

## THE PROBLEM OF ESTABLISHING TERRITORIAL NEW POWER AND FORMATION OF THE SEIM

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In the mid-December of 1917, after signing the Yerznka ceasefire, a recurrent ruling crisis occurred in the Transcaucasus. It was the logical consequence of the stormy events, following the Bolshevik coup, the starting point of which was the confrontation between the provincial government and the Bolshevik central and local forces on the one hand and the establishment of a more stable government on the other.

The first thing that was raised by political parties was to criticize the Commissariat, to make mention of its "temporary" character, to strengthen it and, which was appearing more relevant, to provide it with the circumstance of being endowed with the legislative power.

The Western Armenians were deeply disappointed in the context of Armenian issues, so the conclusions of the newspaper "Armenia" were more genuine and radical. The newspaper of the chief editor Vahan Totovents and the pantentee Garegin Levonyan was pointing out on December 14 that "the Caucasian Commissariat has not yet provided any proof of both practical mind and a staff, having a reputation of a real governance, since its formation; on the contrary, we see unbaked and inexperienced steps in its decisions, decrees and practice from the viewpoint of governing the country".<sup>1</sup>

The said organ, being the interpreter of the Western-Armenians' interests, was explicitly stating that the hasty formation of Transcaucasian government was a result of the Bolshevik coup, which, in its turn, was pushing the territory to the separation from Russia and putting the end of anarchy in Transcaucasia in such a way, of course. It is noteworthy that the national, non-partisan newspaper also agreed with the prevailing approach in the political field, namely, the establishment of "credible, authoritative and uniformly sovereign Socialist authority".<sup>2</sup>

Comparing Ozakom (Special Transcaucasian Committee, in Russian) with Zakom (Transcaucasian Commissariat, in Russian), Arakelyan was convinced in behalf of the People's Party of Armenia (HZhK) that Zakom "not only did not ease the hardships of the people, but it can be said that the situation of the country has deteriorated tenfold ... Zakom has no authority or influence, it is not felt that the country is ruled".<sup>3</sup> "Mshak" particularly emphasized the issue of ceasefire, which was signed in the Caucasian Front, accusing the Commissariat of following blindly the Bolshevik government's approach to destroying and demoralizing the army.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hayastan, December 14, 1917, n.174.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Mshak, December 29, 1917, n.274.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

The unstable status of the Transcaucasian Commissariat was disturbing the Dashnaktsutyun, first of all, because of Bolsheviks' consistent policy aimed at overthrowing the Commissariat and handing over the power to the People's Commissars. The newspaper "Ashkhatavor" ("Worker", in Armenian), the organ of Tiflis central and local committees of the party, was also stating in its editorial of January 1, 1918, "Our work in 1918: the Political Situation in the Caucasus", that the Commissariat does not have a fixed pedestal under its feet and was not able to hold the power so far "despite a number of successful steps".<sup>5</sup> H. Kajaznuni, too, saw the necessity of forming a new government. He was pointing out that the "Commissariat, which continued to govern the country on behalf of the" Temporary Government "of Kerensky, had lost the ground under the feet after the collapse of that government. It was necessary to create a new government, having been more authoritative in the eyes of nation and competent for the conduct of state affairs independently (emphasis mine - V.M.)".<sup>6</sup>

On January 12, 1918, the report of the Commissariat's Chairman on the Political Situation of the Transcaucasian Commissariat and the problem of forming a new body of government became a matter of special consideration at the Commissariat meeting.<sup>7</sup> The substantiations of the chairman, Ye. Gegechkori, were as follows: he reminded the audience that the Commissariat had obtained its power from the regional center of workers and soldiers (hereinafter RCWS), stating that the end of this power was connected with the actual opening of the Constituent Assembly.

As he stated, although the Commissariat had received a vote of confidence from the regional center at that moment, it was not enjoying the credence of organizations and national councils at all. According to Gegechkori, the situation was more complicated because of controversy between the Commissariat and the Executive Committee of Tiflis RCWS. Then, the Chairman suggested to put the following questions into consideration: 1) does the Transcaucasian Commissariat consider it politically moral to preserve its powers and continue to transfer its authority to the body, created by the Transcaucasian Seim?, 2) does the Transcaucasian Commissariat plan to raise the issue of power today in the regional center? At the end, Gegechkori argued that in the created atmosphere the Commissariat can no longer work; so, the delay in resolving the issue is not relevant due to the difficulty of convening the Seim and should be removed from the agenda.<sup>8</sup>

G. Rtskhiladze, Kh. Karchikyan, G. Ter-Ghazaryan, Kh. Melik-Aslanov, Sh. Alexeiev- Meskhiyev made speeches after the report of the Commissariat's president, A.Chkhenkeli. Their views and attitudes were as follows: A. Chkhenkeli found that the issue of power must be raised for the body to be formed and only that body can solve the problem of authority. "Now there is no separation of authorizations between the

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<sup>5</sup> Ashkhatavor, January 1, 1918, n.1.

<sup>6</sup> Kajaznuni 1923: 22.

<sup>7</sup> CSHAG, f. 1818, inv. 2, f. 12, p. 25-26 rev.

<sup>8</sup> CSHAG, f. 1818, inv. 2, f. 12, p. 25.

provincial government and the revolutionary organizations”, he said, “merging the two means disagreements and contradictions. We forget that self-governing is the basis of the revolutionary order and although we are fighting the Bolsheviks, we stand on their point of view. It is unacceptable to put aside revolutionary and party organizations”.<sup>9</sup> A. Chkhenkeli suggested escaping issue of the power and the Transcaucasian Commissariat when being in the Regional Center. C. Rtskhiladze emphasized the role of revolutionary organizations "until the new power has been formed."<sup>10</sup> His approach was justified by the fact that the Commissariat received its powers from a regional center, i.e. from revolutionary organizations, and could not enter the center with its statement on the necessity of creating a new government. He offered to appeal to the "National Councils with tremendous moral power, except revolutionary organizations."<sup>11</sup> The member of ARF party, Kh. Karchikyan, made a brave proposal, who was convinced that the present state of affairs required, first of all, more than a month to transform the government. "It is impossible to carry out planned work now", he said, "probably, the Commissariat Staff does not have moral support".<sup>12</sup> According to Kh. Karchikyan's statement, the "multiple power" is extremely urgent, as the life of Tiflis, the political center of the region, is governed by the Executive Committee of the Workers and Soldiers' Council. "Now it is necessary to make a separation between the two authorities and if that fails, said Kh. Karchikyan, we have to put down our powers".<sup>13</sup> G. Ter-Ghazaryan was worried about Bolshevik moods in all revolutionary organizations. As for the role of national councils when discussing the issue of power, Menshevik G. Ter-Ghazaryan, assessing their irreplaceable role especially when weighing up the national armed forces, stated that the national separation is the destruction of all the peoples of the region, so national councils should be restricted only with moral support and never become governing bodies. He saw danger that National Councils would not leave the newly formed government alone, they would try to eliminate it.<sup>14</sup> That real anxiety was derived from the tactics of the political parties that have taken the path of national separation, and the Armenian Mensheviks also opposed it. Melik-Aslanov believed that the Commissariat had no moral right to put an end to its powers "at the time when the dangerous events in the region and their consequences can lead to insubordination and scandal". At the same time, later, he expressed his disagreement with Ter-Ghazaryan's opinion, noting that the issue of the future Seim is a national one.<sup>15</sup>

Then, it was A. Chkhenkeli who interfered in the quarrel and noted that the new government will solve the national issue, first of all. Obviously, the Georgian

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<sup>9</sup> CSHAG, f. 1818, inv. 2, f. 12, p.25 rev.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> CSHAG, f. 1818, inv. 2, f. 12, p.26.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> CSHAG, f. 1818, inv. 2, f. 12, p. 26 rev.

