

French Policy in the Transcaucasia on the Eve of the Establishment of Independent States

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Ֆրանսիայի քաղաքականությունն Անդրկովկասում անկախ պետությունների ստեղծման նախօրեին

Թովհակյան Մարիամ Մ.

Երևանի պետական համալսարանի միջազգային հարաբերությունների ֆակուլտետի միջազգային հարաբերությունների և դիվանագիտության ամբիոնի ասպիրանտ (Երևան, ՀՀ)
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Ամփոփագիր. Հոդվածում լուսաբանվում են Ֆրանսիայի Հանրապետության արտաքին քաղաքականության անդրկովկասյան ուղղության հիմնական նպատակներն ու խնդիրները երեք անկախ հանրապետությունների ծննդից առաջ, ինչպես նաև ներկայացվում են ֆրանսիական կողմից Անդրկովկասում տեղի ունեցող քաղաքական իրողությունների, փոփոխությունների, զարգացումների վերաբերյալ պաշտոնական արձագանքները և դիրքորոշումները, որոնցից յուրաքանչյուրը պետության ազգային շահերի ու հետաքրքրությունների արտահայտությունն էր ու դրանց ձևակերպումը, որը գլխավորապես ժամանակի հրամայականն էր ու պատմական անհրաժեշտության արտահայտությունը: Ֆրանսիական կողմը, որի արտաքին քաղաքականության կարևորագույն ուղղություններից էր անդրկովկասյան վեկտորը, ի սկզբանե ռազմավարական կարևորագույն նշանակություն ունեցող տարածաշրջանը որպես մեկ ամբողջական համակարգ էր դիտարկում՝ դրանով արտահայտելով սեփական արտաքին քաղաքականությունը, դիրքորոշումը ու վերաբերմունքը ներտարածաշրջանային զարգացումների վերաբերյալ, քաղաքական օրակարգ, որը տրամաբանորեն փոփոխության ենթարկվեց անկախ պետությունների ստեղծումից հետո՝ հիմնովին փոփոխելով երկրի արտաքին քաղաքականության անդրկովկասյան ուղղության ծավալման տրամաբանությունը և բովանդակությունը: Այսինքն, Ֆրանսիայի արտաքին քաղաքական օրակարգում ամրագրում ստացած անդրկովկասյան ուղղությունը, որի նշանակությունը հիմնված էր տարածաշրջանը որպես մեկ ամբողջական, համընդգրկուն կառույցի ընկալման ու դրանից բխող աշխատանքի հիման վրա, որը ժամանակի ընթացքում պետք է դառնար կենսունակ ու իր հերթին հնարավորություն տար սեփական քաղաքատնտեսական դիրքերի, ազդեցության ու ներգրավվածության ուժեղացմանն ու հետագա ամրապնդմանը, որն էլ, ըստ էության, այն որոշիչ գործոնն էր, որ առաջ էր մղում տարածաշրջանի նկատմամբ երկրի վարած արտաքին քաղաքականությունը, որը, տրամաբանորեն զարգացման նոր պատմափուլ թևակոխեց 1918 թվականի մայիսից հետո:

Աշխատանքում անդրադարձ է կատարվում նաև ժամանակի հայ-ֆրանսիական փոխշփումներին ու դրանց պատմությանը, պատմական դրվագներ, որոնք այսօր իրենց ծանրակշիռ ու վճռորոշ դերն ունեն երկու երկրների հարաբերությունների ու դրանց շարունակական զարգացման համատեքստում:

Հանգուցաբառեր՝ Ֆրանսիա, Առաջին համաշխարհային պատերազմ, Անդրկովկաս, արտաքին քաղաքականություն, համագործակցություն, պետական շահ, համակարգ, հավաքական անվտանգություն, քաղաքական գործընթացներ, անկախություն:

Французская политика в Закавказье накануне создания независимых государств

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Аннотация. В статье освещаются основные цели и задачи Закавказского направления внешней политики Французской Республики до рождения трех независимых республик, а также представлены официальные реакции и позиции французской стороны на политические реалии, изменения и события на Кавказе и их формулировка, которая была главным образом велением времени и выражением исторической необходимости. Французская сторона, одним из важнейших направлений внешней политики которой был Закавказский вектор, изначально рассматривала регион, имеющий важнейшее стратегическое значение, как единую целостную систему, тем самым выражая свою внешнюю политику, позицию и отношение к внутрирегиональным развитиям, политическую повестку, которая логически изменилась после создания независимых государств,

