahmed Aghayev was casting thunderbolts and flames at the heads of the Kurdish rebels, whose "unsuitable" behavior, in his opinion, had become an obstacle for the government which was carrying out a historical mission. He declared Molla Selim to be an ignorant fanatic and accused him of becoming a simple tool in others' hands. Later on, the uncompromising chauvinist and Armenophobe Pan-Turkist in order to lead Turkish and foreign public opinion astray, in concord with the It-tihadist government, represented the Bitlis revolt as a reactionary movement against the Armenian reforms and in general against any "progressive steps" of the government. He also advanced the idea that the motive of the Kurdish revolt was the fear of progress and "hatred of the reforms."³⁹⁸

Having no reliable information about the main goals and course of the Bitlis insurrection, the Armenian press confusedly expressed contradictory views about it. For instance, *Mshak* described it as an artificial obstacle placed the way of the Armenian reforms.³⁹⁹ According to this newspaper, the Kurdish movement was directed against the Armenians. However, a little later, probably after collecting trustworthy information, the same *Mshak* expressed a completely opposite view. Thus, B. Navasardian's article depicted the Kurdish movement of Bitlis as a revolt against the Young Turks, neither directed against the reforms nor aimed at causing Armenian massacres. The writer concluded that henceforth the issue of improving Armenian-Kurdish relations had to be stimulated.⁴⁰⁰

The editor of *Mshak*, Hambartsum Arakelian, who was an expert on the Kurdish Question, treated the same topic in the newspaper in his article, "The Idea of Kurdistan." He wrote that the Bitlis rebellion was political in nature, and its motive was not plunder or religious fanaticism as before, but the realization of the idea of "Kurdistan" and the revival of national feeling and ambition among the Kurdish people. In Arakelian's opinion, a group of Kurds who received a European education developed the idea of uniting the Kurdish tribes into one nation, into one political body, and establishing an autonomous Kurdistan, so the

rebellious agitations of Bitlis were the signs and the trailblazers of these ambitions.⁴⁰¹

The newspaper *Biuzandion* published in Istanbul wrote: "A number of Turkish newspapers depicted these Kurdish movements as if they were directed against the Armenian reforms, but this assumption is wrong; on the contrary, the Kurdish rebels acted very considerately toward the Armenian population and did not create significant damage to the Armenian villages they encountered... The outward goal of the movement was the demand for the Sheriat, just like the supporters of the Sheriat in Constantinople... because the ignorant Kurdish people are unable to comprehend another aim for an anti-government movement."⁴⁰²

Olferiev, the Russian vice-consul in Van and Shirkov, the Russian vice-consul in Bitlis, informed the Russian ambassador in Constantinople that the revolting Kurds were in contact with the local Armenians and were negotiating about joint action.⁴⁰³ The Ottoman authorities were aware of that too, and tried to embroil the Armenians and the Kurds in conflicts in order to obstruct the possibility of their reaching an agreement. Therefore, the commander of the Ottoman army deployed in Bitlis and its environs, Ihsan Pasha, who was assigned to suppress the revolt, took a provocative step. He suggested to the Armenian "national leaders" of Mush to obtain weapon from the government, form volunteer regiments, and fight against the rebels,⁴⁰⁴ but his intrigue ended in complete failure. Ihsan Pasha was able to distribute to the Armenians only 150 Mauser rifles.⁴⁰⁵ The Armenian leaders of the Taron region immediately sent secret couriers to Seyyid Ali informing him not to worry if the Armenians organized volunteer groups for show, as the Armenians would remain loyal to the agreement they signed and would not fight against the Kurds.⁴⁰⁶

Assembling a great number of troops around Bitlis from Mush, Diyarbakir and Van, the Turkish army started its attack. The Kurds resisted fiercely and selflessly. However, the forces were unequal in number. The court was merciless to the vanquished. In April and May of 1914, the courts-martial condemned hundreds of people to be shot or hanged. By order of Ihsan Pasha, a lot of Kurdish villages whose inhabitants had participated in the rebellions were wiped off the face of the earth.⁴⁰⁷ Among the leaders of the revolt, only Molla Selim was able to find shelter in the

Russian consulate in Bitlis. In fact, he stayed there until the outbreak of World War I. As soon as the war started, the Ottomans violated the right of diplomatic immunity, broke into the consulate, arrested Molla Selim and hanged him in the public square of Bitlis. By the verdict of the emergency court of Bitlis, Seyyid Ali, his son Sulheddin and his fourteen close companions-in-arms were hanged, while forty-five other people were sentenced to imprisonment in Trebizond and Sinop.

The Young Turk official newspaper *Tanin* wrote the following about the verdict of the Kurdish rebels: "The provocateurs and instigators of that rebellious movement, which in these delicate times could cause lamentable consequences for the state and the nation, in this way are punished."⁴⁰⁸ During his conversation with Ruben Bekgulyants, Tahsin Pasha had declared: "The Kurds were severely punished for their friendship with the neighboring state [i.e., Russia] and for their useless dreams... The Kurds are Muslims and they must remember it. As they started to forget this, they were cruelly requited."⁴⁰⁹

The interview of the reporter of the newspaper *Tanin* with the patriarch of Constantinople Zaven Ter Yeghiayan was extremely interesting. When the patriarch was asked to express his opinion as to whether the revolt of Bitlis was the result of foreign intervention, he answered in a biting tone: "It is true that incitation and instigation exist, but I cannot say whether it was internal or external."⁴¹⁰

Surely, the insurgency of Bitlis in 1914 was one of the significant episodes of anti-Turkish struggle of the Kurdish people. The fact that almost simultaneously other Kurdish anti-governmental movements were launched in Van, Diyarbakir, Erzurum and Mosul provinces provides solid evidence that the revolt of Bitlis was not isolated, local in nature, and fortuitous.⁴¹¹

The Young Turks could manage to crush the revolt easily because the movement did not succeed in spreading widely among the Kurdish masses. It was poorly organized and even had a spontaneous character. The revolt did not have clearly formulated goals, and the leaders were unable to involve the masses. The atmosphere of mistrust created over decades among the feudal leaders participating in the movement, which grew even more intense due to the provocative steps of the Ittihad, did not allow the Armenians also to participate in the anti-government movement.

After the suppression of the revolt, many Kurdish sheikhs and tribal leaders such as Senator Abdul Ghader, Sheikh Taha, the mufti of Bitlis Abdul Mejid, ex-delegate of the Ottoman parliament Fevzi Efendi, and the parliament delegate of Genj Mehmed Emin began to send telegrams to the Sublime Porte in which they did not spare any words to assure their loyalty. They wrote that this "lamentable situation" in Bitlis, supposedly caused by foreign instigation, was "a matter of general reproach for the Kurds," while conversely all the sheikhs, beks, aghas and ashirets were absolutely loyal to the caliphate.⁴¹²

Together with these telegrams from various corners of Western Armenia effusively expressing their profound submission, the government's newspapers as a group began to publish lengthy editorials in defense of "the Kurds who, true, perhaps ignorant, are the possessors of a chivalrous spirit, who are boundlessly devoted to the caliph and the Ottoman government."⁴¹³

Again using the Turkish traditional "soft pillow" approach, the newspaper *Tasfir-i Efkâr*'s editorial stated that in essence the events of Bitlis could not be considered as rebellion: "The Kurds, who are basically smart, and patriotic in principle, would not harm their homeland and they are greatly above agreeing with such inappropriate acts. They consider their connection with religion and the homeland the most important ties in their lives, and these worthy and brave compatriots are quite distant from behavior which would subject the homeland to danger or to harm Islam."⁴¹⁴

As if deliberately in spite of these words, in the late spring of 1914, an uprising of the Barzani Kurds broke out. Sheikh Barzani succeeded in raising more than 500 villages against the government. The Assyrians joined the Kurds. Bloody and unequal fights took place, and the rebels were defeated. They had to flee to Iran to escape the revenge of the Ottoman soldiers.⁴¹⁵

These Kurdish revolts, especially the one in Bitlis, shook the Young Turk government. Istanbul was sure that the war was about to burst out, and the Young Turk government intended to widely use the Kurds against Russia as cannon fodder and also as a restraining factor against the Armenians. The security of the rear became the most significant issue. Thus, the Young Turks were faced with an urgent problem, to develop without delay a

political plan about the Kurdish Question. On March 22, 1914, the central committee of the Ittihad ve Terakki party held a special meeting with the agenda devoted solely to that question. In order to tie them more strongly to the Ittihad, they decided to grant the influential tribal leaders of Kurdistan and Western Armenia subsidies, various positions, and medals of honor, and elect some of them as parliament delegates.⁴¹⁶

* * *

On the eve of World War I the Kurdish nationalists intensified their activities. In June 1913, the Khiva association began publishing the journal *Rozha Kurd* [The Kurd's Day; or The Kurd's Sun] in the Turkish and Kurdish languages on a monthly basis. Beginning with the fourth issue, it appeared under the name *Khatavi Kurd*. The journal dealt with issues concerning the Kurds, and called on them to unite to confront the calls for battle facing the Kurdish people. Considering the development of the educational and cultural level of the Kurdish people to be a significant basis for the realization of the "Kurdish national idea," the journal suggested creating a Kurdish alphabet, enlightening the Kurdish people, and connecting them with world culture.⁴¹⁷

In the second half of 1913, the organization Komala Kurdistan [Union of Kurdistan; or the Alliance of Kurdistan] increased its activity, moving from propaganda to practical work. It organized the delivery of weapons to the tribes, preparing them for "the upcoming events." The nationalists distributed a *mazbata* [report; address] among the Kurds of all of Kurdistan and Western Armenia in which they exhorted the Kurds to fight for their freedom.⁴¹⁸

The program of the Kurdish nationalists at that stage included the following demands: the administrative autonomy of Kurdistan, the decrease and regulation of taxes, formation of a regional Kurdish army, the introduction of local government, the foundation of Kurdish schools with Kurdish as the language of instruction, and all the officials and officers of Kurdistan were required to be Kurds.⁴¹⁹

Despite all this, centralized political leadership and unity on goals were missing in Kurdish society. Some of the Kurdish nationalist and influential tribal chiefs demanded an independent

Kurdish state or *beylik*, another group demanded only autonomy, while others demanded the government stop the realization of the Armenian reforms.⁴²⁰

There was also no agreement on who would lead a Kurdish beylik, if indeed that idea were to be realized. Besides, the Kurdish statesmen had different foreign policy orientations. Abdur-rezak's "political party" was considered pro-Russian, his cousin Hasan Bey's "party" was pro-English, Abdul Ghader was with the Turks, and so on.⁴²¹

CHAPTER FOUR

THE ARMENIAN AND KURDISH QUESTIONS DURING WORLD WAR I AND THE 1919 PARIS PEACE CONFERENCE

The storm of World War I obliterated the plan of implementing reforms in Western Armenia, which, thanks to Russia's obstinate and consistent efforts, on January 26 (February 8 in the Gregorian calendar), 1914, was transformed into a diplomatic and political document accepted by the great powers, as well as the Ottoman Empire. The document gave certain legal guarantees to protect the Armenians from the oppressions and lack of restraint of the Turkish authorities and the Kurds. However, the imminent war created a fine opportunity for the Young Turk government to do away with the document. It decided to enter the war in order to pursue the realization of a number of long-term plans. Its sacred desire was the practical realization of the Pan-Turkish idea and the establishment of a gigantic Turkish empire which would comprise the entire Middle East and Central Asia up to China's borders.

The Young Turks also endeavored to rip up and destroy the inequitable and humiliating capitulation treaties ratified between their predecessors, the Ottoman sultans, and the European countries. Through this they would bring European interference in Turkey's internal affairs to an end, liberate the country from its semi-independent condition, and obtain complete and final independence. They presumed that the accomplishment of this goal could inspire the Turkish youth with enthusiasm, confidence and pride, the loss of which was particularly obvious after the crushing defeat of the first Balkan war, when Ottoman national and state dignity was shaken by defeat by the Balkan peoples formerly considered *rayah*.¹

The Ottoman governing classes intended to take revenge for the territorial losses of the last few years. In 1908 Turkey de-

finitively lost Bosnia and Herzegovina, which were occupied by Austria-Hungary, and this was followed by the obliteration of the remnants of Ottoman sovereignty over Bulgaria. In 1912, during the Tripolitanian war, Italy invaded and gained control over Tripoli and Cyrenaica, the last Ottoman territories in North Africa, along with the Dodecanese islands, which possessed unequaled strategic positions in the Aegean Sea. The 1913 alliance of the Balkan states cost the Ottoman Empire its two main territories in the Balkans, Macedonia and Western Thrace. The Young Turks feared that East Anatolia (West Armenia) would be the next, over which perpetually loomed the Russian threat.

Justifying the Young Turks for dragging the country into war, Mustafa Kemal wrote: "Right at the start of World War I, and four months before we entered the war, the powers declared their intention of establishing an Armenian republic completely at the expense of the Ottoman Empire. Finally, as the secret treaties published by the Bolsheviks revealed, Constantinople had been promised to Tsarist Russia. All these facts clearly depict to what degree Turkey's participation in the war against the Entente states was inevitable."²

Independent of anything promised to the Armenians by anybody, the leaders of the Ittihad were well aware that the logical solution of the Armenian Question could be the independence of Armenia. As later events proved, they would be willing to accept the loss of the spacious and rich Arabian territories but never Armenia, because it was on the way to Turan, from which the Turkish nation dreamed of absorbing the sap of its vitality.³

Thus, this was another great motivation for the Young Turk government to get involved in the war to terminate once and for all the Armenian Question, which kept rising up before the Ottoman Empire during its political crises. No doubt, one of the most essential goals of the Armenian Genocide in 1915 organized by the Ittihadists was to prevent the possibility of the Armenian Question being raised at the tables of international diplomacy after the war, whether Turkey would come out of the war as a victor or a loser. Truly, it was hard to believe that the Young Turks had not taken into consideration the likelihood of Turkey's defeat. However, the Ittihadist leaders thought that even under those circumstances, they would still be victors since they would have

radically solves the Armenian Question, which the Young Turks considered to be a nightmare for the Ottoman Empire.

The Young Turk leaders "justified" their criminal acts under the name of national interest. Talat Pasha, for instance, said: "I have the conviction that as long as a nation does the best for its own interests, and succeeds, the world admires it and thinks it moral. I am ready to die for what I have done, and I know that I shall die for it."⁴ The wide-ranging adventurist plans of the Young Turks received complete support from Germany. In particular, in exchange for Turkey entering the war, Berlin was obliged: a) to protect Ottoman territories under Russian threat; b) to aid Turkey to abolish the capitulations; and c) to secure a correction of Turkey's eastern border, so that it might be in direct contact with Russia's Muslims.⁵

To give the war a religious nature and to raise the country's Muslim population, as well as the entire Islamic world, against the Entente, on November 11, 1914 Sheikh ul-Islam Khayri [Hayri] Efendi declared jihad or "holy war" against Russia, England and France, which, as the sheikh ul-Islam's fetva noted, "wanted to put out the lofty light of Islam."⁶ The fetva considered the powers of the Triple Entente as "unbelievers," while Germany and Austria-Hungary, on the other hand, were the protectors of Islam.

However, the call for holy war did not find as great a response as hoped for in the Ottoman Empire or in the whole Muslim world because it was considered contradictory to Islamic laws. They could not accept the fact that the sultan-caliph declared war against several Christian states while allying with another group of Christian states. Furthermore, according to the laws of Islam, holy war could be declared only when Islam was threatened or persecuted. Hence, Muslims viewed the holy war declared by the sultan and the sheikh ul-Islam as merely a step "to put the Muslim world in motion" for Germany's benefit.⁷

Immediately after the start of World War I, the Young Turk government decided to widely utilize Kurdish military manpower on battlefronts as well as to carry out domestic police functions. Entire large ashirets were obligated to join the Ottoman army to fight on various war fronts and to protect areas near the Russian frontier. Active measures were taken to improve the irregular Hamidiye regiments and increase their fighting capacity.⁸

The Young Turk authorities formed the Kurds into irregular units ready to act in the enemy rear. These groups frequently violated the Russian border to conduct raids throughout the Transcaucasus, destroy objects of military importance, and commit terrorist acts. Wandering dervishes penetrated into Atrpatakan [Iranian Azerbaijan] and Iranian Kurdistan, and called on the Kurds and Azeris to wage holy war - *jihad* - against the Russians.⁹ Istanbul hoped to acquire territories from its weak neighbor Iran as compensation for the vast areas it had lost in the west¹⁰; so it delivered abundant arms and ammunition to the Kurdish ashirets of Iranian Kurdistan which had pro-Turkish tendencies.¹¹ All these activities were fortified through Pan-Islamic propaganda. The Kurdish tribal chiefs of Iran sent a beseechful request addressed to the *mejlis-i mebusan* [Chamber of Deputies; the lower house of the Ottoman parliament] of Istanbul requesting Turkey to take them under its protection.¹² At the same time, Kurdish nationalist organizations active in Turkey had a notable influence on the Iranian Kurds and contributed to the formation of Kurdish nationalism in Iran.

In order to involve great masses of the Kurdish population in the war, the Ittihadists made lavish promises, including to satisfy their national ambitions and grant them autonomy after the triumphal end of the war,¹³ to legalize the land they had confiscated from the Armenians, and to restore their previous rights and privileges. The Young Turk propaganda machine worked feverishly to inspire the Kurds that it was their patriotic duty to fight against the internal and external enemies of Turkey. Armenia was the first on the list of the internal enemies. As an incentive, the Sublime Porte promised to exempt the Kurds from any punishment for robbing these "internal enemies" of the country.

A member of the Young Turk triumvirate, Minister of the Internal Affairs Talat Pasha, recommended that Abdul Ghader, one of the influential Kurdish leaders, leave for Kurdistan and, "performing his patriotic duty," raise the Kurds up against Russia.¹⁴

It should be noted that there were some Kurdish political leaders who looked to the powers of the Triple Entente to solve the issue of "independent Kurdistan." For example, one of them was General Sherif Pasha, who served as the Ottoman ambassador to Sweden. He established ties with the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, proposing that he and his supporters create a

Kurdish rebellion against Turkey. In exchange for this he asked for the assistance of the Entente in establishing an independent Kurdistan.¹⁵ However, Paris rejected Sherif Pasha's proposal not only because the establishment of an independent Kurdistan was not part of the plans of the French government, but also because it did not treat his proposal seriously. Sherif Pasha was not seen as capable and suitable for the accomplishment of such an immense undertaking. Besides, the French statesmen were well informed that the Kurdish upper stratum and tribal notables, as well as the great majority of the Kurdish population, linked their future with the Young Turk government.

The Kurds remained allies of the Turks throughout the entire war because of their political and socioeconomic backwardness, religious and tribal prejudices, lack of clear consciousness of national goals for the future, the machinations of the Turkish state, and political opportunism. This was equally true of the ashiret tribes and the sedentary rayah Kurds. Karo Sasuni wrote:

It is an amazing truth that even rayah Kurds played a significant role in the April crime [i.e. genocide] of 1915. The government had armed them as a temporary gendarmerie, granting them the broad freedom to massacre the Armenians and to get rich from their "abandoned property." The Kurdish rayahs, spoiled by the government's privileges, turned into a real nightmare for the Armenians. They were extremely ruthless towards the Armenians and were able to betray to the government Armenians who had found refuge with certain ashirets.¹⁶

Thus, the Young Turk government was able to accomplish its plan of the Armenian Genocide, widely using as its tools the Kurdish tribal notables, major and minor ashirets, and sedentary, nomadic and semi-nomadic Kurds. In a word, the Kurds became the Young Turk government's partners in the realization of the plan to slaughter the Armenians. They played a distinct role in suppressing the Armenians' battle for survival in Vaspurakan, Sasun, Mush, Shatak, Shapin Garahisar [Shabin Karahisar], Urfa, and Musa Dagh, thus greatly weakening Armenian self-defense efforts. The armed groups of the Kurdish ashirets "captured the Ar-

menian mountains, valleys and groves, and like hounds, made any communication impossible and any shelter unsafe. The Turkish armies, thanks to this assistance, were able to attack the Armenian self-defense positions from the front and the main directions."¹⁷

Russian Kurdologist Vasilii Nikitin explained the Kurdish military support to the Ottoman government by the latter's successful excitation of Kurdish military instincts under the cover of religious slogans.¹⁸ This is of course a correct but one-sided interpretation. There is the view that the Kurdish tribes were enthusiastic about participating in the Armenian Genocide as they considered it as a favorable opportunity for robbery, especially as it was a safe undertaking (the Armenians were unarmed). It was also without danger of punishment, since the government had declared the Christians to be the enemies of the state. Another important motivating factor was the Young Turks' promise to reward the Kurds for their services after the war.

Some researchers interpret the Kurdish behavior in connection with Russia's anti-Kurdish policy during the war. Prior to the war, as discussed above, Russia was engaged in an obvious policy to please the Kurds as part of efforts to gain the favor of peoples in the probable theater of war. However, after the outbreak of the war, after becoming persuaded that the Kurds were unreservedly on the side of the Turks, St. Petersburg changed its course 180 degrees, and showed little interest in the Kurds. It went even further, with Russian troops utterly destroying all Kurdish villages and settlements they encountered on their way regardless of whether the population was hostile.¹⁹

Yet some Kurdish groups not only refused to participate in the mass massacres of the Armenians, but also sheltered the latter. For instance, twenty thousand Armenians were able to find refuge in Dersim and were saved. About twelve thousand Armenians were hidden and defended by various ashirets of the Khuyt and Motegan region in Sasun, and in Mush. A great number of Armenians from South Kurdistan were saved from massacre.²⁰ Numerous tribal chiefs were persecuted by the Turks only because they took the Armenians under their protection and disguised them in Kurdish costume so that they would not be found.²¹ Kurdish leaders frequently warned the Armenians about the actions being prepared by the Turkish authorities against them.²² The Kurdish

historian Abdulaziz Yamulki wrote that three-quarters of the Armenian survivors in Anatolia "were rescued and hidden by the Kurds."²³ There were people among the Kurdish statesmen such as General Sherif Pasha who condemned the Ittihadists for perpetrating bloody Armenian massacres.²⁴

It is also noteworthy that Molla Said who enjoyed great religious authority in the Kurdish regions protested against the jihad or "holy war" proclaimed by the Turkish government against Christians, noting that the government was misusing Islam. He issued a fetva (a pronouncement on a legal matter by a mufti or Muslim religious authority) and insisted that the principles of Islam were incompatible with the robbery and indiscriminate murder of the Christians.²⁵ Because of his daring action, Molla Said was accused of treason and arrested.

Later, in order to deflect responsibility from the Ittihadists, Talat Pasha tried to cast the entire blame for the Armenian Genocide on the Kurds, presenting it as the outcome of racial conflict between the Armenians and the Kurds.²⁶

Generally, Armenians always viewed the Kurds as the blind tools of Turkish governing circles, and not as an independent political unit responsible for its actions. However, a thorough study of Kurdish behavior during the years of the Armenian Genocide undeniably demonstrates that the Kurds bear as much responsibility as the Turks. There is no doubt that "without the destructive participation of the Kurdish factor, existence of the Kurdish devastating participation, the Turks would not have succeeded in definitively solving the Armenian Question by force."²⁷ Karo Samsuni formulated this idea in the following way: "There is no doubt that without Kurdish support the Turks would have had immense difficulties in their undertakings against the Armenians."²⁸

As a result of the genocide the Western Armenians were obliterated or expelled from the land of their ancestors, and from then on they were no longer a significant power in the internal life of the country. It is true that Armenians abroad, the refugees from Western Armenia and volunteer regiments, remained as hostile elements for Turkey but they all now only represented for the Turks an external power against whom the Turkish army had to fight, just as it fought against the Russian army. As a result of the genocide, the Kurds became the predominant ethnic group and

the majority in the territory of Western Armenia. It seemed as if the idea of creating an autonomous Kurdistan which the Young Turks promised the Kurds was becoming a reality. However, from that same time the solution of the "Kurdish problem" became an urgent question on the agenda of the Turkish state. Referring to the Kurdish elements living in the Ottoman Empire, one of the leaders of the Unity and Progress committee wrote, "we must cleanse our country of non-Turkish elements."²⁹

Thus, the second act of the nationalistic and Pan-Turkist plan was to cleanse the eastern provinces of the empire of the dangerous and restless Kurds. The first part of the plan was strangling the Armenians with Kurdish support, and then turning to the Kurd people, which remained alone against the Ottoman government in the eastern provinces of the empire and particularly in Western Armenia. After the deportation and genocide of the Armenians, the Turks started to take measures to solve the Kurdish Question. The Young Turk government, driven by the wild passion of Pan-Turkist ideas, could not permit the Kurds to form the majority in the provinces emptied of the Armenians. However, it was a rather difficult task to solve the Kurdish Question in the same manner as the annihilation of the Armenians. First of all, this time the Turkish government did not have a reliable ally like the Kurds were during the Armenian Genocide. Besides, unlike the Armenians, the Kurds were armed to the teeth, and in order to totally uproot and eradicate them, large armies would have to be withdrawn from battle fronts to start an internal war, which was impossible and undesirable for the Young Turks. That was why they decided mainly to apply the policy of assimilation and Turkification to the Kurds, but as future events show, the annihilation of large masses of Kurds was not excluded. In 1933 the Kurdish statesman Jeladet Ali Bedirhan in a open letter to Mustafa Kemal wrote: "According to the Young Turks' plans, the Kurds are not among those to be annihilated, but among the ranks of those peoples subject to assimilation."³⁰

During the war, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs created the Directorate for the Settlement of Tribes and Refugees with a secret five point statute. Future minister and member of the Young Turk committee Shükrü Kaya Bey was appointed as its head.

According to the by-laws of this body, after the deportation of

the Armenians, the Kurds also had to be deported. They were to be scattered in the depths of Anatolia among the Turkish masses in order not to form more than five percent of the total population.³¹ The aim of the Kurdish deportation was to prevent the Kurds from joining the Russians and Armenians during the harsh conditions of the war, or the creation of a Kurdish majority in the eastern provinces as a result of the deportation and genocide of the Armenians.

According to these plans, the Kurds would also be prohibited from freely speaking their mother tongue. They would be forced to study and speak Turkish and not allowed to change their residence without special state permission.³²

Beginning in 1916, tens of thousands of Kurds were deported from Western Armenia and Kurdistan to the central and western regions of Asia Minor. One of the most important purposes of this strategy was to hinder and impair the further political coalescence and union of the Kurds. Moreover, according to a special clause of the secret statutes, these deportations, taking into consideration the previous experience, should be conducted in such a manner that as many people as possible die on the road due to sickness, starvation, and violence. In other words, the local authorities were instructed to destroy the Kurds in the same way as the Armenians. According to scholarly research, during World War I, over 700 thousand Kurds were deported, around half of whom died on the road or were slaughtered by the Turkish army and police.³³

In some regions where the Kurds were known for their "restless behavior," the Ittihadists decided not to use the strategy of deportation but instead massacred the entire Kurdish population by means of the regular army.

The Young Turks adopted the same policy of extermination in the battle field too, sending the Kurds deliberately and without mercy into the great meat grinder of the war. In that sense, the following fact is very typical: seventy thousand of the ninety thousand soldiers who participated in the battle of Sarikamish (December 4, 1914 to January 18, 1915) were killed, yet upon returning to Istanbul, Minister of War Enver Pasha, a member of the Young Turk triumvirate, declared in the session of the Ittihad's central committee, "Though we are outwardly defeated in the battle of Sarikamish, in actuality we are triumphal because we left

the dead bodies of several tens of thousands young Kurds on the roads from the forests of Sarikamish to Erzurum."³⁴

Though the Turkish government was able to largely slaughter the Kurds and to paralyze and undermine their strength, they could not solve the Kurdish Question definitively as they managed to do with the Armenian Question. Turkey's defeat in the war prevented this.

Thus, the complicity of great masses of Kurds in the Armenian Genocide conclusively divided the Armenians and Kurds into two hostile camps.

After a large portion of Western Armenia was invaded by Russian troops during the war, the Kurds were convinced that this occupation was final and Russia would never leave. The Kurds were persuaded that the Armenians would become the decisive force under this new regime, whereas they would play only a secondary role.³⁵ Their fear was reinforced by the fact that the Entente powers declared that the liberation of the oppressed nations of the Ottoman Empire, in particular the Armenians, was one of the important parts of their military and political program. The Kurds were deeply concerned over whether they were included in the list of "the oppressed nations were being liberated." Indeed, there were good reasons for this anxiety, since the Kurds had joined the Ottoman army and were enthusiastically fighting against the states of the Triple Entente. They were also in a panic because their active participation in the accomplishment of the Armenian Genocide would be taken into consideration during the signing of the post-war peace treaties.

Yet at the beginning of the war, on October 27, 1914 (November 9 according to Gregorian calendar), the British Prime Minister Herbert Henry Asquith declared: "it is the Ottoman Government—that has drawn the sword, and which, I venture to predict, will perish by the sword. It is they and not we who have rung the death-knell of Ottoman domination, not only in Europe, but in Asia. With their disappearance will disappear, as I, at least, hope and believe, the blight which for generations past has withered some of the fairest regions of the earth.... The Turkish Empire has committed suicide and dugged it's grave by own hands."³⁶ Several days before the outbreak of the war, Louis Mallet, the English ambassador in Constantinople threatened the Grand Vizier

that "should Turkey be so unwise as to provoke the Powers of the Triple Entente, it would mean the end of the Ottoman Empire."

A bit later expressing his recognition for the Armenian genocide, Asquith declared that his government "resolved that after the War there shall be an era of liberty and redemption for this ancient people."³⁷

David Lloyd George predicted that:

in this gigantic battle between right and wrong, it is meet that the Turks should march into action shoulder to shoulder with the devastators of Belgium. They have made themselves fit comrades—the ravagers of Armenia and the desolators of Flanders—the Turk of the East and the Turk of the West—both ruthless military empires with only one god, and that is violence. Their downfall will bring gladness, security and peace to a world which has for generations been oppressed and darkened by their grim presence.³⁸

On December 23, 1917 Lloyd George announced the goals of the war:

While we do not challenge the maintenance of the Turkish Empire in the homelands of the Turkish race with its capital at Constantinople, the passage between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea being internationalized and neutralized, Arabia, Armenia, Mesopotamia, Syria and Palestine are in our judgment entitled to a recognition of their separate national conditions.³⁹ ... What the exact form of that recognition in each particular case should be need not here be discussed, beyond stating that it would be impossible to restore to their former sovereignty the territories to which I have already referred.⁴⁰

A little earlier than after this announcement, during negotiations about a separate peace which were conducted by Lloyd George's secretary Philip Henry Kerr and General Ian Christian Smith with Muhtar Bey, the Ottoman leader of the Red Cross mission, the English position on the aforementioned issue was affirmed more definitely. The English intended to establish a mixed

type of administration formed of officials of autonomous governments, or local and European powers under the patronage of one of the Entente powers, as it was practiced in Egypt.⁴¹

In March, 1918 the Eastern Committee was established as part of Lloyd George's government with the objective of political and diplomatic preparation for the "Ottoman inheritance." It was under the management of cabinet member George Nathaniel Curzon, who had the responsibility of coordinating the entire British Eastern policy for the extensive territories ranging from Greece to Afghanistan.⁴²

The English diplomat Mark Sykes, who was one of the signatories of the secret Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916, gave a detailed interpretation of the part of the treaty referring to the Armenians in his March 12, 1916 letter to George Buchanan, the British ambassador in Petrograd: "It seems to me that we must accept that as a result of the extreme brutality and mercilessness of the latest Armenian massacres, we cannot tolerate the possibility of leaving true Armenia under Ottoman rule."

Russia too put the Armenian card into play, as always, as one of its levers of influence in its Middle East policy. On April 25, 1915, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Sazonov assigned Count Aleksandr Petrovich Izvolskii and Count Aleksandr Konstantinovich Benckendorff, the Russian ambassadors of Paris and London, respectively, to arrange negotiations with the French and English authorities about making a joint statement concerning the Armenian massacres, though the Sazonov was skeptical about the effectiveness of such collective proposal in stopping the Turkish plan. Moreover, he was even confident that the joint declaration would have no effect on the Turkish government, especially when the authors of the statement were already at war with the Ottoman Empire. Sazonov was surely only interested in the political benefit of Russia. He found that "in any case, it would raise the spirit of the Armenians who could be useful in the war against Turkey."⁴³

The British Foreign Office, together with the diplomacy of its ally France, tried not to fall behind the Russians in their use of the Armenian card, promising to solve the Armenian Question as compensation for all the Armenians' sacrifices and support after the victorious war.

Lloyd George sincerely confessed the inner motivations of such promises and declarations. He wrote about "the public declarations we made of the Allied intention to liberate and confer self-government on nationalities inside the enemy Empires, - Turkey, Germany, and Austria. These announcements were intended to have a propagandist effect. ...But we were also aware that the proclamation of liberation as part of our war aims would help to disintegrate the solidarity of the enemy countries, and so it did." Furthermore, during one of the sessions of the Supreme Council (the heads of government and foreign ministers of the five major victors of the war; also called the Council of Ten) on military matters, Lloyd George announced that "nobody was bound by a speech."⁴⁴

On January 10, 1917 the states of the Triple Entente issued a joint statement which raised the question of partitioning the Ottoman Empire, calling for "the expulsion of the Ottoman Empire from Europe, decidedly [foreign] to western civilization." The major goal of the war was declared to be the "enfranchisement of populations subject to the bloody tyranny of the Turks."⁴⁵

The government officials and political figures of the United States equally shared that view. In April 1917, immediately after entering the war, President Woodrow Wilson announced that "the Turks, those slaughterers of Christians, must be banished from Europe."⁴⁶ By then Woodrow Wilson had already made a draft of the plan for the solution of the "Turkish Question." Colonel Edward Mandell House, the close assistant of the president, advising him on foreign matters, stated: "In the president's opinion Turkey must be abolished as a state, and the Peace Conference must be the arbiter of its destiny. I added that Turkey must not be divided among the participants of the war but its various parts should be turned into autonomous units according to racial characteristics. He agreed with this and expressed his view in the following way: 'The Turkish portions of the present Turkish Empire must be assured a secure sovereignty and the other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule must be assured full opportunity of successful development.'⁴⁷

On January 8, 1918 Woodrow Wilson addressed the joint session of Conference with his speech "on universal conciliation" which is known as the Fourteen Points, or the peace plan of Wil-

son. Point 12 referred to Turkey: "The Turkish portions of the present Ottoman Empire should be secured a secure sovereignty, but the other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmo- lested opportunity of autonomous development, and the Darda- nelles should be permanently opened as a free passage to the ships and commerce of all nations under international guarantees."⁴⁸

The most typical among Woodrow Wilson's numerous pro- nouncements on Armenia and the Armenian question was the following, made on April 22, 1918: "You may be sure I share the deep interest in the fate of Armenia."⁴⁹ On November 16, 1918 Wilson wrote to Secretary of State Robert Lansing; "My interest in the Armenians is profound and my sympathy for them really poignant..."⁵⁰ On another occasion he said: "At their hearts this great and generous people [Americans] have made the cause of Armenia their own."⁵¹

The White House instructed the State Department to develop appropriate recommendations about the territory of the Middle East, noting the special interests of Washington. It was empha- sized in these instructions that the United States was especially interested in the Armenian Question out of all the issues con- nected with the Ottoman Empire. One of the instructions recom- mended "establishing strong allied control over the essential part of Turkey - Armenia."⁵²

To accomplish its instructions, America's foreign policy bu- reaucracy prepared a memorandum dated December 22, 1917 which formulated the Armenian policy of Washington in the following manner: the United States "must secure a guaranteed autonomy for the Armenians, not only as a matter of justice and humanity but in order to re-establish the one people of Asia Mi- nor capable of preventing economic monopolization of Turkey by the Germans."⁵³

It was not hard to notice that the Armenians were entrusted with an extremely important mission in the extensive American social and political programs for the Near East. The representa- tives of the American political opposition, the Republican Party, shared the Democrats' opinion on this issue. For instance, on Sep- tember 6, 1918, former US president Theodore Roosevelt declared in his speech: "The Austrian and Turkish Empires must be broken up, all the subject people liberated, and the Turks driven from Eu-

rope...Armenia must be freed..."⁵⁴ On December 10, 1918 Sena- tor Henry Cabot Lodge, a prominent opposition statesman of the Republican Party, presented an extensive report and a resolution for examination by the Senate concerning the establishment of an independent Armenia under American mandate. In February 1919, another influential senator, William H. King, presented a new resolution supporting Lodge's initiative.⁵⁵

Senator Lodge's action led to a mass movement of unimagi- nable proportions, indicating that the idea of Armenian indepen- dence was not only a political issue for the American government, but was of interest to the masses, and to all social classes. Armeno- phile mass meetings were organized in various European capitals and many famous political and public figures participated. They turned to Woodrow Wilson with the request to protect the Arme- nian case at the forthcoming Paris Peace Conference.

