

THE PROBLEM OF ILLEGAL CIRCULATION OF WEAPONS AND AMMUNITION IN THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA (1918-1920)

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The February revolution and interim government which took power in Russia in 1917 had made substantial changes in the state system of the country. New statesmen neglected the mixed economic, multireligious and multiethnic character of Russia, also the destructive activities of foreign intelligence services during the pre-war period. "Democratic" laws triggered the gradual collapse of the empire. The situation was especially painful in the former Caucasian viceroyalty which was restructured into the Transcaucasian special committee in March, 1917; the latter failed to acquire authority in the region.

Due to the implementation of sometimes too democratic laws the interim government was unable to secure even a primitive law and order. On the territory of Russia the forensic system was abolished which affected negatively also Transcaucasia. Under the chairmanship of D.Donskoy, Minister of War and Navy of the Transcaucasian Special Committee, in the joint session of the centers of Transcaucasian workers, peasants and soldiers it was decided to sack complete staff of gendarmerie and police and send them to field army.¹ From now on police was recruited from the soldiers and civilian population, and "in the case of the absence of military contingents - exceptionally the recruits from the local population".² Thus, podporuchik Arshavir Shahkhatuni was appointed as the commandant of Yerevan, and military officer Gharibyan as the head of the police.³ In some cases the newly established police was not supported financially. So far the executive committee of Shushi, taking into account the fact that policemen did not receive salary during two months, had decided to eliminate it.⁴ Understandably, such a decision could not enhance the stabilization of the situation since the population which was accustomed to the control of the police, suddenly receives a possibility of free behavior. This especially concerns the Muslim population of the region who, due to strong Pan-Islamist propaganda, immediately took advantage of the new situation.⁵

¹ Horizon, 13.VIII.1917. It should be mentioned that the executive committee of Karabagh, taking into account the new situation, rightly decided to employ also 12 policemen; the final decision was left to the city council of Shushi (see Paylak, 13.IV.1917).

² Melkonyan et al. 2015: 548.

³ Horizon, 23.VI.1917.

⁴ Aparazh, 1.X.1917.

⁵ The Ottoman commanding staff was sure that it was possible to recruit into its army 300 thousand Muslims of the Caucasus (Melkonyan et al. 2015: 623).

That the muslims were intensively acquiring weapons, is seen through the message dated with May 13, 1917, which reports that in two carriages found in the Kars region, on the road to the village of Oghch-Oghlu were hidden 7 boxes containing guns and bullets.⁶ In different places the price on arms and ammunition vary. Thus, in Enzeli (modern Bender-Enzeli) Küçük khan began to acquire arms from Russian militmen who were leaving Northern Persia, 1000 roubles for one machine gun and 200 roubles for a gun.⁷ Sometimes Russian soldiers sell a machine gun for one bottle of vodka or a cannon for one gold coin.⁸ Russian soldiers who return from the Russian-Turkish front prefer to sell their arms and ammunition to Turks and Kurds who offer more money.⁹ In January 1918 Caucasian Tatars attack returning Russian soldiers in the railway station of Shamkhor;¹⁰ more than 2000 Russians were killed, the bandits took over about 15 thousand guns, 70 machine guns and 20 cannons. In February two muslim bands attack the train which delivers arms and ammunition to Nachijevan.¹¹

The situation became even worse after the Treaty of Batumi in June 4, 1918, when the Republic of Armenia was forced to accept the Ottoman terms of the peace treaty. The Republic of Armenia was in a difficult social and economic condition. Many thousands of homeless refugees from Western Armenia were seeking means of existence. The prime-minister H.Kajaznuni describes the situation as «shapeless chaos and a pile of ruins».¹²

Illegal circulation of arms and ammunition is one of the main factors which destabilizes the criminogenic situation in the state and social security, leading to the expansion of murder, robbery, and political retribution. These in their turn were used by the enemies of the republic who propogated anti-national slogans saying that Armenian people could not have independent state and secure its population.¹³ Consequently the population was trying to obtain arms by any means.¹⁴

The population did not accept that the holding of illegal weapons is a violation of law, and also dangerous. The hidden gun one day could fire¹⁵, and the grenade might

⁶ Horizon, 23.VI.1917.

⁷ Arev, 18(31). III.1918. A.G.Yemelyanov, the plenipotentiary of the central committee of the union of All-Russian *zemstvo* in the Russian-Turkish front, mentions: "In the East the arms in the hands of people could not remain long without usage. It burns the hands" (Yemelyanov 2007: 37).

⁸ Vazgen 1930: 161.

⁹ Valadyan 1962: 66.

¹⁰ Virabyan 2003 (ed.): 12-16, 29-30.

¹¹ Simonyan 1996: 202.

¹² Melkonyan et al. 2015: 29.

¹³ NAA, f. 199, l. 1, f. 16, p. 40.