Mensheviks had high expectations for the full power in the "new government", and so they were looking for a solution of national issue within the region in favor of the Georgians. The new interpretation of A. Chkhenkeli became decisive in the matter of authority. Considering the principle that the source of Commissariat's authority is the regional center, he insisted that their statement itself, made at the current session, meant termination of authorizations. "If we are unable to form a government in a short time, we should invite the Regional Council to this end", Chkhenkeli said.<sup>16</sup>

Summing up the point, E. Gegechkori informed that in the context of the collapse of the Constituent Assembly, it is necessary to raise the issue of the new government, and the issue of summoning a regional Seim. "And, if the regional center finds it impossible to do it in a few days," Gegechkori said, "then we have to raise the question about the impossibility of the existence of the Transcaucasian Commissariat in the current situation and the termination of its powers as we do not feel the support of both the councils and the political parties."<sup>17</sup>

The Commissariat Session decided to ask Gegechkori, as a chairman of the Transcaucasian Commissariat, for making an appropriate statement at the meeting of the regional center.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, the collapse of the Constituent Assembly and the real alarm of the alternative Bolshevik government in the region raised the imperative of forming a more stable and strong government. It was striking to note that the idea of the coalition underlying the first conventional stage of the regional government formation could no longer justify itself.

The "Worker" wrote, "We are very afraid that this second attempt to establish power in our country will not go well. We are afraid that this cannot be the uniform rule of the parliamentary majority in the Caucasus, but should have a new coalition based on the national authorities".<sup>19</sup> "If Dashnaktsutyun meant national councils (what was boldly voiced at the January 12 sitting of the regional center of the All-Transcaucasian Council of the Deputies of Workers, Soldiers and Peasants' Councils), it actually proves that the collapse of the Constituent Assembly became the main opportunity and watershed, when the Transcaucasian national forces decisively chose the path of national separation and sovereignty. At the same time, as an announcement, the following was recorded in the editorial of the "Ashkhatavor", "The Issue of Authority", "The Constituent Assembly and the All-Russian Federal Republic - this should be the case", "Ashkhatavor" assured its reader, "especially our Caucasians' political beliefs toward the near future".<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> CSHAG, f. 1818, inv. 2, f. 12, p. 25-26.

<sup>17</sup> CSHAG orgia, f. 1818, inv. 2, f. 12, p. 26 rev.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ashkhatavor, January 17, 1918, n.7.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

Certainly, it can be stated that such formulations are the first references to the Transcaucasian Parliamentary Seim.

On January 12, the joint session of the regional centers of workers, soldiers and peasants was held in Tbilisi under the presidency of N.Jordania.

The question of dispersing the General Assembly by the Bolsheviks and organizing protests against it is indirectly transformed into the issue of organizing the Transcaucasian power. Menshevik Guverceladze announced that "his party has decided to insist on the convening of the Caucasian Seim of Deputies elected for the Constituent Assembly, which should organize the power."<sup>21</sup> Gegechkori tactfully advised the audience how the Communist Party had formulated the Constituent Assembly, so the revolutionary center should have been told to think about creating a new government. Finally, the Mensheviks offered "to invite deputies of the Constituent Assembly elected from the Transcaucasus and the Front in the near future, which will form the Transcaucasian Seim". The proposal was adopted with the ARF members' amendment, according to which the phrase "Seim" was removed from the resolution.<sup>22</sup>

The formation process of the Seim, which lasted about a month, started under the conditions of the political and fully evident leadership of the Georgian Mensheviks at this session. The Shamkhor and Yelizavetpol events, the acceleration of the plan to seize power in the region, headed by Stephan Shahumyan, and the anti-governmental behavior and determination of the last Bolshevik Caucasian military units, moving to Tbilisi, pushed mainly the Georgian Mensheviks to the formation of a more stable and strong authority, the ultimate goal of which was the separation of Transcaucasia from Russia and the creation of a national state. We can firmly state that the next phase of the idea of independence (1/ February Revolutionary Period, 2/ Post October Revolutionary Period - V.M.) was entirely owned by the Georgian Mensheviks and was consistent. Otherwise, why the ARF again played the role of a second violinist in the "Horizon" editorial, but opposed simultaneously and correctly to the partners of the united government.

"The demander for the Seim (the Mensheviks- V.M.)", the "Horizon" wrote, "should consistently require logical conditions that lead to the factual isolation of Transcaucasia from Russia; but the Mensheviks themselves were against the doctrine and unauthorized shutdowns most of all, insisting on the state until now"<sup>23</sup>. The main organ of the ARF noted that they did not reject the idea of the Seim as a pattern of a certain form of the Transcaucasian state organization and always supported the broader decentralization and federal principle. Nevertheless, the ARF found it inexpedient to connect the idea of the Seim to a random assembly of deputies elected for a specific purpose and in such political conditions. The ARF formulated its approach, "The assembly, which should be convened by the members of the congressional assembly,

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<sup>21</sup> Horizon, January 17, 1918, n.10.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Horizon, January 18, 1918, n. 11.

will have one goal - to create a new provisional authority in place of the Transcaucasian Commissariat"<sup>24</sup>.

It is also clear that if the political perspective of their people was linked to the national sovereignty in the case of the Georgian Mensheviks that same matter was rather vague and alarming when considering the case of the ARF.

During the same days, the Mensheviks started to take actions; a circular was received from the Commissar of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Chkhenkeli, addressed to the state, provincial commissars, the mayor of Baku and the Tiflis city militia, stating that all the reforms developed by the Commissariat cannot be realized under the conditions of the present-day anarchy. Instead, it was called upon "to establish a strong organic authority by creating provincial and rural reliable, disciplined and organized militia"<sup>25</sup>.

The 15 January session of the Commissariat heard the report of the Central Electoral Commission on the Elections to the Constituent Assembly and the results of elections within the Transcaucasus election district. It was decided to convene a congress of Deputies from Transcaucasus and the Caucasian Front on 22 January. This conference would turn into a competent and authoritative body for the issues of forming government in Transcaucasia<sup>26</sup>.

On 16 January, circulars with the signature of Gegechkori were sent to Baku, the Central Muslim Committee<sup>27</sup> and the District Committees of Menshevik<sup>28</sup>, Socialist-Revolutionary<sup>29</sup> and Bolshevik Parties<sup>30</sup>.

The issue of jurisdiction of that congress was closely related to the problem of the Transcaucasia's attitude towards the All-Russian Constituent Assembly; thus, it found wide resonance in the party press.

The ARF's newspaper "Molot" was particularly concerned about the fact that certain political forces were claiming that the said congress should proclaim itself a constituent assembly of Transcaucasia. The Armenian National Party was referring to the Georgian Mensheviks. "The words, the terms have some sense, with which it is not worthy to play. The concept of the constitutional assembly is linked to the idea of absolute independence, full autonomy and unlimited power", the "Molot" wrote. "Every other comment is considered an open or secret game against the political slogan"<sup>31</sup>. The ground that the ARF stood on was justified, since the Transcaucasian Constituent Assembly did not have the prior consent and sanction of the All-Russian Constituent Assembly.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> CSHAG, f. 1, inv. 2, f. 7, p. 35, f.12, pp. 37-40.

<sup>27</sup> CSHAG, f. 1, inv. 2, f. 7, p. 35, f. 223, p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> CSHAG, f. 1, inv. 2, f. 7, p. 35, f. 223, p. 4.

<sup>29</sup> CSHAG, f. 1, inv. 2, f. 7, p. 35, f. 223, p. 8.

<sup>30</sup> CSHAG, f. 1, inv. 2, f. 7, p. 35, f. 223, p. 9.

<sup>31</sup> Molot, January 20, 1918, n. 12.

Moreover, if the local constituent Seims were to solve the problem of the content and scope of the seimic power on their own, it would mean that the Transcaucasus rejected the All-Russian Constituent Assembly and the principle of solidarity with All-Russian Democracy. "Molot" revealed that "For that reason the socio-political elements that were alien to the Russian revolutionary orientation admitted the fact of dissolving the Congregational Assembly in Petrograd with sincere heart; they think that now there is no hindrance for organizing their own congresses"<sup>32</sup>. The reference was about Georgian and Tatar political figures and deputies. By fully sharing the Armenian National Party's concern and understanding it, we think that this position, which, unfortunately, was in vain, has objectively driven the ARF party and the Armenian population of the Transcaucasia to self-isolation.