In this period, the British Foreign Office issued a proposal that the American control over Armenia would be the best option to guarantee safety and security for all Armenians.⁵⁶

Secretary of State Robert Lansing most probably prepared a report at the president's request, and in 1918 provided Woodrow Wilson with a detailed memorandum about the future status of Armenia. According to his proposal, Armenia had to be under the protection of a specific country, or several countries combined. Lansing did not mention exactly which country or countries he had in mind.⁵⁷

Liberating Armenia from the Ottoman yoke once and for all was given special importance by the great powers of the West. As for the Kurds, they were included among the "subject nations" of the empire that were likely to obtain liberty and conditions for self-government and development; however, no precise details were given about the Kurdish case.

In the plans of the Triple Entente states the Ottoman Empire was divided into five basic ethnic zones: Turkish Anatolia, Arme- nia, Syria, Kurdistan and Arabia. Thus, the Armenian Question had become a topic of international diplomacy since the 1878 Ber- lin Conference, the problem about the Kurds was being discussed in the political plans of the powers for the first time, with the for- mulation of a separate Kurdish state or, in the extreme case, the possibility to have an independent political life. This surely testi-

fied to the fact that the Kurdish Question was gradually coming to the surface of political life and attracting the attention of the great powers.

It is not a secret that up until the beginning of the twentieth century national sentiment was lacking among the Kurds. The dominant tribal mode of organization hindered the birth and the development of national ideas, pan-Kurdish patriotism, and the process of formation of the Kurdish nation.⁵⁸ Therefore the Kurds were distinguished by racial but not national consciousness. Their nationalism as an ideological and political movement was formed in the early twentieth century, and its final goal was the demand for the creation of a Kurdish national state in the territory of "ethnic Kurdistan."

* * *

In 1914, the Russian army and its Armenian volunteers entered Basen and Alashkert. In 1915 they advanced in the direction of Bulanik and Manazkert, occupied Van and reached Shatak. In the spring of 1916, they invaded Erzurum, Khnus, Mush and Bitlis. In early 1916, the Russian troops reached the Armenian Taurus. The majority of the Kurds of the occupied areas retreated with the Ottoman troops to regions deep in Turkey. Naturally, the Russian troops and the Armenian volunteers considered the Kurds as a hostile force allied with the Turks, or, more precisely, the latter were a constituent part of the Ottoman army. Karo Sasuni described the situation as follows: "The people of Turkish Armenia gradually returned to its homeland together with the lines of occupation, this time armed and vengeful. The Turkish population and the Turkish troops were gone; the remaining Kurds were subject to the revenge of the Russian Cossacks and Armenians. The war between nations had lost the nature of a regular war and turned into a dreadful scene of reciprocal annihilation of peoples..."⁵⁹

When the Russian troops retreated from Van, the Kurds of Aladagh and Abagha descended from the mountains and killed about four thousand Armenians. However, they did not remain unpunished. In autumn 1915, the regiments of the Russian Cossacks and the Armenian volunteers together started punitive

actions. About forty villages were destroyed, and fighters were slaughtered. The survivors took refuge in the Zilan gorge. A number of Kurds from Van, Bitlis, Mush and Khnus, who had fled and had found refuge in the mountains to avoid the Russian and Armenian volunteer troops, starved to death.⁶⁰

The Kurds gradually came to understand that the Turkish massacres had not ended the existence of the Armenians existence once and for all, that the great powers of the West along with Russia planned to establish an independent Armenia, and that the Armenian provinces belonged to the Armenians. As a natural consequence, they began to seek ways out of the situation. In 1916, while the Russian troops were rapidly advancing through the territory of Western Armenia, a number of Kurdish leaders made contact with the Russian commanders and hastened to raise the question of Kurdish national self-determination in order to try to prevent the creation of an independent Armenia under the protection of Russia. One of the influential Kurdish leaders, Yusuf Kamil Bedirhan presented the Kurdish "national claims" to Grand Prince Nikolai Nikolaevich, the viceroy of the Caucasus and the commander of the Caucasian front. Though the Russian authorities did not mind playing the Kurdish card, they did not find it politically expedient at the time.⁶¹

World War I created some new political realities for the countries of the Near East which were embodied in the secret Sykes-Picot agreement in 1916. Even in 1915, the powers of the Triple Entente had already started formulating their post-war policy for the Near East.⁶² They intended to liquidate the Ottoman Empire and divide its territory among them. The first stage of the plan was the treaty among England, France and Russia about the Straits, according to which after the triumphal war Russia would receive Constantinople, Bosphorus and the Dardanelles. The second part was activated in November 1915 with the negotiations between England and France about the partition of Asiatic Turkey. The negotiations lasted until February 1916, and primarily concerned the Arabic territories of Turkey. They also touched upon the issues of Western Armenia and Kurdistan. In February 1916, the English diplomat Mark Sykes and the Frenchman Georges-Picot developed a preliminary version of the partition of Asiatic Turkey, and in March of the same year they left for Petro-

grad to get the approval of the Russian authorities. The document envisaged the division of Armenia and Kurdistan among the powers of the Triple Entente. France would gain control over North Kurdistan (Iraqi Kurdistan), a number of regions in south-eastern Anatolia, and the regions bordering Iran to the south of Lake Urmia, while England would gain a part of Iraqi Kurdistan and the Kirkuk region.⁶³

In his memorandum bearing the date of March 4/17, 1916, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia Sergei Sazonov informed the French and English ambassadors in Petrograd that his "government had no interest in the area stretching south of the line Amadia-Ibn Omar-Diyarbakir and Salmas-Marash-Adana, and without any difficulty would accept any agreement reached between France and England about this."⁶⁴ In other words, Russia did not pursue any special interests in the Arabian countries and had no objection about the part of the Sykes-Picot draft mainly pertaining to them. Instead, in the same memorandum Sazonov insisted on gaining the right to join the passages of Bitlis and the region of Lake Urmia to the Russian zone, while in exchange promising to yield the territory of Armenia Minor falling between Sivas, Kharberd and Caesaria to France.⁶⁵

Sazonov wrote to the French ambassador in Petrograd in his memorandum dated April 13/26, 1916 that Russia was ready to confirm the treaty only under the following conditions: 1. Russia would annex the regions of Erzurum, Trebizond, Van and Bitlis up to the Black Sea coast, the exact point of which to the west of Trebizond had yet to be decided. 2. Russia would annex the part of Kurdistan between the line south of Van and Bitlis to Mush, Sgherd and the Tigris River, Jezireh-Ibn Omar, and the mountain line over Amadia and Mergever, in exchange for which France would obtain the territories within the regions of Ala Dagh, Ak Dagh, Ildiz Dagh, Zara, Akn and Kharberd.⁶⁶

Reflecting on the territories Russia would gain, Sazonov noted in his message to Tsar Nicolas II: "the fact that the territory stretches towards the main mountain ranges seems rather natural from a descriptive viewpoint; however it can hardly be acceptable for political and strategic considerations. It must be considered undesirable that a great European power, albeit at the present our ally [i.e. France], appears along a great length of our Asian border

at places where there is a [ethnically] mixed and restless population, and it penetrates at an angle the Russian-Iranian borderline. It would be most profitable for us to share our southern border with any Muslim Asian state, whether an Arabian caliphate or a Turkish sultanate."⁶⁷

The reasoning of the leader of Russian foreign affairs testified to the fact that the securing of Armenian interests was only of secondary or tertiary significance for the Russian government.

France revised its claims with the mediation of England, adapting them to a certain degree to the Russian proposals, and gave its final consent to the agreement on March 31, 1916.⁶⁸ Sykes accordingly presented Sazonov a new map with the changes that Russia had desired. The Russian government gave its final consent to the partition of Asiatic Turkey on September 1, 1916.

Three or four months after adhering to the Sykes-Picot agreement, Sazonov elucidated Russian policy on the Armenian Question from a basically new position. He noted that the occupation of nearly all of historical Armenia Major by Russian troops and its inclusion within the borders of the Russian Empire would raise a logical problem about the future structure of the territory, so Sazonov tried to draft general guiding principles, basing their development on the fact that the outline of temporary by-laws for "the governance of the Turkish regions occupied by the right of war" was already worked out and soon would be put into practice.

Changing the Russian initial policy on the Armenian Question 180 degrees, Sazonov wrote: "As for granting the Armenians broad autonomy, it should not be forgotten that in Armenia Major, which now has been conquered by Russia, the Armenians have never formed the majority. Moreover, the punitive measures taken against them by the Turks during the war, which according to the testimony of Armenians themselves reached terrible dimensions, have changed that ratio further to the detriment of the Armenians, who after the war barely make up one-quarter of the population. Under these conditions, Armenian self-rule would be an unjust subjugation of the majority to the minority." Sazonov thought it was possible to only preserve for the Armenians the independence of schools and churches, the right to use their native language, and urban and village autonomy.⁶⁹

The viceroy of the Caucasus, Grand Prince Nikolai Nikolae-

vich, expressed his agreement with Sazonov's views, and added that the issue of Armenian autonomy "for now could not be revived" because "it could only complicate in a dangerous fashion the solution of the problems born during the war." He also reserved for the Armenians independence of schools and churches, the right to manage church wealth and properties, and the right to using their mother tongue, on condition that the Russian language would have priority on all official occasions.⁷⁰ At the best, however, the negotiations about "Armenia's autonomy" remained only "academic discussions," and "the topic of these discussions was annihilated during the 1915-1916 massacres of the Turkish Armenians."⁷¹

Remarkably, at the same period of time, the Armenian politicians, independent of the Entente powers, made proposals for the solution of the Kurdish Question. For instance, in June, 1915, Poghos Nubar Pasha presented a memorandum to the French minister of foreign affairs, Théophile Delcassé, which included a proposal about the Kurdish Question along with his plan about the Armenian Question. In particular, he suggested constituting an autonomous Kurdistan under the protection of either one or all of the Triple Entente powers (England, France, and Russia). After the Russian ambassador in France, Izvolskii, rejected this plan, it ceased being a topic of discussion.⁷²

During investigations of the issue of Western Armenia, Mark Sykes believed that the establishment of an Armenian state under Turkish sovereignty would not be a viable plan because, according to Sykes, "the Armenians are unable to compete with the Kurds."⁷³

In general British diplomacy was perplexed as to where to situate a future Armenia or Kurdistan in connection with the Armenian and Kurdish Questions. The officials of the Foreign Office sought solutions using the approach of Lord Beaconsfield's era, considering Western Armenia as Kurdistan or simply transferring the solution of the Kurdish Question to the territory of Armenia.

On December 18, 1917, English diplomat and Secretary to the Prime Minister Philip Henry Kerr (later Marquess of Lothian) reported on a proposal from the pro-Entente section of the Committee of Union and Progress. Accurately assessing Turkish rule over the Armenians as an "utter failure," and stating that a pro-Entente section of the Committee of Union and Progress "was ashamed of

its record of assassination and atrocity," he noted that this group was "willing to leave the fate of Armenia to be entirely decided by the European Powers." This CUP faction proposed grouping the Kurds in the Armenian provinces in a separate province.⁷⁴ That is to say, it advanced the idea of forming a Kurdish state on the territory of Armenia. However unbelievable a suggestion it initially appeared, it eventually became more and more real, and, as seen below, eventually became a cornerstone of the Treaty of Sèvres.

What prompted the Foreign Office to consider constituting Kurdistan on the territory of Armenia? First, according to the Sykes-Picot Agreement, England would annex Mesopotamia, including its northern part, so-called Iraqi Kurdistan; consequently, London would never agree to create Kurdistan in this area. Lloyd George noted in this regard that the Turks were more intent to regain Eastern Anatolia than Mesopotamia or Palestine. In order to remove the Turks from those areas the British prime minister was ready to abandon Armenia, which he called "the land soaked with the blood of innocents."⁷⁵

But what was most important is that the Armenian provinces or Western Armenia had never been included in the areas of British territorial interests. The British lands of desire were to the south of Anatolia, in Mesopotamia, and the basin of the Persian Gulf. The researcher from the Armenian diaspora Akaby Nassibian wrote: "Britain was not willing to spend money or men in a far-away and inaccessible country which was of no interest to her either on strategic or on economic grounds; a desolate country which was only rich in misery. Thus at the end of the war the Armenian question looked like an addition liability for British statesmen."⁷⁶

Of course, this did not mean that British diplomacy ignored or rejected the opportunity to play the Armenian card. Lloyd George, Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour, his deputy Robert Cecil and others assured the Armenians that "the liberation of Armenia is one of the war-aims of the Allies." Lloyd George even entreated the Armenians in Manchester not to lose hope but to believe that "those responsible for the government of this country are not unmindful of their responsibilities to your martyred race."⁷⁷

Throughout the entire war, British diplomacy was also giving false hopes to the Kurdish nationalists and influential leaders with lofty promises about liberating the Kurdish people from

the Turkish yoke once the war was over and giving their political ambitions complete satisfaction—meaning the creation of an independent or autonomous Kurdistan. Simultaneously the English prompted the Kurds to take the initiative in relaxing the tension in Kurdish-Armenian relations, as they considered the Armenian and the Kurdish Questions interdependent. Their view was that the Armenian Question was also the Kurdish Question.

General Sherif Pasha was the first Kurd to respond. He suggested organizing a committee in London with the mission of reconciliation of the Kurds and Armenians. In the memorandum he presented to the English he included an outline of the status of post-war Kurdistan and suggested forming an Anglo-Kurdish committee to determine the territory of Kurdistan.

However, London did not express any interest in Sherif Pasha's suggestions. The problem was not only that the British intelligence service characterized him as a person cut off from his local Kurdish roots, enjoying little influence among the Kurdish ruling circles, and possessing no authority.⁷⁸ An excellent expert on the Middle East, the competent and prudent British secret service agent Gertrude Bell, for instance, had informed London that "the fact that he had been long out of touch with his countrymen gave his opinion too academic a flavour."⁷⁹ The English also had serious concerns that Sherif Pasha was playing a double game and had close connections with the Turks. Under these circumstances, the negotiations between the English and Sherif Pasha had the nature of a preliminary exploration.⁸⁰

As the facts confirm, the British were skeptical about the Kurdish nationalists' real power to impact the situation in the areas of East Anatolia and Western Armenia inhabited by Kurds. Cautious, suspicious and prudent, British diplomats did not recommend their government to place its hopes on these people, whose political behavior was unpredictable, and who themselves were ungovernable. In their opinion, political connections too close to such people could bear undesirable consequences in what was, even without this factor, one of the most restless regions of the Middle East.

However, all those were problems of secondary importance. What was more important was that British diplomacy had no concrete plan to create an independent or autonomous Kurdish. The

British official view about the "Kurdish problem" occasionally appeared in the press. It was basically that the Kurdish Question was an insoluble problem because of the tribal system dominant among the Kurds, the complete division of the tribes which have opposing interests, the absence of national sentiment and the idea of a united homeland, which does not lead them to unite around a common political idea or plan, and the existence of strong hatred, opposition and hostility between the tribes.⁸¹ The British concluded from all this that real bases for the political union of the Kurds and the creation of their statehood did not exist. As a rule, the English diplomats evaluated the political future of the Kurds as extremely uncertain. But they had an assignment from the Foreign Office to "calm down" the Kurds and feed them with hopes for the sake of British vital interests.

England's allies, the French, had similar views on the Kurdish Question, though their skills of trickery were inferior to those of the British. Since the beginning of the war, Sherif Pasha had carried on negotiations with the French in Marseilles. The subject was the same—that is, the creation of the Kurdish state. Not only did the French avoid giving any concrete answer, but they also did not treat seriously the suggestions of the Kurdish leader about political collaboration.⁸² France's unwillingness to establish a Kurdish state was completely obvious. The negotiations about this matter with Sherif Pasha had the character of political exploration, and Paris was only interested in finding out the real intentions and political plans of the Kurdish side.

As a result of the February 1917 bourgeois democratic revolution, the Russian monarchy was overthrown. A new international political situation was created in the Near East and the Middle East. The new Provisional Government established by the liberal delegates of the State Duma paid special attention to the issues of Western Armenia and the Armenian Question in general, while working out their foreign policy plans. In particular, the declaration of the Provisional Government about the possibility of achieving peace based on the principle of national self-determination revived the Armenian Question once again.⁸³

The Provisional Government also issued a proclamation about achieving peace between the warring sides on the basis of national self-determination. It stated that the new regime in Rus-

sia considered one of its next tasks to be the liberation of the non-Turkish population in Asiatic Turkey.⁸⁴ It added that free Russia had no intent to establish its rule over other nations and seize their national possessions and territories.

On April 6, 1917 the Provisional Government adopted a resolution about the administration of the Armenian territories occupied by the rules of war. Through another resolution, a few days later, on April 25/May 6, the territory of Turkish Armenia occupied by Russian troops was removed from the control of the governmental authorities of the Caucasus and the military authorities of the Caucasian front until the final decision of the peace treaty concerning its status and was directly subject to the authority of the Provisional Government. The resolution also mentioned that the Russian troops would not be removed from the conquered territories.⁸⁵

On April 26/May 7, 1917 the resolution "About Turkish Armenia" signed by the chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Provisional Government, Prince Georgii Evgenevich Lvov, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs Pavel Nikolaevich Miliukov was issued.⁸⁶

The Provisional Government created the position of general commissar or commissioner of Turkish Armenia, to which Colonel Petr Ivanovich Averyanov, a military officer well aware of the problems of Western Armenia and Turkish Kurdistan, was appointed. The public activist and political figure Dr. Hakop Zavriev (Zavrian) was appointed his assistant for civil issues.

The Provisional Government divided the Western Armenian areas conquered by the rules of warfare into separate sections to make their management militarily and administratively more effective. On May 15, 1917, the government provided the necessary instructions to the general commissar of Western Armenia: "Without predetermining the future geographical and political borders of Armenia, among all the regions conquered by the rules of warfare of Asian Turkey, the government considers the provinces of Van, Bitlis and Erzurum pure Armenian areas."⁸⁷ Karo Sasuni wrote the following about this: "Turkish Armenia, though considered as a whole, one territory, by the Russian government, was internally divided into four provinces. Alashkert valley and Khnus district, which were parts of Erzurum province, were

joined to the latter province. The governors of these provinces were appointed by Colonel Averyanov and Zavriev. It is noteworthy to mention that they, I do not know for what reason, gave the preference to Russians."⁸⁸

The declarations of the Provisional Government of Russia about the Armenian Question and Western Armenia were accepted and interpreted as the revival of the Armenian Question.⁸⁹ Armenian public opinion welcomed this. However, there were a number of Armenian public figures, especially among the Western Armenians, who were extremely concerned about the future of the Armenians. During Poghos Nubar's meeting with Arnold Joseph Toynbee, one of the secret service officials of the British Foreign Office, the influence of the Russian Revolution on the Armenian Question was discussed, and Nubar expressed his "sole fear" that the Russian rejection of territorial annexations would lead "to the abandonment of Armenia" to Turkey."⁹⁰

The February Revolution gave the opportunity to 150,000 Armenian refugees to return to their homes in Western Armenia and begin rebuilding their destroyed country. With the permission of the Russian authorities, the Western Armenians took over the administrative mechanisms of the country. The Armenians got the right to freely move around. All this created a great deal of anxiety and panic among the Kurds because they interpreted, not unfoundedly, the return of the Armenians to the region and their Russian sponsorship as a revitalization of the Armenian Question.

That supposition almost turned into a conviction after the publication of the resolution "About Turkish Armenia" noted above. The Kurds were also aware of the plans about the Armenian Question being worked out by the powers of the Triple Entente, and regardless of the difficulty of its realization, the possibility of establishment of Armenian statehood on the territory of Western Armenia could not be excluded. Kurdish political thinkers considered this absolutely realistic because the Armenians had a long time ago already become a subject of international relations for the great powers. It made the Kurds believe that the Armenians had a greater chance of establishing their statehood in the same region where they themselves longed to establish their statehood. It meant the long-cherished dreams of the Kurdish nationalists about obtaining autonomy or independence vanished.

These harsh considerations increased the Kurds' feelings of alarm and apprehension, especially because they were now left alone in Western Armenia to face Armenian vengeance and the Russian troops against whom they had fought throughout the war. The Bolshevik revolution of October 1917 caused abrupt changes in the course of political events not only in Europe, but in the Middle East. After the revolution, wrote British author Christopher Walker, "The Turks understood well the dilemma of Transcaucasia, and saw their chance: to detach Transcaucasia finally from Russia (by, say, forcing diplomatic recognition on it); once it was independent, to betray the promises made to coax it to independence; then to overrun it – and pursue eastwards, to Turkestan, Bokhara and beyond. The pan-Turkist dream might come true..."⁹¹

Soon the situation changed drastically. The Russian soldiers, tired of war and inspired by the slogan of "peace without annexations and indemnities" deserted their positions and fled en masse. The Russian Caucasian front dissolved. Avetis Aharonian wrote, "The Russians not only abandoned us and left, leaving as our inheritance a war which was greater than our forces alone could endure, but...they ceded some parts of our country, Kars, Ardahan and Kaghzvan, to the Turks."⁹² This had tragic consequences for the Armenian people. Those Armenian refugees who had returned to Western Armenia after the Russian February Revolution were massacred.

The insistence of Bolshevik Russia that pulling Russian troops out of the region was necessary to give the Armenians the chance to act according to their free will was a cynical deception under the conditions existing at that time because the Russian troops were the only guarantee of security for the Armenians who had survived massacres. Moreover, the Bolshevik government was informed that once the Russian troops were drawn out of Armenia, further massacres of Armenians were unavoidable. The Russian representative, Extraordinary Commissar for Caucasian Affairs Stepan Shahumian wrote on December 20, 1917 in the newspaper *Kavkazskii rabochii*, "the unexpected retreat of the Russian troops has created extremely difficult conditions in Turkish Armenia. We are already aware of the hundreds of thousands of Armenian victims who fell during that damned war... Well aware of the situation in that unfortunate country, we can be certain that a new

hell is being created there; new rivers of blood of the innocent, peaceful population are flowing... Our revolutionary army cannot remain indifferent to the fate of that population."

In December, 1917, the decree issued by the Sovnarkom (Council of People's Commissars) "About Turkish Armenia," according to Armenian-American historian Richard Hovannisian, "invoked the principle of self-determination as a cover under which to recall the armies. ... Actually, this plan was rendered unrealistic, if not cynical, by the Russian abandonment of Turkish Armenia."⁹³

The retreat of the Russian troops from Western Armenia created a huge vacuum in the political balance of the region. British diplomat Harold Nicholson opined in this respect, "the Russian Revolution has changed the whole aspect of the Armenian question."⁹⁴ The Ottoman state, which was on the verge of military, political and economic collapse, absolutely unexpectedly received a new chance for its Pan-Turkish ambitions and immediately made an attempt to use the chance and change the situation for its benefit. On December 5/18, 1917 the Armistice of Erzincan was signed. The eleventh point of the armistice noted: "The Turkish command is obligated to employ all efforts to force the Kurds to carry out the conditions of the armistice. In case of hostile actions the Russian forces at the border will treat the Kurds like bandits who do not recognize authority."⁹⁵

Taking advantage of the unexpected withdrawal of the Russian army, the Turkish army violated the Armistice of Erzincan and launched a military campaign towards the east under the pretext of "protection of the Muslim population." In January, 1918, the Armenian armed forces and the populace from Van to Erzincan were left alone against the invading Turkish army and had a vast front to defend.

Under the pressure of the Turkish troops, the Armenians gradually retreated from Western Armenia to the Caucasus. The Turks again occupied all of Western Armenia.

It seemed like the version of the solution to the sickly Armenian Question developed and partially applied by the Young Turk Armenophobe chauvinists was imminent for Turkey. The collapse of the Caucasian front endangered not only all the Western Armenian territories occupied by Russian troops during the war, but also all of Eastern Armenia. The Armenian people were once again facing a deadly threat, uncertain of the future.

The majority of the Kurds, who were impatiently waiting for the retreat of the Russian troops, again turned hostile to the Armenians and willingly joined the Turkish troops heading toward the Caucasus. The Kurds united with the Ittihadists and once more became the victim of Turkish conspiratorial trickery. They credulously assumed that latching onto the Turkish political wagon could solve their problems of independence and statehood. Turkish political circles and the military command of the front carried on an extensive anti-Armenian propaganda campaign to further excite those illusions, accusing the Armenians of false crimes, and permitting brutalities against the Muslim population, especially the Kurds. In other words they consistently prepared the basis for the division of the Armenian and Kurdish peoples and the exclusion of their possible political cooperation on the territory of Western Armenia. The militant organization Union of Islam [Ittihad-i Islam], established in 1916 by dark Ittihadist forces, enthusiastically participated in that thankless task. It pushed the Turks and Kurds into bloody clashes with the Armenians, and placed all the responsibility upon the latter.⁹⁶ On the initiative of Mehmed Vehip Pasha, the commander of the third Turkish army which was advancing to the Caucasus, irregular Kurdish detachments were organized which were intended to conduct raids behind the lines, accomplish terrorist attacks against the Armenians, and organize killings and massacres.⁹⁷ Those Kurdish detachments in some places such as Erzinjan, Bayburt, Dersim, Kars, and Ardahan took bloody vengeance on the peaceful Armenian population, and carried out daring attacks on the retreating Russians.⁹⁸ Turkish agents in Iran with the assistance of some Kurdish tribes organized terrorist actions, persecutions and massacres against the Armenian and Assyrian Christian population. For instance, in March 1918 the leader of the Kurdish Shekkak tribe Ismail Agha Simko killed the Assyrian patriarch of Hakkari Benyamin Mar Shimun, and the local Armenian and Assyrian population of some areas was slaughtered.⁹⁹ An influential Kurdish leader, Seyyid Taha of Iranian Kurdistan, acted similarly.

On February 12, 1918, Ottoman troops crossed the borderline drawn by the Erzinjan armistice and moved towards the east, in the direction of Erzurum and Aleksandrapol (Alexandropol). The five Turkish divisions were provided with numerous irregu-

lar Kurdish detachments which were summoned mainly to act against the Armenian military units protecting the front.

The Ittihadist military and political leadership encouraged the Kurds to believe that after the complete elimination of the Armenian population from Western Armenia, real preconditions for materialization of the Kurdish desire for autonomy would be created.¹⁰⁰

At the end of March and the beginning of April 1918, the Ottoman troops reached the Russian-Turkish border of 1914; a month after that, they reached the border of 1877. Moving further into the region of the Transcaucasus and in particular Eastern Armenia, they prepared to move on to their sacred goal, Baku. On April 13, 1918, US Secretary of State Robert Lansing wrote to the US ambassador in London, Walter Hines Page, about those events: "The Turks advancing.... Armenians in real danger of extermination... Armenian villages and detachments constantly attacked by armed Moslems....Turks may occupy as much Caucasian territory as they please....massacre of Armenians within two months practically certain." Lansing considered that immediate English assistance was the only way out of the situation; otherwise the Armenians may face "total extermination." Lansing concluded, "As United States is not in war with Turkey this government is prevented from taking action in the above premises."¹⁰¹

On July 14, the Ottoman troops conquered Tabriz, and in August 1918 they completed the militarization of the northern parts of Atrpatakan [Iranian Azerbaijan] and Iranian Kurdistan (south of Lake Urmia). Only armed detachments of Armenians and Assyrians resisted the Turkish invaders on that front.¹⁰² The Armenian military units had to wage a fierce combat of life and death against the "Turkish-Tatar-Kurdish coalition"¹⁰³ and protect a vast front.

In these circumstances, logic points to reaching a common understanding with the Kurds by explaining to them that their participation in the Ottoman expedition was inconsonant with their national interest. First of all, they would meet the resolute resistance of the Russian troops and the Armenian volunteers, and in addition, they would heighten the hostile relations between the Armenian and the Kurdish peoples. Testifying about these events as a contemporary and participant, Karo Sasuni wrote: "Contrary to Armenian just vengeance, some Armenian national bodies still tried to find a language of cooperation with the Kurds and with-

stand the Turkish danger. Some attempts at solidarity and collaboration were carried out but were unsuccessful because the Kurds were reserved, and were not yet conscious of the fate in store for the Kurds outside of the occupied areas."¹⁰⁴

In January 1918, the Armenians made an attempt to establish collaboration and friendship with the Kurds in Khnus. Karo Sasuni took the initiative to invite some prominent Kurdish representatives and notables of Bingöl, Shushar, Tekman and Vardo to a "Kurdish-Armenian conference." The complete history of the two nations and the Turkish massacres of both the Kurdish and Armenian people were explained to the Kurds, and the necessity of Kurdish-Armenian friendship and solidarity was stressed. While there was a positive response among some of the Kurdish delegates, the majority, regardless of their outward approval, could not hide their inner hostility against the Armenians.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, when late in February 1918, the Ottoman army increased its pressure on the Armenian military units, most of the Kurds forgot the vows of loyalty and friendship they had made at the conference, and again aided the Turks. Karo Sasuni wrote: "The Armenians and the Kurds again remained divided during these days of attacks and unfortunate events, as if by the curse of fate, so that the Turkish government at the verge of destruction could freely subdue them, taking advantage of their antagonism and mutual weakening."¹⁰⁶

The Kurdish support of the Ittihadists greatly aided the latter in conquering Atrpatakan [Iranian Azerbaijan] and Iranian Kurdistan. In February 1918 the fourth army corps of the Ottoman army moved towards the Iranian border and, together with the sixth army's military units, which were stationed in Mesopotamia, in April entered Atrpatakan and Iranian Kurdistan, from which Russian troops had recently withdrawn. Ismail Agha Simko and Seyyid Taha, Kurdish leaders of the Avdo branch of the Shekkak tribe who had recently fought the Turks, and had forcefully attacked the Armenian and Assyrian military groups, now joined the Turks.¹⁰⁷ The Kurds of Sauj Bulagh (Mahabad) and the surrounding regions followed their example. Their behavior in Iran created an alarming situation for the English because the latter did not have their own troops in Atrpatakan and Iranian Kurdistan. Hence they had to rely chiefly on Armenian and Assyrian military units to accomplish their military policies.

This was why the British intelligence service started an active work among the Kurdish nationalists exiled to Europe and the Near East such as Bedirhan Beg, Süreya Bedirhan, Abdurez-zak Bey, and Yusuf Kamil, and tried to persuade them about the necessity of collaboration with the Armenians for the sake of the interests of the allies. It promised that after the war the Kurds would be liberated from the Turkish yoke.¹⁰⁸ Of course the English fortified their persuasion with large bribes or lavish promises appealing to their self-esteem. Responding to the British proposals, some tribes got in contact with the British and proposed various preconditions. Thus, the Mukri Kurds of the Sauj Bulagh area started to negotiate with the British consul of Kermanshah, assuring him that they were ready to accept the British proposals. Simultaneously the negotiators secretly declared to him that the Kurds could help in "the solution of the difficult Armenian Question" on condition that the British would give their consent to the creation of "independent Kurdistan" under British patronage.¹⁰⁹ That was surely a completely new formulation on the part of the Kurds, and judging from further developments, the English were interested in it.

In June 1918, broader negotiations between the British army officer and colonial administrator Percy Cox and Sherif Pasha started in Geneva. The subject matter of the negotiations was the question of autonomy for so-called Iraqi Kurdistan with the center of Mosul, which, according to General Cox, had to be under British protection. Moreover, Sherif Pasha advised proclaiming this autonomy before the opening of the Paris Peace Conference in order to place the powers in front of a *fait accompli*.¹¹⁰ Armenian-Kurdish relations were also discussed. Sherif Pasha suggested organizing a standing committee in London to solve current and future conflicts between the two peoples. However his entire portfolio suggestions remained unrealizable and ignored by the English because, first of all, Mesopotamia with the area of Mosul with abundant oil reserves, had already become a part of the British zone of influence through the secret Sykes-Picot agreement in 1916. In addition, the British had absolutely no intention of granting self-rule to the Kurds.

In 1918, during the negotiations for the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, Turkey strengthened its pressure on the Caucasian mili-

tary front to make the Russians be more compromising. Its goal was to increase its borders beyond those of 1878.¹¹¹

Izzet Pasha complained to the Russian delegation that supposedly the Armenians were carrying out the most brutal violent acts against Muslims in the areas occupied by the Russians, and the organization of Armenian and Georgian military forces did not allow the Ottoman army to protect the Muslim population. He expressed the hope in the name of his government that the Russian authorities would take immediate measures to protect the Muslim population from Armenian and Georgian attacks, and against the future organization by the latter of armed gangs, as well as to disarm and dissolve the existing gangs. In addition, Talat Pasha was protesting that the place of the withdrawing Russian army was taken by "Armenian and Georgian armed bandits" who carried out "the most awful abuses and terror."¹¹²

Responding to the Ottoman accusations, the leader of the Russian delegation, Leon Trotsky, declared, "Each of us knows Turkish history well enough to have the right to assert that the Kurds are armed, that the Ottoman government has never taken the responsibility to disarm them, and the Kurds have not always used their weapons for well-being."¹¹³

Member of the Turkish delegation Hakki Pasha objected that "the Kurds' fault is less than that of the other side." Grand Vizier Talat added that "the Ottoman government did not arm the Kurds, and if there are armed Kurds in the areas occupied by the Russians, the Russians should be good enough to disarm both the Armenians and the Kurds."¹¹⁴

According to Article 4 of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, ratified on March 3, 1918, Russia was obligated to "have the provinces of Eastern Anatolia promptly evacuated and returned to Turkey." In this way the Bolshevik government recognized the right of Ottoman sovereignty over all of Western Armenia. Furthermore, the Sovnarkom took upon itself the obligation of dispersing the Armenian armed groups which were in active in Russia and in the occupied Turkish provinces.