¹⁴ A-Do (H.Ter-Martirosyan), one of the national-public activists, writes. "weapon is an evil, war is one of the greatest evils of mankind which arises from the ... to solve international problems by means of fire and sword, but until the weapon remains as such, until the relations of tribes and peoples are limited with the might of the weapon, it perforces the apologist of the weapon" (A-Do 1919: 132).

¹⁵ Quite a substantial number of casualties connected with the use of weapons are reported in the media of that period (Zang, 2.X.1918, 9.X.1918).

blow up in the hand. Unfortunately, such tragic examples were not few; the eagerness of some people to keep weapons increases the possibility of their repetition. Weapons were used also during the domestic quarrels. Thus, in August 18, 1918 in the park of Yerevan the quarrel between the representatives of Yerevan and Surmalu ended in the armed clash and murder of two innocent bystanders and a child.¹⁶

The government tries to hold up the growth of armed crimes which was the consequence of illegal circulation of arms and ammunition. Unfortunately, the difficult situation of the republic, actually the absence of media, lets the internal and external enemies as well as criminals to spread disinformation among the population and steel arms and ammunition. Thus, in July 1, 1918 in Nerqin Akhta (modern Hrazdan) some unspecified people distribute false rumors that the Turks are advancing. This was enough for immediate action; 28 soldiers based in the village and the population attacked armory and took over 100 French guns "Lebel" along with 38 thousand bullets and 70 Russian guns "Mosin" with 14 thousand bullets. During the investigation it became clear that, besides the aforementioned arms, an additional 20 guns and 20 thousand bullets are missing.¹⁷ Due to operative action 70 from the 170 stolen guns were confiscated. It was established that refugees had participated in the attack on the armory; more important to note that the military authorities were unaware of the quantity of guns kept in the armory.¹⁸

The aforementioned case shows that local authorities were weak, and the military command failed to secure the inviolability of the armory. Investigators even did not take care to identify who were the authors of these false rumors and initiators of the attack on the armory. It could be assumed that the attack was planned beforehand since, besides ordinary soldiers, in this action besides ordinary soldiers participated also civilians.

Local authorities, especially the law-keeping system was established just recently and they lack experience of operative and intelligence work, thus were forced to overcome numerous difficulties, including various armed bands operating in the provinces and cities of the republic which destabilize the situation.¹⁹ To the solution of this problem was aimed the draft law submitted to the parliament by Aram Manukyan,²⁰ the Minister of the Interior,²¹ in August 23, 1918. In his speech he pointed that a similar

¹⁶ See Zang, 17.VIII.1918. About the problem of segmentation see more detailed in Hayrapetyan 2018: 164-209.

¹⁷ Virabyan 2010 (ed.): 98.

¹⁸ Idem.

¹⁹ S.Vracyan mentions in his memories. "Along with hunger and epidemic in the country was disturbed also security. Deserted soldiers, refugees and local population deprived of the means of subsistence, by groups or individually were attacking travelers, rob houses, disturb the social order. The so-called "mauzerism" became a social evil, people armed with mauzer operate with impunity even in the streets of the capital city and the population suffer by their hands" (Vracyan 1958: 192).

²⁰ The detailed study see in Asryan 2019; also Asryan 2009.

²¹ The Ministry of the Interior was the biggest in RA, under the subjection of which were "not only administrative-police system but the spheres of the transport, food supplies, social care, immigration,

undertaking met difficulties in Georgia, but Armenia lacks such social and political problems.²²

A.Manukyan supports his initiative through some examples which prove that the presence of weapon not always help people in its self-defence. The minister refers to the accident in Akhta (the murder of three families for a lamb) where in order to pacify the population a battalion was brought from the front. He was confident that the armed crowd is not a military unit. As an example he refers to the attack of more than 300 Kurds on 10 Armenian villages of Nor Bayazet three weeks ago. Although in the district reside about 8000 armed men, the robbers succeeded in their undertaking and stole the sheep of the villagers. The district of Ghamarlu (now Artashat) has about 4000 armed men but instead of to fight back Muslim bands they prefer to ask Yerevan for aid.²³

According to the information of the minister the population of the republic has 60-150 thousand weapons of war.²⁴ And this in the case when the army lacks arms and ammunition and needs colossal finances which the government does not possess with.²⁵ People pay 1500-2000 roubles for a gun,²⁶ which sometimes appear to be stolen.²⁷

A.Manukyan thinks that "Along with the disarming of the population a strong militia should be organized and the borders of the country must be defended against the

public health, education, local autonomy, post-telegraph and others. ... Later, after the disintegration of the ministry several new ministies were established" (Ghazakhecyan et al. 2010: 28; Sargsyan, Sahakyan 2013: Appendix 1, p. 92). Some historians regard the establishment of Armenian army and especially special services as the main pledge for the creation of the independent Armenian statehood. It should be stated that the aforementioned is not enough in the case of the state. The problem of external security is closely interwaved with the internal one, the latter being completely entrusted to the police. In the case of misorganization of this system neither the army, nor special services could act effectively.