Yes, it was quite clear that not only the collapse of the Constituent Assembly, but also its prelude to the Bolshevik Revolution became the major opportunity and the watershed where the strategy of the Georgian and then Tatar national-political forces changed radically, that is, a sovereign and national statehood was created without Russia. The controversy exists also in the fact that the oppositional and separatist ARF's attitude towards its partners was unstable and indecisive, as the congressional debate and many articles in the party press show; the ARF accepted quickly the dictated conditions and came into the Seim. And no matter how the party attempted to involve the inner problems of Transcaucasia into the legality and legal field, the issue of the number and powers of the Transcaucasian congressional delegates (the members of the Constituent Assembly were elected on the basis of all-Russian and not Transcaucasian legislative basis), the process of separation and independence was in decisive stage.

At the same time, it should be also pointed out that the party had consistently and decisively expressed its solidarity with the All-Russian Democrats, the great and common ideals of the political supremacy of the Constituent Assembly. "The local authorities should also serve the interests of the Russian Federation, besides local interests and problems", the newspaper wrote.<sup>33</sup>

The Dashnaktsutyun was rightly concerned with the fact that the idea of establishing a permanent parliament in the Transcaucasia, such as the "Seim" or the "Parliament", in other words, a permanent legislative body, was baselessly accelerated. The idea was not discussed by regional democratic-revolutionary organizations, parties and National Councils. "The transition from the Congress of Deputies to the Transcaucasian Seim must be implemented after substantive discussions; in any case, turning congress to a regional Seim in such a simple way is unacceptable", the "Molot" stated.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Molot, January 20, 1918, n. 12.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

And finally, on 22 January, 1918 a conference of the Transcaucasian Deputies of the Constituent Assembly was convened in Tiflis.<sup>35</sup> There were 10 members from Mensheviks (2 absentees), 7 from Dashnaktsutyun (1 absentee), 5 from Socialist-Revolutionaries (1 absentee), 3 from Tatars (11 absentees),<sup>36</sup> totaling 25 from 40 deputies.<sup>37</sup>

Opening the conference, Gegechkori issued a statement noting that "he left his post today" and informed on behalf of the Commissioner that it is necessary to create a new government, which will have the power to put an end to internal inequality, the financial crisis, and the decline in food supply. Also, he informed that the members of the Commissariat will now operate within the framework of parties. Chkheidze was elected as president of the congress, and Kantemirov<sup>38</sup>, secretary, from a group of Muslim-socialists.

According to N.Jordania, the first issue on the agenda of the Congress was that of competence and power of the conference under discussion. The chief architect of the Transcaucasia's separation and independence, Jordania, clarified the fact that the Transcaucasian deputies of the All-Russian Congress are summoned in Tiflis instead of working in Tauride Palace of Petrograd; so, all the power of revolutionary forces and people's electorate should be engaged only with local problems before establishing connections with Russia. He also found that 25-30 deputies would have been unable to conduct the country due to local problems, so the number of deputies should be increased to 120, and 20,000 people should elect one deputy, instead of 60,000<sup>39</sup>.

It is necessary to thoroughly and essentially consider the speeches and opinions voiced at the congress, as the new Transcaucasian authority was finally formed in those discussions and laid the groundwork for the further events.

The ARF faction was the first, in the face of Tigranyan, to deliver a speech at the congress. The latter objected to the proposal of Jordania on the creation of Seim, which came to the following provisions: 1) according to Tigranyan, the members of the Constituent Assembly, created by the All-Russian Revolutionary Democracy had not laid down their authority and "wanted to believe" that the Assembly would complement its historical mission, namely, "to re-establish Russia as a federative state based on principles of integrity and organized on the ground of largeness and solid union of the autonomous units".<sup>40</sup>

"There are two types of responsibilities for us as members of the Constituent Assembly", Tigranyan said, "First of all, we have responsibility before the constituent assembly, as a new, integral Russian symbol, as well as before the Transcaucasia,

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<sup>35</sup> At the residence of the Transcaucasian Commissariat, in the building of the former Viceroy of the South Caucasus.

<sup>36</sup> Horizon, January 27, 1918, n.18.

<sup>37</sup> The newspaper "Arev", published in Baku, mentions 22 persons; see Arev, January 28, 1918, n. 21.

<sup>38</sup> Horizon, January 22, 1918, n. 15.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Horizon, January 27, 1918, n.18., also Molot, January 26, 1918, n. 17.

where the people entrusted us the title and responsibility of members of the Constituent Assembly. And we will not betray our debt to either the Constituent Assembly or the Transcaucasia".<sup>41</sup>

2) He was convinced that if they were members of the All-Russian Congressional assembly elected from the Transcaucasus and authorized by the electorate on the basis of the All-Russian electoral law, then it would be wrong to conclude that they can act as the Constituent Assembly of the Transcaucasia; "Some people (he meant Gegechkori and Georgian Mensheviks - V.M.) diminish our jurisdiction, while others are exaggerating it".<sup>42</sup>

3) Accusing the Georgian Mensheviks, Tigranyan concluded that an attempt was artificially made to strengthen the staff through improving deputies' reputation as the Transcaucasian deputies lacked the constitutional and legislative powers. And it was supposed to lower the electoral meter and thus invite new groups to the aforementioned assembly, which, in the opinion of the speaker, was beyond the competence of these deputies.<sup>43</sup> "Their participation in the assembly," Tigranyan accented, "will cause dubiety among the permanent and consultative members that will hardly add strength and authority to our assembly. The triplication of the number of Assembly's members will not concentrate the main forces; furthermore, it will deploy these forces because of lack of authority by the population".<sup>44</sup> In his opinion, the reduction of the electoral frontier could allow the representatives of right-wing elements and currents to enter and direct the congress in that direction.<sup>45</sup>

The general conclusion was: The ARF not only accepted, but also insisted on the necessity of the Constituent Assembly of the Transcaucasus, but "simply, in the real order and not accidentally". "And we propose to the present assembly to take on this important task - to convene the Constituent Assembly of Transcaucasia".<sup>46</sup>

Chemodanov made a speech on behalf of the Socialist-Revolutionary Faction. He acknowledged that the revolutionary state of Russia should be based on the Federal Principles, and in this regard welcomed the "former opponents" of the Mensheviks, who stood on the same point of view at that time, but stressed that the republican Russia should have a common center. Chemodanov believed that the members of the Constituent Assembly were elected not for local affairs, but for general ones, and having accented that the Constituent Assembly was existing, he opposed to the offer of separation and establishment of the Seim.<sup>47</sup>

In support of the proposal by Jordania, Smirnov made a speech on behalf of the Menshevik faction, who thought it was necessary to create local authorities first "to build

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<sup>41</sup> Horizon, January 27, 1918, n.18.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

on the power of the central order". He considered the Seim as a necessary body and stated that "the congress can be obtained here by establishing a local body". Arguing to Tigranyan, he thought that "the central power of the Transcaucasus, the Seim, should be created to establish a lively connection with the whole South Caucasus".<sup>48</sup> The social revolutionist Chemodanov objected to Menshevik Smirnov, adding that the government of the country can be temporarily transferred to the united center of soldiers, workers and peasants' councils. "The Seim may never have reputation of a central authority. Smirnov's statement that the people of Transcaucasia attack each other may be in the days of Seim. It is necessary to restore the idea of the Constituent Assembly and the very Constituent Assembly".<sup>49</sup> Sultanov, who had made a speech on behalf of the Muslim faction, joined the proposal of Jordania. Menshevik Ter-Ghazaryan shared fully the opinion of his faction and thought that the Seim to be convened would function also as a Transcaucasian Constituent Assembly.<sup>50</sup>

Chkhenkeli's speech was more radical. "As a commissar of internal affairs I insist," he said, "that there is no power in Transcaucasia ... The Commissariat is forceless enough to fight the anarchy in the country. If the authority to be set up will have no legal jurisdiction, it cannot govern our country".<sup>51</sup> In the speeches of Chkhenkeli and Gegechkori, the role of national councils was also mentioned, which clearly revealed the isolation of the Armenians and the hostility towards the ARF.

