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**THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS AND THE QUESTION OF  
A MANDATE FOR ARMENIA.**

**By**

**Edita Gzoyan,**

**Yerevan State University,  
Armenia.**

***Abstract***

*Following the First World War, Armenia and the Armenian nation began to emerge onto the world stage. Although Armenia existed briefly as an independent state, during 1920 there was also a debate about whether it should become a mandate territory under the auspices of either the League of Nations or one of its members. This article details how the discussions progressed and what they say about the nature of international relations at the time.*

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### **THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS AND THE QUESTION OF A MANDATE FOR ARMENIA.**

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#### **Introduction.**

Situated among the Black, Caspian and Mediterranean Seas, and having the biblical Mount Ararat for its centre, Armenia is one of the oldest historical lands of the Near East. Its historical boundaries are the Minor Caucasus and Pontus in the north, the Taurus range of mountains in the south, the present day Turco-Iranian lands in the east, and the Euphrates River in the west. Of course, the political boundaries of Armenia have changed more than once as a result of historical events, but Armenia has been inhabited by the Armenians since time immemorial. Indo-European in origin, they are one of the ancient peoples of the Near East, although their language belongs to the same family of languages which is spoken by the peoples of Europe.

By character and culture the Armenians are at once eastern and western. Influenced over the centuries by both neighboring and remote civilizations, Armenia has succeeded in evolving individuality in all the branches of its national life and culture. Consequently it has forged a distinct national character. In 301 A.D. the Armenian nation was the first to accept Christianity officially as its state religion—an institution which has lasted to this day as the oldest church in Christendom.

The history of Armenia is a long story of rises and falls, of victories and defeats, of national triumphs and sufferings, all the way from the extensive empire of Tigranes the Great to the terrible massacres under Chengiz Khan, Timurlanes, Abdul Hamid and the Ittihad

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Turks. The last time the Armenians lost their independence was in 1375. For several centuries after this event, Armenia was an arena of Mongul and Turcoman invasions and Turco-Persian wars until, in the 17th century, it was partitioned between Turkey and Persia (a situation which continued until the beginning of the 19th century). As a result of the Russo-Persian war of 1828 and the Russo-Turkish war of 1829, the part of Armenia lying to the north of the Araxes river came under Russian rule. With the Russian annexation of the Kars and Ardahan regions (following the Russo-Turkish war of 1878), Armenia was finally partitioned into what became known as Turkish-Armenian and Russian-Armenia.

*Image 1. From 1920: the first half of a cartoon about a mandate for Armenia...*



Under Russian rule, the Armenians quickly rebuilt their country, multiplied in numbers and were successful culturally and economically. The Armenians of Turkish Armenia faced a much grimmer fate. Their experiences eventually became 'the Armenian Question' which has long disturbed the conscience of mankind, busied international

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diplomacy, and which until today remains unsolved. The First World War opened a new chapter for both Armenia and the Armenian Question, not least because on 28 May 1918 Russian-Armenia was constituted as a free and independent state.

### *Image 2. ... And the second half.*



### **The Armenian Mandate in The League of Nations**

For most of 1918 the Armenian government was absorbed with domestic problems, but by the end of the year its attention had begun to turn towards foreign policy. Armenia was not yet formally recognised by the Allies as an independent sovereign state and the boundaries of the Republic had not been defined internationally. In January 1919, an Armenian Delegation headed by Avetis Aharonian went to Paris to present Armenian's claims to the Peace Conference.

On 12 February, Aharonian and Boghos Nubar Pasha (the latter representing the Turkish Armenians) jointly submitted Armenian's memorandum to the Peace Conference. Its demands were: recognition of an independent Armenian state formed by the union of Turkish

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Armenia and Cilicia with the territories of the Republic; that Armenia be placed under a collective guarantee provided by the Allies and the United State (or by the League of Nations); financial assistance to Armenia for the duration of a transitional period; punishment of those who participated in the massacres committed during the First World War; and measures to return to their Christian faith all Armenian women, young girls and children converted by force to Islamism and kept in Turkish harems.<sup>1</sup>