²² Virabyan 2010 (ed.): 24.

²³ Idem. It is difficult to understand how could the people who in May 1918 fight back the enemy, but after that had failed to defend their own settlements. One shall recall the case of the newly established local authorities of Ghamarlu which, being told about the treaty of Batumi, in June 8 wrote to general M.Silikyan. "The people of the district of Ghamarlu is ready to shed the last drop of its blood and defend the motherland with his weapons, bullets and bread" (A-Do 2015: 409). The national council of Ghamarlu took responsibility for supplying the government with 3,000 soldiers, and the first battalion arrived in Yerevan in June 9. Soldiers lined up before the building of the parliament. Aram addressed them a brief speech. "The Armenian is set to motion when the knife reaches his bones, but better late than never" (Idem: 411).

²⁴ Virabyan 2010: 23. Let us mention that in August 6, 1918, from the district of Nor Bayazet was received a request to send 100 guns of the "Mosin" type and 20 thousand bullets (Virabyan 2009: 329).

²⁵ The shortage of weapons and ammunition was actual during the December 1918 Armenian-Georgian war and the government asked the population to hand over the guns of the type "Lebel" (French), "Mauzer" (Turkish) and bullets for the Russian 3-line rifle "Mosin" (Zang, 25.XII.1918).

²⁶ Already at the fall of 1919 the German revolver "Mauzer" was sold for 8000 roubles (NAA, f. 198, l. 1, f. 2, l. 10).

²⁷ Virabyan 2010: 24. In February 1919 the salary of the militiaman was 300 roubles (idem: 213), like that of the soldier who receives also food, wear and shoes (Ashkhatanq, 8.V.1919).

enemy".²⁸ He suggests to imprison the people who has illegal weapons for the period of 3 months or fine with 3000 roubles; hunting guns and cold steel should not been confiscated.²⁹

Arshavir Melikyan, the member of the Social-democratic (bolshevik) party and a deputy of the parliament, argued against saying: "Every citizen has a right to keep weapon and defend his revolutionary rights",³⁰ so he suggests not to hurry and, in the case if the law should be accepted, let the people to keep the weapons only at home as an "inalienable right".³¹ The law was adopted in the form as it was formulated by Armenian Revolutionary Federation - ARF(16 votes against 12) and the legislative commission was requested to submit its resolution within two days.³²

In the 10th session of the parliament (August 27, 1918) Sirakan Tigranyan (ARF) made a report about the draft law and suggested to read it paragraph by paragraph and vote, which was opposed by Hayk Azatyan and Tadevos Avdalbekyan, the social-democrat deputies. In his report the latter disputes the idea of the minister that the great quantity of weapons in the country should be regarded as one of the causes of anarchy. As an example he referred to Persia whose population is armed but where rules exemplary order. The deputy recalls the army where the people are also armed but at the same time they are disciplined. According to T.Avdalbekyan, the people is armed because they did not trust the government. Since in the provinces happen abuses he suggests to regulate the judicial and legal system, "organize strong militia ... and only after it get on with the problem of disarming. But until that the people should remain armed".³³ He was convinced that the armed people has shown its heroism in the spring of 1918 in Nor Bayazet, Surmalu and Sardarapat.

It goes without saying that the aforementioned example of T.Avdalbekyan does not fully describe the true situation. During the heroic battles against Turkish forces in May 1918 volunteers also had participated but the regular army leaded by its commanders was the main actor. It should be stressed that some local battles such as in Nor Bayazet and Surmalu could not justify the necessity of armed population. One of the solutions to this problem could have been the recording of the weapons on the hands of the population in the frontier zone, organization of forces of self-defence which was done later.³⁴

²⁸ Virabyan 2010 (ed.): 24.

²⁹ Virabyan 2009: 198. In December 13, 1918 a new draft law was submitted to the parliament according to which cold steel also was regarded as a subject for confiscation (Virabyan 2010 (ed.): 127. In November 1919 the fine reached 10 thousand roubles (Socialist Heghapokhakan, 23.XI.1919).

³⁰ Virabyan 2010: 24.

³¹ Idem.

³² Idem.

³³ Idem: 25.

³⁴ In the 42nd session of the parliament (December 6, 1918) general H.Hakhverdyan, the Military minister, was given 25406 roubles for the organization of military police – militia (Virabyan 2010 (ed.): 114).