Gegechkori, for example, found that Dashnaktsutyun was against Seim because "there is an Armenian National Council that acts as a government". Chkhenkeli emphasized that "the national councils play a role of power, but without the central government it is impossible to rule a country like the Transcaucasia. If the Seim does not put an end to the confrontation between our nations, then nothing else can be done to make that happen".<sup>52</sup> Navasardyan criticized fervently the nationalist politics of the Georgian Social-Democrat Mensheviks, "by which they isolate the Armenian democrats. He remembers the cooperation of the Social Democrats with the Begs (Elizavetpol, Shamkhor, etc. - V.M.) and considers the true, genuine solidarity of democracy".<sup>53</sup>

Unfortunately, this genuine solidarity was no longer possible. And the meaning of the Georgian Mensheviks, particularly Jordania's program was that it would have been possible to gain a decisive political dominance in the region through strengthening local power and establishment of the Seim; if doing so, they could dictate the Georgian national policy. Chkhenkeli was threatening the congress and especially ARF that a supernatural force should be used to save the railroad, solve food, economic and financial crisis, for which there was a need for a "solid power." Jordania was clearly

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

using political blackmail, never hiding his anti-Armenian image. "If the Dashnaktsutyun refuses the Seim, the situation of Armenians may deteriorate".<sup>54</sup> The sad fact is that the ARF, as it was at this point, did not manage to resist the Georgian tactics until May 1918, the stage of the independences; the struggle was limited by rhetoric.

At the end of the conference, Jordania's dictating and programmed conclusion followed. "Only after this the Seim can be opened with the burden of forming the government, and before that the Transcaucasian Commissariat will continue its existence".<sup>55</sup>

After lunch Jordania stood for modified proposals; 1) to convene a Seim before the All-Russian Congress is convened, 2) to triple the number of members and 3) to convene the Transcaucasian Seim on February 10.<sup>56</sup>

Then, the resolutions of the factions were published. The resolution of the Socialist-Revolutionaries was suggested by Chemodanov, who formulated it as follows: "Recognizing that the founder of the fate of the Russian Federal Democratic Republic is the Constituent Assembly and considering it only temporarily deferred, the members of the Transcaucasian Constituent Assembly and the Assembly of the Caucasian Army recognize that the main task of the current situation is the preservation of achievements of the All-Russian Congress and Revolution (February - V.M.), so the congress decides that 1) the members of the local Constituent Assembly of the Transcaucasian authorities should go to Petrograd for "Public Service", that is, to take part in the central Constituent Assembly, 2) the current government is responsible for the provincial center of council of workers and soldiers until the Transcaucasian Seim is convened. At the same time, the congress instructed the authorities created by itself to convene the Seim in the near future on the basis of the four-dimensional principle".<sup>57</sup>

After reading the resolution, Gobechia, a member of the District Committee of the Socialist- Revolutionaries, said that his party had decided to vote against the Seim, but he personally, taking into account tactical principles, opposed his party's decision and abstained. Moreover, he pronounced a long and loud applause to the Mensheviks and Jordania, who, in his opinion, were carrying out the idea of Socialist-Revolutionaries.<sup>58</sup> It is possible to draw parallels with the tactics of the Georgian Bolsheviks on the occupation of Tiflis, which opposed the Baku Council and Stephan Shahumyan; and now, Georgian Gobechia, betraying the native Socialist-Revolutionary party, consolidated with the Georgian Mensheviks, giving preference to the national factor.

The Dashnaktsutyun faction proposed the following formula: "Accepting Russia as a federal democratic republic and finding the transformation of Transcaucasia on the federal basis, the Assembly of the Transcaucasian Deputies of the Constituent

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., January 22, 1918, n. 15.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., January 27, 1918, n. 18.

<sup>57</sup> Molot, January 25, 1918, N. 16.

<sup>58</sup> Horizon, January 27, 1918, n.18.

Assembly temporarily takes the functions of the Transcaucasian Seim as a legislative authority on local issues".<sup>59</sup>

The Menshevik faction's resolution stated: "The assembly of the members of the Constituent Assembly, having examined the situation of the country, considers it necessary to temporarily convene a Transcaucasian Seim with legislative functions on all local issues until the convention of the All-Russian Constituent Assembly. Therefore, it is necessary to reduce the electoral size three times to create a Seim, ordering the parties to convene the Seim on February 10".<sup>60</sup>

Before the vote for resolution, Jordania added that only the number of members of the political parties whose deputies have been selected will be tripled.<sup>61</sup>

During the vote, the Resolution of the Socialist-Revolutionaries received 4 votes, Dashnaktsutyun - 7, and Mensheviks - 12, versus 10. The Muslim faction, as expected, voted for the Menshevik faction.<sup>62</sup> Georgian Mensheviks won.

To convene the Seim a bureau was elected, which included A. Babalyan (Dashnaktsutyun), A. Lomtadze (Menshevik), S. Chikalina (Socialist-Revolutionary Party) and M. Jafarov (Muslim).<sup>63</sup>

Following the closure of the session, the statement of the Bolshevik Regional Committee was also read, which stated that the convention of the Seim is a factual separation of Transcaucasia from Russia and a continuation of the policy of the Transcaucasian Commissariat against the power of the councils; hence, the Bolsheviks refused to participate.<sup>64</sup>

Apart from its immediate aim and significance, this conference revealed another important detail. From Jordania's questions it becomes clear that many Mensheviks and even Gegechkori were unaware of individual turns, and did not imagine what to do. In his latest speech, Jordania clarified the tactics of not only the Mensheviks, but also of other Transcaucasian political forces. We do not need to underestimate the fact that Jordania supplemented skillfully the Pharisee formula once again as a factor of extreme passion "to establish relations with Russia," which was merely a word for him and a faith for the majority of the Dashnaktsutyun and Socialist- Revolutionaries.

However, in the editorial "The Transcaucasian Seim", published on January 24, the ARF, which did not accept the use of the term "Seim" two days ago, was now looking for excuses. Recognizing that the Commissariat was not only an executive but also a legislative body, the party found that it linked its legislative work with the All-Russian Congress, which, in its turn, had the laws and decrees of the Commissariat and the right to accept and deny it. In the case of the Seim, the Dashnaktsutyun hoped

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<sup>59</sup> Molot, January 25, 1918, N. 16.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Horizon, January 27, 1918, n.18.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Arev, February 6, 1918, n. 28.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

again that if Russia had a destabilizing Constituent Assembly, its jurisdiction should extend to the Transcaucasus, and the principles of the democratic federal Russia should be mandatory for the Transcaucasian Seim.<sup>65</sup> The conclusion of the party, as we think, was cut off not only from the whole Russian but also the Transcaucasian reality.

"Transcaucasia must be admitted," Horizon wrote, "as a part of the divided Russia, which sincerely does its best to restore the idea of Russian statehood. And from this point of view, one has to make every effort to ensure that the convention of the Seim was not getting the color of separation. The Seim would widely use the popular organs of life - the revolutionary-democratic councils on the one hand, and the National Councils on the other".<sup>66</sup>

The attack by Gegechkori against the Armenian National Council at the congress was not remained unanswered. The January 25 edition of the "Horizon" was clarifying the problem.<sup>67</sup> These thoughts were reflected simultaneously with the fierce confrontation between the Dashnaktsutyun and the Georgian Mensheviks, which was deepening over the creation of the Seim. The characteristic matter was that the leader of the Transcaucasian supreme government, in the presence of a large crowd, found it appropriate to attack an institution with which he and his colleagues were in daily business relations and had repeatedly used the authoritative voice, opinion and means of the Armenian National Council in various explosive situations. During the course of its work, the Commissariat had recognized the National Councils as official bodies and implemented many decisions and continued to do so later. Secondly, the National Councils were already real bodies in Transcaucasia; moreover, they were not created by the Commissariat, but by the problems of the February Revolution and the provisional government.

It should also be noted that the Georgian National Council was formed at the end of November 1917 as a result of the Bolshevik coup and immediately embarked on the national separation strategy and splitting from Russia as well. Some of the members of the Transcaucasian Commissariat, like Jordania and many other Georgian politicians were at the same time members and heads of the Georgian National Council.