Trotsky called the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk "a calamity for the Armenian people."¹¹⁵ Yulii Martov assessed it as a "deal" in which Russia surrendered to Turkey provinces which did not belong to it. The petition of the Armenians in Petrograd against the treaty

stated, "The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk is a death sentence for the Armenians... the part of the Brest-Litovsk treaty concerning Armenia is a flagrant violation of justice and the rights of Armenia."¹¹⁶ Reflecting on the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, Winston Churchill wrote that it "was the signal for a general Turkish advance eastward."¹¹⁷

On the insistence of the Turks, a clause was added to the Brest-Litovsk Treaty which granted Muslim Russian subjects the right to immigrate to Turkey. Naturally, that clause was directed against the Armenians. Adonts wrote that the Ottoman politicians wanted to take advantage of the confusion caused by the war to realize their monstrous plan: "Turkey wanted to settle the Armenian provinces, which now were devoid of inhabitants, with Muslims, and in this way after the war place before Europe the evidence of the transformation of Christian Armenia into a Muslim country."¹¹⁸

By this time, the Russian army had ceased to exist as an organized military force. The Turks did not limit their plans of conquest only to the Transcaucasus, but fostered long term plans about conquering the entire Caucasus, the Caspian regions inhabited by Turks and Muslims, Atrpatakan, Central Asia and Povolzhie (the Volga region). This military expedition was conducted under the banners of Pan-Turkism and Pan-Islamism.

The newspaper *Asparez* evaluated the situation for the Armenians in this way: "The neglected state of the Caucasian battlefront, the possibility of a Turkish counterattack, the Kurds' constant plunder and killings, the hasty arming of the local Tatars, and the Georgians' two-faced policy opens new doors of danger for the Armenians. We are alone with our misery in our impotence, surrounded by rival peoples who do not like us, and who will not lose any opportunity to strike us."¹¹⁹

On May 28, 1918, Armenian statehood was established under the conditions of an increasing Turkish threat and political uncertainty. The declaration of Armenian independence became a new source of anguish for the Kurds. Though the small Armenian Republic "was balled up in its tight skin... the Kurds, on the other hand, began to think that as long as there existed an independent Armenia, large or small, this child could grow tomorrow."¹²⁰ In addition, the Kurds were fully aware that in the separate negotiations Great Britain was conducting with Turkish statesmen, it

was raising the issue of the establishment of autonomous governments in Armenia, Syria, Mesopotamia and Arabia (the Arabian peninsula), while completely ignoring the Kurdish Question.¹²¹

When on July 4, 1918 the Republic of Armenia and the Ottoman Empire were signing the Batum Treaty of "Conciliation and Friendship," the whole of Western Armenia was reconquered by Turkish troops, and Eastern Armenia was pressed into an area of eleven thousand square kilometers. It seemed the time had come for the Young Turks to realize their promise to the Kurds about granting them autonomy. Instead, the Ittihadist statesmen inspired the Kurdish leaders with hopes about discussing that question at the forthcoming peace conference in Paris.

As for the Kurdish policy of the newly established Republic of Armenia, not only was it not worked out, but it was completely outside the field of vision of the leadership of the republic. Karo Sasuni wrote: "The Republic of Armenia did not have the time to think about Armenian-Kurdish relations. The Armenian Question had received universal recognition. The issue of a greater Armenia was considered solved. The promises of the powers of the world were numerous, and Armenian credulity [led to] considering relations between us and our small neighbors as insignificant."¹²² Similarly, the Kurds made no effort towards improving relations with Armenia as Sasuni noted: "The Kurds (neighboring Armenia and some inside its borders) never thought about conciliation and collaboration."¹²³

The main reason for this situation was surely that Armenian and Kurdish interests at that historical period of time were completely opposed. The most vital issue in the foreign policy of the Republic of Armenia was the reestablishment of Armenian statehood in Western Armenia, or if possible, the union of the eastern and western parts of Armenia, realizing the ideal of "united and independent Armenia." This was absolutely rejected by the Kurds and brought forth their resolute resistance, including through armed actions. This was completely understandable because the Kurds were dreaming about establishing "independent Kurdistan" practically in the same territory. These conditions made the development of a close relationship between the "small neighbors" totally senseless.

Sasuni wrote:

Since autumn 1919 the Armenians had been concerned about the problem of reconquering Turkish Armenia, and it must be said that the hostile Kurdish masses were the greatest obstacle. The Republic of Armenia was conscious about the immensity of Turkish power. It saw that it was gradually reorganizing, so if the Armenian Question was not solved in the conferences it would be necessary to settle the problem by means of the sword at our borders.¹²⁴

In autumn 1918, Turkish militarism was already on its deathbed. On October 30, 1918, an armistice treaty was signed on the British battleship *Agamemnon* in the port of Mudros. The Young Turk government was forced to accept its defeat in the war. The armistice meant the capitulation of the Ottoman Empire to the Entente powers. Twelve days later, on November 11, Germany also capitulated. In order to avoid any responsibility, the leaders of the Young Turk government, Talat, Enver, Jemal, Topal Ismail Pasha, Dr. Nazim, Azmi and other Ittihadist organizers of the Armenian massacres escaped abroad. Sultan Mehmed (Muhammed) VI Vahideddin had ordered newly appointed Grand Vizier Izzet Pasha to expel the Ittihadists from the government and arrest them.¹²⁵ Nevertheless, Ahmed Izzet Pasha delivered the sultan a note under the pressure of the Ittihadists stating that the sultan's order contradicted the constitution and that the sultan, ignoring the articles of the Constitution, intended "to move towards monarchy." Thus the government could not satisfy the demand of the emperor.¹²⁶ The sultan then assigned the Ottoman ambassador in London Senator Tevfik Pasha the obligation of forming a new government.

The Ittihad ve Terakki party immediately changed its name. Under the new name Renewal Party [*Tejeddüt Firkasi*] it again held the majority in parliament and forced the government to resign. This time Damad Ferid Pasha was appointed the grand vizier in March 1919. The question of the partition of the Ottoman Empire was on the agenda. The Entente powers could now give satisfaction to the Armenian demands for justice and compensation.¹²⁷ Nonetheless, soon the Western Armenian enthusiasm was changed into bitter disappointment because the Mudros Armistice, for which all Armenians were impatiently waiting, passed over the Armenian Question in silence. According to a contem-

porary Western publication, "the weakness of the armistice lay in that it did not bring home to the Turks in Anatolia the completeness of the defeat they had sustained and that no adequate provision was made for the security of the Armenians."¹²⁸ Turkey, having been crushed and defeated on other fronts, remained the true master of the six Armenian provinces. The desired liberation of the lands of Western Armenia did not occur. The armistice treaty did not bring about the real disarmament of the Turkish troops in Western Armenia, and the Turks had the possibility to rearm. As a result the Milli (nationalist) movement, namely, the Kemalists, started to develop in the Armenian provinces. The armistice was, according to Akaby Nassibian, truly "the first blow to Armenian aspirations."¹²⁹ Mark Sykes rightly noted in his telegram to Lord Robert Cecil that from the Armenian viewpoint, the conditions of the Mudros Armistice were equivalent to treachery.

Many Armenian researchers explained this situation as a result of the indifference of the victorious countries concerning the Armenian Question. This bitter truth is only a partial explanation. It must be accepted that geographical and military considerations caused difficulties during the armistice for the productive safeguarding of Armenia's status. The British had decisively defeated the Turks in Palestine and Mesopotamia while Entente troops had never stepped foot in the Armenian provinces. In addition, the Turks took advantage of the fact that the Russian troops had deserted the front en masse. It is not a secret that even after signing the armistice there existed substantial accumulations of Turkish troops in the remote parts of East Anatolia, and the huge numbers of weapons and ammunition not surrendered to the allies were later used by the Kemalists. So even after the signing of the armistice, a great danger threatened the Western Armenians. British Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour did not exclude that after the armistice the Turks could "do something foolish" in Armenia or in the Caucasus. He only hoped that the Turks would not be so foolish as to do such a thing.¹³⁰

At Mudros Grand Vizier Izzet Pasha proposed establishing a federation of Turkey and the Caucasian peoples under the protection of the Allies, though in reality Turkey would have the status of the "elder brother" in this federation. In fact this was a farsighted and well planned project to annex Caucasus through diplomacy.

The Mudros Armistice definitely enhanced British authority in Eastern Anatolia because the British filled the vacuum created after the Russian troops withdrew. Article 7 of the armistice gave the Allies the right to militarily occupy any strategic points in Turkey "in the event of any situation arising which threatens the security of the Allies." Article 24 stated: "In case of disorder in the six Armenian vilayets [provinces], the Allies reserve to themselves the right to occupy any part of them."¹³¹ This article permitted the intervention of the Allies in Armenia only in case there was a danger of new massacres, as if the slaying of one and half million Armenians was not a sufficient motive.

The Mudros Armistice was like a cold shower for the Kurds. They tied their fate to Turkey and throughout the war spilled plentiful blood on the field of battle for it, but now Turkey was routed. All the promises of the Young Turk government about independent or autonomous Kurdistan had vanished. From Dersim to Bingöl, from Sasun to Shatak in Van, the region was under the control of Russia or Armenia. The issue of granting Armenia independence had become the topic of international diplomacy. Moreover, the Kurds supposed the solution of the Armenian Question was a matter of days, whereas their national dream was being ignored and scorned. They also believed that the English were taking sides in their relations with the Kurds and Armenians by ignoring Kurdish interests. Finally, the Kurdish upper stratum of society assessed the Mudros Armistice as an international legal document for the benefit of the Armenians.

The Kurdish frustration was deliberately exacerbated by the Committee of Union and Progress, whose members continued to work actively secretly both in the capital and the provinces. With the consent of the new government of Istanbul, the Committee stimulated the Kurds' activity in the six Armenian provinces, particularly in Van, in order to prevent the return of Armenian refugees from Persia and the Caucasus. Simultaneously, the Ittihadists formed *chetes*, or gangs, in different parts of Asia Minor in order to act against the surviving Armenian population, and furnished the local Muslim population with arms for the same purpose.¹³² The Pan-Turkist Ittihadists, who were unbridled imperialists and fanatic chauvinists, categorically refused the Kurds' nationalist claims and resolutely prohibited them from

becoming a majority in the provinces emptied of the Armenians, which could become a serious basis for future demands of Kurdish independence or autonomy. At the same time they made the political ambitions and religious feelings of the Kurdish people objects of their political intrigues. They threatened the Kurds that the Entente planned to create a large Armenia on the territory of Western Armenia, and after its realization, the Kurds would have no choice but to become refugees or turn into the slave rayahs and victims of Armenian vengeance. Moreover, this anti-Armenian propaganda was completely infused with the ideas of Islamic solidarity and Pan-Islamism.

The incitatory activity of the Young Turk agents had an effective impact on the Kurdish masses and statesmen. It naturally encouraged anti-Armenian attitudes,¹³³ which were further reinforced by the unfounded reports from Europe stating that the Armenian Question would soon receive its solution. Mevlanzade Rifat wrote:

At this time, non-Islamic elements of Turkey who were in Europe and America, especially the Armenians, had begun intensive propaganda aiming at the partition of the lands remaining to the Ottoman Empire at the end of the war. The Greeks around Trebizond and environs with the idea of the independence of Pontus, the Greeks' famous Prime Minister Venizelos with the occupation of Izmir and its surroundings in the name of the Entente, and the Armenians who were not satisfied with the territory left to the Yerevan Republic with the creation of a greater Armenia comprising the eastern provinces, Kurdistan and Cilicia, pestered the Peace Conference meeting in Paris.¹³⁴

The Kurds were anxious about the fact that they had become an instrument for the Turkish slaughterers during the Armenian Genocide. They supposed that sooner or later not only the Armenians but also the Christian powers would call them and the Turks to account for their bloody deeds. Therefore they also assumed that all bridges had been burnt between the Armenians and the Kurds, and a chance for mutual understanding did not exist. All this naturally turned the Kurds hostage to the Turkish policy.

Of course, the Kurdish nationalists who led the Kurdish national movement were extremely concerned by this. However this segment of the Kurdish people was not free from ethnic prejudice and Muslim chauvinism. The leaders of the Kurdish nationalist organizations, under the dictates of the moment, began to place their hopes for the realization of their national ambitions on the powers of the Triple Entente, though rejecting the idea of actively fighting against the Turks. Kurdish organizations such as *Istikhlas-i Kürdistan* (or *İstihlas-i Kürdistan*) [Liberation of Kurdistan], *Kürt İstiklal Cemiyeti* [Society of Kurdish Independence], *Kürdistan Teali Cemiyeti* [Association for the Revival (or Rise) of Kurdistan], and *Teshkilat-i İjtimai Cemiyeti* [Social Organization Society] which had established relations with the English and French powers and tried to obtain their support for establishing an independent Kurdish state were very active.¹³⁵ The Association for the Revival of Kurdistan also collaborated with the *Hürriyet ve İtilaf* [Freedom and Entente] party opposing the *İttihadists*, and signed an agreement with it about granting autonomy to Kurdistan within the Ottoman Empire.¹³⁶

The Young Kurds had great hopes for the Fourteen Points of Woodrow Wilson. They developed the idea of Kurdish independence in various works such as booklets, propaganda materials, literary anthologies, and the newspapers *Zhiyan* ("Life") and *Kürdistan* published in the Kurdish language at various locations.

After the signing of the Mudros Armistice, the organization *Istiklal-i Kürdistan* [Independence of Kurdistan] founded by the influential Kurdish statesman Süreyya Bedirhan in Cairo, became active in the struggle for the independence of Kurdistan.

All these organizations and individual statesmen had no united view about a future Kurdistan. What is more, they held diametrically opposite positions about the problem. Some found that Kurdistan must be completely independent. Others defended the idea of a Kurdistan with internal autonomy under Turkish protection. A different group of Kurdish statesmen preferred independence under Iranian protection. Finally, a great number of nationalist statesmen demanded an independent Kurdistan under British protection.¹³⁷

In October 1918, the British army under the commander of General William Marshall started the invasion of Mosul, which

was still under Turkish control at that time, and by November 10 the entire province of Mosul was conquered by the British.¹³⁸ The Turks were extremely upset about the loss of the Mosul region, rich in oil deposits.

To provoke the large local Kurdish population against the English, the Turks started fiery anti-English propaganda, also liberally mentioning the "Armenian threat." Simultaneously, Ottoman agents spread rumors that the Assyrians, who not long before were pushed out of those areas because of military actions, were returning to Mosul armed with English weapons to wage a war of vengeance on the Kurds.¹³⁹ To aggravate tensions further, the Ottomans distributed leaflets announcing as an absolute truth that an independent Armenian state was soon to be established with English support which would include true Kurdish lands.¹⁴⁰ The exacerbation of anti-Armenian passions was useful also for Kurdish tribal and religious leaders, so they enthusiastically joined in the dissemination of the propaganda.

The Kurdish upper class concluded that the stirring up of the Armenian Question by the powers of the Triple Entente and the United States was indisputable proof of the fact that the Christian powers were plotting treachery against the Kurdish Muslims with their "Armenian agents." Using that fictitious premise, the Ittihadists and Turkish nationalists craftily started terrorizing the Muslim masses, especially the Kurds, with the specter of the Christian Armenians,¹⁴¹ while attempting to win over the real military and political force of the region, the Kurdish leaders and their armed groups, who the Turks thought could counterbalance the British policy. This anti-British propaganda was secretly supported even by the Itilafist government of Istanbul, which had an Anglophile reputation. The Turkish and Kurdish propaganda war attained such dangerous dimensions, especially in the north of Mesopotamia and Mosul province that on May 12, 1919, the British government officially declared that the areas primarily populated by the Kurds would be free from "Armenian domination."¹⁴² However the Kurds were not satisfied with those announcements and demanded real guarantees.

So in May 1919, during negotiations with the British in Baghdad, Seyyid Taha declared that he was ready to collaborate with them on condition that they satisfied his demands, including that

the return of the Christian peoples (meaning Armenians and Assyrians/Nestorians) to the provinces populated with Kurds must not lead to their rule over the Kurds. The English administration partially accepted this demand, as it was interested in Said Taha's support concerning the Kurdish revolt of Sulaymaniyah.

The head of the British administration in Iraq, Arnold Wilson, sent a letter to Taha. Touching upon various problems, he also promised to help reconcile the Kurds and defend Kurdish interests at the forthcoming peace conference in Paris.¹⁴³ It was completely obvious that British diplomacy had decided to apply a policy of complex manoeuvres to relations with the Armenian and Kurds, offering both parties British support with the purpose of keeping them both within the boundaries of its influence. Hence, English plans about the establishment of separate Armenian and Kurdish states started to appear though the English had no intentions of seeing those arrangements realized. Most importantly, none of those promises obligated the English in any way.

Thus, early in December 1918, the representative of the British war ministry Francis ("Frank") Richard Maunsell put forward a plan according to which the Armenian state would comprise the territory from Lake Van to the Black Sea, and the Kurdish state would include territories to the south of Lake Van.¹⁴⁴ According to another British plan, the Kurdish state would start from the line north of Jezireh-ibn-Omar, Nusaybin (the Armenian Mtsbin), Ras ul-Ayn, Birejik and then it would continue northwards via the Euphrates River, and include Kharberd, Bitlis and Van provinces. Then its border would go to the east towards the Iranian border.¹⁴⁵ In other words, the British plan suggested establishing Kurdistan mainly in the territory of Western Armenia. On June 13, 1919, the British political administration in Baghdad led by Arnold Talbot Wilson created a document which recommended a new concurrent solution to the Iraqi and Kurdish questions. It also included plans for the creation of separate Armenian and Kurdish states. For instance, Trebizond and Erzurum provinces would form an Armenian state under American protection; Diyarbakir, Kharberd, Van, and Bitlis provinces would form a Kurdish state under British protection; and Mosul, Baghdad and Basra provinces would form an Arab state also under British control. The sole alternative offered to that plan was the restoration of Turkish rule

over the six Armenian provinces under European supervision.¹⁴⁶ It was not hard to notice this that was in fact a return to the pre-war Armenian reform plans, but with a pro-Kurdish orientation. The astonishing thing was not the British Kurdophilia, but the fact that at the same period during contacts with the government of the Republic of Armenia, the British drew completely different, incomparably wider borders for Armenia.

The calculations of the British government about the Armenian and Kurdish Questions were also based upon other principles. For instance, the English intelligence agent Major Edward William Charles Noel found that from the viewpoint of British interests, it was preferable to bet on the Kurds. He believed that satisfying the Armenians' claims would lead to the rule of one Armenian over ten Kurds, meaning the domination of the minority over the majority, which would inescapably create a dangerous outcome. Thus, he concluded that the domination of one Kurd over ten Armenians was preferable from the point of view of practicality. The British secret agent saw political sense in it; a "reviving" Russia in the future would be deprived of the possibility of practicing its traditional policy of "protecting the Armenians."¹⁴⁷

The Kurdish nationalists from their beginnings until our days cherished the idea of "united independent Kurdistan,"¹⁴⁸ which meant the union of Iranian, Iraqi and so-called Turkish Kurdistan into the structure of one united Kurdish state. The defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I and the plans for its partition by the Entente persuaded the Kurdish nationalists that the realization of a united Kurdistan was impossible at the time because it contradicted the vital geographical and political interests of the Triple Entente in the Near and Middle East. The Kurdish nationalists believed that the "weakest link" that they could make use of was East Anatolia, viz., Western Armenia, which was not included in the British zone of interest, and a Kurdish state could be established there. The Kurdish nationalists connected the realization of the idea of "Independent Kurdistan" with England, and this was fundamental.

Consequently, Western Armenia became almost the unique object of the political plans of the Kurdish nationalists because it had become a deserted and unpopulated land as a result of the Armenian Genocide, whereas, they thought, it would be impos-

sible to found a Kurdish state in Anatolia proper with its dense Turkish population. The concentration of the Kurdish nationalists on Western Armenia was also connected with the higher level of political development of the Kurds in Turkey than that in Iranian and Iraqi Kurdistan. Thus, the objective preconditions for establishing statehood also were present in precisely that territory. The long-term plans of the Kurdish nationalists targeted only Western Armenia to become the center for Kurdish national development.

Early in 1919 in Istanbul the representatives of the Association for the Revival of Kurdistan, the so-called Young Kurds, demanded the proclamation of the independence of Kurdistan, without mentioning on exactly what territory they intended to establish that "United Kurdistan." They also wanted the expulsion of all foreign forces, including the Turks, from the "Kurdish provinces." The president of the association, Seyyid Abdul Ghader, strictly objected to the suggestion of the Young Kurds, testifying that the Turks agreed to establish an autonomous Kurdistan under the sultan's control (Abdul Ghader had in mind the association's agreement with the governing *Hürriyet ve Itilaf* party). Then Seyyid Abdul Ghader recommended that the young members of the association depart to the Kurdish-populated regions to carry out propaganda within the framework of their association's plan, as well as by all means to resist and counteract the establishment of Armenian statehood according to the principles of US president Woodrow Wilson.¹⁴⁹ Abdul Ghader was resolutely against the collaboration of the Armenians and the Kurds for the solution of the Armenian and Kurdish Questions. He also firmly objected to establishing a Kurdish state independent of the sultanate and the caliphate.

The Kurdish nationalists had opened Kurdish clubs in different cities of Western Armenia, which were mainly joined by the representatives of the Kurdish upper stratum, called by British secret agent Noel "corrupt and degenerate." Gertrude Bell informed her superiors that the *Ittihadists* promised autonomy to the Kurds and tried to turn the Kurdish clubs into an instrument "against British intervention and against the Armenians."¹⁵⁰

Thus, neither the Kurdish nationalists nor the Kurdish tribal chiefs still had clear ideas about the establishment of an independent Kurdish state. The raising of this issue by the great powers in

essence had the nature of a preliminary diplomatic exploration. It was not the objective of the powers of the Triple Entente to establish "Independent Kurdistan." As a result of all this, the Kurds, or at least that part of the people who dreamed about seceding from the Ottoman Empire and founding a national state, were looking forward to the forthcoming Paris Peace Conference.

* * *

On January 18, 1919, the Peace Conference opened under conditions of rivalry, clashes, contradictory plans and open struggle between the powers of the Triple Entente on one side and the countries of the Quadruple Alliance on the other. All the powers of the Entente had their clear positions about the "Turkish inheritance." A stubborn and uncompromising diplomatic fight was expected since neither side was planning to concede without a struggle its claims on territories the possession of which promised significant economic and strategic benefits.

The entire Armenian people anxiously and with great hopes awaited the opening of the Paris Conference, expecting the solution of the long suffering Armenian Question. However, the Republic of Armenia was not listed among the delegations. The leaders of the Allied Powers had decided to include only the victorious countries and the countries which had broken off their relations with the Central Powers.¹⁵¹ Expressing the position of the Allies on the Armenian Question, Woodrow Wilson declared, "on every hand among the delegates to the Peace Conference, I find the most sincere and outspoken sympathy with the Armenians," but unfortunately it was "technically very difficult to assign representatives to political units which have not yet been received into the family of nations." Then he had added that the Armenian case would be defended in such a way that it would be tantamount to having the Armenian representatives present in the hall during the sessions.¹⁵² As historian Richard Hovannisian wrote, the Armenians could not accept that view as they "failed to understand the grounds on which Czechs, Poles, and Arabs could be seated while a people that had sacrificed half its numbers was being denied a place at the Peace Conference."¹⁵³

Nonetheless, the Republic of Armenia sent a delegation un-

der the leadership of Avetis Aharonian whereas the Armenian National Delegation led by Poghos Nubar Pasha was already in Paris. The two delegations had an agreement to act jointly as "the delegation of integral Armenia" about major questions while maintaining their separate identities. Poghos Nubar would primarily represent the Western Armenians, while Avetis Aharonian would represent the Eastern Armenians and the Republic of Armenia.

The Kurds did not send a special delegation to Paris. Sherif Pasha, the Kurdish general of the Ottoman army who was inspired with the ideas of the independence of his people, would stand for the Kurdish Question there. However, he went to Paris "to represent not only a divided movement but one which still had little influence on the average Kurd."¹⁵⁴ It was very far from the truth that all the Kurds living in the Ottoman Empire wanted an independent state. In this respect, the British Foreign Office recorded that "the Kurds have little more than tribal consciousness and are without any national policy."¹⁵⁵ Lord Curzon meditated on the same matter: "It was difficult, however, to find out what the Kurds themselves desired... After enquiries in Constantinople, Bagdad, and elsewhere, he found it impossible to discover any representative Kurd... No Kurd appeared to represent anything more than his own particular clan. The Sherif-Pasha posed as a representative of the Kurds, but was not acknowledged as such."¹⁵⁶

It is worthwhile mentioning that prior to the Paris Conference the statesmen of the victorious countries had great sympathy toward the Armenian Question. As historian Richard Hovannisian wrote, "Armenophiles on every continent, both in and out of government, were clamoring for a swift application of justice. None were more vocal than the Americans."¹⁵⁷ US president Woodrow Wilson was without a doubt in the front ranks of this movement. The famous twelfth of his Fourteen Points announced on January 8, 1918 equally referred to Armenia and Kurdistan. It stated that the non-Turkish provinces of the Ottoman Empire "should be assured a secure sovereignty, but the other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development."¹⁵⁸ In March 1918 in response to the joint appeal of Americans to accept the mandate for Armenia, Woodrow Wil-

son answered without hesitation, "The United States will agree to accept the Armenian mandate." At a later date, on April 22, 1918, touching upon the issue again, the president repeated his announcement and added that "You may be sure I share the deep interest in the fate of Armenia."¹⁵⁹

The American Committee for the Independence of Armenia (ACIA), established in 1918 and led by the former US ambassador in Germany, James Watson Gerard, also worked in favor of the Armenians. In December 1918, one of its members, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge proposed a Senatorial resolution defending the establishment of an independent Armenian Republic comprising Russian Armenia, six provinces of Turkish Armenia, and even a part of northern Persia.¹⁶⁰ President Wilson did not conceal his sympathies toward almost all of the points of the committee's plan, and without vacillation approved the idea of Armenian independence. Senator William H. King summarized the flood of Armenophile sentiments:

Armenia must be freed from Turkish rule and receive the sympathetic support and protection of the Allied Powers until she has clothed herself with the habiliments of national authority and sovereign power. The Armenian people must be given their own lands, devastated and depopulated though they may be. Material as well as sympathetic aid must be extended in order that they may establish a strong virile and liberal republic.¹⁶¹

As long ago as January 22, 1917, President Woodrow Wilson declared in Congress that he spoke "for the silent mass of mankind everywhere" and he was the only leader of the world's states who expressed the hopes of all peoples.¹⁶² In another instance he declared:

It is to America that the whole world turns to-day, not only with its wrongs, but with its hopes and grievances. The hungry expect us to feed them, the roofless look to us for shelter, the sick of heart and body depend upon us for cure. All of these expectations have in them the quality of terrible urgency. There must be no delay.¹⁶³

On December 4, 1918 Woodrow Wilson left for Paris with the American delegation on the ship *George Washington* to participate in the Peace Conference. American propaganda powerfully created for the president the glory of a "peacemaker." The French capital received him with extraordinary pomp. The press did not spare any words of praise for the president. The organ of the socialists, the newspaper *L'Humanité*, wrote that he was the only statesman to know "how to speak... the language of good will, humanity, of international justice."¹⁶⁴

The day of Wilson's arrival was declared to be a public holiday. A twenty-minute artillery salvo honored the US president. The Murat house in Monceau park, one of the most beautiful residences in Paris, was placed at the disposal of the president and his wife. He was also presented a golden pen with which "to sign a just, humane, and stable peace."

The American President hoped to play the role of a judge of the victorious and defeated sides, turning his famous Fourteen Points into commandments able to create the kind of world and framework of relationships between peoples advantageous to American interests. He was confident that he had the opportunity to speak directly to people over the heads of their governments.¹⁶⁵

The Paris Conference had two major goals, to sign peace treaties with the defeated states, including Turkey, and determine the conditions of the post-war peace. The president of the conference was the prime minister of France, Georges Clemenceau. The real decision-making authority rested in the hands of the leaders of four states, the United States, Great Britain, France and Italy.

On January 18, 1919, the delegates of 27 states gathered at the French Foreign Ministry's riverside building on the Quai d'Orsay for the first session which was opened by French president Raymond Poincaré. The position of the United States in Paris was extremely strong.

The peace treaty was nominally based on Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points, which the two opposing groups were not averse to mention. The US president talked about the "new spirit" in politics. The major opponent of Wilson in the conference was Clemenceau. Two conflicting plans about the future structure of international relations, specifically, Wilson's Fourteen Points and Clemenceau's "Carthaginian peace" competed with each other.

A number of authors described Wilson at the peace conference as a living embodiment of "light and goodness" while Clemenceau represented the powers of "darkness and evil." To this very day, the activity of the American president in Paris has been given different and sometimes even contradictory evaluations. The American John Maynard Keynes, for instance, considered Wilson "not a hero or a prophet," and portrayed him as a "blind, deaf Don Quixote."¹⁶⁶ This is, of course, an extreme viewpoint.

According to Harold Nicolson, Clemenceau, the "Old Tiger," as he was known, was "extremely rude"¹⁶⁷ to the small nations, and looked at Wilson's mission in a completely different manner. For instance, he considered the Fourteen Points as propaganda slogans and he called the League of Nations so praised by the American president as the naïve dreams of a bookish person. Lloyd George reported that in Paris at one point Wilson was pontificating: "Why has Jesus Christ so far not succeeded in inducing the world to follow His teachings in these matters? It is because He taught the ideal without devising any practical scheme to carry out his aims." When Wilson proposed that he on the other hand had a practical scheme for this purpose, Clemenceau merely rolled his eyes in derision.

Nevertheless, the French prime minister did not share the opinion that the US president was a Don Quixote with vain illusions. He briefly and masterfully sketched Wilson's character, presenting him as a typical representative of American pragmatism. In his opinion, Wilson was not an idealist in the common sense of that word. "An idealist is a person," wrote Clemenceau, "who builds the social structure according to his ideals. Wilson is a practical person who first builds a good house for himself, very large and on a good foundation, and when the house is ready he attaches his 'idea' to the roof in the same way that builders attach their banners there."¹⁶⁸

The agile, flexible, and witty Lloyd George was with Clemenceau in Paris. He confessed that though they accepted Wilson's Fourteen Points as a general guide, they chose to move any way they pleased. "This declaration...was not regarded by any of the Allies as being at variance on vital matters...with their own declarations," he wrote, "although we never formally accepted them, and they constituted no part of the official policy of the Al-

liance."¹⁶⁹ In other words, we are in favor of it but we will always pursue our own interests. The English and their Entente allies acted according to this principle in Paris. It was completely obvious that when Wilson was alone with Clemenceau and Lloyd George, the former's eloquent words about lofty ideas did not impress them at all. In any case, Wilson remained unwavering until the end and did not yield.

In this environment, the American president, inexperienced in the intrigues of European diplomacy, faced big difficulties. The unstable situation of the president in Washington facilitated his opponents' work. Wilson, who was used to addressing countries and the people directly, over the heads of their ministers and governments, felt like his actions were constrained and his authority limited because of the strong hand of Henry Cabot Lodge, the Republican majority leader in the Senate and the chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee. With the help of Henry White, who was the only Republican among the US delegates to the Peace Conference, Lodge sent a confidential written note to Clemenceau and Balfour, assuring them that they could absolutely rely on the support of the majority in the Senate while bargaining with Wilson in Paris. On November 27, 1918, six weeks before his death and eight days before Wilson left for Paris, the former president and Lodge's comrade-in-arms Theodore Roosevelt announced: "Our allies and our enemies and Mr. Wilson himself should all understand that Mr. Wilson has no authority whatever to speak for the American people at this time."¹⁷⁰

The bargain in Paris was not between the victorious and the vanquished but only among the victors. Considering the serious discord among the powers of the Entente, Clemenceau was worried that the enemy would take advantage of this just as Talleyrand was able to do one hundred years ago in Vienna.

It was during the secret session of March 20, 1919 that Wilson first learned about the secret agreements concerning the partition of Turkey, particularly the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916. According to Ray Stannard Baker, Wilson later spoke "with great disgust of this Sykes-Picot treaty; said that it sounded like the name of a tea; called it a fine example of the old diplomacy."¹⁷¹ Expressing his negative attitude toward secret treaties, he announced at this session that he would never recognize territorial claims if they were not based on the agreement of the parties to be governed.

Ray Stannard Baker extensively used the president's personal archive to write his works,¹⁷² which gave him a unique and inestimable opportunity to reveal the secret mainsprings of the conference because most records of the proceedings of its major body, the so-called "Big Four," were not preserved.

Prior to the Paris Conference, the American government had drafted its core principles on the Turkish, Armenian and Kurdish issues. Thus, on September 21, 1918 US Secretary of State Robert Lansing provided President Wilson with an extensive memorandum consisting of 29 points which was supposed to serve as a guide for the American representatives while drafting territorial stipulations for the peace. Lansing proposed limiting the Ottoman Empire to the territory of Anatolia (which, he noted, needed further discussion), and turning Constantinople into a zone of international protection. The decision of its form of government would be assigned to an international committee or a government chosen by the powers to carry out the mandate over it.¹⁷³ Wilson still hesitated at this period on the question of leaving Turkey territory in Europe. This referred to whether Constantinople should remain under Turkish rule. He felt that this matter also needed special examination.

On March 20, 1918, during the preparatory period for the Paris Conference, the US State Department had drafted a document about the Armenian and Kurdish Questions, including the issues of the precise definition of the Armenian borders, the study of the regions claimed by the Kurds, the investigation of the local ethnic groups in general, and in particular, issues connected with the Kurds and the Nestorians.¹⁷⁴

Prior to the commencement of the conference, Woodrow Wilson already had come to the conclusion that the people who experienced genocide in Western Armenia were still facing the threat of a final annihilation. He felt that if Allied military forces were not sent to Armenia, the Armenians would be left "at the mercy of the Kurds."¹⁷⁵ That was why when the President arrived in Paris on December 13, 1918, Lloyd George and Arthur Balfour asked him "who was to undertake the burden of finding the two divisions, or whatever troops might be required, to prevent the Armenians from being massacred?" Wilson answered that they had to wait for the formation of the League of Nations, and if the Peace

Conference had been operational for some time, "the United States might possibly be less reluctant to consider the question of mandatory intervention."¹⁷⁶ In other words, the issue of sending troops to Western Armenia and the militarization of the region was being considered on the agenda.

The Turkish question did not become a topic of separate negotiations during the initial period of the conference. It was a kind of "petty cash" during the negotiations of other problems, particularly European issues. Though Turkey was a defeated country, it still had to be taken into consideration, especially as the Ottoman government was still capable of influencing the situation in the regions of Eastern Anatolia with Kurdish and Armenian populations.

Grand Vizier Damad Ferid Pasha and former grand vizier Ahmed Tevfik Pasha came to the capital of France to protect Ottoman interests at the Paris Conference. Mustafa Kemal wrote in this regard:

His Highness the Grand Vizier will undoubtedly do everything he possibly can to uphold Ottoman interests at the Conference. Among these national interests that are to be defended in the most energetic manner, there are two of vital importance: 1. The complete independence in every possible way of the State and the Nation; and 2. The majority in the purely national districts of the country shall not be sacrificed in favor of the minority.

It is imperatively necessary that there shall be complete agreement on these points in the minds of the delegates who are preparing to go to Paris, as well as in respect to the formal demands advanced by the national conscience. If this should not be so, the nation might find itself in a very difficult position and, judging from past experience, it might never be able to hold up its head again.¹⁷⁷

The Ottoman delegation left for Paris without any draft about the solution of the Armenian and Kurdish Questions. The Ottoman government had absolutely no plan or idea about those urgent questions because in its opinion the best alternative was to leave the situation unchanged and maintain the status quo.