St.Malkhasyan who represents the Armenian People's party (APP) in the parliament informed that his party accepts the draft law of disarming but has some objections. He mentioned that the desire of population to acquire weapons in places for the sake of self-defence is a consequence of weak administering in the provinces. This situation is visible not only in Armenia but in the whole Caucasus as well. At the same time he says that in the neighboring Georgia and Azerbaijan the governments mostly had succeeded to confiscate the weapons kept by the population. The deputy informs also that his party principally shares the idea of disarming but APP is concerned with the next problem - only the peaceful people shall hand over weapons, while the criminals would hide it in any cost, which shall harm the formers.³⁵

Garegin Yengibaryan of APP argued against Social-democrats saying that he is amazed that being a socialist A.Melikyan "in this regard defends the idea of private property, especially in the case of arms".³⁶

A.Manukyan held a speech at the end of the discussion. He argued against the deputies of the Social-democratic party disproving their "solid arguments" one after another. The minister once more pointed on the necessity of disarming, saying that. "The arming of a peaceful people who does not have brigandish propensity, is now an evil but it also is not a goodness since he could not defend himself from the bandits. Presenting the draft law to the parliament we have a great desire to establish authority in the state, eliminate the anarchy and fight against bandits".³⁷ By the suggestion of Avetik Sahakyan, the speaker of the parliament, after its discussion article after article the draft law was put to a vote; it was accepted by 15 voices against 7.³⁸

In August 29, 1918³⁹ the parliament again discussed the draft law on disarming. Tigran Musheghyan from Socialist-revolutionary fraction (SR) informed that they wish to accept it with the condition of some corrections, but S.Tigranyan rejected this suggestion since comments should have been presented during the previous session and he suggested to hand over the draft law to the editorial commission "where, perhaps, it should be possible to make some corrections".⁴⁰ Finally, in that same day the parliament accepted the draft law presented by the Minister of the Interior.⁴¹ At the same time it was allowed to keep a part of the weapons under the control of officials in the settlements which are endangered by the attacks of the enemy or bandits.⁴²

³⁵ Virabyan 2010 (ed.): 26.

³⁶ Idem.

³⁷ Idem: 26-27.

³⁸ Idem: 28.

³⁹ Law № 6. About the arms and ammunition which belong to private people (Karavarutyan Iraber, 6.IX.1918, էջ 2). At the same day when the parliament works, in Nor Bayazet took place a real battle between police and local population (Virabyan 2009 (ed.): 341).

⁴⁰ Virabyan 2010: 28.

⁴¹ Official part. Law № 6 (Karavarutyan Iraber, 6.IX.1918, p. 2).

⁴² Idem. In December 14, 1918 by the order of A.Manukyan the Russian community of Michayelovski, district of Dilijan (today Lori province) was given right to have 10-15 military guns, except that of "Lebel" and "Mosin" (Virabyan 2009 (ed.): 403).

In September 1, 1918, the gazette of the government had published the order number 1 from August 21 issued by general Hovhannes Hakhverdyan where he expresses his negative attitude connected with the irregular shooting often happening in Yerevan, especially by nights. The general orders the commandant of the city and the chief of the police to inform the population that such behavior is prohibited and should be punished. He warns that in such cases the weapons should be confiscated. Only those citizen could keep weapons who had permission given by the Military ministry and militia.⁴³

The peculiarity of the aforementioned order is the next. The Order number 1 of the Military minister shows that the scale of the circulation of illegal weapons and ammunition had reached a great extent, also its inappropriate use which had forced the minister to mention irregular shooting on the first place of his order.

Regardless the argumentation and aims, the situation described above testifies in favor of the assumption that the government of the republic was not able yet to take control over the situation in the country, as disorder reigns even in the capital city, not to mention the provinces where actually it was unbearable.

Anyway, the government continue to work on the prohibition of illegal weapons' use; under the leadership of captain Popunts in Yerevan was established a special commission dealing with the confiscation of weapons.⁴⁴ In the order it is said: "Every citizen, regardless of nationality and religion, is obliged to bring all his firearms, except those which do not have clips and hunting guns, to Doktorskij street 66 and hand over to the commission, in order to avoid problems. ... The last day of voluntary handover expires in Sunday, September 15, those who bring after that date should be punished according to law, that is 3 months of imprisonment or fined by 3000 roubles".⁴⁵

Irregular military units continue their illegal actions on the territory of the republic. For the sake of success joint operations of the police and army were necessary to find out and confiscate illegal weapons and ammunition. Unfortunately, after the June 4, 1918 treaty of Batumi the Armenian army was significantly downsized. The army was forced to take care of the borders but also fight against internal enemy as well, that is Muslim bands and settlements which did not recognize the authority of the government. That is why initially the struggle for the confiscation of weapons and ammunition could organize only the newly created Armenian police.

A.Manukyan ordered the chief of the police of Yerevan to undertake urgent actions directed against shootings in the capital city, as well as to confiscate weapons.⁴⁶ Simultaneously he warns the population through published written order (in Armenian and Russian languages) that those people who did have a right to own weapons, are prohibited to carry them in public and other places.⁴⁷ By the order of September 18,

⁴³ Orders of the Military minister, № 1, (Karavarutyan Iraber, 1.IX.1918, p. 1).

⁴⁴ AZD (Karavarutyan Iraber, 17.IX.1918, p. 1).

⁴⁵ Idem.

⁴⁶ Zhoghovurd, 5.IX.1918.

⁴⁷ Idem, 27. IX.1918.