"One of them," the "Horizon" emphasized, "probably S. Vratsyan or National Councils, are harmful, first of all you, Gegechkori, Chkhenkeli, Jordania and friends, to be dissatisfied with the Georgian National Council or to narrow the borders of its activities - is it not clear that the Georgian National Council is in fact a Georgian national government today - Or if you do not leave and you do not spare your efforts so that your National Council will live and prosper, then you should have sincerity and civic courage to go to the National Councils of others with a little more respect ... The Armenian National Council can always be freely attacked. And after all this, how foolish Jordania's

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<sup>65</sup> Horizon, January 24, 1918, n.16.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Horizon, January 25, 1918, n.18.

words sound on a democratic frontline and the solidarity between Armenian and Georgian democracies<sup>68</sup>".

Its declinatory position on national councils was also expressed by the Transcaucasian branch of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party on January 31 at the Tbilisi City Committee. They found that in the current political situation, the national councils had become instruments of nationalistic and bourgeois factions that made "Russian class revolution" national and nationalist "that the political role of National Councils should be transferred to the Transcaucasian Regional Center. Based on the adopted resolution, it was decided to recall all Socialist-Revolutionary members from all national councils.<sup>69</sup>

The Armenian parties and political streams expressed their attitude towards the congressional developments, the Seim's content, and deepening of inter-party conflicts and other issues.

Dashnaktsutiun was particularly active, whose position was mainly expressed during the congress through the speech of Sirakan Tigranyan. At the same time, the opinions and concerns, expressed in the party press, were significantly complemented by a relatively complete strategy of the National Party.

In some ways following the attitude of Socialist-Revolutionary party, the ARF thought that the power in the Caucasus had been formed by those revolutionary organizations whose desire was to summon a Constituent Assembly. They saw that the sole problem of the "local branches" of the All-Russian Congressional Council was the establishment of a local, central, and authoritative power, which would "save the region from the final destruction".<sup>70</sup> Dashnaktsutyun considered it necessary to make public disagreements between the three socialist factions of the congress. Everyone who saw the necessity of the Seim in general, namely the Socialist-Revolutionaries and Dashnaks, who accepted the principles of federalism and decentralization, as well as the social-democratic Mensheviks proceeded from the conditions of political conjuncture in Russia and Transcaucasia.

So, the Socialist-Revolutionaries and the members of the ARF were in agreement with the main issue, namely, to authorize the said congress to constitute the fundamental laws of the Seim as soon as possible. However, Dashnaktsutyun considered it possible to announce this congress as "Seim", until the establishment of the "Real Seim".

The Social-Democratic Mensheviks offered another option; they insisted that there was no need to invite a new Seim, but "simply to arrange the number of deputies, already elected to the All-Russian Congress, in such a way that it would be possible to turn it into a Transcaucasian Seim".<sup>71</sup> All parties agreed also that the Transcaucasian

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Molot, January 23, 1918, n.14.

<sup>71</sup> Molot, January 25, 1918, n.16.

Seim, as well as all provisional authorities of the state, would put down their powers as soon as the Central Constituent Assembly was convened. Socialist-Revolutionaries, for example, as mentioned above, did not consistently accept its dissolution, but demanded a postponement, proceeding from the statement by Chernov. It should be noted that the disagreements among the parties were "mitigated" after the Mensheviks stated that the Transcaucasian Seim was not the Transcaucasian Constituent Assembly and could play a legislative role only on current and local issues.

The article "Our Position and Role" by V. Khoreni can be considered as an attempt to solve the problem. He was convinced that every government was strong and stable to the extent that it corresponds to the real relationship between the socio-political forces of the society and the Transcaucasian power, which was deprived of such preconditions as of that day. V. Khoreni explained this by the considerable presence of the dominant anti-revolutionary element among the "third people", Turks, but at the same time, even after the confrontation in the congress under discussion, he made an attempt to draw new lines of solidarity between the Georgian and Armenian revolutionary democracies. He found that "from the very beginning they were confronted by the anti-revolutionary Turkish landlords".<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, the author struck his ultimate blow to the Georgian Mensheviks. "However, the most dangerous and inaccurate perpetrators of the revolution in Russia and Transcaucasia are revolutionary and democratic elements that are harming their common cause by their wrong-doing and inconsistent policies. We must eventually admit", Khoreni wrote, that "it is clear and certain that the Bolsheviks in Russia have played so negative role as Menshevism among us - in Transcaucasia (emphasis mine - V.M.). Furthermore, usually, Menshevism triggered often, consciously or unconsciously, the anti-revolutionary change whatever the motive was".<sup>73</sup>

After the Bolshevik coup V.Khoreni once more states with sorrow that «in spite of its 'international' label the Menshevik part of the "Russian (!?) workers (!?) social-democracy which predominantly held Georgian national orientation and policy due to its character, membership and governance, adopted the national path"<sup>74</sup>. Qualifying the Georgian Mensheviks as the «third element», V.Khoreni blame them in regard to the main issue – that in Transcaucasia was not established strong revolutionary power from the outset, that the revolutionary wave did not spread over the Eastern Transcaucasia, that is "after the Congress of Transcaucasian peasants (June 1917 – V.M.) until today the Georgian Menshevism or the Menshevik Georgians, directly or indirectly – aided, gave strength and authority to the Turkish-Tatar antirevolutionary feudals. facts - 1. their bloc in Congress of Transcaucasian peasants, 2. Their desire to turn Transcaucasia into one electoral district, 3. their attitude in the municipal дума of Tiflis, 4. their position

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<sup>72</sup> Ashkhatavor, January 24, 1918, n.10.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

regarding the Zemstvo and the change of the borders, 5. their attitude towards the defence of the front and mobilization, etc, etc. "<sup>75</sup>

To the list of V.Khoreni we can add some essential facts, like, for example, the pro-Turkish context of the armistice of Erzinka, the organization of anti-Russian riots in the Transcaucasian railway, cooperation connected with the defence of Baku, apparent anti-Armenian position in regard to the establishment of the general-commissary of the Western Armenia after the February revolution, etc. Moreover, as V.Khoreni wrote: "anyhow, regarding the ARF as insufficiently socialist and revolutionary, even claiming them as "slaughterers" and "anti-revolutionary", they were responsible for the political isolation of Armenian democracy".<sup>76</sup>

The theoretician of the Dashnaktsutyun also made the most important confession, admitting that "we were given the position and role of the" unfortunate third party". Accepting, of course, the objective reality and the established Georgian-Tatar alliance, he raised nevertheless the main issue before the author and the party - what should the ARF do, what tactics should it adopt to avoid the "thoughtful and patient position?"<sup>77</sup> Khoreni was convinced that the policy of Dashnaktsutyun was "the smallest of the worst" in the current situation, and "we endured," he said, "tolerated the Menshevik - Bek Dictatorship, and in fact, made tactical large and long-term concessions. And if we did not do what we were supposed to do, to fly alone, we would not be able to run with one foot. We wanted to keep up with solidarity and companionship. Unfortunately, the Caucasian democracy was a "square wheel"; it had three incompatible legs and could not walk in harmony, harmoniously, uncompromisingly and unwieldy"<sup>78</sup>. Then follows the author's main confession, "We endured the dominance of Georgian" national-democracy "in all lines of the Transcaucasian policy, and we accepted the Transcaucasian" coalitionary "power created by it, and, unwilling to do so, we would have to incite the anti-revolution among us. This should be acknowledged. That was our position and role"<sup>79</sup>. Nevertheless, Khoreni as well as most of the Armenian historians and practitioners, found that "it is not our fault." It was the easiest and irresponsible position that could be chosen for a crucial historical era. The strange thing was that the article was published on the very next day of the above-mentioned session, when Dashnaktsutyun failed for some reason to cooperate with "unwillingness" in the united power. The strange thing is that the article was published on the next day after the above-mentioned session of the Seim, when Dashnaktsutyun once again failed to cooperate in a unified government.