коренным образом изменив логику и содержание Закавказского направления внешней политики страны. То есть, Закавказское направление, закрепившееся во внешнеполитической повестке Франции, значение которого было основано на восприятии региона как единой целостной, всеобъемлющей структуры и вытекающей из нее работе, которая со временем должна была стать жизнеспособной и в свою очередь дать возможность усилению и дальнейшему укреплению собственных политико-экономических позиций, влияния и вовлеченности, что, по сути, было тем решающим фактором, который продвигал внешнюю политику страны, логически новый этап развития вступил после мая 1918 года.

В работе также затрагиваются армяно-французские взаимодействия того времени и их история, исторические эпизоды, которые сегодня играют весомую и решающую роль в контексте отношений двух стран и их продолжительного развития.

Ключевые слова: Франция, Первая мировая война, Закавказье, внешняя политика, сотрудничество, государственные интересы, система, коллективная безопасность, политические процессы, независимость.

This year we celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the establishment of bilateral diplomatic relations between the Third Republic of Armenia and the French Republic, a historical fact that is the result of centuries-old historical relations and strong psychological, historical and cultural relations between the Armenian and French peoples. Speaking about the history of the Armenian-French privileged relations, its separate historical stages, it should be noted that in the course of that time, in the context of various geopolitical developments and changes, it has always maintained its urgency and importance for both the Armenian people and France, taking into account the strategic importance of the region for the French side as a center for the realization of long-term interests [11, p. 68], to achieve political positions, presence and influence in the region, which is a zone of its interests [9, p. 170].

Fateful for the Armenian people, in 1918, when the first Republic of Armenia was born as a result of turbulent political processes and changes [2, p. 61], a new historical stage of Armenian-French interactions and relations began, which played a significant role for continuous deepening, strengthening and expanding cooperation, a process that is in the process of being developed today.

It should be noted that May 1918 was the culmination of geopolitical developments and changes in the Caucasus, a historical period that marked the beginning of further active political processes, keeping the region in the center of attention of extra-regional powers, including France, a circumstance that he took advantage of to try to maximize its influence in the region, a task that was on the agenda of the French political elite on the eve of World War I and throughout it [30, p. 25].

May 1918 was the starting point after which, with the birth of three independent republics, the French side redefined the transcaucasian direction of its foreign policy [2, p. 96], which with its agenda and priorities, as well as the dynamics of expansion, was a new reality in the context of regional developments. The distinctive features of the goals and objectives can be understood as a result of its

complete and comprehensive study, starting from the first phase of the First World War, in particular from February 1917 to May 1918, after which a new period of French Transcaucasian policy began [2, p. 26].

Thus, in his first speech since the declaration of war on August 4, 1914, the President of the French Republic, Raymond Poincaré, did not mention any purpose other than the protection of the country's security and state borders [43]. In the months that followed, as the war escalated to a new level of inclusion, French political thought set out to define a new plan of action - a strategy that would guide the country during the war in the context of geopolitical developments and changes [29, p. 172]. In this case, the main goal of the French government was to create a security system to avoid new threats and challenges that would directly threaten the national security of the country. In order to achieve all this, the goals were set to protect its own borders as much as possible, to create international frameworks, platforms and thus collective security with the involvement of Germany [42]. In other words, it turns out that the French political circles would pursue a policy that would, consequently, choose a strategy that would not only protect their own borders, ensure the country's security, but in turn could contribute to the creation of international and regional systems, which would, in essence, constitute a framework of collective security, thus precluding further hostilities, the changes and developments that would take place as a result of which, in the first place, would preclude the existence of a threat directed specifically at the political and economic interests of France.

Apart from the European front, which was the main stage and epicenter of the ongoing struggle [28, p. 37], the Eastern Front [38, p. 267] was of great importance, where the events had a direct impact on the European front, thus strengthening it in French political thought, the idea and the belief that the two vectors of foreign policy are interdependent and interconnected, therefore complementary, so that ultimate success can be achieved only through victories on both fronts.