At the beginning of 1920, the Allied Great Powers finally extended *de facto* recognition to the Armenian government. The Supreme Council did so on 19 January.<sup>2</sup> The US Ambassador approved the decision on 26 January and the Governments of France, Great Britain and Italy followed suit. Recognition was also extended by Japan.<sup>3</sup> According to a memorandum agreed by the Supreme Council and the governments of the Allied Powers, recognition was extended to the Republic centred on Yerevan which was created on the Armenian territories of the former Russian Empire. At the same time, however, the memorandum didn't attempt to pre-determine the final boundaries of the new-born Republic. Consequently it left open the possibility that one day the Armenian territories of the Ottoman Empire could be included as part of the state.

As early as 30 January 1919, during meetings in Paris representatives of the USA, Great Britain, France, Italy and Japan decided that the Paris Peace Conference should place a number of former Ottoman territories under the protection of particular states as directed by a mandate of the League of Nations. The idea of the mandate was formulated legally in Article 22 of the League of Nations' Covenant. This guaranteed 'tutelage' for territories which had 'ceased to be under the sovereignty of the states which formerly governed them and which were inhabited by people not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions

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<sup>1</sup> J.Missakian, *A Searchlight on the Armenian Question (1878-1950)*. Boston, 1950. p.75.

<sup>2</sup> R.G.Hovhannisian, *The Republic of Armenia. Vol. 2*. Berkley-Los Angeles-London, 1959. p.512

<sup>3</sup> A.Mandelstam, *La societe des nations et les puissances devant le problem Armenien*. Beirut, 1970. pp.71-72.

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of the modern world'. Securing the 'well-being and development' of such people was defined as a 'sacred trust of civilization' and had to be enacted by the 'advanced nations' of the globe.

Without doubt the Armenian people came under the terms of Article 22. On the one hand, they inhabited a territory which had been part of the Ottoman Empire; on the other hand, they were not yet in a position to stand on their own two feet. Furthermore, it was generally recognised that their well-being and development was of considerable interest to the civilised nations of the world. Consequently the Supreme Council should have been obliged to establish the Armenian territories as a mandate of a given state. Nonetheless, the Supreme Council suggested that the League of Nations assume the protection of Armenian territories itself. This request was made on 12 March 1920 and a telegram sent the same day noted that recently the Supreme Council had accepted unanimously a proposition that Armenia (in accordance with pledges given repeatedly by Allied and Associated Powers at various stages of the war) should be constituted as a free and independent state. It was hoped that the state would be placed under a mandate supervised either by the USA or a European Power. If no Power proved willing to undertake the obligation, the Supreme Council suggested that the peace treaty with Turkey make provision for the Armenian State to be protected by the League of Nations. The Supreme Council was anxious to know whether the Council of the League would accept such an obligation and so solve the Armenian question.<sup>4</sup>

At this point the problem arose of whether it would be possible to provide adequate military forces to maintain Armenian independence, particularly since most Armenian territories continued to be under Turkish rule. There were also questions about the presence of sufficient material and economic resources to promote the lands' future development. In fact, the military point had already been examined by a separate commission of the Supreme Council which reported that the Armenians of Yerevan had an army of 25,000 men who had

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<sup>4</sup> J. Barsexov, *The Armenian Genocide. Documents 2*. p.448 (Russian).

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been trained by the Russian army. It was believed that their numbers could be increased easily to 40,000 if the necessary arms and equipment were provided by the Allies.

Meanwhile, the Council of the League received a further communication from the Supreme Council which proposed offering protection to minorities within the frontiers of Turkey.<sup>5</sup> Since the Council was heavily engaged in general work towards the end of its third session, it did not have enough time to reply to the Supreme Council at once. Nevertheless, the proposal was interesting. It suggested that protection should be guaranteed by the League of Nations which should have a representative stationed in Constantinople to investigate possible abuses of minorities. The Supreme Council also drafted a Minorities Treaty which stipulated the rights they should enjoy. There was provision for private houses and institutions to be searched—an extremely important point because about 73,350 Armenians were still being kept in such places.<sup>6</sup> Measures were also defined for the return of the homes and property, also for the re-establishment of the businesses of non-ethnic Turks who had been forced to leave by through fear of persecution after 1 August 1914.<sup>7</sup>