1918, A.Manukyan specifies which types of weapons should be confiscated. People who were authorized to confiscate should compile protocols with the participation of two eyewitnesses. The minister again reminds that only the fighting guns having clips should be confiscated. Ministers, the speaker of the parliament, his assistants and members of families were exempted from the search of weapons.⁴⁸

In order to avoid the illegal circulation of weapons through army officers general H.Hakhverdyan, the Military minister ordered them to have "relevant permission given by their commanders regarding the right to carry arms, mentioning the number and system of the weapon; the handover of weapons to other person is prohibited" in regard to the acquired personal weapons.⁴⁹ From this order it could be deduced that some irresponsible army officers also were guilty in the illegal circulation of weapons, who use their position and acquire them without permission. It should be mentioned that a part of people involved in the illegal selling of weapons and ammunition were deprived of subsistence but this did not exempt them from responsibility, especially in case if the arms were sold to Muslims living on the territory of RA. The arms represent danger at the hands of those who used to serve in the army and have military experience.

In some cases the authorities were forced to involve military units in the disarming actions since those who should have been disarmed were armed better than policemen. For example, in Garni in November 1918 the operation of disarming was organized under the command of Garegin Nzhdeh whose detachment was supplied with machine guns and artillery,⁵⁰ and in the same month the punitive squad of Tigran Baghdasaryan forced the Muslims of Mets Mazra to hand over 450 guns.⁵¹

Unfortunately, during the operations of disarming sometimes took place negative moments (actions of violence and robbery).⁵²

A strange position was adopted by the British command, the so-called ally. Facts show that the British authorities frankly favor Muslims and did not give Armenian law enforcers chances to establish order in the provinces. After the victory of Entente Ottoman troops were withdrawn from Armenia including the province of Kars. When arose the question to establish order here the British suggested to organize a militia of 1000 people exclusively consisting of Ossetians and former Russian policemen, since, as wrote S.Tigranyan, the Minister of the Interior in his letter addressed to the parliament in March 1919: «the local Turks are irritated against Armenians but it seems that England did not rely on any Armenian force since is sure that ... Armenian is more Russian than the Russian himself and Armenian could not be trusted when something is planned against Russia".⁵³

⁴⁸ Virabyan A. 2009: 353.

⁴⁹ Zhoghovurd, 27. IX.1918.

⁵⁰ Virabyan 2009 (ed.): 371, 515.

⁵¹ Virabyan 2009: 228.

⁵² See Zang, 12.X.1918.

⁵³ Vracyan 1958: 246. The duplicitous behavior of the British is evident by the next fact: they hand over money and 300 French firearms of the "Lebel" type to Simko, the leader of the Shikak tribe, the well-known Kurdish bandit (Martirossyan 1961: 80). Simko did not hesitate and very soon, in March 3, 1918,

After the withdrawal of Ottoman army was begun the mass immigration of refugees to motherland. Due to the large scale of this process it was decided to organize in the provinces mounted units of police consisting of 100-200 people.⁵⁴

In spite of the difficult situation, anyway, the police fights against the illegal circulation of weapons. Thus, only in the district of Zangibasar (today the community of Massis in the province of Ararat) in January-May 1919 from the population were confiscated 762 revolvers of "Nagan" type, 13124 gendarmerie guns,⁵⁵ 10276 firearms of "Browning" type, 30151 infantry guns and about 3,5 million bullets of different calibres.⁵⁶

In February 18, 1919, the session of the parliament again discussed events connected with the police. The social-democrat Bolshevik fraction criticized those policemen who did not perform their duties accurately and fail to help threatened citizens. S.Torosyan, the acting officer of the Minister of the Interior clarified the situation as the next. First of all the salary of the policemen is small, but even that minor sum was not paid already several months.⁵⁷ This in its turn forces them to abuse their position, although it could not freed them from responsibility; offenders should be withdrawn from their service. The minister said with sorrow that "It should not be forgotten that police does not possess with conscientious people".⁵⁸ As an illustration for the aforementioned is the case of the restaurant "Bomond" in Yerevan. A group of policemen leded by H.Amatuni, the chief of the criminal intelligence service, after a feast⁵⁹ began to fire in the street.⁶⁰ As to April 1919, the number of policemen in Yerevan reaches 79 people.⁶¹ Some of them sometimes show irresponsibility towards their duties. For example, Hmayak Margaryan and other policemen of Yerevan police department, after using spirits had left their office, for which were discharged and punished.⁶²

cunningly killed Mar Shimun, the religious leader of Assyrians, his brother Davit and 75 bodyguards, among them also some Russian officers. In March 28 Simko attacked the refugees who were retreating from Vaspurakan to Persia and killed or wounded about 150 people and 60 soldiers of the escort (Sahakyan 2011: 348).

⁵⁴ Vracyan 1958: 249.

⁵⁵ During World war I the confronting sides, including Russia, feel a strong need of guns with clips, so it was decided to supply gendarms with the French rifles of the "Gra" type, and the 3-line "Mosin" to send to the field army.