Speaking of the situation on the Caucasus Front and the events taking place there [36, p. 132], it should be noted that it was in a period of continuous change, being a stage for diplomatic and military operations of regional and extra-regional forces [2, p. 26], center of conflicting interests and constant confrontations [2, pp. 186-189]. It should be noted that in the conditions of all this, the peoples of the region found themselves in a difficult situation, who tried to take steps, first of all, to ensure their own security, participating in the events, pursuing their own interests, political and economic goals. The French side could not help but use all this, which was positively impressed in the historical memory of the peoples of the region [17, p. 311], taking into account the historical past, the realities of the past, in which the French side had a certain participation [2, p. 246]. Thus, the use of the capital of the peoples of the region for a positive attitude and sympathy towards France has always been present in French political thought, a problem that is still relevant in the coming years and today in terms of more active French penetration into the South Caucasus and direct involvement in regional realities [10, p. 68].

The February Revolution of 1917, which had reached the Transcaucasus in full force [2, p. 274], was widely reported in the French political circles, and even the idea was circulated that the main elements of the great French Revolution could be seen in the logic of the Russian Revolution, and this is also due to the fact that initially there was an unequivocally positive attitude towards the event [39, p. 439], but it soon changed to criticism, seeing the revolution as a source of new difficulties and unpredictable events [40, p. 30].

And it is no coincidence that from the very beginning of 1917, the transcaucasian direction of French foreign policy underwent new changes, a circumstance which was first of all conditioned by the new realities in the Russian-French relations, which entered a new period of development after the revolution [4, p. 1], one of the most important components of which was the increase of involvement and strengthening of influence in the region, which both sides aspired to. According to archival documents relating to Russian-French relations, the positions and attitudes of French political circles on the February Revolution, during that period the relations between the two countries entered a phase of deep crisis, which intensified day by day due to continuous accusations and criticisms of the French side [4, p. 3], a problem which in this case testified to the growing rivalry between the parties, which targeted the whole of Transcaucasia [4, p. 4].

It turns out that the events taking place in Transcaucasia were the result of conflicts between regional and extra-regional forces, various political interests of the centers of power, historical realities on which not only the present, but also the future of the peoples of Transcaucasia but also of the region depended [2, p. 26].

Immediately after the February Revolution, political life in the Caucasus underwent a period of development and change, beginning with the establishment of the Transcaucasian Special Committee on March 9, 1917 [23] instead of the Caucasus Substitute [21, p. 32], which began its activities on March 18 of the same year [24, p. 360], which, although a new reality in the context of regional events, ceased to exist due to various circumstances in the course of time, first of all due to the diverse composition of the peoples of the region, their activities, giving way to unique bodies around which the political life of the region should be concentrated.

The French socio-political thought always kept in its focus the developments in the Transcaucasia, especially the events which, by their nature, significance, predictability and possible influence, could fit into the geopolitical ideas of the future of the country. And it is not accidental that many French politicians prepared brief analyzes of regional changes. One such analysis-report is a document preserved in the archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs dated December 29, 1917, which presents the political situation in the Caucasus after the February Revolution, the plight of the peoples of the region, who, according to the document, could still find strength to fight to become the pioneers contributing to the sustainable development of the region, of course, not excluding the support of extra-regional forces, especially France, which would make their struggle more effective and real [26]. There were many publications in the French press about these events as a record of changes in the context of the state's foreign policy in the Caucasus, which were essentially assessments of the February Revolution and subsequent political processes, predicting a possible and desirable French presence in it [41, pp. 42-43].

As we have mentioned, the French political circles saw the post-war world in general, its separate regions in particular in security systems, systems that at the same time would be collective security frameworks that would exclude further hostilities and other unpredictable developments. It seems that the French side should have expressed concern over the failure of the work of the Transcaucasian Special Committee, a body that was essentially a system of separate components, but

unstable and viable, given first and foremost the existing differences and contradictions that gave rise to them [25].

And it is not accidental that the local peculiarities became the agenda and historical necessity of regional developments, taking into account the creation of a third power or multiplicity at the end of 1917, under the auspices of the Armenian, Georgian, Tatar National Councils [14, p. 14], about which the French side reacted positively from the very beginning and expressed a position, which was argued in the following years by the active political processes, the frequent interactions [2, pp. 190-201], which continued until May 1918, found their further expansion already in the conditions of new realities and changes [2, p. 169]. One of the vivid evidences of the above is one of the documents kept in the archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a brief report dated July 10, 1918, which gives a brief overview of the situation of the peoples of the region, the establishment of national councils, their activities and the attitude of the French side noting that France must work hard with these structures, first of all for the sake of regional security and its further preservation, which must guarantee the deepening of contacts between the region and the French side both during the War and after the War, which, according to This document was one of the main problems of the French policy of the time [27]. It should be noted that the report greatly emphasized the importance of the French side working with the national councils, its prospects, which provided wide opportunities for it to achieve its strategic goals.