But should the League of Nations accept this responsibility? Some felt the protection of minorities in Turkey should be accepted on the grounds that guarantees were already being extended towards, for instance, minorities in Poland. Others, however, claimed that Poland had a settled, organized government that was amenable to pressure, whereas no such thing could be said about Turkey—a country where, in the past, popular opinion had been able to do little, if anything, to help oppressed minorities. In Turkey minorities were often persecuted by irregular armed bands which were entirely beyond the control of central government. Furthermore, Turkey was not a member of the League, so it was particularly unclear how the

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<sup>5</sup> League of Nations 20/29/6 Procès-Verbal of the Third Session of the Council of the League of Nations held in Paris on 12 and 13 March 1920, 27/34/49/2764/. pp.17–18.

<sup>6</sup> Al. Xattisian, *The born and development of the Republic of Armenia*. Athens 1957, pp. 325–26.

<sup>7</sup> League of Nations Archives ( LNA), 20/4/39, Section 2, dossier 3421, doc. 3421.

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organisation would intervene in its domestic affairs. All in all, it was no wonder that the already over-worked Council decided to discuss all of the issues involved here at a later date.

Regarding Armenia's future, the Council of the League found the information provided by the Supreme Council insufficient for a decision to be reached. Apart from the territorial question, the most difficult issue was the financial one: should the League bear the cost of any budgetary deficit incurred by a future Armenian state? Any such use of League funds would necessitate the agreement of the Assembly. And when exactly should the Armenian state come under the protection of the League? Again it was emphasised that the organisation had no international military units and that any possible obligation to support the state through the use of armed force would require very careful examination indeed. Understandably, then, replying to the Supreme Council, the Council of the League stressed that it could not take a firm position over Armenia's future until more information was available.

It was decided to send Secretary-General Eric Drummond to London on a fact-finding mission. The Council also appointed a delegation to negotiate with the Allied expert representatives of the committee charged with preparing a treaty with Turkey. This delegation presented a paper of conditions under which the Council of the League would consider accepting Armenia's protection. The original document no longer exists, but its contents can be inferred from other materials. Apparently the Allied experts raised no problems concerning the territorial definition of Armenia. Nor were they concerned about Armenia having access to the Black Sea. Regarding financial questions, it quickly became clear that most difficulties would concern guarantees for a loan to support the Armenian budget. This was, however, a vital question because if the Allied Powers refused to allow Armenia any money, they might as well abandon all hope of creating an independent state.

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The Armenian delegation to the Peace Conference was also in London at this time and the Council's delegates contacted the members.<sup>8</sup> The Armenian delegation expressed complete agreement with most of the Council's thinking, particularly over territorial, military and communications issues. Regarding finance, for the delegation, Boghos Pasha foresaw little difficulty in obtaining a loan on the open market provided it was guaranteed by the League. Furthermore, he believed that the organisation would only actually have to guarantee £40,000 per year. This meant, in fact, that several individual member states would only be required to cover £4,000 to £5,000 per year each—and even this amount could be credited to them as a debt against Armenian revenues. So he thought that raising the required sum was a very realistic prospect.

The League's representatives asked whether Armenia would prefer a single or mixed power mandate, to which the reply was the former. The chief of the League Council's legal section also raised the possibility of American military and civil advisers assisting Armenia. This delighted the Armenian delegation which felt the advisers would help manage Armenia's administrative and financial difficulties.<sup>9</sup> The enthusiasm of the Armenian delegation was explained by the fact that US President Woodrow Wilson was very much interested in a mandate for Armenia and also because there were a lot of pro-Armenian organizations in the US, together with a very favourable popular public attitude towards the national group.<sup>10</sup>

The United Armenian Delegation was asked to formulate its demands for the League of Nations and on 28 March it presented a memorandum to the Council which addressed all the possible solutions to the Armenian question. The memorandum provided extensive information about natural resources, railways, economic and financial prospects and armed forces.<sup>11</sup> Taking into consideration the possibility that some Armenian territories of the

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<sup>8</sup> LNA, section 2, dossier 3421, doc. 3539.