On 17 June 1919, Damad Ferid Pasha received the right of

speech at the conference. He tried to use Wilson's Fourteen Points in defense of the preservation of the integrity of the Ottoman Empire. He equated the crimes of the Young Turks against the Christians especially against the Armenians with the calamities that befell "three million Muslims" during the war. However, the crafty reasoning of Ferid Pasha did not have any influence on the participants of the conference. Clemenceau mentioned that the grand vizier "did not seek in any way to excuse or attenuate these crimes of which the Turkish government." Simultaneously he resolutely refused Ferid Pasha's assertions that Turkey has always treated its subjects well, the preservation of the Ottoman Empire is a necessity for the religious equilibrium of the world, and that civilization and justice require leaving the pre-war borders of Turkey unchanged. Clemenceau said that "not a single case is found in Europe, Asia, or Africa where the establishment of Turkish domination over a country was not followed by a diminution of its material prosperity and a decline in its level of culture," and added: "the modern history of the government which occupies the throne at Constantinople cannot be a source of joy or pride."¹⁷⁸

On June 23 the Ottoman delegation provided the Allies with a memorandum which clarified the view of Istanbul about the future fate of the different parts of the Ottoman Empire. The document made no mention of Constantinople and the Straits; as for Armenia, it mentioned in a remote and obscure manner that "if the Armenian republic established at Erivan is recognised by the Powers of the Entente, the Ottoman Delegation will consent to discuss *ad referendum* the frontier line which is to separate the new republic from the Ottoman State."¹⁷⁹

During the Paris Peace Conference the Ottoman delegation made every effort to persuade the Allies to preserve its Asian territories. Damad Ferid Pasha announced that:

The ranges of the Taurus are, moreover, nothing more than a geological line of demarcation. The regions situated beyond those mountains, from the Mediterranean up to the Arabian Sea, are, although a language different from the Turkish language is spoken there, indissolubly linked with Constantinople by feelings which are deeper than the principle of nationality; on either side of the Tau-

rus the same ideals, the same thoughts, the same moral and material interests bind the inhabitants. These form a compact block and its disintegration would be detrimental to the peace and tranquillity of the East.¹⁸⁰

The memorandum of Damad Ferid Pasha and his reasoning in general were completely rejected by the conference. Woodrow Wilson, noting that the Ottomans had been listened to, made a harsh comment: "They had exhibited complete absence of common sense... They had imagined that the conference knew no history and was ready to swallow enormous falsehoods." He concluded that "it would be better to let them go."¹⁸¹

The Council of Four replied to the Ottoman delegation with a note which unambiguously stated that the Turks could not expect forgiveness from the Allies and they in general had no "capacity to rule over alien races," and "never has he shown himself able to develop in peace what he has won by war."¹⁸²

In his speech Balfour thoroughly depicted the disastrous consequences of Ottoman rule over all non-Turkish nations, and in particular, he noted, "The obvious conclusion from these facts would seem to be that, since Turkey has, without the least excuse or provocation, deliberately attacked the Entente Powers, and been defeated, she has thrown upon the victors the heavy duty of determining the destiny of the various populations in her heterogenous empire. This duty the Council of the principal Allied and Associated Powers desire to carry out as far as may be in accordance with the wishes and permanent interests of the populations themselves."¹⁸³

The Kemalists who carefully followed the proceedings of the conference were extremely dissatisfied that Damad Ferid Pasha himself brought up the following matter concerning Armenia. Mustafa Kemal, according to a condensed memorandum appended to General James Harbord's report on the American military mission to Armenia, said that the sultan's government had announced to the Paris Conference through its representative, the grand vizier that it was not against "the creation of an extensive Armenian state in eastern Anatolia." However, the published version of Kemal's epic speech before the Turkish Grand National Assembly in 1927 quotes a 1919 telegram from Kemal which merely

states that "the Grand Vizier has affirmed that he has accepted the principle of Armenian autonomy, but he has not defined what the frontiers of this Armenia will be." Kemal went on to note that "the population of the Eastern provinces, astounded at this, has felt themselves bound to demand an explanation."¹⁸⁴ In reality, Ferid Pasha had not given his approval to the establishment of an "extensive Armenia" but had only consented to the principle of Armenian autonomy.¹⁸⁵

On May 21, 1919 during a meeting of the "Big Three" (Wilson, Clemenceau and Lloyd George), the latter proposed a new way of solving the Turkish question. He expressed his complete willingness not only to confirm his previous resolution about giving the United States a "full mandate" over Constantinople, the Straits and Armenia, including Cilicia, but also additionally to give it a "provisional mandate" over Anatolia, Russian Armenia, Azerbaijan and the entire Caucasus area until the "solution of the Russian problem."¹⁸⁶ Thus, the territory of "the joint mandate" comprised the territory from the zone of Constantinople and the Straits to Baku, including all of "Turkish Armenia, Russian Armenia and Persian Armenia."

"The prospect of a mandate for Armenia and Constantinople appealed to President Wilson's idealism. There was no need for persuasion,"¹⁸⁷ wrote Lloyd George. Wilson was truly content to accept the right of the mandate over these territories; however, he cautiously added that the American people must make the final decision. The principle of the Wilsonian joint mandate "from Constantinople to the Caucasus" was based on the idea that the existence of different nations and peoples, and consequently different interests, on a vast territory required that the territory be under the protection of a powerful center, otherwise there would never be peace in that explosive region of the world. The American members of the International Commission on Mandates in Turkey, Henry King and Charles Crane, formulated this concept in the following way: "the problems of the different States in Asia Minor are too closely related to be wisely entrusted to entirely different Powers, with different ideals and methods. That situation would inevitably tend to produce friction, waste, and bad feeling..."¹⁸⁸

The Americans believed that from the economic viewpoint, Asia Minor and the Transcaucasus were an inseparable whole

which could not be divided from the viewpoint of solicitous mandates.¹⁸⁹ According to the mission report of General James Harbord, under a single mandatory power, the Armenians and the Turks "will be neighbors. Under two or more they will be rivals..."¹⁹⁰ Finally in the opinion of Harbord's military mission, the Armenian Question could be solved only on condition that all Asia Minor came under the protection of one state - in this particular case, the United States.

Only the French delegation was dissatisfied with giving the mandate over Anatolia to the Americans. Clemenceau was upset because he had given up Mosul and Palestine, could not obtain Syria by any means, and now was being deprived of Anatolia. He even dared to remark that he "considered it dangerous to introduce the United States of America into Asia Minor." Ridiculing the prolixity of Wilson and Lloyd George about the significance of the Muslim world, Clemenceau announced that if in addition to Constantinople and Armenia, America was also given Anatolia between the two aforementioned places, it would create division in the whole of the European world.¹⁹¹

The French prime minister did not lose the chance to tell Wilson with poisonous mockery, "When you cease to be President we will make you Grand Turk" [what Europeans used to call the sultan].¹⁹²

It was not a secret that Constantinople and the Straits were the chief objects English desires. Offering their mandate to the United States was part of a multi-step plan. Most probably that offer was a type of test. In case America rejected the offer, most likely the question of an English mandate would have been raised.

The most complicated question of the Paris Conference was not deciding the English or French portion of the "Ottoman inheritance," but the American part. As the United States started to express its active and enthusiastic interest in Near Eastern affairs and its pretensions to play a leading role in the solution of the "Turkish problem," France and England employed creative diplomatic maneuvers to avoid open confrontation with Washington. They viewed the American active involvement quite calmly because from the very beginning the Americans did not express any aspirations concerning the Arab territories of the Ottoman Empire. Most importantly, America did not have any soldiers in the Near East, so that it was not possible for it in practice to obtain any

territory there. In addition, at that time the political position of President Wilson in the United States started weakening seriously and his second presidential term was close to its end. In 1918, as a result of the midterm elections, the Democratic Party which Wilson was leading lost the majority of votes in both Houses of the Congress. The opposition to his foreign policy was increasing in the capitol and in the entire country, as it was gaged by public opinion and the ruling class as expensive and ineffective.

Highly experienced and informed political actors, Lloyd George and Clemenceau understood all this and did not delay in using it to their benefit. In the end, their calculations turned out to be accurate. On November 19, 1919 the American Senate refused to accept the mandate over Turkey. By early December, the American delegates practically stopped their participation in the work of the Paris Peace Conference. In fact, the abovementioned Senate vote pointed to a more significant political event, that the United States was withdrawing its participation in the "Versailles system." This also meant that the issue of the partitioning of the Ottoman Empire returned to its starting point of the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916. Once more, England and France remained the two active parties, and their negotiations occasionally took on the nature of weapons clanging against one another.

The Kurdish Question was first mentioned in the Paris conference on January 29, 1919. On that day a member of the British delegation, the South African prominent military and political figure, General Jan Christiaan Smuts, introduced a resolution he drafted to the Council of Ten which stated that throughout their entire history the Turks had governed all the peoples under their dominion extremely poorly. In the recent past they even organized terrible massacres of the Armenians and other peoples. Therefore both the "Allied and Associated Powers are agreed that Armenia, Syria, Mesopotamia, and Kurdistan, Palestine and Arabia must be completely severed from the Turkish Empire."¹⁹³ Smuts distinguished Palestine and Armenia as special types of territories, "owing chiefly to the heterogeneous character of the population and their incapacity for administrative cooperation." Therefore, the author wrote, "autonomy in any real sense would be out of the question, and the administration would have to be undertaken to a very large extent by some external power."¹⁹⁴

On January 30, 1919 the resolution was submitted to a comprehensive discussion. As David Hunter Miller, legal advisor to the American delegation at the conference, noted, the participants to the discussion, particularly Vittorio Orlando, the prime minister of Italy, declared that the mention of Armenia and Kurdistan could create great difficulties.¹⁹⁵ Interestingly, the initial resolution did not include the term Kurdistan. Lloyd George added the word later, apologizing about having forgotten a country in the structure of Turkey. He also mentioned its location as "between Mesopotamia and Armenia." So the British prime minister placed Kurdistan between Lake Van and Mosul province. He proposed to the participants of the session to add Kurdistan into the resolution if there were no objections.¹⁹⁶ During the discussions, Lloyd George declared that England had little desire to accept the mandates of territories that were subject to military occupation, such as Syria and parts of Armenia (meaning Cilicia). He added that "he thought the same thing applied to Kurdistan and a part of the Caucasus although they had rich oil-wells."¹⁹⁷

On the same day, January 30, on the suggestion of President Wilson the session accepted the following resolution: Armenia, Kurdistan, Syria, Mesopotamia, Palestine and Arabia would be separated from Turkey. Those states were to be placed under the protection of the Triple Entente powers through the mandate system under the management of the League of Nations. Smuts' memorandum illuminated the main concept of the mandate system for those states: "The people left behind by the break up of Russia, Austria, and Turkey are mostly untrained politically; many of them are either incapable or deficient in power of self-government; they are mostly destitute and will require much nursing towards economic and political independence."¹⁹⁸ Reflecting on the historic session of January 30, 1919, the American historian Harry Howard declared: "the European Powers had decreed the end of the Turkish Empire."¹⁹⁹

On February 26, 1919, Avetis Aharonian spoke at the session of the "Council of Ten" at the Paris Conference and presented Armenia's territorial claims to Turkey. Notably, the representative of the Republic of Armenia declared to the conference that Armenia did not have any objection to the creation of an independent Kurdistan. He emphasized that the Armenians were giving their

consent about including some areas which were part of historical Armenia, such as Hakkari and the southern part of Diyarbakir, in the territory of a future Kurdistan.²⁰⁰

At the conference the interests of the Kurdish people were represented by General Sherif Pasha who served for a long time as an Ottoman diplomat during the reign of Sultan Abdul Hamid II and lived in Europe (in Berlin, Stockholm, Paris and other places). After the Committee of Unity and Progress had seized power over the country he published the opposition journal *Meshrutiyet* in Paris.²⁰¹ Sherif Pasha was a typical Kurdish nationalist and advocate of "free and independent Kurdistan." The Ottoman Empire had included him in its delegation to participate in the Congress of Versailles. However, he made his final choice, rejecting the responsibilities of an Ottoman delegate. He accepted the proposal of the Association for the Revival of Kurdistan, which declared him as "president of the Kurdish delegation." However, his status was not recognized by the diplomatic circles of the Paris conference, which considered that, first of all, no "Kurdish delegation" existed in Paris, and in any case, though he had the consent of some Kurdish leaders to represent the Kurdish case in Paris, he was not commissioned to do so by his people, or at least by part of it, the influential Kurdish tribes. Yet, as no other body represented the Kurdish Question in Paris, the conference gave its approval to Sherif Pasha to do so.

On March 22, 1919, he presented a memorandum about Kurdish claims and several documents about Kurdish desires.²⁰² The memorandum depicted the "lawful claims of the Kurdish nation" about the creation of a "united and independent Kurdish state" in conformity with the principles of Wilson's Fourteen Points as it was done in the cases of Armenia and Arabia. He understood and interpreted the Wilsonian right of the national self-determination in his own manner. As he had no exact idea about the probable boundaries of a future Kurdistan, he suggested founding an international committee to draw the borders based on the principle of "nationality" and include all regions where the Kurds formed the majority. It was obvious that he was taking advantage of the fact that after the Armenian Genocide in 1915, the size of the Armenian population had sharply decreased or it completely disappeared in the six Armenian provinces, leaving the Kurds naturally as the

majority in those regions. With this in mind, Sherif Pasha suggested conducting a referendum in East Anatolia, that is, in Western Armenia. In order to "orient" the future international committee of the referendum, Sherif Pasha suggested Diyarbakir, Kharberd, Bitlis, and Mosul provinces, and Urfa sanjak, as the territory of a future Kurdistan. This was a minimum demand that the general called "imperfect Kurdistan," or "Kurdistan enjoying the favor of the West and created with favorable conditions for Armenia." He felt that if the powerful countries of the world "wanted to justly apply the principle of nationality," the country where the Kurds made up the majority would stretch much further, towards the southeast and northwest, or would include a significant part of Erzurum province and all of Persian Kurdistan.

According to Sherif Pasha's "maximal plan," the boundaries of Turkish Kurdistan in the north followed the Caucasian frontier, continuing westwards to Erzurum, Erzinjan, Arabkir, and Divrik; in the south they followed the line of Sinjar, the mountains of Tel Asfar, Kirkuk, and Sulaymaniyah, and Sineyi (Senendej); in the east the Rawanduz-Bashkale line, and then via the Iranian frontier as far as Mount Ararat. Thus, the Kurdish general of the Ottoman army included a significant part of Western Armenia in Kurdistan in his extremely maximalist plan. As its "basis" he cited the following "reasons": in his opinion, while solving the Kurdish Question one should take into account that the Kurdish national wealth was exclusively won through sheep farming, which required, because of the climatic factor, available summer and winter pastures. "If even one of those pastures remains outside of the future borders of Kurdistan, economic life would be greatly injured, and the people would be in misery after a short period of time," meditated the general. In his opinion, such circumstances would make the Kurds rob and raid neighboring lands, creating constant instability. Continuing to threaten the powers, he said that if the future Armenia comprised regions where the Kurdish population was the majority, undoubtedly the war-loving tribes concerned for their national independence would not tolerate it, so the future Armenia would be in constant turmoil. This was, of course, if the Allies did not continually keep a powerful army within the country, but even then, he added, those armies would, in their turn, be subject to attacks by guerilla bands. Finally, the

memo stated that all the natural resources of Kurdistan should belong only to the Kurds.

Sherif Pasha made an effort to justify the extensive Kurdish usurpation of Armenian lands from the reign of Abdal Hamid II through the Young Turk regime. Moreover, well aware of the plans and the views of the participant states in the peace conference, he attempted political blackmail to prevent the return of the Armenian refugees to Western Armenia. Sherif Pasha said in his memorandum:

The Kurd is the only one among the peoples of Asia which is capable of forming an unequalled buffer state to block the path of the Bolshevik flood. Considering that the Armenians are strongly infected with those dangerous ideas, and because of the antagonism among their political parties and the rivalry of their revolutionary committees, they can never give the same guarantees to their neighbors. Bolshevik ideas penetrate the Armenians with the speed of lightning and there is no border capable of stopping that dreadful infection. Only Muslim countries are resistant and do not fear that terrible epidemic.

Sherif Pasha's memorandum is striking for its unbridled maximalism and had an obvious anti-Armenian emphasis. It resolutely rejected rights of the Armenian people to Western Armenia.

The memo, however, not only was not discussed but was not even taken seriously by the conference participants. Russian Kurdologist Mikhail S. Lazarev wrote; "The political effectiveness of Sherif Pasha's memorandum is equal to zero. The prominent diplomatic figures of the Paris Conference disregarded the document and its author because nobody who could be taken into consideration stood behind them."²⁰³ The anti-Armenian spirit of the memo was anachronistic and politically bankrupt because the Armenian Question was not an insignificant factor in the diplomatic resolutions concerning Turkey. Armenia and the problems of the Armenian people had become one of the urgent diplomatic issues requiring discussion.

Sherif Pasha demonstrated his affection toward Great Britain in an undisguised manner in Paris, trying to assure the British that

the Kurdish people were Anglophile in their orientation. He used any possible opportunity to emphasize that the Kurds connected their dreams of independence only with that country. In January 1919, he directly addressed England, asking to establish a Kurdish state as an "English protectorate".²⁰⁴ Sherif Pasha considered its political structure to be that of an emirate, and he announced his candidacy for emir.²⁰⁵

However, other representatives of old Kurdish clans also laid claim to the position of emir, such as Abdul Ghader, Said Taha, Süreyya Bedirhan, Süleyman Nazif and Mahmud Bey.²⁰⁶ The latter was the son of Ibrahim Pasha, the leader of the powerful Milli tribal confederation, who was isolated by the Turks and kept in prison throughout the war. The English in particular disregarded Mahmud Bey, considering him a person who "does not have his own views" and incapable of playing a role in such a big project.

All these Kurdish leaders imagined independent or autonomous Kurdistan as a state under British protection. In general, most Kurdish nationalists saw the future Kurdistan as a British protectorate. In their opinion, only England, which they considered as the initiator and inspiration of the Armenian Question, could make the solution to that same question fail.

England did not make haste in supporting the ambitions of the Kurdish nationalists. The establishment of independent Kurdistan was not included in British political plans. The English were also convinced that the Kurdish nationalists could not play even the smallest role in their political plans because of their political ignorance and limited influence over the Kurdish masses. That was why Sherif Pasha was not taken seriously—he and his ilk were not considered capable of changing the situation in the areas of Western Armenian inhabited by Kurds. The English also thought Sherif Pasha was not useful because of his age and the many years he lived in Paris, distant from Kurdistan.²⁰⁷ The English did not accept his political suggestions as they thought Sherif Pasha could not offer substantial services for the Allied states.

The British Foreign Office and various military and political agencies came to the unanimous conclusion that Sherif Pasha was undesirable as the "leader of future Kurdistan."²⁰⁸ Moreover, Kurdish circles did not accept the pasha as their leader either, and gave him the epithet of "*bosh horu*" [Turkish, *bosh herif* — a useless fellow].

Nonetheless, regardless of Sherif Pasha's negative attitude toward the Armenian Question and his maximalist claims for "Independent Kurdistan," the Armenian delegation of Paris always tried to make contact with him to form a united Armenian-Kurdish political front in the diplomatic sphere.

Sherif Pasha was undoubtedly aware of the weakness of the Kurdish political positions at the conference. He became convinced of the necessity of responding to the Armenian initiative about the establishment of a united front in order to be successful. He could also see in Paris the general affection toward Armenia and the Armenian people. Consequently, he decided to enter into active contact with the Armenian delegation, and in particular with Poghos Nubar.

The result was that in November 1919, they addressed a joint memorandum to the conference signed by Nubar, the leader of the Armenian National Delegation, the vice-president of the delegation of the Republic of Armenia Hamo Ohanjanian, and "the president of the Kurdish national delegation" Sherif Pasha.²⁰⁹

On November 20, 1919 the joint appeal-memo was presented to the Paris conference. The full text of the appeal has not been preserved in European historical literature, so we must quote an extract from Karo Sasuni's book:

Mr. Chairman of the Peace Conference, we, the present signatories, the representatives of the Armenian and Kurdish nations, have the honor to declare to the Peace Conference that our two peoples, both of the Aryan race, have the same interests and pursue the same goal, that is, their liberation and independence. In particular, the Armenians desire to be liberated from the merciless Turkish government, and, in general the Armenians and the Kurds demand their deliverance from the yoke of the Union and Progress Committee, whose official and secret governments have been so disastrous for both of them.

We are completely in agreement, therefore, to jointly ask the Peace Conference for the constitution of a united independent Armenia and an independent Kurdistan according to the principle of nationalities, with the assistance of a great power, which will be decided after listen-

ing to the will of peoples, and which will give its technical and economic assistance to our countries during the period of reconstruction.

As for the territories subject to dispute which are shown in the memoranda consecutively presented by our two delegations to the Peace Conference, we definitely declare that we leave this arrangement to the decision of the Peace Conference, being confident in advance that its resolution will be based upon justice and right.

We also confirm our full assent to respect the legitimate rights of the minorities in our two states.²¹⁰

The memorandum/agreement had an astonishing effect on the European diplomats, as they considered the previously existing hostility between the two peoples as completely natural and normal.²¹¹

In Lord Curzon's view, according to that agreement, the Armenians and the Kurds had "identical interests and aspirations, and demand freedom from Turkey for a unified independent Armenia and an independent Kurdistan under one Mandatory Power." The British high commissioner in Turkey, Admiral John de Robeck, viewed the Armenian-Kurdish accord "as of happiest augury." In his telegram dated December 20, 1919, Curzon ordered the office of the high commissioner in Turkey to support that "movement" in every possible way, though during a conversation with Avetis Aharonian he said he "does not believe and does not trust" Sherif Pasha.²¹²

Only Admiral Richard Webb, the commander of the British naval forces in the eastern Mediterranean, expressed his extreme mistrust of the Armenian-Kurdish agreement. On January 8, 1920 he wrote that despite its desirability it actually did nothing, primarily because Sherif Pasha was unaware of the real situation of the country or "the aspirations and sentiments of the Kurdish race."²¹³

The agreement was not unanimously welcomed in Armenian circles either. The ambassador of the Republic of Armenia in Washington, Armen Garo (Garegin Pastrmajian) issued a declaration of protest against Poghos Nubar and Hamo Ohanjanian, who had dared to sign such an agreement. According to Armen Garo, through this agreement "some land rights were ceded to

the Kurdish nation, and it brought about its intervention in indisputably Armenian territories."²¹⁴ Interpreting this step of Armen Garo, Karo Sasuni wrote, "of course this protest was given its tone by the dominant mentality of contemporary Armenian political leaders, who thought that our sea-to-sea territorial rights were indisputable."²¹⁵ The issue became a topic for dispute in the press. The delegation of integral Armenia (that is, the Republic of Armenia and the National Delegation) considered it necessary to make a joint public explanation and end the dispute. So, on January 29, 1920, a telegram signed by Avetis Aharonian and Poghos Nubar was sent from Paris to America for publication in the press, stating: "We find it extremely lamentable that a dispute has arisen in the press about the Armenian-Kurdish agreement. This agreement, which was signed by the National Delegation, does not in any way jeopardize Armenian interests and claims."²¹⁶

Sherif Pasha did not remain long in his role of leader of the Kurdish delegation. He resigned from his post, and in his declarations at various times he denied the existence of the agreement with the Armenians.

The Paris Peace Conference did not record any positive advance in the solution of the Armenian Question. It did not register any tangible result for the Kurdish Question either. Poghos Nubar's maximalistic plan of "sea to sea" Armenia and Sherif Pasha's no less expansionist proposal poorly served both the Armenian and Kurdish Questions. Naturally, the extremism of both sides hindered their mutual agreement. In such cases the great powers could have determined the solution, and both parties would have had to accept their decision as a *fait accompli*. However, this did not happen either. In the near future, both peoples would face new trials which would be critical, especially for the Armenian people.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE KEMALIST MOVEMENT AND THE ATTITUDE OF THE TURKISH NATIONALISTS CONCERNING THE ARMENIAN AND KURDISH QUESTIONS

In the spring of 1919 events developed at a dizzying speed within the Ottoman Empire and in its environs. On May 19, 1919, the Greeks dispatched troops to Izmir and initiated military actions against Turkey. The Greco-Turkish war started. General Mustafa Kemal, the future leader of the Turkish Milli (nationalist) movement, decided with his confederates to leave for Eastern Anatolia, where more favorable military, strategic and political conditions existed to organize a resistance movement against the plans to partition Turkey. Melvanzade Rifat noted that former army officers belonging to the *Ittihad ve Terakki* party had invited Mustafa Kemal as the former commander of the *Yildirim* or Thunderbolt Army Group to be leader of their newly organized secret organization, the Crescent Star.¹ The program of the *Ittihadist* secret organization intended to prevent the partitioning of the Ottoman Empire by foreign states.² Sultan Mehmed VI Vahideddin was aware of all this and had given his approval.³ Taking advantage of the fact that the conditions of the Mudros Armistice did not provide for mechanisms in the depths of Anatolia to disarm and disperse Ottoman troops, and that there were huge supplies of arms in these areas, Mustafa Kemal quickly organized an alternative center of government in Anatolia. He created the nucleus of an army from the remnants of the sultan's troops and *gendarmerie* detachments, and began to unite followers around the organization he created, Association for the Defense of the Rights of the Eastern Provinces, with the motto "The homeland is in danger." The initially small group of Turkish nationalists gradually grew stronger, and soon it would become the real master of Anatolia.

Mevlanzade Rifat reported the following fascinating information:

According to the sovereign's desire, the Crescent Star military union had assigned three of its members to develop relations with the Association for the Defense of the Rights of the Eastern Provinces. This delegation of the Crescent Star military union made the Association for the Defense of the Rights of the Eastern Provinces understand that a joint front was necessary for effective propaganda. If the Sublime Porte was forced to sign a treaty uniting the eastern provinces to Armenia, the authority the government of Armenia would have over these provinces must not be recognized, and if necessary taking up arms, they would work to prepare an armed force in the eastern provinces for defense starting now. Then it demonstrated with facts that the European powers would not be able to send forces to protect Armenian rule over this territory to be annexed to Armenia.

They were also convinced that with this force to be prepared in the eastern provinces it would be possible to disperse the armies of Yerevan's newly formed government which was under the administration of the Armenians' Dashnaktsutiun [ARF] political party.⁴

Thus, it is obvious that the Kemalist movement was based on the Ittihadists' plan, since the Association for the Defense of the Rights of the Eastern Provinces, having praised and adopted it, began to carry it out.⁵

The significance of this movement, its dimensions and political importance, was not sufficiently deeply understood, or perhaps was underestimated, by the powers of the Triple Entente. Unfortunately, they were also not able in Armenia to sufficiently deeply analyze these events. As a consequence, the Armenian Question suffered heavy and irreparable losses. The desires of the Armenian people about secession from the Ottoman state, colliding with the rising wave of Turkish nationalism, were broken into pieces.

In any case, the threat of the partition of Turkey continued to loom over the previously powerful country which now had two governments. It is true that its final fate would be decided in Eu-

rope, at the international conference in Paris, where the former "friends" of the Ottoman Empire, England and France, which turned into its fierce enemies during the war, would be the dictating parties. However, for now, as the Kemalists understood it, together with the "Greek danger," the "Armenian danger" from the East threatened Turkey.

In the summer of 1919, the situation at the Armenian-Turkish border became very serious. Battles were fought in the Olti [Oltu] region and Nakhijevan [Nakhchivan]. As a result of the Turkish officers' incitation, ten thousand Kurds between Bayazit and Karakilise threatened to attack the Armenians. On July 29, British admiral Somerset Calthorpe wrote to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Lord Curzon that "All this talk about a greater Armenia is fanning [the] flame of the national movement, is playing into the hands of the extremists and by bringing Kurds back into line with Turks is strengthening forces of Pan Islamism."⁶ Another letter of Calthorpe, dated July 30, sounded the alarm to the leadership of the Foreign Office that in Turkey "the state of public security goes from bad to worse, and has already been stated in recent reports the spread of the 'National Movement' has given a fresh impetus to outlawry and brigandage, the forces of which are now being enlisted in a Crusade nominally for the defence of Turkish independence."⁷

Calthorpe did not consider the Kemalist movement spontaneous and he believed it was supported by the Committee of Union and Progress, which "is still in being throughout the provinces."⁹ Actually, the Ittihadists controlled the government in Eastern Anatolia and had great influence over Turkish army units stationed in that area. Since the start of the Kemalists' activities, a secret and obviously close collaboration existed between the Turkish nationalists and the Ittihadists. Their views on numerous issues perfectly coincided or at least were quite close. They both followed the nationalistic mottoes of "Turkey for the Turks" and "Turkey free from all foreign intervention." They had similar views on the Armenian Question. In general, the Kemalists declared in accordance with their policy on national issues that they were categorically against granting independence or autonomy to any people living in the Ottoman Empire. British Admiral Robeck informed Lord Curzon that Mustafa Kemal regarded "the surviving Arme-

nians and Greeks as so many hostages for the exaction from the Allies of more favorable terms of peace for his own country."¹⁰

The Kemalist movement placed the surviving Western Armenians under a grave new threat. Conditions were not favorable in the Transcaucasus either. On August 9, 1919, Arthur James Balfour wrote to Prime Minister David Lloyd George from Paris to express his concern about the situation in the Caucasus, fearing massacres of Armenians and general bloodshed in the Caucasus after the withdrawal of British troops.¹¹ In his opinion, the only way to avoid this would be if America would intervene. The English diplomat was confident that the United States would do it because it always expressed an interest in Armenia and it left the impression that it intended to accept the mandate over this country.

On July 28, 1919, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Lord Curzon wrote a confidential note to Colville Barclay, the councilor of the English Embassy in Washington, requesting him to find out through informal inquiries if the US government was making any preparation to send troops to Turkish Armenia in case the United States decided to accept the mandate of the country.¹²

Curzon invited John W. Davis, the American ambassador in London, to elucidate the matter, and asked him a series of questions. Did he think that the American government would probably accept such a request, if it were to be made? Do the latter have sufficient troops in Europe or elsewhere to use for that purpose? Was it probable that Congress would want to accept the mandate over Armenia or any other large or small portion of the Ottoman Empire? If yes, then when was the nearest deadline, if such a decision were to be made? Was it possible if the American government decided to accept the responsibility for Armenia that it would broaden the sphere of its interests over the entire Caucasus?

The ambassador answered that he could not officially speak on behalf of his government, but he would not mind expressing his personal opinion, which was the following. The Americans only have one hundred thousand troops in Europe now, most of whom have received orders to return home. Consequently it would be impossible to transfer any part of these troops to Armenia. Moreover, any dispatch of troops to that area could not occur without the knowledge and permission of Congress. As for the mandate, he did not personally believe that the consideration

of the American people's profound interest in Armenia based on philanthropic grounds could force his country to abandon its twin traditional principles of foreign policy, which are: a) renunciation of involvement in foreign alliances and commissions; and b) remaining faithful to the Monroe Doctrine.

Ambassador Davis also added that as soon as the American public started to comprehend all the political, ethnographic, physical and other types of difficulties connected with the Armenian Question, which it had not so far, he was very doubtful that philanthropy would win the struggle over expediency. He concluded that he would communicate Mr. Balfour's request to the American government, though he doubted whether it could lead to any practical results.¹³

Although on September 9, 1919, American Senator John Sharp Williams proposed a joint resolution in the Senate to empower the government to use American troops in Armenia, the opposition Republican Party refused it, arguing that the troops could not be sent to a country with which the United States was not at war.

French Prime Minister George Clemenceau described the situation of Armenia in the following way: "France could do nothing, Italy could do nothing, Great Britain could do nothing and, for the present, America could do nothing. It remained to be seen whether, as a result of this, any Armenians would remain."¹⁴

Beginning in autumn 1919, the most important issue in the foreign policy of the Republic of Armenia was the reconquest of Western Armenia. Two of the greatest obstacles in this matter were the Kemalist authorities and the Kurds.

In the summer of 1919, from July 23 to August 7, the Erzurum Congress of the Association for the Defense of the Rights of East Anatolia adopted the following resolutions: "The eastern provinces of Asia Minor, Trebizond province and Janik sanjak, Erzurum, Sivas, Diyarbakir, Mamuret ül-Aziz [Kharberd], Van, and Bitlis provinces and all the sanjaks [counties or sub-provinces] of these provinces must not be separated from one other in any way, on any pretext, or for any reason. Together, they all form a unity, all of the parts of which are in complete harmony with one another, whether in times of happiness or misfortune, and they all desire the same goal for their future destiny."

The second article of the congress stated: "Viewing any oc-

cupation of our territory and any interference in our affairs as intended for the creation of a Greek or Armenian community, we put forward the principle of self-defense and mutual support." Then it added:

We will never permit the Armenians and the Greeks to threaten our existence, the rights of Muslims, and Ottoman self-defense, directly or indirectly, covertly, overtly in any other possible way.

Thus, our nation considers itself competent and able to protect itself with all the means at its disposal, be they physical or moral, with the goal of preventing the attempts of the Greeks and the Armenians to harm our country. In such circumstances we view each intervention of the great powers of the Entente as support for the realizations of those plans and programs which we reject.¹⁵

Summarizing the work of the congress, Mustafa Kemal declared that "currently our country finds itself between two dangers, the Armenian danger and the Greek danger."¹⁶

The resolutions of the September 4-11, 1919 Kemalist congress in Sivas were in the same spirit. Unlike the previous congress, however, this one expounded the motto of the inviolability and unity of the entire Ottoman Empire, not just the eastern provinces. In addition, the Sivas congress expressed its anti-Armenian and anti-Greek tone more determinedly.¹⁷ This was characteristic of the September 10, 1919 telegram sent by Mustafa Kemal on behalf of the committee of the congress, which noted that it was impossible "to give even an inch of the land of our provinces to Armenia or any other state."¹⁸

Later on the resolutions of the Erzurum and Sivas congresses became the basis of the Kemalist National Pact [Misak-i Milli]¹⁹ declared on January 28, 1920 which excluded the actual or legal division and partition of Eastern Anatolia, viz., Western Armenia. Of course the adoption of the National Pact excluded not only an Armenian state on the territory of Western Armenia but also a Kurdish state or autonomous region. These resolutions confirmed that the Kemalists did not recognize the right of independence of the Armenian people, or its national rights in general. Mustafa Ke-

mal called the desires for independence of the oppressed nations of Turkey as an "expedition against our great state." In his July 13, 1919 speech, he declared:

The issue of the partitioning of our homeland is not only on the agenda, but has already been definitely decided. It has already been decided to establish an "Armenia" in our eastern provinces. Another Armenia under the name of "Cilicia" is supposed to be formed in Adana, Kozan and adjacent regions. In Greece, they suppose they are going to annex the regions of Smyrna and Aydin as well as the territories of Thrace as far as the gates of our capital. A "Pontic" kingdom is supposed to be established on our land along the coast of the Black Sea. They are either going to subject the rest of the land to foreign military occupation or place it under a protectorate. They completely ignore the principles of humanity and human civilization, let alone the rights of national self-determination, while solving this problem. They are trying to make slaves and servants out of a nation which has been independent for 650 years, and this is the nation which in its time brought the banner of justice and courage as far as the borders of India, the heart of Africa and the western frontiers of Hungary.²⁰

This was how "the father of the Turks" comprehended humanity, the principles of human civilization, and the right of national self-determination.

The prospect of the establishment of an Armenian state in Western Armenia upset Kurdish nationalists and the Kurdish masses no less than the Kemalists. Once again, the Kurds feared that if Western Armenia would pass into the hands of the Armenians, their interests would suffer under Armenian rule, and they would be turned into a secondary force. Both Turkish and Kurdish public opinion held the unwavering view that "the repetition of the policy of Izmir" inexorably would take place in Western Armenia, meaning that the Republic of Armenia would attack Turkey from the east, and, with the help of the Triple Entente powers, an Armenian state would be established on the territory of Western Armenia.