In other words, the French side actually reformulated its position on the concept of security system, giving priority to ensuring the viability and guarantee of its separate components, which, logically, would automatically lead to the creation of a unified regional security system, the individual components of which would be strongly interconnected. Indeed, the national councils, which had become the coordinating bodies of the political activities of the peoples of the region, were in active interaction and work [5, pp. 2-7], which in fact made the French political thought more probable and predictable about the future model and structure of the region.

Thus, new structures entered the political life of Transcaucasia [33, p. 18], which from the beginning not only enjoyed wide prestige, influence and great popularity, but also became the real, viable components that would form the core and the pillar of the future regional security system-model of the French side. One of those vital components was the Armenian National (Central) Council established as

a result of the Conference of Eastern Armenians held in Tbilisi (Georgia) from September 29 to October 13, 1917 [15, pp. 53-54], which was one of the most important centers of Armenian political and public thought, which, in fact, became the most influential structure-body of the Armenian struggle and political activity, whose agenda was quite comprehensive, solving various issues facing the Armenians, improving the situation of the Armenians and other issues [6, p. 1].

The next major event of 1917, which had a fundamental impact on the political situation in the region, was the Bolshevik coup [37], a historical event that received a mixed response not only from national and political circles, but also from extraterritorial forces, particularly the French side [31, p. 369], being considered a factor threatening regional stability, a position and attitude, which first of all expressed France's idea of serving the relatively stable regional situation to its own political interests, which had already become a distinguishing feature of the country's transcaucasian foreign policy.

It should be noted that the French side followed with interest all the events taking place in the region, each of which, given the unfolding geopolitical realities in that period, played a decisive role not only in its policy [3, p. 16]. Further political realities, such as the opening of the Transcaucasian Commissariat in November 1917 [22, p. 35], the ensuing internal political events, the escalating Ottoman pressure [20, pp. 67-68], the controversy, and the resolution of the Yerznka Armistice [4, pp. 14-23], French side showed caution first of all, taking into account the fact that the reduction of its own political weight and prestige among the peoples of the region is not in its political and economic interests, a problem which, according to the French side, was faced by all the forces in the region at that time [34, p. 189].

And it is not accidental that a few days after the signing of the Yerznka Armistice on December 5, 1917 [7, pp. 412-416], in one of his reports sent to Petrograd on December 9 of the same year, the French consul in Tbilisi [3, pp. 1-6] spoke about regional developments and the situation of the peoples of the region, especially the Armenians. He writes that the French side has a deep desire to spread and establish its influence on all Armenians, regardless of whether they are Turkish Armenians or Russian Armenians, noting that they will all be citizens of the future Great Armenia, which will be born after the victory of Countries of the Entente. In the report, the consul refers to the activities of the national councils, particularly the Armenian National Council, as well as an interesting fact, according to which the French side is greatly

inspired by the bravery of the Armenian general Torgom, expresses its support to the Armenian side to create new units that would contribute to the victory of the Countries of the Entente [3, pp. 7-15].

In addition to the above, a special place in the report is occupied by the issue of cooperation and joint struggle of Armenians and Georgians, which, according to the French consul, could have achieved more significant success if it had a governing body, armed forces, not excluding the commitment and the interest of the French side in the creation and realization of all that [3, p. 16].

Thus, the study of the report shows that the French side, in the context of historical events, each of which had its impact on the situation in the region and its further stability, considered the main and most important component of its foreign policy to be cooperation between the peoples of the region. The creation of a system through work, and, consequently, through a joint struggle and by contributing to that struggle, which, in turn, would have both its political and military components.

That is, even during the First World War, one of the most important ideas-goals of the French political thought was reflected in the perspective of the French side's involvement in the Eastern or Caucasian front and its continuous increase.

It should be noted that the report also referred to the Armenian or Eastern Legion [18, pp. 133-134], Armenian volunteer military unit, formed in 1916 as part of the French army, based on the agreement reached in London, October 27, 1916, between representatives of the Countries of the Entente Mark Sikes, Georges Picot and President of the Armenian National Delegation [8, p. 220] Boghos Nubar [1, p. 28], according to which the Armenian legionnaires were to take part in the military operations against the Ottoman Empire, first on the Syrian-Palestinian and then on the Cilician fronts [2, p. 233], in return for which France promised to include Cilicia with its four sanjaks in the future Great Armenia [19, pp. 107-108].