<sup>9</sup> LNA, section 2, dossier 3421, doc. 3538.

<sup>10</sup> Armenian State Central Historical Archives (ASCHA), section 368, dossier 2, doc. 51.

<sup>11</sup> LNA, section 2, dossier 3421, doc. 4396.

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Ottoman Empire would join an Armenian state in time, the delegation also provided some information about the Turkish Armenian vilayets of Van, Bitlis and Erzerum. The memorandum discussed two possible solutions to the Armenian question: either it could be accepted as a full member state of the League (with its borders guaranteed against external aggression as a result), or else Article 22 of the Covenant could be implemented. The first option was addressed on 13 May, when the Armenian Delegation asked that Armenia be admitted to the League of Nations. The second option was covered in a draft 'project of assistance' drawn up by the Armenian delegation. This noted that the country was rich in natural resources and so could benefit any mandatory state.

The Council of the League requested that its legal section explore further the different kinds of protection which could be extended to an Armenian state and its conclusions were presented to the Secretary-General on 29 March. Legally-speaking, the section saw no objection to a mandate being supervised by either a single power or a group of states. It did conclude, however, that the League itself could not offer direct guarantees to an Armenian state, rather it would have to act as an intermediary and as an organizer. For instance, it could help settle any disputes concerning the state should they ever arise. It could also provide moral support; but the League would only be able to act indirectly when it came to providing military forces, necessary funding and adequate governance. It also became clear that even a vote by the Assembly would not be enough to guarantee a loan to Armenia by the League. In fact, the Covenant had not intended such a financial liability to be undertaken. It was beyond the powers of the Assembly to make any such decision because it could not bind individual member states to comply with its decision. Rather, individual states had to act on their own authority, perhaps by ratifying an appropriate international convention. The president of the legal section, however, wondered how many countries would enter into any such obligation. To solve the financial questions, the legal section suggested that the League

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organize a financial body to fund Armenia. Such an organization might take the form of an Armenian Bank, and probably it would have to rely on a good deal of US banking support.

During these discussions, the section took into consideration suggestions made by Colonel Rhea, who had been the Allied High Commissioner for the Caucasian Republics. He said that an independent Armenian Republic might get substantial American assistance such that, in effect, an unofficial American mandate would come into existence. The legal section was inclined to think that the League should only act over Armenia (and the other Caucasian Republic) by making an appeal to the USA for urgent and extensive assistance. Attempts to organize Armenia without the co-operation of private enterprise and some official assistance from the USA would amount to nothing but meddling. If the USA refused to be drawn into the solution to the Armenian problem, the League should not become involved.<sup>12</sup>

Generally the Armenian Question was regarded with sympathy in many different countries around the world, and numerous philarmenian organizations took an interest in it. This fact was also important to discussions about Armenia which took place inside the League of Nations. On March 30 the question of a mandate for Armenia was discussed by the executive committee of the League of Nations Union. It offered various ways in which the League should deal with Armenia and the protection of minorities. For instance, it suggested the appointment of a neutral state mandate holder to act under the direct responsibility of the Council of the League. Furthermore the governments of at least the European members of the League should be asked to guarantee the deficit on the Armenian budget for the early years of the state's existence. In addition, the League should secure the assistance of powerful voluntary agencies in the USA and elsewhere to act under League supervision to provide appropriate personnel and funding to support the project. If these devices proved unsatisfactory, the Council should organize a commission to advise and assist a new Armenian state. In the end, the committee adopted the following resolution:

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<sup>12</sup> LNA, section 2, dossier 3421, doc. 6491.