⁵⁶ Virabyan 2003: 109.

⁵⁷ The illustration to this is the next report. In March 6 the Kurds living on the foothills of Mount Massis attacked the Yezidis of the village of Kuluk, kill the shepherd and steel 40 sheep. This was already the second attack. The last time the robbers had stolen 400 cattle and about 2000 sheep. The reporter tells also that "The Yezidi policemen, like Armenian, did not receive salary" (Zang, 14.IV.1919).

⁵⁸ Virabyan 2010: 213.

⁵⁹ Most of the so-called "debauchers" own significant finances for whom the payment of fines was not a problem (Haraj, 30.VI.1920).

⁶⁰ See Zang, 16.II.1919.

⁶¹ Zhoghovurd, 11. IV.1919.

⁶² See Zang, 9.X.1918.

The authority of police was difficult to hold on desired level since rumors circulate that the government uses public security organs for its political goals. Thus, as though during the June 21-23, 1919 parliamentary elections policemen demanded from people to vote in favor of ARF.⁶³

It should be mentioned that the government tried to deal with those policemen who were involved in illegal actions, including high officials. For example, only in January 1919 against the personnel of administration and police were initiated 23 and in February - 29 criminal charges. Were arrested chiefs of the city administration and criminal investigation departments of the police.⁶⁴

The newly established police lacks skilful and ideologically trained commanders who could not only inspire but also be a case in point for their subjects. One of such people was Garegin Nzhdeh, chief of the police of Nakhijevan. In his letter addressed to the Minister of the Interior M.Silikyan, the commander of the Armenian division, describing the military operations which took place in the district of Davalu (now Ararat), mentions that "It would be useful and appropriate to leave the police of Nakhijevan in Bash-Gyarni (now Garni) for which I seek your order. I find it necessary to report about the brilliant military operation of Nakhijevani police in the district of Gharalar (now Aralez) and especially the heroism of Nzhdeh, its chief".⁶⁵

According to the July 24, 1919 decision of the government in regard to the confiscation of weapons it was considered to give the refugees flour for the handed weapons and bullets, but by the October the latter did not receive the promised flour.⁶⁶ This indeed was a reason for mistrusting the government, so many people hide their weapons and ammunition and some prefer to sell it in order to survive.⁶⁷ At the same day the government adopted a law implementing death penalty. Those persons who "hijack, waste or steal weapon or gunpowder belonging to the state" also could be subject to capital punishment.⁶⁸

In their turn the military also conduct some actions in order to return the weapons kept by the population to the army. For example, Sepuh (Arshak Nersisyan), the commander of the Armenian 4th separate brigade declared that the soldiers of his detachment who entered the military service with their private guns of "Mosin" type and

⁶³ Zhoghovurd, 1.VIII.1919.

⁶⁴ Virabyan 2009: 29.

⁶⁵ See Zang. 7.IV.1919.

⁶⁶ NAA, f. 198, l. 1, f. 44, p. 1.

⁶⁷ Armenian army strongly lacks shortage of ammunition which becomes clear through the decision of the government issued in September 6, 1919, to give the military ministry 2.500.000 roubles for the production of 50 thousand bullets daily (Virabyan 2010 (ed.): 293). This enabled to turn down the practice of bying bullets anymore (Idem: 297). In the September 12, 1919 session the government endorsed the memorandum of the military minister "to open a credit of 6,000,000 roubles for the workshop of the production of bullets and cartridges and working staff" (Idem: 298).

⁶⁸ Ghazakhecyan 2000: 115.

bullets shall receive 500 roubles, the price of the gun.⁶⁹ Simultaneously police keep arresting those citizens who had fired without necessity.⁷⁰

In July 29 the government made a change in the July 24 law: "During the collection of weapons every citizen is obliged to pay tribute by means of guns, bullets or money, according to the size established by the special commissar".⁷¹

In September 11, 1919, Ruben Papikyan who was appointed as the chief of the Yerevan police,⁷² informed the citizens that the weapons of those who have not allowed to keep them should be confiscated and those "who have such right, cannot carry them over the dress".⁷³

The performance of duties by policemen in their struggle against the illegal circulation of weapons and ammunition was seriously hampered by armed groups whom the people call "Mauzerists". They appear in the public with revolvers of "Mauzer" type with silver-plated handle and could fire in crowded places and even kill people.⁷⁴ Thus, in October 7, 1919, the city commissar Vardanesyan was killed while he was trying to warn the Mauzerists.⁷⁵ Police succeeded to disarm the band led by Dali Ghazo; were confiscated 215 guns and about 4000 bullets.⁷⁶

The commission of the parliament during his inspection in the district of Dilijan in December 1919 revealed a number of serious shortcomings. As Armenak Maksapetyan, the member of the commission mentions, here robbery and thievery were widespread since "Police is in difficult situation from both sides; first is its economic situation, and the second is that it is composed of the people having the age of military service, the salary is received on irregular basis, and their applications are neglected".⁷⁷ A.Maksapetyan registers that one of the most common crimes is the selling of weapons. "weapons which could be found here go to Azerbaijan".⁷⁸ Besides that, as Sahak

⁶⁹ Ashkhatanq, 24.VII.1919.