It should be noted that the existence and activity of the Armenian Legion, as an exceptional historical reality, opened a new stage in the context of the Armenian-French relations, around which, in fact, the active interactions of national, social, political and military figures of the two peoples took place for the benefit of their own interests [2, p. 233]. It is noteworthy that in the bilateral correspondence of that time, in addition to presenting the regional situation, the existing threats and challenges [12, pp. 475-479], they also offered options for overcoming or resolving them by both sides, through Armenian-French agreements, cooperation and joint work. In particular, it referred

to the issues of political and military assistance [3, pp. 3-6], which, if successful, would in turn address two issues: the future status of the Armenians, the status issue and the victory of the Countries of the Entente, in this case France [3, pp. 7-15].

As early as 1918, when the situation in Transcaucasia reached a new, deeper level of tension, with the establishment of the Transcaucasian Seim in February [35] and the subsequent political developments, the start of diplomatic negotiations with Turkey, Germany, Austria-Hungary and Bulgaria [4, pp. 32-33], the result of which was the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk [32, p. 134], the subsequent Trabzon negotiations [4, pp. 25-29] and its immediate aftermath [4, pp. 32-33], the extraordinary meeting of Alexandropol in April of the same year [16, pp. 82-84], and further political developments, in fact, the strain of regional tensions, dictated by time, gave rise to the three independent republics, [2, p. 169] thus leading to new developments, changes, and events in a region that has become a scene of continual collapse.

And so, with the birth of the three independent republics, not only do regional developments enter a new phase, but in their context and development dynamics they begin to include historical realities that were directly related to the foreign policy, activities and initiatives of the extraterritorial forces and power centers which, in fact, gained momentum after those important events.

The French side, in all the above-mentioned events, continued to maintain its active involvement for the benefit of the struggle and victory of the countries of the Countries of the Entente, the maximum realization of the strategic goals, the time of which, according to French political thought, came with the birth of three independent states [13, pp. 269-273], an event which in turn was the harbinger of a new historical period in the transcaucasian direction of French foreign policy.

Thus, trying to summarize the results of the study, we can say that France, one of the most influential players in World Politics, has historically necessitated the most important direction of its foreign policy, the Transcaucasian vector, the region which was of strategic importance for the country, putting the French side first of all, the issue of establishing regional involvement and its continuous strengthening, an issue that is still relevant today, has a significant place in the country's foreign policy agenda.

The Transcaucasia, which is constantly changing and evolving, which in the course of time has become a short-term and long-term interests of the extra-regional powers, their collision zone, has been of great importance in French political thought, given the capital of regional peoples which was the

result of the political processes of the past and the subsequent involvement of the French side in other regional issues, which, in fact, was to turn into a direct influence, a task set before the French political elite of the time.

It should be noted that the vision-goal of regional and international security systems, based on them, the creation of collective security, which arose during the First World War, which France was trying to achieve by all possible means, was fully reflected in the transcaucasian direction of French policy. It was, in fact, a vector whose importance in the foreign policy agenda of the state was growing day by day, taking into account the decisive influence of regional developments on the basis of international processes, thus making visible in general the international, in particular the existing close ties between the regional systems, which would later put them in a strong interdependence and interconnectedness.

It can be said that the French side initially considered the region as one complete system (foreign policy, position, attitude, which logically changed after the creation of three independent states), a complete, comprehensive structure which in the course of time had to become viable and enable its own political positions and, consequently, the strengthening of its influence and involvement in the region, which was the decisive factor that pushed the country's foreign policy towards the region.

Thus, the French side, pursuing its strategic interests, greatly intensified its policy in the Caucasus from the middle of the twentieth century, being directly involved and influential in the unfolding events thus having a constant presence and participation in regional change, political processes that were essentially transformed and reorganized with the creation of three independent states, thus changing the previous state of affairs and leading to new developments, keeping the region in the focus of ongoing processes.

Thus, the French side's relations with the Transcaucasian region, which have a history of several centuries, allow us to discover and present the current realities in a unique way, based on the examination of past lessons and historical realities, which not only show the past but also determine the vision of the future.

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