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‘It is of the utmost importance to the future of the League of Nations that it should not lightly refuse any responsibilities or duties offered to it by the Supreme Council in connection with the future of the Armenians or of the racial minorities in Turkey.’<sup>13</sup>

To take more examples, the Joint Council of British Societies for Assisting the Armenian People and the Swiss Philarmenian Body presented their own projects concerning a mandate for Armenia. Both urged that Armenia should be placed under the protection of Article 22 of the Covenant. Four months later, on 15th July, about 10 British philarmenian organizations held a conference and unanimously adopted the following resolution:

‘This Conference of representatives of all British organizations interested in the future of Armenia desired to call the attention of the Supreme Council to the urgent necessity of guaranteeing adequate financial and military support to any Power which should accept from the League of Nations responsibility for the mandate for Armenia. In as much as the acceptance of a mandate and the delimitation of Armenian’s boundaries were intimately bound up, the Conference further urged that the President of the USA be requested to communicate his decision on the latter point at the earliest possible moment, so that the League of Nations might forthwith approach possible mandatory Powers.’<sup>14</sup>

A very interesting and detailed letter was received by Secretary-General Eric Drummond on March 30 from the well-known British armenophile Lord Bryce.<sup>15</sup> He pointed out that the troubles which had affected the Armenian Provinces were entirely due to the malevolent action of the Turkish Government and that the native races were not fanatical (not even the Muslems—except when they had been stirred up by the Turkish Government). In fact, the different religious communities lived together harmoniously when left to their own devices. The attacks on the Christians by Kurds had been instigated by the Turkish Government for the last thirty years, since Abdul Hamid formed his plan of gradually exterminating the Christian element. So it should be concluded that when Turkish

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<sup>13</sup> LNA, section 2, dossier 3421, doc. 3627.

<sup>14</sup> ASCHA, section 412, doc.1, dossier 3187.

<sup>15</sup> LNA, section 2, dossier 3421, doc. 3891.

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provocations were no longer in play, autonomy was conceded to Kurdish tribes and opportunities for peaceful trade were assured, then a comparatively small police force would suffice to preserve order. Lord Bryce also discussed friction with the Tartar population of Azerbaijan in the north-east and felt these troubles would subside once the issue of boundaries between Azerbaijan and Armenia was settled, most likely under the aegis of the Allied Powers. Taking all of these points into consideration, his lordship thought that an expenditure of £1 million a year would provide for the requisite police force and a staff of suitable European officials. After a few years, local revenues (especially from valuable local mines) would reduce even this annual cost.

Lord Bryce also discussed the possibility of funds coming from America. The matter of contributions had been raised in the US Congress, but never urgently, not least because it had been wrapped up with the questions of both America's entry into the League and a possible mandate. So, if the controversial issues were set aside entirely, and if it was merely proposed that Congress should grant to aid to any Power which would accept a mandate, it seemed quite possible (even probable) that such a grant would be made—perhaps to the tune of \$3 or \$4 million every year for a few years. But even if Congress rejected the plan, Lord Bryce had the idea of either floating a loan in America to be supported by many wealthy philanthropists, or else of raising a large sum of money through voluntary subscriptions, since the American people had already given enormous sums to the relief of the Near East.

After all this preparatory work, on 9 April the Council of the League opened its fourth session under the presidency of Leon Bourgeois. During its first private meeting, the Council heard a memorandum prepared by the Secretary-General.<sup>16</sup> This addressed far more issues than who exactly should hold a mandate for Armenia—a single power or several powers. It also raised the possibility of aid being offered to Armenia in the form of a mission

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<sup>16</sup> LN, Procès-Verbal of the Fifth session of the Council of the LN held in Paris from 9<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> April, 1920, p. 19–21

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to provide administrative advice and assistance, with the composition of the body being decided by the League of Nations. The Secretary-General felt that the supply of a small number of civil advisers to the Armenian state would be relatively easy since it would not require any formal, significant or binding commitment by the Powers; but he went on to discuss a number of points about the work which might face such a body of men.

For example, he could not see it becoming involved in efforts to evacuate Turkish troops from Armenian territory, although the Allied Powers seemed to think that the presence of League officials would help facilitate this process anyway. Regarding the defence of Armenia, it was noted that Armenian representatives had already requested the assistance of foreign volunteer officers (to help organise their troops) and also for arms and equipment, so the door was open for the dispatch of a military mission and, perhaps, a volunteer corps. It was noted that the future of the port of Batumi was absolutely vital, since it was the only possible outlet that Armenia might have to the sea. So the Council would have to maintain an interest in Armenia's use of and access to the port. Regarding finances, it was suggested that in due course the Armenian state could be financed from its own resources supplemented by contributions from Armenians abroad. Initially, however, no revenue could be drawn from the provinces which formerly had been under Turkish rule, and the revenue from the former Russian provinces would be greatly reduced. Hence in its early life the Armenian State would probably have to negotiate foreign loans or credits. The League would have to know the details of how such funds could be guaranteed, particularly since it was hard to see how Armenia's security could be safeguarded if its finances were uncertain.