Undoubtedly, that fear could bring the Kurds closer to such

powers as the Istanbul government or the Milli (nationalist) movement, both of which not only rejected Armenian independence and Armenian ambitions to establish their own statehood but also were ready to fight with all the resources at their disposal against this. Thus, the foundation existed for increasing Turkophile attitudes among the Kurds based on common interests.

The new post-war conditions did not have a great influence on Kurdish political development. As before, they did not have a contemporary type of political party which could unite an influential part of the population around any political idea. Though there existed a small stratum of Kurdish intellectuals, it could not represent a collective will, and it had no influence or force in rural areas where the great majority of the Kurdish population lived. The feudal lords and tribal chiefs treated the intellectuals suspiciously, considering them as the purveyors of irreligious and revolutionary ideas.²¹

Analyzing the structure of Kurdish society, Arnold Toynbee, the British historian, wrote that Kurdish national feeling could be expressed only in opposition to the Turks, Arabs, Englishmen or other foreign elements, but it was completely absent in connection with general Kurdish solidarity. In Toynbee's opinion, the political horizon of the majority of the Kurds was limited to their tribes and their internal disputes. Though they possessed great vitality, the Kurds showed "little sign, as yet, of any positive consciousness of Kurdish national solidarity."²²

Almost all the Kurds living in Constantinople were the descendants of the Kurdish ashiret chiefs who were exiled to Istanbul. They had studied at the so-called *ashiret mektepleri* [tribal schools] or at imperial military colleges which had opened their doors to young Kurds since 1870.²³ This Kurdish upper stratum was connected with the Turkish state in numerous ways; as a rule it avoided political problems, and was isolated from its people.

There was no unity even in the Kurdish nationalist camp. Its polarization became even more obvious during the Kemalist movement. The so-called "autonomists" under the leadership of Sheikh Abdul Ghader pursued the idea of autonomy within the Ottoman Empire. During an interview with the Turkish newspaper *Tasfir-i Efkâr*, Sheikh Abdul Ghader introduced this notion. On March 9, 1920 the *New York Times* reprinted the article. Sheikh

Abdul Ghader was one of the sons of the famous Sheikh Obeydullah. Throughout his life he had been connected with the sultan's government, and enjoyed the "generosity" of Abdul Hamid. After the Young Turk revolution, he became the president of the Ottoman senate, and later on was given the position of president of the council of state. In Ottoman circles he was known as an "extremely religious man" who respected the sultan as "the caliph of all Muslims."²⁴

One of the sons of Amin Ali Bedirhan had appraised the "autonomists," the supporters of Sheikh Abdul Ghader, as follows: "They kept one foot in the Kurdish camp, and the other in the Ottoman and Islamic camp... They wanted to become president."²⁵ The Turkish government had promised the Kurdish autonomists autonomy for Kurdistan under the control of the sultan and the Ottoman parliament.

The other group of the Kurdish nationalists, the so-called "independents" under the leadership of Amin Ali Bedirhan, wanted to completely separate from Turkey and establish an independent Kurdish state. As a matter of fact, the majority of the famous Bedirhan dynasty was arrested or exiled, and their property was confiscated by the government after the 1908 "Constantinople spring," that is to say, after the Young Turk coup. The head of the dynasty, Amin Ali Bedirhan, was sentenced to death in absentia.

Soon it became quite obvious that the differences between the two directions of the Kurdish movement were unbridgeable and political cooperation between them impossible. Their separation became irreversible.

Independent of all this, the anti-Armenian attitude of the Kurds was definitely intensifying after the start of the Kemalist movement because they wanted to establish a state or at least autonomy fundamentally on the territory which was the historical cradle of the Armenian people. Admiral Calthorpe, the British high commissioner in Constantinople, informed Lord Curzon that the "Greek occupations and Italian encroachments, coupled with rumours of a coming Pontine Republic and an independent Armenia, had aroused feelings of alarm and unrest among the Moslems of Anatolia, and made them an ideal field for the activities of Nationalist agitators, with which a weak and bankrupt Central Government has been unable to cope."²⁶ The other danger, con-

tinued the admiral, is the possible collaboration of the Kurdish Nationalist Party with the Kemalists.²⁷

This situation placed the Kurds in a dilemma; were they to submit to the Armenians if an independent Armenian state were established in Western Armenia, or were they to collaborate with the Turks? Most of the Kurds preferred to cooperate with the Turks, so they took a hostile position against the Armenians and their national desires. The Kemalists with great flexibility were able to take advantage of this prevalent mentality among among the Kurdish people and its upper class. In general, not only had Mustafa Kemal and his supporters carefully observed events in Western Armenia since the first days of their political activity, but also they had kept the Kurdish Question at the center of their attention because the Kurdish political orientation would become a decisive factor for their success or failure in keeping Western Armenia within the structure of Turkey.

The Kemalists had accurate information about the Kurdish aspirations for the establishment of an independent state or at least autonomy. In one of his speeches Mustafa Kemal announced for the first time that "the Association for the Revival of Kurdistan which has its center in Constantinople and branches in Diyarbekir, Bitlis and Kharberd, attempts to establish a Kurdish state under foreign protection."²⁸ In his letter to the governor of Diyarbakir, Kemal recommended not to increase the persecution of members of that Kurdish party. On the contrary, he advised working to win them over to their side, and uniting with them to rise against the powers of the Triple Entente in Anatolia within the framework of the Association for the Defense of Rights (for the Turkish people), and the organization Against Annexation.²⁹

On December 26, 1919 British Admiral de Robeck telegraphed Lord Curzon to inform him that on December 5 Mustafa Kemal invited Turkish, Kurdish and Arab leaders to a general assembly in Erzurum to discuss ways to prevent the creation of an Armenian state and how to struggle against Armenia. Even the representatives of Musavatist Azerbaijan were present at the general assembly. The telegram also reported about Mustafa Kemal Pasha's plans to form "Islamic forces" [*kuva-yi islamiye*], which would include Kurds and Arabs as well as Turks.³⁰

The Kemalists proposed the idea of "social unity" in order to

neutralize the Kurds and to include them in their political sphere. They declared that "in Turkey the Kurdish people have rights equal to the Turks." Its meaning was completely clear. While the Kurds were fighting for their national independence in Iraq and Iran, and certain Kurdish circles in Turkey were inspired with ideas of national self-determination, it was not beneficial for the Kemalists to make use of the traditional route of denying the existence of the Kurdish people in Turkey. Thus, for a while, Mustafa Kemal and his associates encouraged, but in word only, the idea of "equal rights for the Kurds" in the new Turkey.³¹ The Kemalists also steadily promoted the idea that there was no essential difference between the Turks and the Kurds, and the complete dominance of the Turkish state must extend throughout Eastern Thrace, Asia Minor and Eastern Anatolia, where "the population was chiefly Turks or Kurds."³²

Not only did the Kemalists gradually manage to stub out the acuteness of the Kurdish Question, but they also involved the Kurds in their policies. On June 21, 1919, Mustafa Kemal wrote to his followers: "When the movements born as a result of English propaganda, such as the current movement for Kurdish independence, raised the issue of the partition of the empire, glory to God, they were turned into our benefit. Thanks to correspondence with the participants of that movement, the latter became included in the common work, and have united with us around the caliphate and the crown. A perfect harmony has been established among us, and they were invited to participate in the work of the congress [this refers to the Erzurum Congress of July to August, 1919]."³³

It is not hard to guess what Kemal had promised the Kurds in his correspondence. It becomes obvious when the Association for the Defense of the Rights of the Eastern Provinces, which included Kurds in its structure, placed the following issues on the agenda of the Erzurum Congress: 1) the goal of propaganda in the eastern provinces; 2) issues of Turkism and Kurdism; and 3) differences in religion.³⁴

In June 1919, a conference of leaders of the Kurdish national movement was convened in Erzurum, and its resolutions were distinguished by their sympathy toward the Kemalist movement. The conference announced that it unreservedly defended the Kemalist movement, on condition that the Turkish nationalists

grant autonomy to Kurdistan. The leaders of the Kurdish national movement stressed clearly that they were not against the establishment of a Turkish national state as long as Kurdistan received autonomy within its structure.

At the same time, it was decided to stir up Kurdish insurrection against the sultan and his government. As a sign of solidarity with the Turkish nationalists, the conference participants decided to take part in the Erzurum Congress.³⁵

However, in the resolutions and manifestos adopted at the Erzurum and Sivas congresses, and in their current policies, the Kemalists categorically refused the principle of territorial or any other type of autonomy for national minorities. Moreover, taking advantage of the religious sentiments of non-Turkish Muslim minorities such as Kurds, Laz, and Circassians, and extensively using a policy of clever promises, the Kemalists were able to unite and lead them in the fight against the Armenians and the Greeks. It is typical that the Kemalists introduced themselves to the Kurdish tribal upper stratum as ardent supporters of the caliphate and the sultan, though they based their future policies on the principle of laicism (secularism) and the abolishment of the caliphate and the sultanate. Of course this political behavior completely revealed the demagogic and populist essence of Kemalism. They also often used the principle of "the inviolable unity of nation and religion," which did not correspond to their basic political and ideological principles.

Naturally their primary enticement to influence the Kurds was the Armenian Question. In that sense, Sultan Abdul Hamid II and the Ittihadists could be teachers of the Kemalists. The Kurds were inspired by the idea that the Kurdish-Turkish alliance would become the basis for the neutralization of the desires of the Armenians for independence. The main goal of the alliance was proclaimed to be the preservation of the country's territorial integrity, and the securing of the interests of "the Turkish and Kurdish majority."³⁶

Kemal was categorically against giving the Armenians even an inch from "the eastern vilayets." He wrote: "Even before the war, the population of those areas was composed mainly of Turks, a small number of the so-called Zaza Kurds and an insignificant number of Armenians."³⁷

Thus, it was not hard to see that the Kemalists tried to unite the Kurdish leaders of Western Armenia, and the Kurdish population in general, around an anti-Armenian platform.

Three Kurds were part of the nine-man representative committee led by Mustafa Kemal at the Erzurum Congress: Sheikh Ömer Fevzi bey, Sadullah Efendi, and Haji Musa Bey. The influential Kurdish leader Jemil Chato Bey was also in active collaboration with the Kemalists. However, Mustafa Kemal did not trust the Kurdish members in the representative committee, and considered them "random people with no political or military experience"; therefore the committee never met. On the other hand, the Kurdish members of the committee and especially Ömer Fevzi Bey, never trusted Mustafa Kemal.³⁸ Despite this mistrust, after the Erzurum Congress, Mustafa Kemal continued to rely on the Kurdish leaders while he fought against the Greeks and maneuvered around the sultan and the caliphate. For instance, in his address to one of them, Abdurrahman Agha of Shirnak, he noted:

the entire world is aware of your devotion to the caliphate and sultanate. It is no less obvious that you would never agree to the Armenians trampling on the holy soil of your homeland. I am sending you a certain number of copies of the manifesto and resolutions adopted by the Erzurum Congress. I ask you to take immediate measures for the organization of national forces and enthusiastically end the treacherous actions of our opponents. Trusting in your patriotism, I await the results of the measures that you have undertaken.³⁹

Mustafa Kemal noted in his August 10, 1919 letter to Haji Musa Bey, the leader of the Mutki tribe: "With praise and gratitude we always remember the valuable support which you on many occasions provided to our army in regaining Bitlis as well as for your enthusiasm in protecting the Mutki [Motkan] region from enemies... Now our enemies are trying to divide our country into pieces and enslave our nation, which for centuries has spilled so much blood in the name of Islam, to deprive it of its sovereign rights and independence. They desire to create Armenia in our homeland, the territory we have inherited from our

ancestors."⁴⁰ Such telegrams were also sent to Sheikh Abdalbaki Effendi Küfrev Zade of Bitlis, Ömer Agha of Dershev, Resul Agha of Mushas, Sadullah Effendi, Sheikh Mahmud Effendi, Sheikh Ziyaeddin Effendi from Nurshin, the chief of the Garzan Kurds Jemil Chato Bey, and many other prominent Kurdish leaders. Mustafa Kemal sent famous ashiret leaders a circular letter encouraging them to fight against the Armenians and "the provocations of other enemies."⁴¹

Many of the Kurdish leaders responded to the appeal of Mustafa Kemal. Telegrams and letters were sent to Ankara from various parts of Western Armenia, assuring the Kemalists of the Kurdish faithfulness to the caliphate and the sultanate, as well as the friendship of the Kurdish and Turkish people.⁴²

Nevertheless, not all the Kurdish leaders expressed their readiness to collaborate with the Kemalists. Kurdish revolts and riots broke out against the Turkish nationalists at various regions. Some of the feudal lords and tribal chiefs who supported the sultan and mistrusted the Kemalists rejected the resolutions of the Erzurum Congress and refused collaboration with the Kemalists. It was not a coincidence that comparably small number of Kurds participated in the Sivas Congress.⁴³ One reason was the paragraph in the political resolution accepted by the Erzurum Congress stating that the Muslim elements living in the seven eastern provinces "are viewed as fraternal groups originating from the same parents," which basically denies the existence of the Kurdish nation.

During the Sivas Congress, the Kemalists received word that the Kurds in the Malatya region, including a large number of members of the Association for the Revival of Kurdistan, and many members of the notable Bedirhan clan such as Kâmuran Ali Bey, his brother Jeladet Bey, Jemil Pashazade Ekrem Bey from Diyarbakir, and the governor of Malatya Khalil [Halil] Rahmi Bey Bedirhan, were planning a revolt against the government for the purpose of establishing an independent Kurdistan.⁴⁴ A conference among the Kurdish leaders was held in Shiro, located about 20 kilometers away from Malatya, where Khalil Rahmi-bey promulgated in the name of the Committee of the Defense of Rights of the Kurds the basic principles of independent Kurdistan. As a circular letter, this document was sent to numerous influential Kurdish leaders, calling on them to raise the

flag of revolt "to end the adventurism of Mustafa Kemal." Thus, the Kurds pursued goals possessing state-wide importance. During the conference the Kurdish sheikhs declared Khalil Rahmi Bey Bedirhan to be the governor of "Independent Kurdistan."

Mustafa Kemal was informed about that movement early in July 1919. He ordered the governor of Janik (Samsun) and the commander of the 13th army corps stationed in Diyarbakir to attentively observe and inform him about the behavior of the Kurdish leaders.

Mustafa Kemal considered that the movement was the result of English instigation. He took severe measures to strangle it in its embryonic state. On September 10, 1919, the commander of the 15th regiment, Ilyas Bey received the directive to suppress the revolt "in the most radical manner" and "with all necessary measures," and mercilessly massacre all the rebels against "the Padishah and his army," who were threatening the national existence of Turkey.⁴⁵ By the order of Mustafa Kemal, additional forces were sent from Elazigh, Severeck and Sivas to accelerate the disciplinary actions.

While the troops were on their way to Malatya, the Kurdish leaders asked for help from Lt. Colonel Henry Bell in Aleppo, of the British secret intelligence service. However, Bell persuaded them to withdraw from the rebellion, assuring them that the Allies would solve the Kurdish Question.⁴⁶

Thus, the revolt was squelched even before it started. The assembled rebellious forces in Malatya dispersed. Governor Ghalib Bey, the prominent leader of Elazigh, escaped to Aleppo. The Kemalists expelled British officer Major Noel from Malatya as he was in close contacts with the rebels.

Without a doubt, the main reason for the failure was that the majority of the Kurdish tribes decided against rising against the Kemalists. Significantly, the booklet *The Case of Kurdistan against Turkey* published in 1928 in the United States by the Kurdish organization Hoybun noted that if at that time the Kurds had attacked from the south and the Armenians from the north, they could have solved both the Armenian and the Kurdish Questions with their own forces in the summer of 1919.

Trying to find out the causes of the abortive revolt, Mustafa Kemal ordered Reshid Pasha, the governor of Sivas province, to

arrest and bring to him the chief organizers of the revolt, including Kâmuran Ali, Jeladet Bey Bedirhan, and Jemil Pashazade Ekrem Bey. However, only Alishan Bey, the leader of the Kochgiri tribe and governor of Ümraniye district, was brought to Kemal. During interrogation, Alishan Bey declared that according to the US president Wilson's principles, Armenia would gain the eastern provinces, so the Kurds' interests would be violated. Thus, their objective was to establish an autonomous Kurdistan under the protection of the sultanate in the provinces where the Kurdish people composed a majority. Mustafa Kemal, who personally was conducting the interrogation, announced that Wilson's principles had no power, and proposed that the Kurdish leaders collaborate with the Kemalists. He added that at the Erzurum Congress, all the Kurdish representatives had assured him that they would support the nationalists fighting for "the defense of the homeland."⁴⁷

The Kurds had no common view about either the way to establishing Kurdish statehood or the question of the rebirth of Armenian statehood on the territory of Western Armenia. Henry Churchill King and Charles R. Crane reported extremely important information on this. They were the American section members of a theoretically interallied commission on the potential mandates of Turkey, and were conducting a comprehensive investigation in the Ottoman Empire from June 10 to July 29, 1919 on, among other things, the Armenian and Kurdish Questions. For instance, their report noted that Ahmed Emin (Yalman), the well-known Turkish journalist and publisher and editor of the newspaper *Vakit*, tried to persuade them that it would have been a great mistake if the Paris Congress granted the Armenians the territories where the Turks and Kurds were the majority. In his opinion the Kurds should be prepared to receive autonomy in those regions.⁴⁸

During their tour, the members of the King-Crane commission met a number of Kurdish statesmen who introduced themselves as the members of the Kurdish Democratic Party. Statesmen such as Nejmuddin Bey, Hüseyin Bey, and Aziz Baban Bey approved the idea of establishing a Kurdish state under a British mandate in the regions where, in their opinion, the Kurdish population formed a "significant majority." They mentioned such regions as Kharberd, Diyarbakir, Van, Bitlis, Bayazit and Mosul, with an outlet to the Mediterranean Sea. They emphasized that they were against

having any kind of political ties with the Turks and the Arabs. As for the future Armenian state, they were ready to recognize it, "if, of course, that state is located outside of those territories on which they had claims." They proposed a population exchange, meaning that Armenians would be transferred from the territory of the future Kurdish state to that of the Armenian one, while all the Kurds on Armenian territory would move to Kurdistan. As for the Assyrians' claims to a separate territory or "national home," the Kurdish statesmen unconditionally objected to this, explaining that the Assyrians were not a majority anywhere.⁴⁹

Mustafa Kemal resolutely fought all the Kurdish organizations and statesmen who did not reject the idea of the establishment of an Armenian state in Eastern Anatolia. Thus, on November 17, 1919, "the father of the Turks" sent a reproachful letter from Sivas to Mahmud Chürüksulu Pasha, the Kurdish statesman and member of the Ottoman Senate. Kemal reminded him about his announcement at an interview with the French-language newspaper *Le Bosphorus* that, "Without accepting the exaggerated demands of the Armenians as being reasonable, we are willing to consent to certain alterations being made in the frontier line." Kemal wrote about this without hiding his rage:

It was, indeed, an astonishing and remarkable thing that a statesman, a member of the Peace Commission, could commit himself to a statement that was practically a promise to grant territorial compensation in Eastern Anatolia to the Armenians.

...I said that "the population of Eastern Anatolia were perfectly justified in feeling incensed and irritated at this phrase; that the nation, according to the decisions arrived at at the Erzerum and Sivas Congresses, had no idea of ceding an inch of their territory and had decided to defend their own rights, as already announced to the whole world, even if the Government should tamely submit to a shameful promise of this description."

I added that this decision of the nation was very well known to the honorable members of the Peace Commission and that they must follow it.⁵⁰

The prevalent mentality among the Kurds was that Eastern Anatolia had to form an inseparable part of Turkey. It meant the rejection of the idea of establishing an Armenian state on the territory of Western Armenia.⁵¹

The sultan's government in Constantinople was not as categorical and negative towards the Armenian claims as the Turkish Nationalists or Kemalists were. Aleksandr Khatisian testified that in the summer of 1920 he met Reshad Pasha, the minister of internal affairs of the sultan's government and, he said: "I revealed our aspirations to Reshad Pasha and explained how desirable it was to determine through mutual agreement the borders of United Armenia, by including the significant portion of the six vilayets and a port in the Armenian territories to thus solve our ancient dispute." In reply, Reshad Pasha drew the possible frontiers of Armenia from the Turkish viewpoint, and it comprised all of Russian Armenia, the Alashkert and Basen valleys, and the port of Rize on the Black Sea.⁵² Other information confirms that this was not only the personal opinion of Reshad Pasha but the political position of the government of Sultan Mehmed VI Vahideddin. The problem was that in late 1919 and 1920 the Constantinople government did not have real power and the real authority was irretrievably in the hands of the Kemalists.

Except for some individual insignificant incidents, no other Kurdish anti-Kemalist movements or serious armed revolts took place. This attests to the fact that the interests of the Kemalists and Kurds perfectly coincided on the Armenian Question. As a consequence, no internal Kurdish front was formed against the Kemalists in Western Armenia. On the contrary, most of the Kurdish population was involved in the armed fight against Armenia and Greece. They also actively participated in the struggle against the Armenians and the French in Cilicia. In reply to the Kemalists' special appeal the Kurds became particularly notorious for organizing the massive slaughter of the Armenian population in the regions of Urfa and Marash.

Early in 1920 the Kurds of Kogb, Kagzvan, Ararat and Olti became a dangerous force for the Republic of Armenia. They could weaken the Armenian forces or endanger the rear if those forces tried to enter Alashkert and Basen "to become the master by armed force of the territory of the homeland."⁵³ As a result of

that concern, beginning in January 1920, the government of the Republic of Armenia paid special attention to the Kurds within the Armenian borders in order to obtain their friendship, or at least their loyalty.

By decision of the Armenian government and on the instructions of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, from March to the end of April 1920, Karo Sasuni traveled through those regions. Accompanied by the governor of Kars, Stepan Ghorghanian, he met with Kurdish and Azerbaijani representatives to preach interethnic solidarity. At the same time, Sasuni paid individual visits to the Kurdish leaders and tried to explain the necessity of Armenian-Kurdish collaboration. Except for the Yezidis, however, about sixty thousand Kurds remained distant. Though they depicted themselves as Armenian citizens in their words, in their actions "they were biased in favor of the Turks."⁵⁴ "The Kurds remained armed along our borders," Sasuni wrote, "so that the Armenian army was obliged to keep an eye on the Turkish regular troops and Tatar population on the one hand, and on the other, to watch over the armed Kurds inside and near the borders."⁵⁵

In September 1920, after the outbreak of the Armenian-Turkish war, part of the Kurds of Western Armenia joined the army of Kazim Karabekir Pasha and fought against the Republic of Armenia. The Kurds of Olti and Koghb as well as the Haydaranli ashiret of Malazkert and Archesh under the leadership of Kör Hüseyin Pasha became noted for their anti-Armenian activities. They participated in the battles of Kars and Alexandropol.

On December 2, 1920, Armenia, having suffered immensely during the Turkish-Armenian war, was forced to sign the Treaty of Alexandropol. Soviet rule was established in Armenia, concluding the last page of the chronicles of the first Armenian republic.

Meanwhile, the Kurdish question was generating new sparks in Turkey. In 1920, one of the Kurdish leaders, Khalit Bey Jibranlı, and a number of Kurdish officers in the Turkish army held negotiations with Kurdish tribal chiefs and sheikhs in the provinces of Vardo, Karlova, Manazkert, Bulanik and Khnus to create a united front and struggle against the Erzurum and Sivas Congresses and an article of the National Pact. It was the article which denied the existence of the Kurdish people and placed a tombstone over the idea of independent Kurdistan.⁵⁶

In the summer of 1920, Khalit Bey Jibranlı established ties with Abdul Ghader and Abdurrahman Hakkari, members of the Association for the Revival of Kurdistan in Istanbul. Through their mediation, he came to an agreement with the Kurdish delegate to the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA) Yusuf Ziya and his supporters to fight for the independence of Kurdistan with the help of the League of Nations. At the same time, the supporters of Khalit Bey prepared for an armed revolt in the Dersim-Kochgiri area, which was mainly inhabited by the Kizilbash (Ali-Ilahi) population, hostile towards the Turkish government.

Early in 1920 the representatives of some influential Kurdish tribes such as the Janbekli and Kurmeshan convened an assembly in Dersim, and the participants unanimously swore to start an armed struggle for the sake of the establishment of an independent Kurdistan, which would comprise Diyarbakir, Van, Bitlis, Elazigh, and Dersim-Kochgiri provinces—that is, a large part of the territory of Western Armenia.

In November 1920 the Kurdish leaders of Dersim and Chmshkatsag convened a new meeting in Khozat, the center of Dersim, and decided to unite all their forces to gain their national rights. In November 15, they sent a letter to the Ankara government and demanded an immediate answer about its views on the autonomy of Kurdistan. The letter also demanded the release of all the Kurds imprisoned in Elazigh, Malatya, Sivas and Erzinjan, the immediate retreat of the Turkish troops from the Kochgiri region, and the withdrawal of all Turkish officials from all regions with Kurdish majorities. In response to the letter, the government of Ankara sent a delegation to Elazigh and Dersim. In order to calm down the Kurds, it announced that their claims were just and advised them to abstain from rebellion.⁵⁷

Pretending to be the Kurds' friends, the Kemalists tried to gain the favor of influential Kurdish leaders with various promises and bribes. They were able to obtain the friendship of some tribal chiefs of Dersim such as Mecho Agha, Diap Agha, Mustafa Zeki Bey, Remiz Bey, Abdulkhak Teftik Bey, and Hasan Hayri Bey. The Kemalists appointed them as delegates to the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, after which these former opponents began closely collaborating with the Kemalists. Moreover, some of them later supported the Turkish Nationalists in the suppression of the anti-Kemalist revolt in Dersim.⁵⁸

Occasionally the Kemalists made vain, unsubstantiated promises to pacify the Kurds and stroke the pride of the Kurdish statesmen collaborating with them. As an example, the delegate of Erzurum, Hüseyin Avni Bey, declared at the Grand National Assembly of Turkey: "This country belongs to the Kurds and the Turks."⁵⁹ Such announcements which obligated nothing could not at all satisfy Kurdish political circles which were demanding the satisfaction of their national ambitions within the framework of a joint federated state.

When necessary, the Kemalists threw away their mask of friendship with the Kurds. Thus, in spring 1921, the Kemalists demanded the dispersal of the anti-government Kurdish detachments in Dersim; otherwise they would order the obliteration of the Kurdish settlements. The Kurds answered the threat with a revolt which spread to other Kurdish-populated regions encompassing fifteen thousand square kilometers.⁶⁰ The Ankara government first decided to divide the Kurdish movement with the help of the Kurdish statesmen who were on their side, and they enjoyed some success. Later, they amassed significant forces at the centers of the revolts, and on March 15, 1921, they declared a state of siege in the provinces of Sivas, Elazigh and Erzinjan. The government sent a telegram to the leaders of the insurrection demanding their surrender, and received the response: "as they are aware that the Turkish government intends to exterminate the Kurds as they exterminated the Armenians, they will continue the struggle for the sake of their national rights."⁶¹

The insurgency grew bigger until it reached such great proportions that the Ankara government had to draw back some Turkish troops from the Greek front to send against the rebels. Finally the Kemalists were able to suppress the revolt with great difficulty.

In 1921, Mustafa Kemal and his government started energetic activities in the hope of taking advantage of Kurdish national and religious sentiments to seize Mosul province from the English and French and join this region rich in oil to the "New Turkey." Mustafa Kemal trusted the accomplishment of that important task to one of his close companions-in-arms, General Özdemir Pasha, who had repeatedly revealed his diplomatic capability in finding unusual solutions to various problems. Calling the Turks and Kurds "children of one common religion," the general ap-

pealed to them to unite around the Ankara government and shed their blood "for the sake of the faith" against the sworn enemies of Islam and especially against the English.⁶² At the same time, he successfully employed the key weapon of the Kemalist political armory—anti-imperialist slogans. Thus, all the Kurdish leaders who refused to obey the Kemalists were categorized as the "agents of imperialism," "religious fanatics," "reactionaries," and so forth.

The Kemalist authorities attempted to use the support of Bolshevik Russia to solve the Mosul problem in favor of Turkey, and employed the slogans of "anti-imperialist" and "anti-British" as bait. Therefore, in his letter dated August 4, 1921, the Kemalist minister of foreign affairs Yusuf Kemal Bey aimed to persuade Georgii Chicherin, the people's commissar of foreign affairs of Russia that the British planned to take steps to gain control of oil-rich Mosul and to perpetuate their colonial rule over India. Naturally this would directly affect Russian interests. "Toward this goal," Yusuf Kemal wrote, "the English had planned to establish several states between Mesopotamia and the Black Sea which must be under their own protection. Armenia was once planned for such a purpose, but now, since it is out of the question, England is trying to use for the same plan, though in vain, the Kurdish bands controlled by scoundrels."⁶³ He was referring to the establishment of a Kurdish state under British protection on Turkey's territory.

It is improbable that Moscow could not guess the hidden meaning of the Kemalist "revolutionary anti-imperialistic" prolixity. However, led by purely pragmatic considerations, the Soviet leaders not only pretended to enthusiastically and wholeheartedly accept it but also started encouraging the chauvinistic ambitions of Ankara.

For the sake of the solution of the Mosul issue, the Kemalists actively began to use the card of "independent Kurdistan." In particular, in order to gain the favor of the Iraqi Kurds, the Kemalists signed an agreement with their influential leaders in which they promised to aid the "holy cause" of the independence of Iraqi Kurdistan. Thus, Ankara gave its approval to establish an "independent Kurdistan," but only at the expense of Iraq.⁶⁴

In the early 1920s, Iranian Kurdistan was at the center of the Kemalists' attention. In mid-1922, a powerful separatist move-

ment started under the leadership of Ismail Agha Simko, the tribal chief of the Shekkak tribe, as a counterattack to the consistent state policy about the subjugation of insubordinate tribes. The insurgents demanded the creation of an independent Kurdistan on the territory of Iran.⁶⁵

There is some evidence that the Kurdish insurrection which had the purpose of liberating Iranian Kurdistan received its inspiration from the Turks and Bolsheviks. The Kemalists tried to keep the Persian territories in constant turbulence to create hostility between the Persians and the Kurds, so that the Turks could rely on the Iranian government's support against the Kurdish movement. In addition, the Kemalists attempted through those movements to distract Kurdish attention from Turkey and to concentrate on Iranian Kurdistan.⁶⁶ In 1922 Basri Bey, the head of the Turkish army's general staff, sent a secret instruction to Özdemir Pasha informing him that the victories of Simko and the growth of his influence among the Kurds were not in the Turkish interest. The instructions continued: "However, it is not our interest to make him our enemy either. So, you would accomplish a great service to the homeland if you could deceive the tribes and incline them against Simko, by, for example, spreading rumors that Simko conducted the revolution with English money, and shed Kurdish blood to serve the English, and solely his own interests."⁶⁷

During his "sincere talk" with Semen Ivanovich Aralov, the Soviet ambassador in Ankara, Mustafa Kemal did not conceal from the diplomatic representative of the "friendly country" that "the Kurds living around Lake Urmia had declared their desire to work jointly with Turkey," that they had the necessary amount of weapons and money, and they were ready to fight against "English imperialism." "The father of the Turks" then explained to his interlocutor: "The Kurdish Question is very complicated and tangled. England takes advantage of the fact that the Kurds belong to two states, namely, to Turkey and Persia, and plays with this. England wants to establish a Kurdish state under its control and thus be in a commanding position with respect to us, Persia and the Transcaucasus... Now the Kurdish leaders are divided; one part is inclined towards Iran, the other towards England, and the third towards us... The English forced Sheikh Mahmud to act against us in Sulaymaniyah... We Turks," Kemal continued

with a smirk, "do not leave wrongs unrequited either. We helped the Kurdish Fettik and others to revolt against the English in the south of Kurdistan."⁶⁸

In August 1922, the troops of Reza Khan of Iran wiped out Simko's revolt and occupied his residence of Chehrik Kale, thus ending for a while Turkish interference in the internal affairs of Iran.

The Kemalists followed a politics of double standards; while supporting the national desires of the Kurds in Iran and Iraq, in the regions of Turkish Kurdistan and Western Armenia inhabited by Kurds, they followed the traditional policy of "blood and iron" by mercilessly crushing any inclination towards independence and in general working to extirpate the Kurdish Question. The Kemalists fostered plans to transform Turkey into a homogenous state from the national and ethnic points of view. Therefore, they were prepared to continue the policy begun by the Young Turks of cleansing Western Armenia of "alien elements" in order to establishing an ethnically uniform Turkey. Now it was the turn of the Kurds, and Ankara intended to solve the Kurdish Question in its own manner.

Depicting the turn of Mustafa Kemal's policy to the strategy of "the big stick," the Kurdish national statesman Kâmuran Bedirhan noted that when the Kurds reminded him about the abundant promises given to them in the past, he in response showed the Kurds cannons and bayonets, and ordered the closure of Kurdish schools, the arrest of influential and patriotic statesmen, and the surrender of the latter to the notorious Independence Courts (special courts established during the Turkish War of Independence to prosecute those against the government).⁶⁹

On October 18, 1923, the Grand National Assembly of Turkey adopted a law "about the suppression of bandit movements," which gave the government the opportunity to qualify any movement as one of brigandage and banditry and suppress it with merciless cruelty.

The method of "total cleansing," already attempted on the Armenians, entered its next stage. The Kurds were convinced that after massacring the Armenians, Greeks and Assyrians, and expelling them from the country by brute force, they remained alone in Turkey, and the Turkish danger now was exclusively focused on them. They also realized that their Islamism had no value for

the nationalistic Kemalists, while their previous support and services to the Turkish state were completely ignored. At the same time, they deeply regretted that "when the Turks were dead," that is to say, in the final period of World War I when, after the Mudros Armistice the defeated Turkish state was placed at the mercy of the Allies, they lost their chance and did not revolt.

These grave thoughts drove the Kurds to internal organization. In the autumn of 1920, a number of influential Kurdish leaders such as the Jibranlı ashiret chief Colonel Khalit, the parliamentary delegate from Bitlis Ali Reza, Kemal Fevzi Bey, and Sheikh Said Nakshbendi established an organization which after five years of activity became a complete network rooted in the regions of Turkey inhabited by Kurds, and, most importantly, found supporters in Iran, Iraq, Syria and even Egypt.

CHAPTER SIX

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE KURDISH AND ARMENIAN QUESTIONS IN THE PERIOD BETWEEN SEVRES AND LAUSANNE

Even before the questions concerning Turkey became a subject of the negotiations at the international peace conferences, British diplomacy had energetically worked out a variety of approaches to the "Turkish Question" it was going to use during various international gatherings. The Armenian and the Kurdish Questions had their significant place in the British long-term and complex plans. However, a fundamental solution to these problems was certainly not the main target of the British government. Its own geopolitical interests were naturally the country's priority. The Foreign Office did not shy away from the tried and tested method of artificially inflaming an issue in order to make an adversary more yielding. Such an attempt was made in the summer of 1919.