⁷⁰ Idem, 24.VII.1919. Amazingly, one of the aforementioned people was arrested for 20 days, and the another for 30 days, while for such misdeed the person should have been sentenced for 3 months or pay a fine of 3000 roubles, as it was decided by the parliament.

⁷¹ Virabyan 2010: 268. In December 1918 the tax equals to 5 roubles for every firearm (Virabyan A. 2009: 403).

⁷² R.Papikyan had come from the French army quartered in Cilicia. He was lieutenant of military police (gendarmierie)(NAA, f. 201, l. 2, f. 123, p. 10).

⁷³ Zhoghovurd, 24. IX.1919.

⁷⁴ Vahe Artsruni writes. "Mauzerist's, except a small percent who really symbolize the modern chivalry of Armenia, number only several dozens in the country, but their life, viewing it from inside or outside, had a worst reflection on the image of our country. ... The appetite of Mauzerist's in regard to robbery was unlimited Any opportunity to become rich, or to commit personal vendetta or to fish in troubled waters, they were always ready" (Artsruni 2002: 31).

⁷⁵ Virabyan 2003: 216.

⁷⁶ See Zang, 19.X.1919.

⁷⁷ Virabyan 2010: 412.

⁷⁸ Idem.

Torosyan, the assistant (deputy) of the Minister of the Interior has mentioned, policemen partly "are armed with accidentally acquired weapons, often without bullets, etc."⁷⁹ At the same time in the republic was very active the Muslim population who was guided by special services of Azerbaijan and Ottoman Turkey, thus creating dangerous situation by secretly sending weapons to the Muslims of Armenia.⁸⁰ It should be stated that the great majority of those who buy weapons were Muslims,⁸¹ which hampers the activities of the police. Large sums of money regularly comes from Azerbaijan and Turkey. Besides that they were trying to introduce also false Armenian banknotes.⁸²

The illegal circulation of weapons greatly affects the desertion which reached its highest peak at the end of 1919. The number of deserters has reached 17665, and in the army between 16-18 thousand people.⁸³ Some of them escape taking with them their weapons and ammunition. A part of those who avoid military service appear in the police which "leaves demoralizing and oppressing impression on the population".⁸⁴ This circumstance negatively affects on the authority of the police and its further duties.

A.Gyulkhandanyan, the minister of the Interior informs the population that "If he (the deserter – Auth.) in the course of his desertion has stolen a military uniform and sold it, along with being convicted should reimburse thrice the cost of the stolen calculated by market prices, and in the case if he is insolvent - his family".⁸⁵

The deserters through illegal means acquire passports of different countries, mostly of Persia. In some cases they are "assisted" by the "numerous reckless, unconscientious" officers of the ministry and police,⁸⁶ administrators and even deputies of the parliament.⁸⁷ Unfortunately, even the severe laws against desertion did not give expected results. Definitely the desertion has more fundamental causes which needs special study.⁸⁸ In order to survive the armed deserters cause serious problems since

⁷⁹ Virabyan 2003: 79. According to the newspaper "Ashkhatanq". "Every citizen could receive certificate from the police if he pays 300 roubles to the clerk residing there ..." (Ashkhatanq, 12.VIII.1919, N 55).

⁸⁰ Virabyan 2003: 89.

⁸¹ The acquirement of weapons and ammunition in RA gives the Azerbaijani authorities a possibility to send money in order to buy it in Armenia. In April 10, 1920 A.Gyulkhandanyan, the Minister of the Interior in his special order lauded Hambartsum Hakobyan, the mounted senior policeman, in that he has arrested three Azerbaijani envoys who were escorting 500 thousand Azerbaijani bones to Zangibasar and who offered the policeman 100 thousand roubles as a bribe but H.Hakobyan refused to take it. By the order of the minister the senior policeman was rewarded with 20 thousand roubles (Ghazakhecyan 2000: 181).

⁸² Virabyan 2003: 104.

⁸³ Idem: 62-63. Unfortunately, like during the World war I, in the RA most of the deserters were the citizens of Yerevan and Aleksandrapol (Haraj, 30.III.1920).

⁸⁴ Virabyan 2003: 66.

⁸⁵ NAA, f. 201, l. 1, f. 490, p. 144.

⁸⁶ Virabyan 2003: 62.

⁸⁷ See Hakobyan 2005: 72.