Let's just go ahead and say that the said party would then make concessions in many and fateful issues ... and it was so until May, 1918. Unfortunately, this remarkable

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

publication does not try to clarify again the reasons for our position and role, the situation and the isolation, the problem of weakness or lack of its own policy, the cause of the problem of not becoming a political factor and a subject.

Instead of looking at his own kitchen, looking at the mirror, Khoreni concludes his thoughts with the anticipated and defeatist conclusion, "We hope that at this moment of the crisis of the revolution, when the freedom and physical existence of our common people are endangered, the Georgian "Social-Democracy" will at least stand on a genuine internationalist and national standpoint, will abandon its traditional Armenophobia and Turkish oriented politics and contribute the creation of a strong power for the salvation of the Caucasian democracy and the revolution together with us. There is no other salvation. And with that consciousness, our social-political position and role, along with the Caucasian peoples, have always been and will always be the strengthening of the achievements of the revolution in the Federative and Democratic Republic of Russia"<sup>80</sup>.

The problem is that this "strong power" which has been repeatedly circulated by the three main political forces of Transcaucasia was differently interpreted and accepted. The Georgian-Tatar bloc needed a "strong power" primarily for stabilizing its position and the anti-Armenian line as well, which eventually aimed at leaving Russia and getting closer to Turkey. Well, let's say that this was a clear, understandable policy which, in our opinion, was visible and tangible for the ARF. If we admit that this coherent policy was legitimized and put in the joint court of the United Government, in other words, if the Georgians and Tatars were not hiding their goals, then questions are arising: where was the Armenian program? Was its purpose to wait and serve the neighbors? Was it to serve the state interests, cut off from the reality in 1918? Was it aimed at unnecessary speculation on the phrase "revolution", "socialism" and "Caucasian democracy". After all, these same words were used by Georgian Mensheviks and Tatars to lead their narrow national affairs. Yes, their interest was, to put it mildly, to isolate the Armenians and the ARF starting from the February Revolution in 1917 and especially the Bolshevik one, and to annihilate them if possible. "A strong government" for Dashnaktsutyun meant a united Armenian-Turkish-Georgian government, a dreamy idea, mainly found in textbooks, which had to defend the interests of Armenians for some reason, those interests being, in particular, in protection of the frontline from the Turkish invasion.

One more fact; in the post-October period, Dashnaktsutyun announced periodically that the party did not raise an issue of independent statehood and saw the solution of the national issue within the federal Democratic All-Russian United States. In this sense, the ARF organ "Azatamart" acted in a strange way. It published an article titled as "The Governmental Federal Staff in Armenia". The author, Amatouni, was thoroughly discussing the problem of autonomy of national minorities in future Armenia as a proven fact and concludes that "Armenia should have a federal staff".<sup>81</sup> Taking into account the

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Azatamart, January 11, 1918, n. 6.

fact that the article was published in January 11, i.e. after the Constituent Assembly was dissolved by the Bolsheviks, as well as the circumstance that the publication was the editorial of a reputable party newspaper, it can only be stated that this was not a casual journalistic occurrence, but a serious claim about Armenia's independence.

A question arises as to what kind of borders and what Armenia were being discussed. What is more disturbing is the appropriateness of discussing the question of Armenian state by the ARF when the Turkish troops had invaded Western Armenia in 1917-1918 and the new disasters of wars were evident in the most critical and fateful stage for Armenian people.

The ARF Yerevan-based newspaper "Ashkhatanq" which was the organ of A.Manukyan and Western Armenian politicians as well, expressed the conviction on the occasion of convening the local congressional assembly that "the Caucasus is an inseparable part of Russia and should not be the idea of separation at all. All revolutionary parties, those who realize the true interest of their nation and their homeland, could not have any motto other than that. At the same time, it is necessary to believe in the revival of mental and spiritual renaissance of Russian people. "It was somehow a response to some members of its own party in Tiflis, which proves that there were contradictory opinions about this historical issue inside the party. The Socialist-Revolutionary Levon Atabekian's assessment can be considered as characteristic given at the March 4 session of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party's council. "It is not me," he said, "who is going to stop on the Dashnaktsutyun with delicacy. **My attitude towards the Turkish-Armenian activity of that organization, its "socialism" towards the party's border changes, the very national doctrinarianism and social opportunism that are very close to each other are known to you long ago. However, that party had a feature that no one can deny. He closely followed the hearts of the Armenian people, never missed the blood of the nation and always walked the path that was desirable to the popular majority. This majority, unconscious and vulgar, was very often crowded, but it was the majority** (emphasis mine-V.M.)."<sup>82</sup>

**The Armenian People's Party** welcomed the idea of setting up a Transcaucasian parliament, even temporarily, before convening the All-Russian Founder Assembly, "because it is a healthy, clever and state-based principle."<sup>83</sup> The Armenian People's Party, in the face of Arakelyan, hopes, like Dashnaktsutyun, that Transcaucasia, as part of Russia, had problem of final political reorganization and the Transcaucasian Seim must have a temporary nature, since its solution belongs to the All-Russian Congress. "The aspiration now is to create an autonomous union, independent from Russia," Arakelyan wrote, "or to create three separate autonomous governments, and we consider it a catastrophic consequence for all ethnicities of the Transcaucasus and

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<sup>82</sup> Ashkhatanqi droshak, March 18, 1918, n. 8.

<sup>83</sup> Mshak, January 24, 1918, n.16.

especially for Armenians".<sup>84</sup> The Armenian cadet party was convinced that "the salvation of the Armenian people is in the state principle. If we do not have a strong state in Transcaucasia, all-Russian rule or power, organized by the state principle, but not local or national, our existence will be greatly threatened".<sup>85</sup> There is also a contradiction in this approach. Would the government be formed on the "state" principle in Transcaucasia, having been based not on theoretical, but on a practical principle, and organized from national, even nationalist parties and the people who do not recognize each other? And what were the common national interests that should be brought together at the very moment by the Shamkhor syndrome-fed national forces, the main purpose of which was the national separation. In this case, such approaches of the Dashnaktsutyun and the Armenian People's Party can be explained by the fact that the two political forces, at least for the time being, were holding pro-Russian orientation, hoping that the Bolshevik government would be collapsed soon, the country's owner would become the lawful and the only authorized body - the Constituent Assembly, which would regulate interethnic relations, would confirm the pledges of the Provisional Government of the Russian Federation on national and Armenian issues. It was still the main thing; would the party that dissolved the congressional assembly cede the power not in November 1917 but at the end of January 1918?

In our deepest conviction, the Georgian Menshevism's farsightedness and political flexibility were that Mensheviks, besides being the opponents of the Bolsheviks, were also Georgian nationalists, who were greatly tempted by the hope of restoring national sovereignty. They were well aware of the Bolsheviks and were consistent in their anti-Russian views and practice. And since the Armenian national political field was mostly immersed in the burden of the Armenian Question, Self-Defense and Refugee Issues, it was an alternative to follow the Georgian political line. An alternative challenge can be considered Stephan Shahumyan's program and the ARF-Shahumian rapprochement, which could seriously interfere with the Georgian-Tatar long-distance programs.

**The Armenian Social-Democratic Party's** organ, "Paykar", considered the "Horizon" and the Dashnaks in public and political affairs as "profane" and argued that "if they see separatism in the protection of the idea of the Seim, then they are, in fact and first of all, separatists, declaring themselves as warm supporters of Seim as a form of political decentralization".<sup>86</sup> The Armenian Mensheviks found that "the aspiration of the Dashnaktsutyun and its leaders to establish a state has always existed" and is perceived as a Menshevik solidarity in the sense of refuting the National Councils and substantiating their "state of the local national broad autonomy".<sup>87</sup> The Armenian Mensheviks did not deny that all their efforts should be directed to the re-opening of the Central Constituent Assembly, but since it is not yet consolidated and it has "not

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Payqar, January 23, 1918, n.16.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

survived," "the state of emergency in our country forces us to take extraordinary steps and measures".<sup>88</sup> We are convinced once again that the Armenian Mensheviks were also seeing the danger of dismantling the Commissariat by Shahumyan, in the context of defending "the Leninist encroachments", as well as the appointment of Shahumyan as an extraordinary commissar in the Caucasus, in short, the real threat of Sovietization of Transcaucasia. In this regard, we find that by saying "strong power" and establishing it, the desire of the Mensheviks was, first of all, to prevent the Bolshevik penetration; the Seim was needed to withstand the Bolshevism. It is even possible to conclude that the social, economic, financial and food crises referred to by the Georgian "Mensheviks" in the inner kitchen repeatedly were understood as a political crisis and the fact of seizure of power by Shahumyan led to the idea of creating a "united and strong power" - the Seim.