The British political agent Colonel Arnold Talbot Wilson unveiled a plan about the status of Western Armenia intended to "solve" the Armenian and the Kurdish Questions. The colonel suggested forming an Armenian state by uniting Trebizond and Erzurum provinces, mainly under American protection, and establishing a Kurdish state, presumably under British protection, in the other four Armenian provinces. This suggestion was so absurd that it met with rejection even in British political circles. For instance, in his letter to Lord Curzon dated August 19, 1919, the English admiral Webb wrote that he had serious objections to Colonel Wilson's plan. The admiral explained that Trebizond practically did not have any Armenian population, whereas Van and Mushsaud [this was how Webb called Mush] in Western Armenia, which had always been regions heavily populated with Armenians, were going to remain in the Kurdish state. The admiral commented: "This would be regarded as a betrayal of Ar-

menian interests and in direct contradiction to assurances which have been given by Allied Powers." Then he added that "it would be quite premature and most dangerous to attempt delimitation of frontiers of Armenia and Kurdistan at present..."¹

Another British diplomat in Constantinople, Thomas B. Hohler, also expressed his discomfort with and criticism of Colonel Wilson's plan in his letter written on August 27, 1919 to Clerk Kerr, noting that he himself is "more or less conversant with Kurdish affairs," concerning which he has had twenty five years of personal experience. He said that he approached this matter from a completely different point of view, which he was sure was correct. He said, "We do not care a row of pins about Kurds quâ Kurds I imagine, nor about Armenians except from a humanitarian point of view..." Then he went on to say, "I fear we cannot afford in these hard times to go in too heavily for humanity, and *must* base ourselves in the first place on considerations of British interests." In Hohler's opinion, Great Britain had to look at the Kurdish Question practically solely from the viewpoint of Mesopotamia. This meant that England was to abstain from raising the Armenian and the Kurdish Questions in Turkey itself because at that moment this did not correspond to British interests.

Hohler had an extremely negative opinion about Colonel Wilson. "I'm rather frightened of Wilson," he wrote. "He seems to me too slap-dash, and his intelligence has been very faulty so far and his actions consequently rather imprudent, while his agents don't inspire confidence."

Summarizing his views, Hohler found that it was necessary to leave the borders of Armenia and Kurdistan in a vague state and first of all become involved in "getting our Mesopotamian frontier right."² This could not be expressed more clearly. England was trying to avoid playing with fire in a region where it had no real or long-term interests. Its focus was Mesopotamia, which "was coming to" Britain according to the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement.

The opinion of the British high commissioner in Constantinople was not much different from that of Hohler, who said that the "whole basis of our action as regards Kurds should be in my opinion the assurance of a satisfactory boundary to Mesopotamia." The difference was that "such a boundary cannot possibly be secured I imagine in the plains, but must be found in the Kurdish

mountains." That meant that in order to secure the Mesopotamian border, it would be necessary for the English, as the commissioner said, to be "taking on only so much of the barren mountains of Kurdistan as may be indispensable for this purpose."

Then, expressing his platonic love of the Armenian and the Kurdish peoples, the commissioner went on to say: "I have not the slightest doubt but that British administrators could manage to secure peace and justice to the Kurds, as well as to the Armenians although these two things are more congenial to the latter than to the former."

The commissioner had one conclusion: he considered it desirable to leave the determination of the Armenian and Kurdish zones "exactly as vague as is our present knowledge of the real value of their present claims both of which are without doubt equally preposterous."³ So this British high-ranking statesman characterized the Armenian and Kurdish ambitions for national self-determination simply as "preposterous"

Sir John Evelyn Shuckburgh, an official of the India Office of Great Britain, had an even more noteworthy idea about the Kurdish and Armenian Questions. Speaking about the future state of Kurdistan, he wrote in his August 1, 1919 letter to Lord Charles Hardinge at the Foreign Office, that the civil commissioner of Baghdad was empowered to create "an Arab province of Mosul, bordered by a fringe of autonomous Kurdish States under Kurdish Chiefs with British political advisers." However, he added that such instructions were temporary, since all decisions would remain indefinite until their final solutions at the signing of the peace treaty with Turkey.

It said in the letter that according to the opinion of Edwin S. Montague, the secretary of state for India, the final solution of the Kurdish Question depended on various factors, one of which was that the expanse and nature of the Armenian state were still indefinite. He objected to Great Britain accepting the responsibility for "the predominantly Kurdish area" because he considered it inappropriate to extend "British military and political commitments in these remote regions." At the same time, Montague found it "hard to believe that any other Western Power would accept a mandate for Kurdistan or would undertake the thankless task of superintending its affairs."⁴ He was also against restoring Turkish rule

over the six Armenian provinces even under European control, about which British diplomats had made proposals.⁵ This meant leaving Western Armenia under Turkish control.

British diplomacy also had serious objections to leaving the work of government to the Kurds without any European supervision because in that case "the interests of the local Christian elements" would be sacrificed. In London's opinion, Kurdistan without supervision could become an unpleasant neighbor not only for the new Iraqi state, but for the Armenian mandate state in the extreme north as well.⁶

On the night of March 16, 1920, English troops landed in Istanbul and placed the city under military occupation in order to conclude the issue of partitioning Turkey as quickly as possible. The English dissolved the Ottoman parliament and exiled most of the delegates to the island of Malta. The British military authorities forced Damad Ferid Pasha, again appointed grand vizier, to make negative declarations about the Kemalist movement. The sheikh ul-Islam declared that movement to be "an insurrection against the sultan" and called Kemal Pasha "a criminal."

As their answer, the Kemalists convoked a new parliament. On April 23, 1920 the Turkish National Grand Assembly was convened in Ankara.

Constantinople, the capital of the Ottoman Empire, had thus come under English control. The English established their supervision over the entire zone of the Straits and if necessary could militarily occupy it too. At that period of time the Greeks ruled over Smyrna and the surrounding zones, whereas Cilicia and the Arabian countries were already basically occupied by the English and the French. Under such conditions, in the opinion of the British authorities, the difficulties were connected with the eastern that is, the Armenian and Kurdish provinces. The English diplomat Eyre Crowe in his letter from Paris to George Kidston, dated November 17, 1919, expressed his view that even if America rejected the mandate over these territories, and no other country accepted the protection of the area, "it should be possible to devise some method of placing the whole of this area under the League of Nations and some form of International control and dividing it into Armenian and Kurdish zones (it seems both possible and desirable to have a Kurdish and an Armenian policy at the same

time)."⁷ Moreover, Crowe found that the first zone could "link up Cilicia with the Erivan republic, and the latter might cover the really Kurdish territories from Diarbekir to the Persian frontier. Whether the Kurdish zone should be attached in some way to a Mesopotamian mandate or left to an international control, would be a matter for discussion..."⁸

In another letter to Kidston dated December 1, 1919, Crowe justifiably wrote that "to consider and decide the Armenian question purely on the basis of present numbers would surely amount to countenancing and encouraging the past Turkish method of dealing with the problem of their subject nationalities!"⁹

These proposals and counterproposals testify that the British authorities did not have clear plans either for the Kurdish or for the Armenian Question. The British military authorities, and its general staff in particular, did not see in April of 1920 "how the State of Armenia, if it is to include any part of the former Turkish vilayets, can be established without the goodwill of Turkey..."¹⁰ It even appeared to the general staff that "the best interests of Armenia demand that her representatives should be told frankly that her existence as a self-contained State, if she desires to absorb any territory formerly Turkish, can only be guaranteed under Turkish suzerainty..." The general staff tried to assure that "if these facts were once faced most of the difficulties connected with Armenia would disappear."¹¹

As early as 1918, when trying to argue that Armenia was not able to gain control over its ancestral lands Henry Wilson, the British chief of the Imperial General Staff, asked: "How do you imagine that unarmed Armenia can resist an armed Turkey and a rearmed Azerbaijan?"¹² After signing the Mudros Armistice, the War Office of Great Britain exercised pressure on its government to gradually mitigate its policy towards Turkey and even make concessions to it. The War Office saw the nationalist movement as a patriotic organization with the chief goal of preventing the partitioning of the Ottoman Empire. It threatened its own government that if Britain did not attempt to improve its relations with the Kemalists, then it had to be ready to accept the alliance of the Kemalism and Bolshevism which would spread Pan-Islamic ideas from the Transcaspian area to India and provoke revolts in the Near and Middle East. Moreover, making 'the patriotic elements'

hostile would hinder the reduction of the British troops in Egypt, Palestine and Mesopotamia and would cause the British taxpayers to shoulder the harsh duty of paying unnecessary millions.¹³

This view had numerous supporters not only in the British army and navy but also in the Foreign Office. For instance, Montagu continuously reminded Lloyd George that if relations with Turkey were not arranged, the peace would be endangered in the east. "Friendly" Turkey could be useful for Britain and "angry" Turkey would never stop inciting political disturbances in India, insisted Montagu.

Undoubtedly, after World War I the center of the Kurdish movement was not in Iranian or Iraqi Kurdistan but in Western Armenia, and it was not coincidental that this very territory became the birthplace of Kurdish nationalism. How seriously the possibility of the creation of a Kurdish state was taken by the Turkish masses is revealed by the following fact. In September 1919, the British government sent Major Edward Noel, the famous intelligence agent and expert on the Kurdish Question, to Western Armenia with the assignment of finding out the balance of political forces in the territory, to conduct intelligence service and political activities, and to acquire comprehensive information in general. Major Noel was accompanied by Kamuran and Jeladet Bedirhan, who were well known Anglophile Kurdish nationalists and advocates of the establishment of a Kurdish state. Crossing through nearly all of Western Armenia, the English secret serviceman found out something very important which at first amazed him. It turned out that the local Turkish population, which greatly feared the establishment of Kurdish rule over that area, preferred having Armenian rather than Kurdish rule.¹⁴

A number of British statesmen believed the Kurdish and the Armenian Questions to be closely intertwined. Arthur Hirtzel, the India Office expert, wrote in his memorandum that the Armenian Question is the Kurdish Question. He found realistic prospects for the establishment of a Kurdish state. In his opinion, in that Kurdish state, which would have to be under an English, French or American mandate, Armenians would also be granted rights, which, thanks to their comparatively high cultural level, would be greater than what they could expect in Armenia due to their small numbers. As a clarification, Hirtzel noted that the Armenians

would get about the same rights in that hypothetical Kurdish state as the famous Morley-Minto reforms of 1909 would give to the Indian Muslims.¹⁵ Hirtzel's conclusions surely testified to the fact that the aforementioned British institution dealing with the Armenian Question was not particularly pro-Armenian. Furthermore, Hirtzel and the Kurdish statesmen sharing his view believed that the establishment of an Armenian state in the area of Western Armenia contradicted "the principle of self-determination" because after the destruction of the Armenians during the war, very few Armenians were left, except in Cilicia, and the Kurds would not like to be controlled by them. Mahmud Bey, the leader of the Kurdish Milli tribe advanced the same view during his talk with British political officer Captain Charles Leonard Woolley. Moreover, he wanted to persuade the Englishman that the Kurdish government would be tolerant and broadminded, and would recruit the Armenians for the army as they were more educated. Then he added that when Kurdish schools would be opened, the Kurds would surpass the Armenians in their educational level.¹⁶

Arnold Wilson, the British civil commissioner in Baghdad, shared the view of the officials of the Foreign Office and the army's general headquarters about the future status of Western Armenia. In his opinion Turkish sovereignty had to be maintained over the six Armenian provinces. The establishment of an Armenian or Kurdish state depended on the United States accepting a mandate over part of Asiatic Turkey. He insisted that the British government must not accept any additional responsibility over those provinces.¹⁷

For obvious reasons, the English had adopted a hostile position towards the Kemalist movement since spring 1919. It is true that they made some attempts, relying on the Sublime Porte, their main political source of influence in Turkey, to take the Kemalists in hand. This plan seemed quite realistic, especially as Grand Vizier Damad Ferid Pasha was their partisan. He was the head of the Itilafist government of Istanbul and enjoyed the complete trust of Sultan Mehmed VI Vahideddin. In October 1919, Grand Vizier Ferid Pasha was replaced by Ali Riza, also considered to have connections with the British. London had a reserve or alternative plan too; namely, it could reconcile the Kemalists with Istanbul and thus be in full control of the situation again. However, reality

proved the insufficiency of both versions, and the impossibility of their practical realization.

* * *

Undoubtedly, the Kemalist movement and the successes it achieved forced Armenian statesmen to adopt in accordance with the changed situation in Turkey new positions on the Armenian Question and various related issues, including the Kurdish Question. The following fact is notable in this regard. On March 20, 1920 in London the Armenian delegation with the participation of Patriarch Zaven Ter Yeghiayan of Constantinople, Avetis Aharonian, and Poghos Nubar Pasha met with the committee determining the Armenian borders. During the meeting, a member of the committee, English diplomat Robert Vansittart, asked how the future Armenian state was going to treat the Kurds as a minority in Armenia. Aharonian gave the following answer: "At the present moment in Armenia, very few ashirets have remained implacable and rebellious toward the Armenians, especially since their numbers have drastically decreased as a result of the war. We do not have even the slightest doubt that when the Kurds are free from the Turkish corrupt influence they will also prefer to live with us in peace. Of course the minority might also choose to migrate either to Turkey or to Kurdistan."¹⁸

Early in March 1920, the Entente Supreme Council passed a resolution which foresaw the creation of independent Armenia. The resolution mentioned an idea, that "the recognition of independent Kurdistan is also a possibility,"¹⁹ without specifying the borders of the latter state.

From April 19 to 26, 1920 an international conference was held in San Remo to work out the Entente's peace treaty with Turkey, so the Armenian and Kurdish Questions again became a topic of discussion. Lloyd George announced about the Armenian Question that: "I could not accept the responsibility of agreeing to the Larger Armenia. ... From the moment America repudiated any idea of accepting the mandate for Armenia, I was more than doubtful of the practicability of establishing and maintaining an independent Armenian State from sea to sea."²⁰ Lloyd George portrayed Armenia's situation in the following way: "They had

on one side the Azerbaijanis... on another side they had the Anatolians, and on another the Kurds. It seemed to him an extraordinary proposition to ask the Armenians to conquer a vast territory when they could hardly defend the very limited sphere which they held at present."

Lloyd George felt that any solution required military action in the heart of Asia Minor and the serious and long-term expenditure of resources by the Allies. He was convinced that no state would do this, especially since it concerned regions where the majority of the inhabitants were hostile to the Allies and where local conditions favor stubborn partisan fighting. The English prime minister asserted that the Allies would not even consider waging war in the interior of Anatolia.²¹

With Lloyd George's clear formulation kept in mind, Lord Curzon's declaration that the liberation of Armenia "had been one of the most often proclaimed Allied war aims," and that in this regard, "the Allies had, therefore, a heavy moral responsibility upon them" sounds very cynical.²²

The Kurdish Question was the topic of discussion at the conference session on April 19, and Lord Curzon made a thorough analysis of it. He mentioned that it was a difficult and complicated problem as Kurdistan, which comprised one part of the Ottoman Empire, was inhabited by warlike tribes which were hostile both to their neighbors and to the Ottoman government. This problem also concerned the European states, as Kurdistan was the neighbor of Armenia. Its destiny was also connected with the Nestorian or Chaldian Assyrians.

According to Curzon, the question of Southern Kurdistan, that is to say, the Kurdish-inhabited regions in the north of Mesopotamia (present Iraqi Kurdistan), had an extremely clear solution. As it was part of oil-rich Mosul province, to which the English had pretensions, it "was likely to pass under the mandatory control of Great Britain."

As for the status of the Kurds living in Eastern Anatolia, Lord Curzon suggested several options, of which he preferred the following: placing the territories with a Kurdish population under the protection of England and France. If for some reason its realization was not possible, Curzon felt that separating Kurdistan from Turkey and granting it autonomy was the next best option.

However, he expressed his misgivings about this option. He wondered whether the Kurds would be able to express their collective will about the issue of establishing an autonomous Kurdistan, since their intentions had always been extremely vague. In addition, it would be hard to find "any representative Kurd," so that in his opinion, even Sherif Pasha could not be accepted as the representative of Kurdistan.

Lord Curzon's final variant was that if independence was unattainable for the Kurds, or if England and France did not agree to take Kurdistan under its protection, the best option for the Kurds would be to be left under the Turkish government, to which "the country had grown accustomed." In general, Lord Curzon believed that the Kurds could not exist without the support of the great powers.²³ The range of options about the solution to the Kurdish Question clearly testified that the Foreign Office had not reached a final decision.

During the San Remo Conference, the English adopted a document which became the basis of the peace treaty with Turkey. It stated the following about Kurdistan. A committee of representatives of England, France and Italy would work in Istanbul and within six months of the peace treaty coming into force, present a scheme of "local autonomies" for the areas inhabited by Kurds, which were east of the Euphrates, south of the southern border of Armenia, and north of the borders of Syria and Mesopotamia. This plan had to include the protection of the Assyrians and other racial and religious minorities in that area. Another committee with the representatives of England, France, Italy, Iran and the Kurds was "to correct" the Turkish border, and in particular the Turkish-Iranian border. It was also decided that if, after the the Turkish peace treaty came into force, "the Kurdish people" of the aforementioned territories turned to the Council of the League of Nations and demanded in the name of the majority independence from Turkey, and the council decided that the people were "capable of such independence" and guaranteed this, then Turkey was obligated to accomplish the guarantee and concede all rights over the territory.²⁴

After a broad debate of this draft, it was decided: 1. To accept the British draft with the reservation that the rights of France should not be limited over the territory east of the Euphrates,

which were guaranteed for France by a triple accord at San Remo between England, France and Italy. 2. If the members of the "Kurdish committee" were not able to come to a unanimous solution about any matter, the problem would be turned over to the leaders of the interested states for examination.²⁵

Thus, the discussion of the Kurdish Question during the San Remo Conference showed that the question of the establishment of a Kurdish state was still on the level of vague discourse in the programs of the Triple Entente powers. First of all, those states expressed doubts that the Kurds were capable of independent existence. For instance, the English did not believe in the existence of the "Kurdish national idea," without which it would be impossible to establish statehood. In their opinion, the Kurds still maintained their medieval traditions. The majority of them had not escaped a tribal mentality and could not imagine any other authority but that authority of the aghas and the sheikhs. Consequently, "contemporary democratic standards" would not be applicable to them. The English called the Kurds the Asian version of the Albanians because of those attributes. The English thought that the educated Kurds with the ambition of seceding from Turkey were devoid of sufficient influence.

The major part of the text of the peace treaty between Turkey and the Entente was arranged between the Allies at the San Remo Conference. It was decided that the agreement would be signed in Sèvres, a suburb of Paris.

On May 11, 1920, the powers of the Triple Entente presented the Turkish government with the conditions of the draft of the San Remo peace treaty. The Sublime Porte immediately created a committee to prepare their counterproposals. A memorandum was prepared, and Damad Ferid Pasha left for Paris to introduce it to the Entente Supreme Council. The goal of the memorandum was to obtain concessions. As for the Kurdish Question, the Turks demanded that Kurdistan be left as part of the Ottoman Empire.

On August 10, 1920 the Treaty of Sèvres, which was the crown of the Versailles system, was signed. The treaty was basically a death sentence for the Ottoman Empire. Along with other international political problems, the Sèvres Treaty was intended to solve the problems of independence for Armenia and Kurdistan.²⁶ In the treaty, Armenia was acknowledged *de jure* as a free, inde-

pendent and sovereign country. Since the precise Turkish-Armenian boundaries were left unspecified, it was left to US president Woodrow Wilson to completely finalize the Turkish-Armenian boundaries within the regions of Erzurum, Bitlis and Trebizond provinces. About three months later, the president had drawn the boundaries, which were announced on November 22, and so Armenia received its own territory on the map, an area of about 127,000 square kilometers. According to Woodrow Wilson's *Arbitral Award*, the Armenian-Turkish boundary started from the city of Ghotur [Kotur] near the Iranian border, and crossed Van, Bitlis and Mush provinces, leaving about half of the area of the province of Van outside of Armenia. Then the boundary stretched northwards, going near Erzinjan. The boundary north of Dersim was drawn in such a way that the Armenia had a proper outlet to the sea.

The American president's address noted that all the ethnic groups included in the future Armenian state within the mentioned borders would have equal civil rights.²⁷ Western Armenia with the Wilsonian borders would comprise Van sanjak from Van province, Bitlis and Mush sanjaks from Bitlis province, almost the entire Erzurum province, the sanjaks of Old Bayazit and Yezinka, Trebizond sanjak and the eastern parts of Gümüşhane. It also included all of Lake Van, the upper and middle valleys of the Arasani and the Western Euphrates, and the upper and middle valleys of the Chorokh [Choruh or Coruh] River.

However, those territories were under Turkish control and the Allies did not explain how the Armenians were going to obtain the land granted to them on paper, especially since instead of the exhausted and diminished army of the sultan they were facing the newly created armed forces of the Kemalists energized with nationalist enthusiasm. Nikoghayos Adonts believed that "the solution of the Armenian Question in Turkey [by the Treaty of Sèvres] is being delayed. And as the history of the Armenian Question showed, every uncertainty, every delay has a destructive effect on the fate of the Armenians."²⁸

It is important to note that three of the six Armenian provinces were left out of the territory given to Armenia in the Treaty of Sèvres. Part of the excluded provinces remained in Turkey, while the rest of the region to the east of the Euphrates River was

joined to Kurdistan. Thus, the Kurdish Question was included in the Treaty of Sèvres (Section Three, Kurdistan, Articles 62-64), for the first time becoming the subject of international legal treaties. However, the treaty referred only to the Kurds living in Turkey, and Kurdistan was not going to be established where it should have been established. For instance, the Dersim and Kharberd sanjaks that were given to Kurdistan ethnically and geographically formed an indivisible part of the Armenian plateau. This, Adonts commented,

was an obvious step directed against the vital interests of Armenia. Of course the Armenians were not less interested in the creation of an independent Kurdistan than the Allies. In that way the ignorant Kurdish tribal chiefs would finally stop being an evil instrument in the hands of the Turkish politicians... The idea of an artificial structure on an alien land would better suit old Molla Idris or the Turkish rulers who imitated him, those who dreamed about the Kurdification of the Armenian regions. But it was astonishing and unexpected that the European diplomats would accept and sanctify the vile policy of the inspirers of the Armenian massacres. The real political nature of that act apparently was different, and can be understood if we recall the secret treaty of 1916 between France and Russia about the division of Armenia--precisely along the Kharberd [border] line.²⁹

Adonts meant the English-French-Russian Treaty of April 16, 1916 signed in Petrograd, according to which Erzurum, Trebizond and Bitlis provinces were to join the Russian Empire after the war.³⁰

The Treaty of Sèvres recognized the rights of the Armenian people over the eastern provinces of Turkey, namely, over Western Armenia, at a time when this land had been completely emptied of its former inhabitants. The problem was that the powers of the Entente, wrote Adonts, "did not come up with a better idea than squeezing Armenia inside a chain of Muslim countries, pushing it away from them [the Entente] in the south and also cutting it off from Russia in the north. The Armenians wanted to obtain a free, independent homeland, but not a prison deprived of light, guarded by Turks, Tatars, Kurds and others like them."³¹

What positive things did the Sèvres Treaty have for the Armenian people? First, Armenia entered the group of signatories of international treaties as an independent state. Secondly, the powers recognized the Armenian people's inalienable right of statehood. Even when the articles of the treaty referring to Armenia lost their legal force, they never lost their importance and even today remain as the symbol of the international acknowledgement of the Armenian Question and Armenia as an independent subject in the system of international relations. That is, to say the moral power of the Treaty of Sèvres is still functional. In brief, it was a diplomatic success for Armenia.

However, the treaty became, as Hovhannes Kajaznuni expressed it, "a kind of a blue bird," "untouchable and inaccessible."³² It irritated both Kemalist Turkey and Soviet Russia. The two states categorically refused to recognize it, considering it to be "imperialistic" and viewing Armenia as the myrmidon of their most dangerous enemy, Great Britain. During the Turkish mejlis session Mustafa Kemal called Sultan Mehmed VI Vahid-eddin, Grand Vizier Damad Ferid Pasha and other officials who had participated or somehow were connected with the Treaty of Sèvres traitors. On his suggestion, the assembly adopted a law condemning them in as traitors to the state in absentia.³³ In addition, "the father of the Turks" put the names of the 150 members of the Turkish delegation who signed the treaty on a black list.³⁴

Of course the failure of the Treaty of Sèvres was the result of a sharp change in the international situation which had its consequences even in the Middle East. After their initial success, the Greeks collided with growing Kemalist resistance and started losing battles one after the other. The Kemalists' foreign political position also was strengthened, mainly because of flirting and the establishment of friendly relations with the Russian Federation. They increased their contacts with France and Italy, the states of the Triple Entente which did not disguise their dissatisfaction with Sèvres. Another important factor was the martial characteristics of the Kemalist army and the rise in its morale, stimulated by nationalistic ideas, in the summer of 1920.

After the Treaty of Sèvres, certainly the Turkish threat for Armenia did not end. Instead, it increased even more, because Kemalist Turkey wanted to abrogate the treaty by force. The Kemal-

ists could obviously see that Europe was tired and wanted to settle its relations with the new regime of Turkey, the leaders of which, it must be confessed, exhibited great enthusiasm and ability.

As previously mentioned, the Treaty of Sèvres was the first international legal act which dealt with the Kurdish Question and acknowledged the Kurds' rights as a separate ethnos. Articles 62-64 referring to the Kurds included conditions on the basis of which it was supposed the problem of the national self-determination of most Kurds would be solved. However, the treaty did not touch upon the problems of the Kurds living in Iranian Kurdistan and Syria.

Article 62 stated:

A Commission sitting at Constantinople and composed of three members appointed by the British, French and Italian Governments respectively shall draft within six months from the coming into force of the present Treaty a scheme of local autonomy for the predominantly Kurdish areas lying east of the Euphrates, south of the southern boundary of Armenia as it may be hereafter determined, and north of the frontier of Turkey with Syria and Mesopotamia, as defined in Article 27, II (2) and (3). If unanimity cannot be secured on any question, it will be referred by the members of the Commission to their respective Governments. The scheme shall contain full safeguards for the protection of the Assyro-Chaldeans and other racial or religious minorities within these areas, and with this object a Commission composed of British, French, Italian, Persian and Kurdish representatives shall visit the spot to examine and decide what rectifications, if any, should be made in the Turkish frontier where, under the provisions of the present Treaty, that frontier coincides with that of Persia.

Article 63 obligated Turkey to accept and realize the resolutions of both committees within three months. Article 64 declared that if one year later the Kurdish population of the regions mentioned in Article 62 applied to the Council of the League of Nations with the request that the majority of the population wanted

to be independent of Turkey, and the League Council considered it capable of independence, then Turkey would have to relinquish its rights over those regions. If the Kurds of Mosul province were willing to enter into the body of the Kurdish state, the Allies would not object.³⁵

Thus, the Treaty of Sèvres envisaged creating an autonomous Kurdistan on the territory of Turkey first, and granted it the right, if it so wanted, to secede from Turkey one year later to become independent Kurdistan. Consequently the problem of Kurdistan received a partial solution, opening the door to future difficulties.³⁶

The part of the Treaty of Sèvres referring to the Kurds received contradictory interpretations. For instance, Karo Sasuni found that English influence was noticeable in it, and that in general the English were pursuing long-term goals in the articles referring to Kurdistan. They were conscious that it was absolutely impossible to extend the borders of Iraq to Diyarbakir and Malatya, taking them under English protection, because the rival powers also wanted their share. So England endeavored to establish an independent Kurdish state, unite it with Mosul and expand British domination from the north of Mesopotamia to the depths of Asia Minor without creating any problems with the Allies. Hence, Karo Sasuni considered the articles of Sèvres Treaty referring to the Kurds the success of British diplomacy.³⁷

The Russian Kurdologist Vasilii Nikitin assessed the Treaty of Sèvres for the Kurds in the following way: "Though the Treaty of Sèvres remained only on paper, it marked an extremely important turning point in the development of the Kurdish Question. For the first time in history, the treatment in a diplomatic document took place of... the question of local autonomy in the regions densely inhabited with Kurds. Since that moment, the international significance of the Kurdish problem no longer aroused doubt."³⁸ Another Russian expert on the Kurds, Mikhail S. Lazarev, wrote: "We should confess that Articles 62-64 of the Sèvres Treaty did not die with the treaty but fully remained in the ideological and political arsenal of the Kurdish national liberation movement. Being unrealizable in practice from their very birth, and soon losing their legal force, nevertheless, the articles remain a symbol to this day of the fact that the Kurdish people's right to self-determination was recognized for the first time in history, along with the existence of the Kurdish national question as a distinct subject in the

system of international relations. The recognition was not granted from above, but gained at the price of the blood of thousands of warriors who died in numerous Kurdish revolts."³⁹

Famous Kurdish national statesman Kâmuran Ali Bedirhan described the Treaty of Sèvres in this way: the treaty "secured for the Kurdish people the right of unity and independence. It was gained as a result of lengthy efforts and great sacrifices. Even though that treaty was never put into practice, its moral power was strengthened with new factors..."⁴⁰

The British historian Arnold Toynbee, on the contrary, found that the Treaty of Sèvres did not have any essential impact on the Kurdish Question. He wrote: "There seems to be no evidence that this provision [Article 62] made any impression on the minds of the Kurdish population concerned, or even that they were aware that it had been inserted in the treaty."⁴¹ Toynbee felt that for the Kurds, what was more important was the possibility of the creation of "an Armenian state in the territory where they lived," which led them to collaborate with the Turks, "for though there is strong evidence that they were alienated from Turkey by their experience of Turkish rule, it is certain that the prospect of Armenian rule was regarded by them with greater repugnance."⁴²

The truth is that from the very beginning, the powers were not in earnest about the articles referring to Kurdistan.⁴³ Articles 62 to 64 were also vulnerable to criticism as the treaty did not explain how and by what means the transition from autonomy to independence and secession from the structure of Turkey would be realized.

By 1922, the Allied powers had already forgotten the Kurdish articles and in general, they did not raise the Kurdish Question in their proposals any more. As a result, as we can see below, the Kemalists had the opportunity to leave it off the agenda of the Lausanne Conference. All the countries which signed the Treaty of Sèvres, except for Italy, did not ratify it. Furthermore, later on, because of the changes in the international situations, England reconsidered its previously proposed plans about the establishment of an independent Kurdish state.

The provisions of the Treaty of Sèvres quickly lost their value because the Kemalist regime became fairly strong and consolidated its power. Turkish-Bolshevik collaboration increased. Bolshevik Russia provided military, political and moral support to the

Turkish Nationalists. The governments of Ankara and Moscow resolutely declared that they would not acknowledge or respect the Treaty of Sèvres.

In spring 1921, Winston Churchill, the British secretary of state for the colonies, assessed the international situation for the British after the Greek suffered a crushing defeat by the Kemalists in the battle near İnönü in Anatolia: "The reactions from this state of affairs fall mainly upon us, and to a lesser extent on the French. They are all unfavourable. The Turks will be thrown into the arms of the Bolsheviks; Mesopotamia will be disturbed at the critical period of the reduction of the Army there; it will probably be quite impossible to hold Mosul and Baghdad without a powerful and expensive army... Further misfortunes will fall upon the Armenians."⁴⁴

It was under such conditions that the conference of the government leaders and ministers of foreign affairs of England, France, Italy and Japan took place in London from February 21 to March 14, 1921. This was "the result of the resistance that Turkey put up against accepting the conditions of the Treaty of Sèvres," Aleksandr Khatisian wrote.⁴⁵ The main topic of the discussions of the Conference of London was the reconsideration of the conditions of the Treaty of Sèvres. Two Turkish delegations were sent to London, one from Constantinople and the other from Ankara. However, immediately after the conference started its work, the delegation of Constantinople refused its commission and its leader Reshid Pasha declared that Bekir Sami Bey, the leader of the Ankara delegation, was authorized to express the united Turkish view.

The draft treaty that Turkey introduced at the conference essentially articulated all the major principles of the National Pact. It did not recognize the Armenian right of self-determination. Bekir Sami Bey demanded the reinstatement of the Turkish borders of 1914, and the return of Izmir and Cilicia. The Armenian Question also became a subject of debates at the London Conference. Poghos Nubar Pasha and Avetis Aharonian tried to persuade the powers to acknowledge the rights of Armenia over Western Armenia in vain.

Speaking about the Kurdish Question, the head of the British delegation, Lord Curzon, declared that the Turks had to grant autonomy to the Kurds. In his extended speech on February 24,

Bekir Sami Bey thoroughly presented the position of the united Turkish delegation about the Armenian and Kurdish Questions. He declared: "We find that the scrupulous study of the agrarian problem, especially concerning Armenia and Kurdistan, provides the possibility of finding a just solution to its essential points." Then he added that Turkey recognized the borders it has with Armenia which were determined through the Treaty of Alexandropol on December 2, 1920. As for the Kurdish Question, in Bekir Sami Bey's opinion, the Kurds wanted nothing but to live with the Turks side by side, like brothers.⁴⁶ In other words, the Turkish delegation spoke against Kurdish national self-determination, which meant that both Ankara and Istanbul demanded the annulment of the relevant articles of the Treaty of Sèvres about the Kurds. Simultaneously applying the Turkish traditional tactic of lulling the opponent's vigilance, Bekir Sami Bey declared about Armenia and Kurdistan that "the future of these two countries was of very great interest to Turkey, in as much as they lie upon her eastern frontier." At the same time, the head of the Turkish delegation made it understood that they considered the Kurdish Question as a domestic Turkish matter.⁴⁷

However, Lord Curzon persistently demanded a reexamination of the Armenian and the Kurdish articles of the Treaty of Sèvres, emphasizing that the Entente powers compromised with Turkey by doing so and agreeing to put the questions of the future of Armenia and Kurdistan to a second discussion. Trying to disregard the Armenian Question as much as possible, Bekir Sami Bey bent over backwards to persuade the conference participants that the Kurds were appropriately represented in the Turkish National Grand Assembly and that the Kurds had always declared that they "constituted an indivisible whole with Turkey: the two races were united by a common feeling, a common culture and a common religion." Then, crafting a reservation, Bekir Sami Bey noted that in fact a small number of Kurds expressed their desire to secede from Turkey after the armistice, and they had established a "small committee" under the leadership of two Ottoman senators, one of which was Sherif Pasha, a personage not unknown to the Europeans. However, the committee was a self-proclaimed body which did not represent anybody, and was led more by personal than national motives. The head of the Turkish delegation added

that the Kurds of Constantinople refused to recognize the members of the abovementioned committee, and declared their rights to be on this committee to be void.

To prove to the Allies the truth of his statements, Bekir Sami Bey declared that the Ankara government was ready to receive a commission in Kurdistan which could conduct an investigation or even a referendum. Bekir Sami Bey lied, however, stating that the new organic statute drafted by the Turkish National Grand Assembly granted the Kurds local autonomy. Areas with a predominantly Kurdish population would receive such autonomy. He added that "the frontiers indicated in Article 62 of the Treaty of Peace did not correspond to the real ethnographical situation." He pointed out that the western and southern portions of the provinces of Mamuret ul-Aziz and of Diyarbakir, particularly Severek sanjak, were purely Turkish. Only the Dersim sanjak in the province of Diyarbakir was Kurdish. Particularly dense masses of Kurds inhabited the provinces of Bitlis, Van and a part of Mosul. They were superior in numbers along the Iranian border and in the north. On the other hand, the districts of Erbil, Altin Köprü and of Tuz Hurmatli [Tuz Khurmatu] in Mosul province were primarily inhabited by Turks.

When Lord Curzon demanded precise facts about the intentions of the Turkish government to provide the Kurds with autonomy, the specific borders of that autonomous Kurdistan, and other items, Bekir Sami Bey simply avoided answering and started speaking extravagantly about the resolution of Ankara to implement a policy of decentralization, and added that the differences between the Kurds and the Turks were not bigger than those between the English and the Scots.⁴⁸

This approach of the Turkish delegation testified that the experienced Turkish diplomats must have come to the conclusion in London that the powers of the Triple Entente were ready to compromise with the Turks about the Armenian and Kurdish Questions and reconsider the clauses of the Treaty of Sèvres referring to Armenia and Kurdistan. It is possible that the Kemalist intelligence service obtained trustworthy information about this.