The Armenian delegation had already made a number of suggestions about the sort of assistance which could be rendered to the Armenian state if the League of Nations assumed its protection.<sup>17</sup> The suggestions were also discussed during the Council's session. Regarding civil assistance, it was proposed that this should cover twenty years, with the possibility of

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<sup>17</sup> V. Papazian, *Memories. Vol. II.* Boston, 1973, pp.336–337

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renewal by common agreement for two successive periods of ten years. The League would exercise its mandate via a High Commissioner who would be resident in Yerevan and who would have advisers working in the Armenian ministries. Armenia would appoint a representative to the League and, under Article 22 of the Covenant, would receive League officials to give ‘assistance and advice’.

There would be military assistance too.<sup>18</sup> A foreign military mission would re-organise the army and control the operations of the units occupying the districts to be evacuated by the Turks. Furthermore, in order to prove to the Allies that the Armenian army would only be used for defensive purposes, on several occasions it was proposed that the army should be put under the control of the Allied Powers. The presence of Allied officers at the time of the occupation of Turkish Armenia would guarantee the implementation of Peace Conference’s decisions, would reassure Allied public opinion and would allay fears of persecution among the Muslim population. The proposal went on to suggest a foreign officer belonging to the military mission should be attached to each of the army’s brigades.

It is worth observing, incidentally, that these suggestions were actually quite modest. The Armenian proposal would only have involved a chief of mission plus some ten military officers, the latter being able to appoint as many assistants as necessary. In a letter to the Secretary-General from London’s Foreign Office, Lord Vansittart wrote ‘You would see that they [the Armenians] asked for much less than expected.’<sup>19</sup> But the proposals were never acted upon.

Later the same day (9 April), the Council raised the Armenian Question again during its second sitting. The most important issue was to decide the rights and obligations of the League in view of the invitation by the Supreme Council to assume protection of the state.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> LNA, section 2, dossier 3421, doc. 3567

<sup>19</sup> LNA, section 2, dossier 3421, doc. 3963

<sup>20</sup> LN, Procès-Verbal of the Fourth Session of the Council of the LN held in Paris on 9 and 11 April 1920, 20/29/7–10

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Venizelos, the Greek representative, emphasised that the matter simply had to fall within the League's competence because Article 22 of the Covenant defined as a 'sacred trust of civilization' the provision of mandates for territories inhabited by 'peoples not yet able to stand by themselves'. He believed the League had a moral obligation to provide for the protection of Armenia and that this should be accomplished in the first instance through military assistance. If each of the Allied Powers lent one brigade to form the nucleus of the Armenian Army, then the United States (which had already expressed a desire to see the creation of an independent Armenia) most likely would provide assistance too. Five brigades, reinforcing the Armenian Army as it already existed, would be enough for the time-being to ensure the security of the new state. Most importantly, Venizelos added that Greece would contribute half of the military force to be provided by the Great Powers.

The Greek representative went on to raise the matter of immediate financial guarantees. Credits were necessary to enable Armenia to exist independently until she could support herself financially, and Venizelos estimated the amount at £20,000,000 over a period of eight to ten years. He thought the necessary guarantees might be furnished by members of the League. He recognised that the Assembly would have to decide this question, but it would not meet until the following autumn. So pending this event, Venizelos suggested that the Supreme Council might be asked to furnish a collective guarantee.

The British representative, H.A.L. Fisher thought the best solution would be to find an individual state willing to assume the mandate for Armenia. If no Power would do this, he hoped the Council of the League would consider giving some assistance if only in the form of advice. For Belgium, Baron de Gaiffier D'Hestroy noted the importance of Turkey being required to withdraw her troops still occupying the Armenian provinces of the Turkish Empire.