This is evidenced by the January 28 plenary sessions of the Tiflis Council of the Deputies of Workers, Soldiers and Peasants, where two respective resolutions were discussed based on the speeches by the Bolsheviks (Romanov, Tropaidze, Gakhokia) and Menshevik (Khartishvili, Petrosyan, Gabunia, Jugheli). The Bolshevik resolution, which received 17 votes, said: "Taking into account the fact that summoning the Transcaucasian Seim, consisting of anti-revolutionary elements, is the repetition of the coalition government, the Bolsheviks' faction considers it urgent to summon an extraordinary congress of the Deputies of Workers, Soldiers and Peasants to organize the central Soviet power in the Caucasus."<sup>89</sup> Let's just add that the Bolsheviks' famous ultimatum to the Transcaucasian Commissariat was also published in the same issue of the newspaper. With 7 votes in favor, the session adopted the following formula by its majority: "1. the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly by the Government of the People's Commissars cut the last tie connecting the Transcaucasus with the Russian republic. 2. It further aggravated the anarchy and the civil war that were widespread in the country. 3. The consolidation of revolutionary forces will promote the revival of Russia's entire revolutionary democracy; the Tiflis council of Workers, Soldiers and Peasants considers it necessary to temporarily summon a Constituent Assembly of the All-Russian Congress to create Transcaucasian Seim with constitutional functions. The revolutionary organizations had to support all the steps of the Seim aimed at the final consolidation and development of all the achievements of revolutionary democracy against the centrifugal, chauvinistic and irrational aspirations of nationalist and anti-revolutionary circles".<sup>90</sup> The publication of the "Paykar" revealed that in the first days of February an extraordinary congress of the Social Democrats of Russia and Transcaucasian organizations took place in Tbilisi, which approved and adopted the resolution on the plenary session of the Seim. It was also decided that national councils should not play any role in government.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Molot, January 31, 1918, n.21.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Payqar, February 8, 1918, n.28.

The 1918 **congress of social-democratic Menshevik organizations, held in Tbilisi on February 1-4**, was dedicated to various issues of the military-political acute crisis in Transcaucasia, occurred in January-February.<sup>92</sup> It is noteworthy that the discussions on the defense of the front and the Bolshevik military units of the Caucasian army, moving towards Tbilisi, were skillfully held in the context of the necessity of establishing the Seim.

For example, at the February 2 session, presided over by Azatyan, Gegechkori informed that as the Commissioner's appeal to Petrograd and the North Caucasus governments to reconcile the issue remained unanswered, we had to solve this issue by ourselves, but such a serious problem cannot get some progress without an authoritative intervention of the Transcaucasian Seim; we are preparing a material for the Seim and, in this sense, I will send an answer to Enver Pasha tomorrow (emphasis mine – V.M.).<sup>93</sup>

We want to consider a thought expressed by Gegechkori at the February 4 session, which is profound, perspective, and is a solid contradiction in our opinion.

"If Transcaucasian Commissariat did not succeed, it was because of its various reactionary elements. The current Seim should have a homogeneous, democratically elected body.<sup>94</sup> The "reactionary elements" for Gegechkori meant, of course, first of all, Tatar-bek commissars and their supporters, who, as we have seen, defended again the "strong power" of the Seim, besides the Georgian Mensheviks. How and why (and more importantly) these "reactionary elements" should not have appeared in the staff of the new government? Moreover, let's note that just a few days later, when the Seim was open, it turned out that it was again involved in non-Democrat and the same "reactionary elements". In addition, at this session, the Menshevik President of the Commissariat also expressed concern that "at present there are many authorities that do not operate within their rights, such as national councils, which should be called to the order (emphasis mine – V.M.)".<sup>95</sup>

In fact, Ye.Gegechkori continue to hide his hatred and fear towards Armenian National council; to that date he regards this influential and mighty Armenian organization, besides St.Shahumyan, the political opponent of Georgian nation. Let us remind once more that the triumvirate of N.Zhordania, Ye.Gegechkori and N.Ramishvili and many leading Georgian Mensheviks were members of the Georgian National Council.

The Armenian party's official view about the Seim was announced by the Armenian Revolutionary Federation-Dashnaktsutyun Party on February 4 at its general assembly. Atabekyan reported on the Transcaucasian congress of the Congressional Assembly, keeping informed about the position of the parties. An important detail of his

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<sup>92</sup> Horizon, February 7, 1918, n.28.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Horizon, February 8, 1918, n.29.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

report becomes known - "the leftist Dashnaks accept the power of the people's commissars, totally denying the existence of the Seim."<sup>96</sup> Three attitudes occurred during the exchange of thoughts; (a) the minority believed that it was necessary to participate and to carry out legislative work; (b) the majority believed that it was necessary to participate with an ambitious purpose; and (c) the third one was totally against the participation of the regime in general.<sup>97</sup> The final decision was made by the influential and powerful reputation of the Baku branch. The 12-point resolution on joining the Seim was adopted by the Armenian branch of the Socialist-Revolutionary Organization of Baku.<sup>98</sup>

The view of the **Social-Democrat Armenian Workers' Association** (SPS) is briefly presented by D. Ananun, which indirectly justifies our position.

"The isolation of the Armenians becomes definite," he wrote, "in the formation of Seim. It was a decision that put the Russians in the state of the incomer and, in spite of the Georgian Mensheviks' speeches that they were with the Russian democracy, proved that their weight depended on the goodness of nobility".<sup>99</sup> These days, by the way, the "Banvor" weekly of the Specifics began to be published again (which was ceased in July 1917), which was fully supporting the idea of All-Russian Congress against the Seim. At the same time, the Armenian Socialist-Revolutionaries criticized Anonymous's "military-patriotic feast" when the Armenian intellectual was trying to justify that "the Armenian people are surrounded by enemies. We are orphans without Russians", published in his article of "100 years later".<sup>100</sup>

It is necessary to emphasize the fact that the organization of the Seim lasted until the eve of its opening. In addition, an unprecedented political alliance was testifying the tense political situation. At the beginning of January, a joint conference of the Socialist-Revolutionary Armenian organization and the Armenian Social-Democrat Working Group (Specifics) was held in Baku. The adopted resolution was defining the following matter a major problem: "The protection of the Armenian people's physical existence, who was and still is the bearer of a culture, capable of high development".<sup>101</sup> The problems of the front defense with other peoples of the region, the factor of the national military units in that process, the necessity of decisions of the National Council, the creation of a local militia for ensuring the life and property of the Armenian population, residing in Western Armenia, were raised<sup>102</sup>. The national political handwriting of the Specifics is an evident fact in the decisions that were made, which was supported even by the anti-national Armenian Socialist-Revolutionary Organization.

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<sup>96</sup> Ashkhatanqi droshak, February 11, 1918, n.4.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ashkhatanqi droshak, February 18, 1918, n.5.

<sup>99</sup> Ananun 1916: 610.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ashkhatanqi droshak, February 14, 1918, n.2.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

Following each other, the sessions of the Council of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party's Baku Organization (presided by Atabekyan; Sahakyan's report on the Congress of Transcaucasian Labor Councils was heard) and the Socialist-Revolutionaries and their supporters (reporter Atabekyan) were held on January 8<sup>103</sup> and January 21, accordingly.<sup>104</sup> On February 18, the party reported to its supporters that Socialist-Revolutionaries entered into the Seim.<sup>105</sup>

On February 9, 1918, the Transcaucasian Commissariat heard the questions about its political report submitted to the Seim.<sup>106</sup>

First, the Bureau of the Commissariat reported on the draft on granting the White Hall (the palace of viceroy - V. M.) to the Seim for its sessions on the occasion of summoning the Seim. Before organizing the Seim, its affairs would be administered by the Commissariat's Office<sup>107</sup>.