Many facts indicated that such an atmosphere indeed existed in London and Paris.⁴⁹ For instance, on March 9, 1921, Bekir Sami Bey and Aristides Briand, the French minister of foreign affairs,

signed a separate military, political and economic treaty in London according to which France gained a predominant economic position in Cilicia, Diyarbakir and Sivas (Sebastia) in return for discontinuing its military presence in Cilicia and in the south-eastern provinces of Anatolia adjacent to it. A similar treaty about southern and southeastern Anatolia was signed between Turkey and Italy on March 12, 1921 in London⁵⁰ by the Italian minister of foreign affairs Count Carlo Sforza and Bekir Sami Bey. Italy agreed to defend the interests of Turkey during the conclusion of the peace treaty. It is true that the Turkish National Grand Assembly did not ratify Bekir Sami Bey's treaties and arrangements signed in London as documents influenced by the Sèvres spirit, and Bekir Sami Bey was removed from his post. Nonetheless, all of this indicated that attitudes toward Turkey had begun to change in the capitals of the Entente.

This became more obvious after the signing of the Treaty of Friendship and Brotherhood between Soviet Russia and Turkey on March 16, 1921, as well as the agreement signed between England and Soviet Russia on the same day. Thus Moscow accepted the obligation to stop its anti-English propaganda in the British colonies, and London agreed to end its protection of the newly established states of the former Russian Empire. That was a fatal blow to Armenia because England was going to cease its assistance to the Armenians.⁵¹

Armenia sent a large delegation to London. The head of the delegation representing the Republic of Armenia (which did not exist any more) was Avetis Aharonian, while Poghos Nubar Pasha was the leader of the National Delegation. General Hakob Bagratuni participated in both delegations, as did the Armenian Revolutionary Federation statesmen Mikayel Varandian, Garegin Pastrmajian (Armen Garo), General Sepuh (Arshak Nersesian) and Sargis Araratian. The councilor of the Republic of Armenia's delegation was Hovhannes Khan Masehian. Both Armenian delegations cooperatively demanded maintaining unchanged all the sections of the Treaty of Sèvres pertaining to Armenia. Aharonian declared that the Treaty of Alexandropol, mentioned by Bekir Sami Bey, was not valid because it was signed under threat and pressure, and not ratified.

The London Conference adopted a separate article (Article

9) about Armenia, which replaced Article 88 on establishing united and independent Armenia with a new clause on creating a "National Home" (National Hearth) for the Armenians. Aleksandr Khatisian wrote: "What was the hearth and where did it come from?"⁵² On September 21, 1921, the League of Nations unanimously decided that the "Home" should be completely independent from Turkey,⁵³ but this did not change the nature of the problem. The delegation of the Republic of Armenia was ill-disposed, and even hostile, to the idea of the Home, believing that it, and all other Armenians, must continue to defend the idea of united and independent Armenia. The Armenian National Delegation, however, became reconciled with and accepted the National Home proposal.⁵⁴

As for the Kurdish Question, on March 11, 1921, the Allies announced that they were ready to accept the changes of the Treaty of Sèvres "to adapt it to the facts of the existing situation."⁵⁵ It meant that the question of independent or autonomous Kurdistan was finally removed from the political programs of the Triple Entente.

Lloyd George and Bekir Sami Bey had an extremely interesting talk in the British House of Commons on March 16, immediately after the work of the London Conference was completed. The British prime minister spoke about the concessions of London to Turkey, and mentioned the names of Armenia and Kurdistan. But Bekir Sami Bey said that Mesopotamia was "was certainly not worth the price of British friendship" and he added that Ankara did not intend to cause trouble for England in Mosul.⁵⁶ Obviously, the political bargain was at the expense of the Kurdish and the Armenian nations.

France wanted peace with Turkey at all costs. On October 20, 1921, Henry Franklin-Bouillon, in the name of the French government, signed with the Kemalist government a separate Franco-Turkish peace treaty in Ankara which became one of the important stages in the destruction of the Sèvres structure in the Near East. The treaty meant the breakdown of the anti-Turkish front of the Triple Entente. Basically, France declined the Treaty of Sèvres and recognized the Kemalist government. Before leaving for Ankara, Franklin-Bouillon met with Aleksandr Khatisian, and the French diplomat promised to protect the interests of the Arme-

nians during the negotiations. At the same time, he advised: "in order to protect the interests of the Armenians, it is necessary to reconcile with the Turks, to gain their trust."⁵⁷

The Franklin-Bouillon Agreement had tragic consequences for the Armenians. Cilicia was given to Turkey. As a result, it was depopulated of Armenians and 150 thousand people had to seek refuge in Syria and Greece.

The Franklin-Bouillon Agreement had an indirection connection with the Kurdish Question too. One of the Triple Entente states had left the Sèvres structure, thus annulling the Treaty of Sèvres with its articles about the Kurdish Question. Expressing the attitude of the French ruling circles, Maurice Pernot, a publicist with great authority among politicians in Paris, wrote: "We should not subject to experiments the issues of autonomous Kurdistan or independent Armenia any more."⁵⁸

A conference of the foreign ministers of England, France and Italy about the questions of the Near East was held in Paris from March 22 to 26, 1922. During the conference, the powers of the Entente made new concessions to Turkey, including the "Armenian National Home" promised to the Armenians at the London Conference, so "it was not clear where the Home was situated."⁵⁹

The joint memorandum adopted by the participants mentioned the following resolution about the Armenians but it was nobody's obligation to carry it out: "The condition of the Armenians should become a matter of special attention not only because during the war the Allied powers accepted some responsibilities concerning them, but also because that people suffered greatly."⁶⁰ The memorandum said nothing about the Kurds.

The Kemalists' decisive victory over the Greeks in 1922 and concurrent events forced the already divided Triple Entente states of World War I to return to the negotiation table with the Turks and negotiate the Treaty of Lausanne (November 1922-July 1923), which was to replace the Treaty of Sèvres and solve all disputed questions between Turkey and the Allies.

Before the negotiations, Aleksandr Khatisian met Vansittart and Francis d'Arcy Godolphin Osborne, officials of the Near East division of the Foreign Office. They told him:

The Turkish position does not predict success for the con-

ference and the Allies today do not possess real means to influence the Turks. They make us understand that no one wants a war. Well aware of this, the Turks will be stubborn until the end. The Allies do not have a united attitude about the problem, and some of them even offer financial and military support to the Turks. The Armenians' claims are not vital issues for the Allies. They are more concerned with the problem of the Straits and it is not likely that they will cut relations off with Turkey only for the Armenian Question.⁶¹

When Aleksandr Khatisian, after hearing the bitter truth, reminded Osborne about the numerous promises England had made to Armenia, the following answer was given: "What can we do? We promised Smyrna and Thrace to the Greeks, but we were not able to carry out our promise."⁶²

Khatisian received similar answers in Paris. Without using force, it was impossible to achieve anything with the Turks, and there was nobody to use force. Peoples no longer wanted to go to war. This was the French answer.

The Allies refused to allow the participation of the two Armenian delegations in the Lausanne Conference, objecting that Armenia had accepted the Soviet system, the rule of which was not recognized by the Allies. What this meant was that the Armenian delegations were deprived of direct participation in the conference. During the conference Lord Curzon turned to İsmet İnönü, the head of the Turkish delegation, and declared: "The entire civilized world is looking at you, expecting that you will give satisfaction to the Armenians." İnönü's answer followed: "It is you that the civilized world is looking at, because it is you who has given endless promises to the Armenians, while we have not given any promises."⁶³

The Turkish delegation tried to refuse the discussion of the Armenian Question on the grounds that the Treaties of Moscow and Kars had decided the boundaries of Armenia and Turkey. As for the Armenians living inside Turkey, they were only Turkey's internal problem.

The political committee of the conference decided to discuss the Armenian Question while examining the issue of the Turkish bor-

ders. For this purpose, the representatives of both Armenian delegations were invited to participate in the session of December 26.

In Lausanne, the English representatives persistently insisted on establishing the Armenian Home in Cilicia, while the French suggested establishing it in the eastern provinces of Turkey, near Caucasian Armenia. The reason was that the English wanted to establish a base near the borders of Syria. It was because of the same reason that the French rejected the establishment of the Armenian Home near the border of the country under its protection.

The Armenian delegation through Avetis Aharonian suggested an alternative version of the National Home. It should be established in the territory of Western Armenia with an outlet to the sea. However, the Armenian delegation would also have no objections if the National Home were established in Cilicia.⁶⁴

As for the United States, its delegation in Lausanne defended the idea of the Armenian National Home. On December 30, 1922, the American delegation informed the states participating in the conference that the proposal about the establishment of the independent Armenian National Home had aroused the deep interest and affection of most of the population of the United States.⁶⁵ The Armenia-America Society presented to the conference a detailed plan for the Armenian Home, noting that its realization required a source for the necessary financial means. The society thought that the location of the Armenian Home should be decided by a special committee of knowledgeable members to be assembled for this purpose. Nonetheless, it suggested the northern part of Syria to the west of the Euphrates River as the best location for the Armenian Home. It would provide easy access to the sea and encompass 18 thousand square miles. According to the American view, the Armenian Home would have to be independent, under the protection of the League of Nations, and follow a neutral line in its foreign policy. The authors of the project believed that most of the Western Armenian refugees scattered in various locations would like to return and settle down in the Armenian Home.⁶⁶

However the practical realization of this American project naturally required "applying effective means," one thing that Washington was not willing to do. The British representatives in the conference (Lord Curzon, Horace Rumbold, etc.) tried to persuade the Turkish delegation that the establishment of the Na-

tional Home near the Syrian border or in another place aimed to gather all the Armenians in one place to give the opportunity to preserve their nationality, language and culture. The English also emphasized that the territory should remain under Turkish rule and be governed by a Turkish general-governor.⁶⁷

Soviet Russia did not want to strain its relations with Kemalist Turkey for the sake of the Armenian National Home. People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs Georgii Chicherin avoided using the combination of words "National Home for the Armenians" in his January 26, 1923 letter, which was a response to the memorandum from the Union of Patriots. Instead, he wrote that the Russian and Ukrainian governments proposed settling the Armenian refugees within their borders. This meant that Chicherin wanted to move the National Home to Russia. This was nothing else but killing the cause of Turkish Armenia.⁶⁸

The Turkish delegation, led by Ismet İnönü and Riza Nur Bey, developed the view that the establishment of the Armenian Home was equivalent to the partitioning of Turkey. Even without this Turkey was already crowded into its ethnic borders. So Turkey was not able to find a spare inch of land to realize such a project. Ismet İnönü even crossed the bounds of diplomatic decency when he cynically declared that Europe had splendid corners, and the Europeans ruled over much larger territories than Turkey. Would they would mind doing the Armenians a favor and providing them with territory for the establishment of the National Home?⁶⁹ Moreover, Riza Nur Bey stood up and categorically declared that he would not participate in a session where the Armenian Question was being discussed. After his announcement, he left the hall of the conference with his councilors, slamming the door behind him.

As Aleksandr Khatisian testified, after this incident "the discussion of the Armenian Question ceased from a political viewpoint." That is to say, the question was removed from the political sphere to the philanthropic sphere, and as Lord Curzon said, "it died silently."⁷⁰ As a consequence, the Armenian Question changed from the idea of the National Home into assembling Armenians in any corner of Turkey. This was the last demand made of the Turks. Afterwards, the conference removed the Armenian Question from its agenda. Thus, by the united will of the great

powers a gravestone was placed on the Treaty of Sèvres. Not the slightest mention was made about the Armenians in the final records of the Lausanne Conference.⁷¹ Truly, "Lausanne became one of the tragic stages of the Armenian case" (Aleksandr Khatisian).

Not only did the Lausanne Conference become the burial of the Armenian Question, which had been the subject of bargaining during the years of the war and the post-war period, and was continually tormented in the diplomatic tribunals of the Versailles system. It finally and definitely ended the Kurdish Question, which was also the result of Sèvres, and died without even growing. Arshak Safrastian was completely correct when he wrote with bitterness that despite their numerous promises and their signatures on the Treaty of Sèvres, the Allied states "betrayed both Armenia and Kurdistan" in Lausanne.⁷²

Unlike the Armenian Question, which despite its failure, had become a topic of discussion in Lausanne, the Kurdish Question was completely omitted from the agenda because in 1921 the Allies refused the proposal of the Kurdish claim for national self-determination.⁷³

The conference discussed the Kurdish Question mainly as a part of the Mosul problem. Incidentally, after having no success in enlarging its territory at the expense of Iraqi Kurdistan at the Treaty of Versailles, Iran repeated its claim in the Lausanne Conference. At the end of December 1922, it appealed to the representatives of England, France and Italy to express "goodwill" toward Iran and revise the Iranian-Turkish "Kurdistanian frontier" in favor of Tehran. As a basis for its claim, Iranian diplomacy pointed to the English-Iranian agreement of August 9, 1919, according to which the English supposedly promised to satisfy the ambitions of Iran on this matter.

The English answer was extremely crude; moreover, it was rude. Lord Curzon, who was leading the English delegation, declared that no promises had been made to the Persians, and if they were citing the treaty of 1919, it did not exist any longer. Then Lord Curzon added: "Moreover there is now no question of setting up a Kurdish state or a Kurdish autonomous province under Turkey as was contemplated in the Treaty of Sèvres."⁷⁴ He also categorically refused the demand of Iran to permit its representative to participate in the Lausanne Conference, at which the Mosul issue would be discussed. Iranian diplomacy insisted that at

this conference "Iran had common interests with Turkey"⁷⁵ Thus, Lord Curzon took his vengeance on the Persians, whose persistently demands forced England to withdraw its troops from Iran in 1921.

From the first day of the Lausanne Conference, the Kemalist government firmly had demanded the exclusion of the Kurdish Question from the agenda of the conference,⁷⁶ reasoning that all the Muslim minorities of Turkey, namely, Kurds, Arabs, Laz, Circassians and others, were Turkish citizens; consequently their problems were an internal issue. During the discussion of the problem of national minorities, the Turkish delegation took the following position about the Kurdish Question: the Kurds enjoyed all rights in Turkey and did not want to secede from Turkey, as in the Treaty of Sèvres. The leader of the Turkish delegation, Ismet İnönü, asserted that the Kurds of Anatolia were ready to join the Turks and take arms to fight side by side against any attempt to separate Kurdistan from Turkey.⁷⁷ Turkey would not recognize any mandate over any part of its territory, and no Kurd wanted Kurdistan to turn into a colony.⁷⁸

In response, the English declared they would like to hear all of this from the Kurds themselves, instead of from the members of the Turkish delegation, and added that only the Kurdish delegates of the Turkish National Grand Assembly were competent to answer the problem. The Kurds were asked to make an official statement.

The Kemalist government of Ankara had to carry out this matter in the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TNGA) in 1922. An extraordinary session was arranged, and Mustafa Kemal suggested that the Kurdish delegates discuss and expressing their views about the issue. He was sure in advance of what answer to expect from them. First of all, the delegate from Erzurum, Hüseyin Avni Bey, announced: "This country belongs to the Turks and the Kurds. Only two nations, the Kurds and the Turks, can speak from this tribune."⁷⁹ The delegates Hasan Khayri [Hayri] and Ramiz from Dersim, Bozan Bey and Shahin from Urfa, and other delegates from places like Palu, Van, Bitlis, Diyarbakir, Malatya backed up Avni Bey. Absolutely all the TNGA delegates spoke in the same spirit. This theatrical performance intended to demonstrate to all Englishmen, and to the entire world, the Kurdish devotion to the "Turkish-Kurdish homeland."

After this response was received from the Kurdish delegates of the TNGA, it was immediately telegraphed to Lausanne that "the Kurds will never separate from Turkey."⁸⁰

As soon as he received the telegram, Ismet İnönü Pasha made the declaration at the conference that Turkey belonged to two peoples, the Turks and the Kurds, who were legally equal and enjoyed similar national rights.⁸¹ At the same time, some representatives of the Kurdish ruling circles of Turkey sent telegrams to the Lausanne Conference expressing their loyalty to the Turkish state, which promised to satisfy their national rights. Facing a fait accompli, the conference participants immediately withdrew the Kurdish Question from the agenda.

What is absurd is that on another occasion the same Ismet İnönü denied that the Kurds were a distinct ethnic group, and considered them as identical to the Turks. According to a Kurdish-language source, Lord Curzon commented on this point:

There is only one person in the world who can propose such a thesis, and he is Ismet İnönü. There are Kurdish delegates in the Turkish mejlis. They are people who do not even know Turkish, and do not participate in the work of the mejlis. They are not elected but appointed. The Kurdish people is not presented in the mejlis. The Kurds are a completely different people with their language, country and traditions. The Kurds, whom the Turks declare to be their kindred, have led an independent life in their mountains for thousands of years. They have always resisted the interference of the Istanbul government.⁸³

As a result of this all, the text of the peace treaty which was ratified by the Allied states and Turkey on July 24, 1923 mentioned neither Kurdish independence and autonomy, nor Kurdistan in general. Thus, the articles of the Treaty of Sèvres about the national dreams of the Kurdish people were lowered into their grave.

Similarly, Lausanne ignored the question of another national minority living in Turkey, the question of the Assyrians. The Turkish delegation firmly refused to discuss that question.

The Treaty of Lausanne did contain a particular section which was titled Section III. Protection of Minorities (Articles 38-45). Article 38 ran: "The Turkish Government undertakes to assure full

and complete protection of life and liberty to all inhabitants of Turkey without distinction of birth, nationality, language, race or religion."⁸⁴

Article 39 obligated the Turkish government to assure that "no restrictions shall be imposed on the free use by any Turkish national of any language in private intercourse, in commerce, religion, in the press, or in publications of any kind or at public meetings."

However those articles were dead letters for the Armenian people, because the devastating storm of genocide had emptied all Western Armenia of its Armenians. No Armenians were left to use the formal and trifling rights granted by the Lausanne Conference.

As for the Kurds, the articles of the Treaty of Lausanne about the legal guarantees of the rights of the minorities referred only to non-Muslim minorities. In general, the Treaty of Lausanne did not recognize the status of non-Turkish Muslims, including the Kurds, as "minorities."⁸⁵

After Lausanne, the much tormented Armenian Question was removed from the portfolio of international diplomacy and sent to the archives with the reasoning that Western Armenia was devoid of Armenians (no Armenians, so no Armenian Question), while the eastern part of Armenia had found its solution in the second Republic of Armenian, Soviet Armenia. The Kurdish Question was left to play the role of political small change, this time in the Turkish new nationalists' Milli or Kemalist hands, and bring new trouble to the Kurdish people.

After the Lausanne Conference, Kâmuran Bedirhan wrote: "The Treaty of Lausanne had just been ratified when Mustafa Kemal made a sharp turn from his policy of collaboration to breach his promises and even the treaty obligations of the Turkish government about the rights of national minorities... When the Turks were reminded about their promises, he [Mustafa Kemal] ordered closing the schools and arresting patriots and influential figures. Again they began the lawlessness. Some former [parliamentary] delegates were arrested and sent to the court martial. Violent actions were taking place throughout Kurdistan again."⁸⁶

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE KURDISH UPRISINGS OF THE 1920S AND 1930S: KEMALIST REPRESSION IN ACTION AND NEW PAGES OF ARMENIAN-KURDISH COOPERATION

After the Lausanne Conference, the hatred of the Kurdish people towards the Kemalist government was expressed through spontaneous insurgency, rebellions and civil unrest in different parts of East Anatolia (Western Armenia and Turkish Kurdistan). On February 8, 1925 a huge rebellion broke out in the eastern provinces under the leadership of Sheikh Said, and it differed from the previous movements in its strength and extent of organization. The political objective of the revolt was the creation of an independent and united Kurdistan through military means, mainly relying upon its own force.¹

Sheikh Said from Piran (Elazigh province), who undertook the management of the revolt, was the head of the Nakshbendi (Nakshibendi, Nakhshbandi, Naqshbandiya) Sufi brotherhood and enjoyed great influence in Turkey. He was also a member of the Committee for the Independence of Kurdistan, and after it was disbanded he became the absolute leader of the Kurdish movement.²

The center of the revolt was chiefly the area west of Lake Van. Before long, the flame of the revolt flickered over a territory of 50-60 thousand square kilometers.³

The government of the Republican People's Party (RPP) of Turkey characterized Sheikh Said's revolt as "reactionary," as an "explosion of Kurdish religious fanaticism." Its goals supposedly were to restore the caliphate that had been abolished by the Kemalists, institute the norms of the Shariat, destroy the current "secular atheistic" regime, and prevent Turkey's modernization and Europeanization. Moreover, following the instructions of Prime Minister Ali Fethi Bey and Minister of Foreign Affairs Jemil Bey, the Turkish press engaged in propaganda stating that

the Kurds revolted as the result of the intrigues of foreign powers (namely, England).⁴ The Kurdish revolt led to Fethi Bey's resignation from the government because the extreme nationalists of the RPP accused him of indecisiveness in suppressing the revolt.

Throughout the revolt, Ankara persistently attempted to arouse anti-Kurdish attitudes in the leaders of Soviet Russia by representing the Kurdish national movement as a pro-imperialistic and pro-Western. As far back as August 4, 1921, the Turkish minister of foreign affairs, Yusuf Kemal Bey, mentioned in his memorandum written to the Russian people's commissar of foreign affairs, Chicherin, that the cherished desire of the English was to create a barrier for the protection of India and control over the rich oil reserves in Mosul. He continued: "For that goal, the English planned to establish one or several small states between Mesopotamia and the Black Sea which must be under British protection. Since Armenia, which had been intended for this purpose, at present was out of the question, England was attempting to use for this purpose, though in vain, Kurdish bands led by scoundrels."⁵

It is hard to believe that Moscow did not understand the hidden meaning of the "anti-revolutionary, anti-imperialistic" fancy phrases of the Kemalists. However, guided solely by pragmatic considerations, the Soviet leaders not only accepted them, but yielded to Ankara's chauvinistic ambitions, including concerning the Kurdish Question.

On March 3, 1925, Ismet İnönü became the head of the Turkish government again, and prepared political and administrative measures to suppress the revolt of Sheikh Said. According to Mustafa Kemal's official admission, the Turkish government had to keep eight or nine divisions of regular troops in active service. The defeat of the Kurdish rebellion was predetermined by a number of factors, including the numerical and technical superiority of the Turkish troops, the lack of unity among the Kurdish leaders, the absence of a mature political organization with a distinct plan of action. By mid-April 1925, the main rebellious forces were surrounded and obliterated in Genjo valley. Sheikh Said and the other leaders of the revolt were captured while crossing the bridge over the Murat Chay [çay, stream]. Late in June a state Independence Court found them guilty and sentenced them to be hanged in Diyarbakir.

It is interesting to learn that the Armenians, Assyrians and Circassians of various localities in Western Armenia vigorously participated in the Kurdish revolt, though only scattered information about this is extant. For instance, on September 26, 1925, blacksmith Poghos from Chmshkatsag was accused of active participation in the Kurdish revolt and of espionage in Kharberd in favor of the rebels, and the Independence Court condemned him to death. Furthermore, the newspaper *Hakimiyet-i Milliye* wrote that Armenian and Assyrian volunteers joined the rebels to establish an independent Armenia united with Kurdistan.⁶ The circular letter of the Turkish army command to the local governor reported: "Filled with uncontrollable feelings of vengeance towards us, the Armenians are surely waiting for a suitable moment to destroy all non-Armenian elements, including the Kurds whom they are now aiding. They want to reestablish a new Armenia on our territory and on the bones of our Muslim race."⁷

Before the beginning of the movement, the Kurdish rebels supposed that foreign states would not aid the Turks. They were mistaken. Some of the neighboring states directly or indirectly assisted Turkey. For instance, the French authorities in Syria permitted Turkey to use Syrian railroads to send troops and weapon to the areas of rebellion.

After suppressing Sheikh Said's revolt, the Turkish authorities carried out a policy of state terror and extermination towards the Kurds. The English diplomat Harold C. Armstrong wrote:

Kurdistan was laid waste with fire and sword; the men were tortured and killed, the villages were burnt, the crops destroyed, the women and children raped and murdered. The Turks of Mustafa Kemal, in revenge, massacred the Kurds with the cruelty and ferocity with which the Turks of the Sultan had massacred Greeks, Armenians, and Bulgars.

Mustafa Kemal sent special military tribunals... They hanged, banished, and imprisoned thousands with military brevity.⁸

The goal of the extreme cruelty was to paralyze the willpower of the Kurdish people through terror. After the revolt a deep

chasm was opened between the Turks and the Kurds. The entire Kurdish people were filled with feelings of hatred and revenge. Turkish-Kurdish relations took on a terrible form. These events fundamentally persuaded the Kurdish masses and their leaders that if they did not resist they would experience the same fate as the Armenians. Throughout June and July of 1925, Seyyid Abdullah, the son of the prominent Kurdish leader Seyyid Abdul Ghader who had been executed and hanged by verdict of an Independence Court, raised the banner of revolt in Hakkari near the Iranian-Iraqi border. Fierce battles were fought between the Kurdish rebels and the state troops in the regions of Van and Bitlis. In autumn 1926, the Jelali, Hasananli, Jibranlı and Haydaranlı tribes retreated to Mount Ararat and started a new revolt. The saddle between the peaks of Little and Great Ararat, which the Turks called Kire, became the epicenter and base of the Kurdish rebellious movement. A great number of Kurdish groups were concentrated there. Throughout 1926-1927 those detachments made brazen raids upon the regions of Khnus, Vardo, Mush, Solhan, Chapaghjur, Derjan, Genj, Lije and many other regions.

In addition to using huge military force, including numerous planes, against the rebels, the Turkish authorities began to widely use administrative measures. For instance, on June 10, 1927, the Turkish National Grand Assembly adopted law number 1097 to deport the Kurds from the eastern to the western provinces of the country.⁹ In accordance with that law, one million Kurds were exiled to Western Anatolia. Nikitin wrote that these forced deportations were conducted in the same way as the deportations of the Armenians during World War I.¹⁰

The rebellious Kurdish movement in the environs of Ararat was organized by Hoybun [Independence], a military and political committee which was established during a convention of the Kurdish organizations in Syria and Lebanon.¹¹ The political objectives of Hoybun were adopted during the convention, and its regulations were drafted. In fact, Hoybun turned into a political party which declared as its main goal the independence of Turkish Kurdistan. Each member of the party swore an "oath of brotherhood," and vowed to fight for the creation of independent Kurdistan. Hoybun formed branches in Syria, Lebanon, a number of European countries and the United States to engage in propa-

ganda about the Kurdish Question outside of Turkey. The party statutes paid special attention to "the question of establishing permanent brotherly relations with the Iranian government and the fraternal Iranian people" (Article 4).

The Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) in the Armenian diaspora enthusiastically supported the activities of Hoybun. Beginning in 1926, Armenian and Kurdish activists worked together closely to prepare the minds of the Kurdish masses and reconcile xenophobic forces. In general, from 1921, after the destruction of the first Armenian Republic, Armenian political emigrants, especially the leaders of the ARF, lived through a period of reassessment, analyzing past and possible future political circumstances, and weighing future opportunities.

The march of events had convinced both the Kurds and the Armenian statesmen in exile that if they wanted to keep on fighting against Turkey, which trampled on the rights of their peoples, they had to approach and understand one another. When the promises given by the great powers were unreal, the collaboration of two neighboring peoples could have a greater real value. Of course, it was a different matter as to whether the scheme was based upon correct calculations with a political future. In any case, the aforementioned idea gradually occupied the minds of the leaders of both sides, "becoming a necessary factor for the liberation movement of both nations."¹²

ARF representative Vahan Papazian participated in the first Hoybun congress, and Ruben Ter Minasian established connections between Hoybun and the ARF military structure. A Kurdish researcher, Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou, wrote that Hoybun was under the direct influence of the ARF, which provided it with "political, organizational and financial support."¹³

Hoybun declared that it was going to focus all its activities on Turkey.¹⁴ Thus, once again the ARF pursued Armenian-Kurdish collaboration, and was able to find Kurdish leaders both in Turkey and elsewhere who comprehended the significance of unity against the "great enemy." As early as 1924, the ARF and the Committee for the Independence of Kurdistan had confirmed an initial agreement taking into consideration the borders and the principles of the Sèvres Treaty.

As a consequence, a special clause was adopted in the regula-

tions of Hoybun which stated: "accepting as an indisputable precondition, friendship and collaboration with the Armenian people, as a nation sharing the same fate against a common enemy, [and] reciprocal recognition of the independence and territorial integrity of Western Armenia and Kurdistan."¹⁵

Hoybun made a four-point declaration, the fourth point of which stated: "The convention publicly declares that Armenia and Kurdistan, where these two peoples have lived for centuries, refuse to be subjected to any foreign power, and they strive for independence. These two lands belong only to the Armenian and Kurdish peoples."¹⁶

The Armenian diasporan press considered the Armenia-Kurdish collaboration during the revolt of Sheikh Said in 1925 as the most significant issue for the political future of the two neighboring peoples. In the same year, on the initiative of the ARF Bureau, the ARF delegates to the socialist international's Marseilles conference presented a memorandum which evaluated the Kurdish liberation movement. After this, the representative of the ARF at the London and Zurich conferences presented the Kurdish movement in detail, and demanded the recognition of Kurdistan.¹⁷

In its turn, Hoybun conducted consistent propaganda among the Kurdish masses about the necessity and importance of Armenian-Kurdish friendship. In 1928, Süreyya Bedirhan issued the following announcement: "In October 1927, in the name of the representatives of the Armenian and Kurdish peoples who have united in solidarity against the common enemy, Turkey, Hoybun accomplished a general reconciliation. On behalf of my people, I express my deep affection to the heroic Armenian people, and assure them of my immeasurable respect towards their lawful national desire, which is a united, independent Armenia."¹⁸

Reflecting on the motives of the agreement between Hoybun and the ARF, the Kurdish national statesman Zinnar Silopi (the pseudonym for Kadri Beg Jemil Pasha) noted: "There has never been a single organization or a country which has tried to help Hoybun and has shown a friendly attitude toward it. Therefore we have considered it expedient to establish friendship with the Armenians." The determination of the borders between Kurdistan and Armenia, Silopi believed, should be left to the "decision of the future Armenian and Kurdish governments." Obligations

were also divided. The Armenians accepted the duty of providing Hoybun with financial support, and establishing its relations with Kurdish communities in various countries. The Armenians also had to assure the connection between the Kurdish rebels of Ararat and Hoybun. Silopi revealed that the sympathetic Armenian press published in America and Europe provided a great service by dispelling the prejudice of other nations towards the Kurds and by opposing anti-Kurdish propaganda.¹⁹

In its turn, the ARF issued a statement at its Eleventh General Assembly in April of 1929. It said: "The assembly has special greetings for the Kurdish revolt against the Turks. The assembly finds that this revolt is indispensable for the solution of the Armenian and the Kurdish questions, and calls the attention and sympathy of all knowledgeable Armenians to that unique and heroic struggle."²⁰

The ARF justified its sympathy for and support to the Kurdish movement with the following argumentation: a) The Kurdish movement developed in the territory of Turkish Armenia so any Armenian who was concerned with the fate of his homeland should be sympathetic to the Kurdish Question; b) The anti-Turkish struggle of the Kurds is an obstacle to the settlement in Turkish Armenia of Turkish *muhajirs* or refugees, who are a great danger for the Armenian people; c) The establishment of independent Kurdistan thwarts the realization of the Turks' Pan-Turkist ambitions; d) The Kurdish movement weakens Turkey and thus creates the preconditions for waging the battle for "united independent Armenia."²¹

The following information is noteworthy. In the late 1920s the prominent Dashnak statesman Ruben Ter Minasian published an article in the journal *Droshak*. It was titled "About the Union of Aryan Races," which the author understood to mean the cooperation of the Armenians, Persians and Kurds to besiege the Turkish government. Inspired with the prospects of realizing the project he had come up with, Ter Minasian left for Iran to personally direct this process and began to work energetically.²² Within the framework of this plan, and according to the resolutions of the Eleventh General Assembly, the ARF center of Iran sent some activists "on certain missions" to the region of Ararat, and most of them were killed there.

The government of the Shah accused Archbishop Nerses Melik-Tangian, the diocesan leader of Atrpatakan (Iranian Azerbaijan) and a number of other members of the Iranian ARF leadership of complicity in the Kurdish issue in Ararat, so the court minister Abdol-Hoseyn Teymurtash was ordered to invite the accused from Tabriz to Tehran to be rebuked.²³ This incident is evidence that the government of Reza Shah did not approve the idea of the "Union of Aryan Races"; moreover it discouraged the collaboration of the ARF with Hoybun.

After 1925, the Kurdish national liberation movement entered a new stage. It largely gave up religious slogans and began to be guided primarily by nationalist motifs. Propaganda was conducted for independence throughout Kurdistan, including its Iranian, Iraqi and Syrian territories. Not only Hoybun but other Kurdish political organizations worked on this. For instance, the Association of Northern Kurdistan, founded by Sallaheddin, the son of Sheikh Said of Erzerum, had branches in Damascus and Aleppo, disseminated appeals and leaflets about the necessity of forming an Armenian-Kurdish state.²⁴ The members of the ARF, in their turn, were proselytizing in support of collaboration with the Kurds, and "for waging a joint struggle for the creation of independent Kurdistan and Armenia."²⁵ In general, at that point of time Kurdish-Armenian collaboration and mutual support had reached unprecedented proportions.²⁶ As for the position of the Turkish government towards the Armenian-Kurdish collaboration, as expected, it took a very hostile attitude, seeing it as a serious threat to the national security of Turkey. The Kemalists called the Hoybun party and its members the "agents of imperialism." The official "Green Book" (Hoybun-Dashnak) was published in Ankara which proposed that after the suppression of the revolt led by Sheikh Said in 1925, the Kurdish movement was revitalized due to the collaboration of Hoybun and the ARF. In 1926 Hoybun sent Ihsan Nuri, a former officer of the Turkish army, as its extraordinary military representative to the region of Ararat, to direct the Ararat movement as "the commander of the revolutionary army." Besides him, there were two other main leaders, one of which was the head of the Jelali tribe, Ibrahim Hiske Telli and the other Zilan Bey, actually the pseudonym of Artashes Muradian from Khnus. The latter represented the Armenian wing of the revolutionary leadership. However before the breakout of the

revolution Zilan Bey "fell victim to a Bolshevik trap, was imprisoned, and it is unclear what his end was."²⁷

A civil administrative body was formed, which Hiske Telli headed. The rebels published the journal *Aghri*, which published Ihsan Nuri's article in January 1930. This article appealed to all Kurds to supply the rebels with weapons and food. Ihsan Nuri reorganized the Kurdish armed regiments to fight mountainous guerilla warfare. Simultaneously, he developed relations with Ismail Agha Simko, who had once again stirred up an insurrection against the regime of the Shah in Iran. The headquarters of the Ararat rebellion disseminated an appeal among the Kurdish circles of Iran, Turkey, Iraq and Syria, calling upon them to unite for the struggle for liberation from the Turkish yoke. A copy of the appeal was sent to the League of Nations.²⁸

Late in spring 1927, a Turkish army of about 10,000 soldiers launched an attack against Ararat from the directions of Igdir and Bayazit at the same time. Thus the first rebellion started in the area of Ararat. The Turkish government and the Kurdish detachments were engaged in fierce battles against one another until June 1930. The Turks suffered great losses of men and material. The Kurds even succeeded in bringing down 12 military airplanes.²⁹

Early in 1930, all the northeastern provinces of Turkey basically were under Kurdish control. Under these conditions, the Turkish government was forced to craftily maneuver. On one hand, it strengthened the military pressure against the Kurds, and on the other hand, it published an amnesty in order to mislead and divide the Kurdish ashirets. Ankara sent Ibrahim Tali to the eastern provinces as an inspector-general, ostensibly for the purpose of maintaining order there. However, in reality, his objective was to declare martial law in the Kurdish populated regions in order to organize massacres more quickly and silently. This Kemalist official truly manifested brilliant ability in the art of bribing the leaders of the Kurdish movement and luring them into traps. He even sent a special delegation to Ihsan Nuri with the suggestion of a general amnesty for all the Kurds and the promise of a high position for him personally in Turkey or abroad. In exchange, he required only one thing from the commander of the rebellious army, to get the Kurds to surrender. In refusing this offer, Ihsan Nuri declared that the Kurds would end

their struggle only when the Turkish troops left Kurdistan, and Turkey recognized Kurdish independence.³⁰

Early in June 1930, the last great rebellion of Ararat broke out. The rebels in the Ararat region continued organizing military marches to Zilan, Van, Bulanik, Manazkert, Mush, Kagzvan, Khnus, Koghb, Kars and other places. The Turkish government called out a great number of reserve servicemen and armed them, and concentrated a huge quantity of firepower and planes in the battle zone. Almost one-third of all troops was sent to the east, and several dozen million liras were spent. The government troops began decisive actions, and with the help of aviation, they were able to push the Kurds to the mountainous passes near the Turkish-Iranian border where the rebels had only one way out for their salvation; that was to cross the Iranian border.