⁸⁸ More detailed about that see Virabyan 2009: 148-190.

they have to conduct illegal actions, that is robbery or other criminal deeds.⁸⁹ Definitely, after the untimely death of A.Manukyan the system of the Ministry of the Interior failed to be completely organized. Even twice were made attempts to organize courses for the staff of the police,⁹⁰ but we could not find any information whether these courses were initiated. The government provided finances, appointed teachers, compiled schedules, and regulations about the duties of the police.⁹¹

Different ethnic minorities of the republic, taking into account the current situation, continue to keep weapons and ammunition.⁹² In October 7, 1920, A.Shakhhatuni, the commandant of Yerevan several times warned the population in that the citizens could be arrested for the period between 1 to 6 months or fined (30.000 roubles) in the case if they do not have a right to carry arms.⁹³

One of the productive guarantors of the illegal circulation of weapons and ammunition could be the organization of the frontier military units and the control over the borders facing neighboring countries, but the parliament only had succeeded to discuss the problem of the frontier military detachments in the June 11, 1920 session.⁹⁴

As in 1918, in 1920 the illegal circulation of weapons and ammunition continues, as well as the firing at the streets. Thus, one of the articles published in the official newspaper "Haraj" of ARF was entitled as "Hail of bullets in Yerevan".⁹⁵ As a result of the shortsighted policy corruption and protectionism were flourishing in the police. As a rule, during the searching and confiscation people were robbed, even if they were aware that might have been punished.⁹⁶ First of all the government had failed to subside police,⁹⁷ since in the current situation the latter shares the responsibility of the army, which could help in the struggle against the criminals. One of the causes of such

⁸⁹ In favor of the widespread character of desertion speaks the statement of captain Muradyan, "Special commissar of the struggle against desertion". "Those who deserts for the second time or more should be handed over to the military court and suffer a DEATH PENALTY, about which I inform everyone (Ashkhatanq, 9.VIII.1919).

⁹⁰ See NAA, f. 199, l.1, f. 16, p. 369-370, 372-379.

⁹¹ See NAA, f. 201, l. 2, f. 123, p. 6-10, NAA, f. 199, l.1, f. 16, p. 370, 372-373.

⁹² Haraj, 29.VI.1920.

⁹³ Haraj, 7.IX.1920.

⁹⁴ Virabyan 2010 (ed.): 487.

⁹⁵ The newspaper writes. "Every day, beginning from 5 PM Yerevan represents a battlefield due to the voice of firing from guns and revolvers. I could not be mistaken if I shall say that every day a great number of bullets are being wasted in the air" (Haraj, 30.VI.1920).

⁹⁶ See the order of A.Jamalyan, the temporary acting officer of the Minister of the Interior dated with May 13, 1920, according to which the officer of the ministry could have been sentenced even to execution by the Emergency Court if during the search he had used force or took bribe (NAA, f. 201, l.1, f. 490, p. 212).

⁹⁷ In the memorandum of Pavel Sitin, the former general of the Russian imperial army who later joined Bolsheviks, the agent of the Bolshevik residency in Georgia dated with November 9, 1920, writes the next about the Armenian army. "The officers are young, in the military aspect not enough educated High command, that is commanders of regiments lack experience and are interested in economics and are busy with it" (Ganin 2014: 225, <http://orenbkazak.narod.ru/PDF/Sytin1.pdf>).

situation was the absolute rule of ARF, although this party twice had composed a government along with the Armenian peoples' party and Social-revolutionaries; but this could not change the situation essentially.⁹⁸ The anti-government activities of Bolsheviks also should not be forgotten, who in May 1920 had organized the coup which was a heavy blow on the republic. To this should be added the destructive activities of Turkish-Azerbaijani agents who acquire weapons and ammunition from the population of RA and supply their bands.

Summary

1. In the unfavorable economic and political situation of the Republic of Armenia, despite some successes, the Ministry of the Interior had failed to act productively against the illegal circulation of weapons and ammunition due to the lack of professionals.
2. The problem was not solved also due to the segmentation of the society.
3. Most of the refugees and their authorities did not accept the Republic of Armenia as a single Armenian statehood, the segmentation was strong.
4. The Republic of Armenia was not able to eliminate irregular military units.
5. After the death of A.Manukyan police did not became the force which could have overcome the problem of different armed groups.
6. The RA could not supply the police with dutiful and disciplined personnel.
7. Police employs people who belong to some party but who often were not related to that same party.
8. The bodies of counterintelligence could not completely prevent the supply of weapons and ammunition from Azerbaijan and Turkey for the Muslim population residing in Armenia.
9. The destabilization of the situation was greatly triggered by the apolitical activities of Bolsheviks.

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⁹⁸ According to V.Virabyan, in his struggle against the crimes, including the illegal circulation of weapons and ammunition the police failed also because "often the Ministry of the Interior frivolously replenishes its staff taking into account affiliation to a party" (Virabyan 2003: 213). The same idea had expressed Vahe Artsruni, one of the leaders of the national-liberatory movement. "The desire to acquire a position and place, to secure the supremacy of the party step by step became greatest goal, first for the private persons then for the parties" (Artsruni 2002: 28).

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