Then, Rtskhiladze, Ghazaryan, Chkhenkeli, Gegechkori and Khas-Mamedov made speeches on the report. Let's discuss the formulations of their thoughts.

Rtskhiladze and Ghazaryan advised to emphasize the barriers that blocked the work of the Commissariat and only then to declare that the Commissariat was handing the entire power to Seim. Chkhenkeli found that the government had to express its opinion on the issue of the agenda in the Seim. And he himself, Chkhenkeli, for some reasons, presents the list of issues in the Caucasus. Those were the formation of power and its nature, the war and peace, the domestic issues - financial, food, national separation, etc. According to Chkhenkeli, after these questions only "the Seim should consider the Declaration of the Commissariat and when it is formed majority, then that majority will separate itself from a responsible government"<sup>108</sup>. He insisted that the entire power of the region should belong to the Seim and the uncertainty of splitting the power and the spheres of operation that complicated the Commissariat functioning<sup>109</sup>. This was not an endless motive and was directed against revolutionary organizations, especially against the Socialist-Revolutionary, Bolshevik and National Councils.

This idea was also well developed by Gegechkori, who emphasized the factor of "multiple power". He believed that the competition between National Councils and revolutionary organizations was aimed at the struggle for power in the Transcaucasus, which, in our deepest conviction, does not correspond to the reality. At least with the example of the Armenian and Muslim National Councils we have repeatedly substantiated it. He also took care morbidly of the power of the Seim government, finding that strengthening the Seim, there was a need to give levers to the revolutionary organizations, namely to the regional center, which was also a leap. "The organs of the

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ashkhatanqi droshak, January 28, 1918, n.6.

<sup>105</sup> Ashkhatanqi droshak, January 18, 1918, n. 5.

<sup>106</sup> CSHAG, f. 1818, inv. 2, f. 12, p. 86.

<sup>107</sup> Horizon, February 14, 1918, n.33.

<sup>108</sup> CSHAG, f. 1818, inv. 2, f. 12, p. 86.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

government would be united," Gegechkori said, "the revolutionary organizations and National Councils will have their own special problems"<sup>110</sup>. Khas-Mamedov stated that "the Constituent Assembly and the Seim are the culmination of the revolution." Rzkhiladze further stated that "if revolutionary organizations interfered with the orders of the authorities, the latter should either bow down before them or declare them anti-revolutionary. It's impossible to reconcile these sides; either the revolution or the government will govern"<sup>111</sup>. For some reason, another Menshevik suddenly remembered the February Revolution of 1917 and its values in February 1918.

Finally it was decided that the authority should be united, drawing the attention of the Seim<sup>112</sup>. Regardless of the content of the speeches and the absence of both the Armenian and Tatar commissars of the Commissariat, it was quite clear that the problems were being solved by the Georgian Mensheviks and it was they who formed new government of the Caucasus.

Summing up thoughts, some reference should be made about the staff of the Transcaucasian Seim. The fate was sealed. The opening of the Seim was inevitable and Dashnaktsutjun expressed its satisfaction with establishing the Seim. "Horizon" wrote: "The overwhelming majority of members belong to the Socialist parties. The bourgeois element is insignificant, and the fragmentary-partial part is represented a little bit more"<sup>113</sup>. Actually, nothing was changed in the political tactics of the Armenian National Party. The same intolerance was manifested in the "bourgeois element", i.e. the Armenian People's Party and the same painful timeserving when considering the Georgian-Tatar alliance. A powerful wave of criticism against the hegemony of Georgian Mensheviks and "reactionary forces" is now yielding its place when weighing up the fact that the "bek-landowners' part is represented a little bit more" in the defeatist manner. It's difficult to say how the ARF analyzed its condition, but it was clear that the fact of obedience to almost the same coalition could, in our opinion, be interpreted as the beginning of a defeat or a great defeat. Of course, one can argue and say that in reality this coalition led to independence. In our opinion, this approach cannot be considered as scientific for the simple reason that in 1918, under the Turkish invasion that began in February, it was impossible to guess the May battles and even think about restoring the statehood.

For some reason Dashnaktsutyun was optimistically convinced that "the problem of homogeneous or coalitionary government should be considered as solved bearing in mind the fact of the staff gotten together at the Seim to be convened. A legislative body, whose three quarters of the members is socialists, must naturally have a socialist ministry"<sup>114</sup>. Having fully accepted the former danger, the party itself responded to the

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> CSHAG, f. 1818, inv. 2, f. 12, p. 86.

<sup>113</sup> Horizon, February 8, 1918, n. 29.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

contemporary question, "The whole problem is whether socialist parties, who are now wandering and often neutralizing each other, will be able to create a harmonious and solid socialist union, which could govern the country's political life"<sup>115</sup>.

The editorial of the "Horizon" ends with conclusions that, in our deepest conviction, most of the ARF figures could not believe. **"It seems to us,"** the newspaper wrote, **"that this possibility has long been created. The real possibility is to create psychological possibilities which will not be difficult, if the Armenian, Russian, Georgian and Turkish socialists really try to come close to each other, to understand and to open the ground on which one can stand together with others** (emphasis mine - V.M.). The situation is facilitated by the fact that the Turkish Democracy will also be represented in the Seim, which, of course, is a more real force and compatible with the lives of Muslim workers than the people who had monopolized the Turkish people's political representation so far. The issue of the composition of the Transcaucasian government is, therefore, entirely dependent on the layout of the party factions in the Seim. Therefore, before defining the government, it is necessary to know the body that will create it<sup>116</sup>.

By administrative and official results of the congressional elections, according to the "Horizon", 11 deputies were elected from the N1 list in the Transcaucasia, from the list N3-1, N 4 (ARF) - 9, N 5 - 1, N10-10, N 11 - 1, N 12 - 2 and N 14 - 1; 36 deputies in total. The election meter was counted with 62,044 votes, for which 32 were elected to the Seim from N 1, 1 from N 2, 5 from N 3, 27 from N4, 4 from N5, 1 from N6, 1 from N8, 30 from N10, 4 from N 11, 7 from N12 and 3 from N14, totaling 115. The ARF received 558,400 votes. The Seim election meter was calculated 20,681<sup>117</sup>.

It is noteworthy that the newspapers "Arev" and "Ashkhatavor" of the ARF presented the votes of Dashnaktsutyun in small numbers - 552,000<sup>118</sup>. According to the votes received by the parties, the picture was as follows:

Mensheviks - 660,000 votes - 33 deputies

ARF - 552,000 - 27

Musavat - 574,000 - 28

Bolsheviks - 93,000 + voices of the front - 7

Socialist Revolutionaries - 112,000 + Frontstones - 20

The Turkish Socialist Bloc - 156,000 - 7

"Turks in Russia" - 66,000 - 3

Cadets and PPA - 40,000 - 2

Socialists - federalists - 22,000 - 1

Georgian National Democrats - 25,000 - 1<sup>119</sup>:

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Arev, February 6, 1918, n.28.

Thus, after the January 1918, it took about a month to form a new regional coalition government in the Transcaucasus - the Seim.

At the plenary session of the Social-Democratic Menshevist organizations held in Tbilisi, the central issue in the party press was solved, it was decided to create a seim and appoint it on the day it was opened.

The said issue was solved at the joint session of the Transcaucasian Commissariat and Territorial Center of the Workers and Soldiers' Deputies on January 22, held in Tbilisi, and at the congress of the Transcaucasian deputies of the Constituent Assembly on 28 January as well as at the plenary meeting of the Tiflis Council of the Workers and Soldiers' Deputies and at the congress of Social-Democratic Menchevik organizations, held at the beginning of February in Tiflis, in party press; it was decided to establish a Seim and the day of its opening was fixed.

The Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaktsutyun), despite its objectionable and sharp criticism, retreated because of the organized tactics of the Social-Democratic Mensheviks' Georgian wing, and agreed to join the Seim.

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