The government of Reza Shah Pahlavi, which at that time was still engaged in the policy of oppressing Kurdish movements, gave the Turkish troops permission to freely cross the Iranian border and pursue the Kurdish rebels until their final and complete obliteration.

As a matter of fact, on April 22, 1926, a treaty of friendship and security was signed between Iran and Turkey through the arbitration of the Soviet Union. It contained articles about the suppression with joint forces of the Kurdish movements. According to Article 5 of the treaty, the signatories were required not to permit the formation or presence on their territories of organizations and groups which intend to disturb the peace and security of the other country, change its governmental system, or intend to use all their means to fight against the other country.

The sixth clause of the treaty noted that in order to secure the peace and the safety of the population in the frontier zone, the signatories would take all possible measures to stop the criminal activities and intrigues of the tribes living in these regions which could trouble the peace of both countries.³¹

The fact that the Turkish-Iranian border had not been defined continually created misunderstandings. Thus, in April 1929, a convention was signed in Ankara about the security of the borders. However, when Iranian and Turkish troops were conducting punitive actions against the Kurds, the latter crossed the border without difficulty and found refuge in the territory of the other

country. For this reason, in 1930 Iran and Turkey signed a new convention about "joint action to regulate border incidents," which was basically directed against noncompliant Kurdish tribes.³² Due to domestic and external political reasons, both Turkey and Iran were interested in quickly bringing to a close the Kurdish Question, which was a cause of so much trouble for both countries.

Relying on the authority of the abovementioned convention, the Kemalist punitive military units moved forward along the line Bazirgan-Yarmikaya-Aybek-Donbat-Kire, cutting off all routes for Kurdish movement, and attempting to catch the Kurds in a pincer. However, unexpectedly, the Iranian Kurds under the leadership of Simko appeared from the region of Maku, rapidly reaching the rebels, and rescued them. The danger of being blockaded and the news of new Kurdish rebellions in Bashkala, Sara, Baghrikala, Archesh, Patnots, Van, Zilan and other regions made the Turkish command hastily pull their troops out of Iranian territory and send them against the new rebellions instead. Fierce battles took place in which the armed detachments of the Iranian Kurds also participated. On July 14, 1930, the well-organized and sudden Kurdish attack against a Turkish battalion near Aralikh [Aralik] forced the Turkish troops to retreat. They barely escaped by crossing the border of Soviet Armenia through the region of Ghamarlu [Kamarlu]. They remained there for a while by the arrangement of Moscow.³³

Despite these partial successes, the forces of the rebels were gradually diminishing, while the Kemalists were assembling fresh new forces in the region of Ararat and using military aviation more frequently. At the same time, the Turkish special services were able to divide the Kurds and even persuade individual Kurdish tribes to fight against their own people.

Ihsan Nuri and some other leaders managed to continue to resist with their reduced forces until September 25, when they were forced to flee to Iran. Ibrahim Hiske Telli, despite being surrounded with the hostile troops of the enemy and facing harsh winter conditions, continued his resistance. Since it became impossible to feed the local inhabitants who had joined the rebels, Hiske Telli decided "to kill all the women, the weak elders, and the children, thus leaving the revolutionary troops, who, having burnt all bridges behind them, had to fight to the last person. With revolutionary ruthlessness, Hiske Telli first tried to realize

his plan on his relatives, revealing a scene of terrible and moving tragedy on the heights of Ararat."³⁴

During a difficult battle, Ibrahim Hiske Telli was killed, and his companions in arms were captured. Thus this heroic chapter of the Kurdish anti-Turkish struggle, which lasted for five years (1927-1931), came to its close.

Though the Ararat rebellion did not encompass all of Kurdistan and involve great masses of people, it was significant due to its clear political perception and persistence. Truly, it could be considered the greatest episode of the Kurdish liberation movement.

The rebellion thwarted a number of plans of the Kemalist government for the assimilation of Western Armenia. For instance, in 1927, Ankara intended to settle 100,000 Turkish *muhajirs*, or refugees, in the eastern provinces, and the Turkish National Grand Assembly had allotted one million gold liras in the budget for that purpose.³⁵ The project completely failed.

The expenses of the war created great problems for Turkey's finances. The attempts at obtaining foreign loans ended in complete failure, creating even greater difficulties for Turkey. A governmental crisis began in Ankara. Profound conflicts emerged between the president of the republic, Mustafa Kemal, and Prime Minister Ismet İnönü. Kemal approved Ali Fethi Bey's Free Republican Party, which severely criticized Ismet İnönü's Kurdish policy.

The suppression of the Ararat rebellion was followed by cruel retribution not only against the Kurdish rebels but against all Kurds. Punitive military units organized massive slaughter and deportations. According to Hoybun's data, 10-15 thousand rebels were killed, 660 villages destroyed, and 15,206 residences were burnt. The Kurdish language was officially prohibited, and Kurdish publications were confiscated and burnt. The words "Kurd" and "Kurdistan" were expunged from textbooks. Henceforth, the Kurds would be called "mountain Turks." Finally, Kurdistan was isolated from the rest of the world, and foreigners were strictly forbidden to travel there.³⁶

On November 1, 1930, during the opening ceremony of the Turkish National Grand Assembly, Mustafa Kemal announced that the events of the east were a "threat to our independence."³⁷ The Prime Minister Ismet İnönü declared to the world: "In this country, only the Turkish nation can claim ethnic and racial rights.

No other element has that right." Mahmut Esat Bey [Bozkurt], the Minister of Justice, made a more loathsome announcement: "We live in Turkey, the freest country in the world...the Turk is the only master of this country. Turks of unclean origin [i.e. the Kurds] have only one right in this country, to be servants and slaves. Let both friend and foe remember this truth; let even the mountains know it." The newspaper *Milliyet* printed a picture of a gravestone on Mount Ararat with the inscription, "Hypothetical Kurdistan is buried here."³⁸

Interestingly, during the initial period of the Ararat rebellion, the Turkish press published a great deal of materials about the participation of Armenians in the Kurdish rebellion, but surmising that the elucidation of this matter would not be beneficial for Turkish interests, "because of an order from above, not a word was said about it any more, apparently being cautious on the immensity of the Kurdish-Armenian united cause."³⁹

After the suppression of the rebellion, the ARF began ardently presenting the real picture of the events to public opinion in Europe and America. As a result of the attempts of the party, the Western press published appalling information about the merciless Turkish brutality. The Armenian diaspora gathered donations for the families of the rebels. Simultaneously the ARF sent appeals to the Social International Committee, asking it to help protect the Kurds.⁴⁰

Despite the fact that throughout the Ararat rebellion, the government of Reza Shah, in accordance with its treaty obligations, supported the Turkish government's efforts to destroy the Kurdish movement, Ankara was still dissatisfied with the extent of this cooperation and accused Iran of unfriendly behavior. Thus, on July 8, 1930, the official newspaper *Hakimiyet-i Milliye* published a crude article which said: "Turkish public opinion cannot comprehend how numerous bands could be formed on the territory of a neighboring state to conduct raids against our country, or how those bands could keep in close connection with their central organization after crossing the border." In July, 1930 the newspaper *Republic* published another article with a stricter tone: "If Iran is incapable of teaching a lesson to the bands which arm themselves on its own territory, then it has no right to object if those lessons are taught by others."⁴¹

Karo Sasuni pointed out that during the rebellion of the Ararat region Turkish-Bolshevik collaboration was directed not only against the Kurds but also against Iran. He wrote: "Russian troops crossed the Araks River and provided their support for the Turkish barbaric troops to crush the Kurdish revolution. Not satisfied with this, Russian-Turkish joint diplomacy pressed the Iranian government to give its consent to leave Little Ararat to Turkey and to cooperate with its armed forces in the suppression of the Ararat movement. Persia resisted the political pressure for a long time. Relations between Persia and Turkey became so tense that for a time the world was very worried about a possible Turkish-Persian war, which could create great international complications."⁴²

It is true that during the harsh period of the Ararat rebellion, the Turkish government asked Tehran to cede territory at the foot of Little Ararat, reasoning that it was necessary for obstructing the movements of Kurds from Iran to Turkey or vice versa, and to finally obliterate the rebels. However, led by military, strategic and political considerations, the Iranian government rejected the claim. Tehran in particular found that sector of the border to be strategically dominant over the territory of Atrpatakan [Iranian Azerbaijan], with its Turkish-speaking Azeris. The Turkish leaders nurtured a secret, but at some times openly expressed, Pan-Turkish interest in Atrpatakan. Tehran was also worried that through this strip of territory, Turkey would have direct access to Nakhijevan, to which Iran itself had pretensions at that time.

The Turkish press immediately responded to the rejection by the Shah's government with articles of sharp criticism, even casting doubt on the sincerity of the Turkish-Iranian friendship and their treaty relations. The Soviet Union immediately joined the Turkish pressure on Iran. Sasuni wrote: "Military units of the Bolshevik Red Army entered the region of Atrpatakan and violated Persian territory, on the pretext that those who fomented rebellion in the Caucasus had fled to Persia and the Bolshevik army had to pursue them. However, all those actions, as well as the pressure in Tehran exerted by the Bolshevik and the Turkish ambassadors, showed that the Turks were looking for an opportunity to dispatch troops into Atrpatakan and solve part of the Pan-Turkish plan along with the problem of the Kurdish movement."⁴³

However, the Kemalists' claims were not limited only to

stationing Turkish military units in the region of Maku and occupying Little Ararat. They also demanded that "Persian troops cooperate with the Turkish army throughout the Ararat actions, and that the Persian troops which were based along the borders should be subject to the Turkish general command."⁴⁴

This was nothing but a crude violation of the state sovereignty of Iran. Iran concentrated troops along the borders of Atrpatakan with the goal of self-defense, intending also by this step to prevent Kurds who were Persian subjects from slipping across the state border to join the Kurdish movement in Turkey. At the same time Tehran made Turkey understand that the Iranian troops were determined to defend their country's borders if the Turks tried to invade Iran.

International public opinion was excited by these events, and it expressed its support to Iran. Sasuni wrote, "This public opinion and the possibility of international intervention in a Turkish-Iranian war forced the Turks to be moderate in their actions and extreme in their words."⁴⁵

However, considering a number of significant circumstances, Iran gradually conceded its positions to avoid an extreme situation. The transformation of its position was based in part on the understanding that the Kurdish liberation movement, the idea of "Free Kurdistan" and Kurdish independence in general, was as dangerous for Iran as for Turkey. In case that idea was realized, Iran would lose a large territory inhabited with Kurds, Iranian Kurdistan, where "independent Kurdistan" would be established, or even more dangerously, that territory could be joined to Turkish Kurdistan if an independent Kurdish state was founded there. In general, the Kurdish rebellion and the question of independent Kurdistan brought closer together the countries which possessed territories where the Kurdish masses lived, and which historically ruled over Kurdish areas. Those countries were Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. Iran, on the other hand, was concerned that the Soviet Union was Turkey's partner on the Kurdish issue, enthusiastically exploiting this question, and that it was even willing to intervene militarily in order to pressure Iran. Tehran was also well aware that though international public opinion was in its favor, during times of crisis all it could do would be to protest.

Finally, in this period, tribal insurrections had reached

threatening magnitudes inside Iran. As early as 1929, the Baharlu, Ghashghai (Qashqai) and Bakhtiari tribes took up arms. The highest-ranking Shiite clergy of Najaf and Karbala supported the movement and issued a special fetva expressing their approval about the tribal battles against the "heretic government." In 1929-1933 armed tribal uprisings also took place in Iranian Kurdistan, Lorestan and Baluchestan.

All these developments made the government of Reza Shah take a new political course with respect to Turkey and cooperate with it against the Kurds. Moreover, in order to deceive public opinion in their own countries or abroad, they both started to utilize "intricate diplomacy."

As a consequence, Turkish-Iranian relations started developing rapidly. On January 23, 1932, the record of the specification of the borders was signed in Tehran. According to it, Iran conceded to Turkey a narrow passage of land at the foot of Ararat. This unprecedentedly strengthened Turkey's strategic position not only on that section of the border but also in the whole region. In the same year, another treaty about arbitration and "conciliation procedure" was signed,⁴⁶ and on November 5, 1932, the Turkish-Iranian friendship treaty was signed. It was ratified on December 28, 1933.

In 1934 the official visit of Reza Shah to Turkey became a new spur to the development of the Turkish-Iranian relationship. Generally the Shah of Iran had great sympathy for the reforms of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, and in many matters, he imitated his methods of governing. Throughout the visit, Ataturk went out of his way to show warm hospitality to the absolute monarch of Iran. They even addressed each other as "brother." The visit became the start of a whole series of Turkish-Iranian treaties and conventions, including a pact about the solution of "the Kurdish Question."⁴⁷ In the latter, the parties agreed to close their borders to prevent the Kurds from moving from one country to the other, and in case of Kurdish rebellions, to implement all available measures at their disposal "to reinstate order and calm."

On July 8, 1937, the ministers of foreign affairs of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan signed a quadrilateral treaty in the Saadabad palace in Tehran which came to be known as the Saadabad Pact. In essence, it was a Near Eastern Islamic treaty, which among other issues dealt with the Kurdish Question. Without naming the

Kurds, the treaty noted that the signatory states are obligated to wage a united fight against the separatist movements challenging the security of their countries. Furthermore, after the signing of the Saadabad Pact, the three of the abovementioned countries with dense Kurdish populations continuously assembled for "consultations" about the urgent and imperative Kurdish Question. They drafted joint plans to strangle the Kurdish liberation movements in their cradle within their countries and in bordering regions.

CONCLUSION

After the Lausanne Conference, when by the collective will of the great powers the Armenian and the Kurdish Questions were removed from international agendas and those questions no longer posed a threat for Turkey, the Kemalists started an unprecedented oppression of the Kurds. On October 18, 1923, the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA) adopted a new law "on the suppression of brigandage movements," which gave the government the possibility of qualifying any movement as brigandage or banditry, and to subjugate it with ruthless cruelty.

The Kurds were certain that after the Armenians and Greeks were massacred and expelled from the country by brute force, they remained alone in Turkey, and the Turkish danger was solely directed at them. They understood quite well that their Islamism had absolutely no value for the nationalistic Kemalists; moreover, their previous service to the Turkish state was completely ignored. They felt deep remorse about not taking advantage of the favorable opportunity for revolt at the final stage of World War I, when a defeated Turkey was left to the mercy of the Allies by the Mudros Armistice.

Such serious thoughts led the Kurds to organize themselves internally. However, the Kemalists were also not sleeping. According to the republican constitution adopted in 1924, all citizens living within the borders of Turkey were declared to be Turks irrespective of their nationality.

The Kurdish people responded to the chauvinistic and assimilatory policy of republican Turkey with liberation movements. In this new stage, the Kurdish struggle was definitely more mature politically, ideologically and organizationally. This was evidence

of the rapid development of the Kurdish people's national consciousness. A series of Kurdish mass rebellions took place in the 1920s and 1930s which shook the foundations of the Turkish Republic. In 1925 the revolt of Sheikh Said broke out, with the goal of liberating the Kurds from the Turkish yoke and establishing an independent Kurdish state.

The government of the Republican People's Party (RPP) of Turkey characterized Sheikh Said's revolt as "reactionary," as an "explosion of Kurdish religious fanaticism." Its goals supposedly were to restore the caliphate that had been abolished by the Kemalists, institute the norms of the Shariat, destroy the current "secular atheistic" regime, and prevent Turkey's modernization and Europeanization. In order to gain the assistance of the Soviet Union in suppressing the Kurdish movement, the Kemalist government qualified it as pro-imperialistic and pro-Western.

After the suppression of the revolt led by Sheikh Said, the Turkish government started implementing a policy of state terror towards the Kurds. The objective of the extreme cruelty was to paralyze the willpower of the Kurdish people through terror. After the revolt a deep chasm was opened between the Turkish and Kurdish peoples. The Kurds came to believe that they would be condemned to the same fate as the Armenians if they did not resist.

On June 10, 1927, the Turkish Grand National Assembly adopted a new law about driving the Kurds out of the eastern provinces to the western ones. One million Kurds were deported to Western Anatolia in accordance with that law. In 1927, a Kurdish military and political committee called Hoybun [Independence] was founded which later turned into a political party. It had declared its goal to be the independence of Turkish Kurdistan. The activity of Hoybun was vigorously supported by the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, which was active in the Armenian diaspora, and again started working for Armenian-Kurdish solidarity.

Hoybun's by-laws included a special point about collaboration with the Armenians as "a nation sharing the same fate." In 1925, during the period of Sheikh Said's insurgency, the Armenian diasporan press considered Armenian-Kurdish collaboration as the most important issue for the political future of the two neighboring peoples. In its turn, Hoybun carried out tireless propaganda among the Kurdish masses about the necessity and significance

of Armenian-Kurdish friendship. In 1928, one of the prominent figures of the Kurdish liberation movement, Süreyya Bedirhan (Badirkhan) issued a declaration which stated: "On behalf of my people, I express my deep affection to the heroic Armenian people, and assure them of my immeasurable respect towards their lawful national desire, which is a united, independent Armenia."

In 1927, the Kurds of the region of Iğdir and Bayazıt again raised the banner of rebellion. As a consequence of this revolt, all the northeastern provinces of Turkey were under Kurdish control in the mid-1930s. The Kurds of the Ararat region also were waging a fierce insurgent struggle. The oppression of the Ararat rebellion was followed by cruel retributions not only against the rebels but also against the Kurdish people as a whole. The Turkish punitive military units organized mass slaughters and deportations.

In the 1930s, besides using brute force, the ruling authorities of Turkey implemented a number of laws designed to exterminate the Kurds' sense of national awareness, dignity, and belonging. The goal was to assimilate and Turkify the Kurdish masses. The Kurdish language was officially prohibited, and Kurdish books were confiscated and burnt. The words "Kurd" and "Kurdistan" were completely expunged from textbooks, and henceforth the Kurds would be called "mountain Turks." They were not even permitted to wear Kurdish tradition clothing. The Kurdish-populated regions in the east of Turkey were isolated from the rest of the world and the entry of foreigners there was strictly forbidden.

On November 1, 1930, during the opening ceremony of the TNGA, Mustafa Kemal announced that the events in the east were a "threat to our independence." The "second man" of Turkey, Prime Minister İsmet İnönü, declared to the world: "In this country, only the Turkish nation can claim ethnic and racial rights. No other element has that right."

After World War II, great changes occurred in the world. Colonialism was destroyed, and the question of human rights became a priority, yet the nationalists of Turkey continued to insist that the Kurdish people did not exist. The new constitution of the Republic of Turkey adopted in 1961 declared that all citizens of Turkey were "pure" Turks.

After the military coup of September 12, 1980, the Turkish authorities unleashed a policy of mass persecution and oppression

against the Kurdish population of the country. Any reference to Kurdish autonomy or national identity was suppressed with extreme brutality. The Kurdish nation responded with a resistance movement led by the Kurdistan Workers' Party [Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan], commonly known as PKK. The Kurdish struggle for the protection of their identity and the attainment of political and human rights is still in progress. There is no doubt that the Kurdish factor is currently one of the most important elements necessary for peace and stability in the region of the Near and Middle East.

The historical paths of the Armenian and the Kurdish peoples have been extremely complicated and contradictory. Currently, when these neighboring peoples are facing various challenges, they must seriously reconsider and learn lessons from their history. Today's imperative is that these two peoples, with sober mind and penetrating gaze, reevaluate their past relations in order to be able to look toward the future with faith and confidence.

SUMMARY

The historical links between the Armenians and the Kurds, who resided in the elevated mountainous region south and south-east of Lake Van, emerge from the depth of centuries. Being close neighbors, situated nearly in the same geographical, historical and cultural environment, the Armenian and Kurdish peoples had many grounds for interaction. In the sixteenth century, the Ottoman Empire almost simultaneously conquered Western Armenia and Kurdistan. Since that time, the Armenians and the Kurds have lived under Ottoman rule for more than five centuries. This period has been the darkest and most sinister period in both people's histories. Throughout these centuries, the Ottoman government's policy towards the Armenians and the Kurds has been that of forced assimilation, denationalization and physical extermination.

Some modern Kurdish ultra-chauvinists and nationalists, engaged in the counterfeiting of history, including that of their own people, and inspired by political motivations, are trying to prove that the Kurds have historical rights over Western Armenia on equal terms with the Armenian people. These pseudo-scholars and political speculators are ready to do anything to prove that the Kurds are indigenous inhabitants, or autochthonous to Western Armenia, and claim that the historical life of the Kurds in this territory allegedly began in "times immemorial." However, it is a well-known fact that up until the end of the Middle Ages, that is, the fifteenth century, no significant number of Kurds lived in the Armenian Highland. Neither Kurdish, nor foreign, nor even Armenian sources contain any information on the existence of a significant ethnic Kurdish element in this area. In reality, the massive influx or, more accurately, ethnic expansion of the Kurds to

the Armenian Plateau took place from the beginning of the sixteenth century, when the Ottoman sultan Selim Yavuz the First, after conquering Western Armenia, started a deliberate campaign of encouraging the massive migration of Kurds from Northern Mesopotamia and Iran to Western Armenia. As a result of this policy, nomadic and sedentary Kurdish tribes established residence throughout Western Armenia.

This process continued during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by means of the Kurdification of the Armenian land that had been inhabited by Armenians for millennia. The chiefs of Kurdish tribes, who were closely collaborating with the Turkish authorities, used arms to forcefully invade Armenian-owned lands, and declared themselves the owners of these lands. Starting from the sixteenth century, the Kurds of the Ottoman Empire were Turkish-oriented. The Kurds became Ottoman allies not only in the countless wars waged by the Ottomans in Europe and Asia, but also in the conquest of Western Armenia by the Ottomans, and its retention within the empire. Indeed, the Ottoman Empire would have hardly succeeded in maintaining its rule over Western Armenia for centuries had it not possessed the military and political assistance of the Kurds.

It is an established fact that despite geographical and cultural proximity, the Armenian and Kurdish peoples chose different paths for their national struggle against Turkish rule. There are several reasons for that.

The Armenian Question became a topic on the agenda of international diplomatic discussions beginning with the Congress of Berlin in 1878. Facing the internationalization of the Armenian Question with panic, the Ottoman government tried to deal with it by means of massacre and state terror. At the same time, the government vigorously made efforts to create a counterbalance to the Armenian national liberation movement by instigating the Kurds against the Armenians. The infamous Kurdish Hamidiye detachments served as a tool to suppress and destroy the Armenian national liberation movement in Western Armenia. The stirring up of Armenian-Kurdish enmity became the cornerstone of the Ottoman state's Eastern policy. To this end, the Ottoman government launched a propaganda campaign. One of its techniques was calling Armenian lands Kurdistan. The usage of the word

Armenia was banned in official communication, and "Armenia" was replaced with "Kurdistan." This aimed at placing Armenians outside of the boundaries of legal protection, enabling the Kurds to freely apply violence against the Armenians.

To unleash conflict, Turkish agents were sent to disseminate among the Kurds the rumor that Armenians were determined to establish an independent state in the eastern provinces of the empire and oust the Kurds. They also assured the Kurds that the only way out of the situation was the extermination of the Armenians. Thus, as many Ottoman politicians felt that the empire could lose its Asian territories in case of an Armenian-Kurdish alliance, the cornerstone of the Ottoman government's Eastern policy became the deliberate aggravation of Armenian-Kurdish relations.

After the Young Turk coup in 1908, the Ottoman Empire's Armenian and Kurdish policies did not undergo significant changes. Inheriting the policy of Sultan Abdul Hamid II, the Young Turk government continued to use the Kurds against the Armenian national liberation movements. In 1909 the Ittihadists sent their numerous agents into Western Armenia with the instruction to ignite hostilities between the Armenians and the Kurds.

After the serious defeats in the Balkan Wars, the notion and slogan "Anatolia is in danger" prevailed among Turkish ruling circles. The primary cause of this presumption was the growing Armenian aspiration for national liberation. Thus Turkey was switching its focus more decisively from the West to the East.

Pan-Turkism looked upon the Armenians as a wedge driven between Turkey and Turan (the Caucasian Tartars and Turkic nations of Central Asia and the Siberian steppes). Kurds were allocated a certain role to play in the plans to remove this wedge.

It is known that the liberation of small peoples based on the principle of self-determination was one of the popular slogans during World War I. The plans of the Entente countries envisaged the partition of the Ottoman Empire into five main ethnic areas: Turkish Anatolia, Armenia, Syria, Kurdistan and Arabia. Moreover, it was foreseen that independent Armenian and Kurdish states would be created on the territory of Western Armenia and Turkish Kurdistan.

When during the years of World War I, the government of the Young Turks organized the genocide of the Western Armenians,

a crime that did not have a historical precedent in the history of mankind, it also succeeded in exploiting the Kurds who became their accomplice in the implementation of their farfetched plans. A great mass of Kurds took part in the Armenian Genocide. This fact aroused hostility between Armenians and Kurds. Kurdish nationalists intended to form "independent Kurdistan" on the territory of Western Armenia, and therefore they made efforts to counter the idea of the creation of an independent Armenian state raised by some of the Great Powers.

The declaration of independence by Armenia on May 28, 1918 created new anxiety among the Kurds. The government of the Republic of Armenia set as a foreign policy priority the reestablishment of Armenian statehood on the territory of Western Armenia, while Kurds dreamt of "independent Kurdistan" on that very territory. Despite the consecutive steps taken by the first Armenian republic to cooperate with Kurdish leaders and to solve the discord between two nations through admissible conditions, Kurdish nationalists, who served the Turkish state system, frustrated those attempts both during the rule of the sultan and the Kemalists. Numerous documents show how Kemalists and Turkish nationalists tried to keep the Kurdish leaders of Western Armenia supporting an anti-Armenian platform.

As far as the Kurdish Question is concerned, it was first reflected in the political schemes of the Great Powers during the years of World War I, and at post-war international diplomatic forums, particularly at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, the Conference of San Remo of 1920, and the Conference of London of 1921.

Once more, in 1919, during the Paris Conference an attempt was made to form a united Armenia-Kurdish diplomatic front, but this too failed. The Kurds, through General Sherif Pasha, the head of their delegation, presented at the conference Kurdish claims sharply opposed to those of the Armenians. Moreover, the Kurdish arguments included the sweeping decline of the Armenian population in six Armenian provinces after the 1915 genocide and the consequent predominance in numbers of the Kurdish population.

In the provisions of the Treaty of Sèvres, signed on August 10, 1920, for the first time in international legal practice specific decisions were taken on the Armenian and Kurdish issues. In those

provisions, the issue of forming Armenian and Kurdish independent states on the territory of the Ottoman Empire was put on the agenda. It seemed that the centuries-old Armenian-Kurdish problem was going to find its final and just solution.

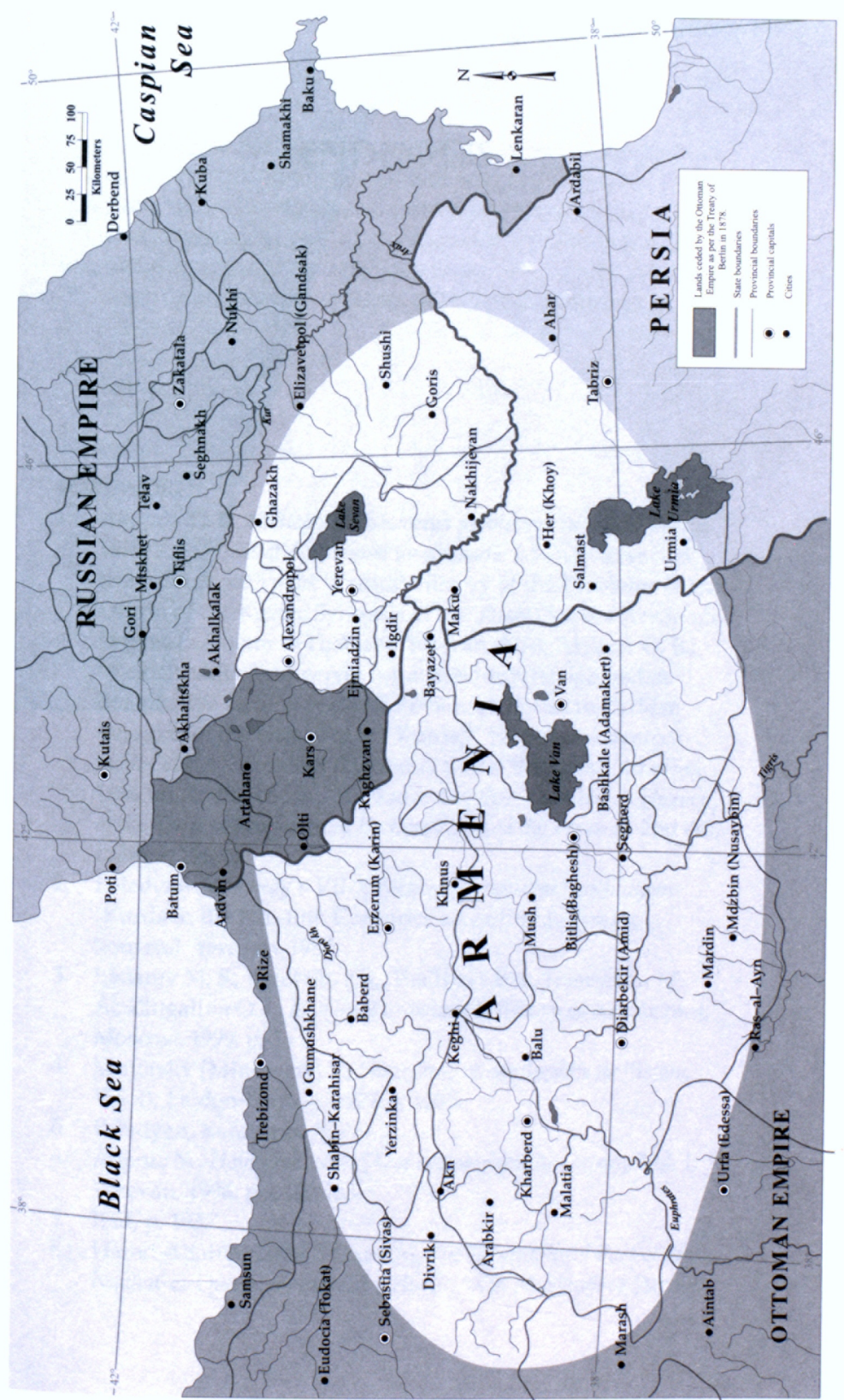
However, the Treaty of Sèvres was never implemented as a result of the Kemalist Turkish nationalist movement in Turkey, Turkish-Bolshevik rapprochement, and the consequent improvement of relations between the Allies and the Kemalists. The Conference of Lausanne, which took place in 1922-1923, was pursuing the aim of resolving all the disputable issues between Turkey and the Allies. The Treaty of Sèvres was revised during the Conference of Lausanne upon the common desire of the Great Powers. As a result the issues of Armenia and Kurdistan specified in the articles of the treaty were removed from the agenda of international deliberations. The Armenian and Kurdish issues were not only neglected. A tombstone was laid over the Treaty of Sèvres and on the Armenian and Kurdish Questions on the whole.

Kemalists, the Turkish nationalists, carried on the policy of double-dealing or duplicitous two-track policies. They encouraged the struggle of the Kurds of Iran and Iraq against their own governments, whereas in Turkish Kurdistan, guided by the chauvinistic slogan "Turkey is for the Turks," they carried out a policy of state terrorism, national and social oppressions. The Kurdish people responded to them with their national liberation movements. In particular, the powerful rebellion of Sheikh Said broke out in 1925. Another great uprising of the Kurds, concentrated near Mount Ararat, took place in 1927-1931. The government of Ankara oppressed it with much difficulty. The Kurdish military and political committee of Hoybun, a political party, basically prepared and led that uprising, with the aim of freeing the Kurds from the Turkish yoke and forming an independent Kurdistan on the territory of Turkey. Close cooperation existed between Hoybun and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation. A political agreement was concluded between these two parties, and the articles of the Sèvres Treaty concerning independent Armenia and independent Kurdistan served as the basis of that agreement.

The governments of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and Reza Shah Pahlavi concluded several agreements with the aim of oppressing the Kurdish movements in their countries, which presupposed the

joint struggle of the two states of Iran and Turkey against Kurdish movements. The political and military cooperation of those two states made it possible for them to defeat the Kurdish liberation movements in their territories.

ARMENIA UNDER OTTOMAN, RUSSIAN AND PERSIAN DOMINATION (1828-1914)



ENDNOTES

FOREWORD

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CHAPTER ONE

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The Kizilbash practiced a religion which differed from Christianity and Islam. Their religion basically was a unique fusion of Christianity, Manichaeism and Shi'ism. A number of researchers erroneously considered the Kizilbash as Kurds. For instance, Nikoghayos Adonts found that the Kizilbash were a sectarian community formed as a result of the Paulician movement. In his opinion we should comprehend the word *tuzhik* as the Armenian word sectarian, and the name of Dersim should be comprehended as the land of the sectarians. (Dyuz is derived from the ancient name Dyurz, which becomes the source of Dyurzaana and its Arabic derivative Dyurisim). Adonts wrote, "The sectarians of the Paulician movement occupied an area which stretched between the territories of the Dersim Mountains and Kharberd. Under Byzantine pressure some of them joined the official church and until the present live in the territory of Akn (Egin) under the name of Rum or Chalcedonian Armenians (N. Adonts, "Iz istorii armyanskogo voprosa" [From the History of the Armenian Question], *AN ArmSSR, Tsentra nauchnoy informatsii po obshchestvennym nayukam. Nauchno-informatsionnyy byulleten'. Armenovedenie za rubezhom* [Academy of Sciences of ArmSSR, Center of Academic Information on Humanities, Academic Informative Bulletin. Armenian Studies Abroad], Series III, No. 7 (72), p. 16).

Adonts noted that the customs and traditions of the Kizilbash linked them to the Christians more than to Muslims. The Ghizilbash's "national character and peaceful lifestyle strongly distinguished them from the Kurds. There is no basis to consider them, partially Christian elements, of Kurdish origin," Adonts concluded (Adonts, "Iz istorii, p. 16).

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CHAPTER TWO

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CHAPTER FOUR

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CHAPTER FIVE

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