With all of this said, and having consulted the representatives of Brazil, Spain and Japan, the Council agreed several points unanimously. It felt it could make a clear decision of

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principle over how to deal with Armenia without this decision prejudicing any future resolution of the Assembly. It would have to take every precaution that a possible mission to Armenia did not fail because such an outcome would compromise the authority of the League seriously. Hence it had to pursue a course of action basically compatible with its character as a conciliator and arbitrator between the organized states of the world. It was deemed desirable for a mandatory to be found for Armenia, and that such a recommendation should be addressed to the Supreme Council. This body should also be asked to furnish the military and financial guarantees necessary to underpin the creation and security of the new state. In connection with military issues, the attention of the Supreme Council should be drawn to the need to delimit Armenia's frontiers with a view to bringing about the evacuation of the Armenian portions of Turkish territory. In any case, considerable military power would be necessary to preserve the security of Armenia. General Harbord, of the American Army, estimated that at least 60,000 men would be required. So the Council of the League wondered if the Supreme Council would be prepared to organize a military force of this magnitude. The Council also wondered about the Supreme Council's attitude to a seaport for Armenia. This was indispensable, both to secure Armenia's communications with the outside world and to ensure the free passage of a mandatory power or the Great Powers. It was also proposed that, should the Supreme Council lack information about Armenia, a mission of enquiry should be sent to study the country. Finally, the Council observed that if the Supreme Council could respond to all these points in a satisfactory way, then the League would take up the problem of Armenia. Mr. Bourgeois then asked Mr. Fisher to prepare a report on the matter.<sup>21</sup>

The resulting report emphasized the readiness of the Council of the League to see Armenia constituted as a free, secure, independent state. The Council believed the best solution would be for a civilized state to accept a mandate for Armenia, but it was recognised

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<sup>21</sup> LN, Procès-Verbal of the Fourth session of the Council of the League of Nations held in Paris on 9 and 11 April, 1920. 20/29/7-10, p.31

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as uncertain whether any state would accept such a responsibility. The Council thought the answer would depend in large measure on whether satisfactory military steps could be taken to liberate the territory fully and to protect the new state's frontiers, but also on whether the finances of the state could be placed on secure foundations. Concerning finances, the report proposed that if the mandatory state were relieved of financial liabilities associated with Armenia, then it should not be hard to find a candidate ready to assume the responsibilities. The new state would need credits to help it weather its first years of existence, and the Council was prepared to submit to the Assembly a proposal to the effect that its members should consider providing a collective guarantee. Meanwhile, given that the Assembly would not meet until the autumn, the Council proposed entering into communications with the Supreme Council, to see what provisional financial agreements could be arranged to underpin the state.

H.A.L. Fisher's report was accepted unanimously by the Council during its meeting in Paris on 11 April 1920. A memorandum entitled *Future Status of Armenia* was accepted too.<sup>22</sup> This also assumed that the establishment of a secure and independent Armenian state amounted to an obligation of humanity and suggested that the League of Nations was anxious to promote such an end. On the other hand, the Council also noted that its organisation was not, itself, a state, lacked an army, did not have independent finances and that public opinion would not be as strong if it attempted an ambitious venture in Asia Minor rather than in more central parts of Europe. Most important of all, however, the memorandum noted that Article 22 of the Covenant did not foresee the League itself accepting a mandate. Quite the reverse, the article called for the League to supervise a mandate implemented by a specified Power to the benefit of communities formerly belonging to the Ottoman Empire. The fact that various mandates for different regions of the Ottoman Empire had already been entrusted to certain

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<sup>22</sup> A.Mandelstam, *La société des nations et les puissances devant le problème Arménien*. Beirut, 1970. p.73–75

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Powers was hardly compatible with the League itself assuming the mandate for a comparable region.

The Council also asked the Supreme Council to define a number of fundamental points concerning questions of finance, defence and communications which were necessary to facilitate the acceptance of a mandate by a member of the League. Once the Supreme Council was in a position to deal with the points in a satisfactory way, the League would then make informal enquiries to see if any member would accept a mandate for Armenia. If a suitable candidate were forthcoming, then the Council of the League would invite the member in question to communicate with the Supreme Council directly to ascertain key information concerning the future boundaries of the state and its prospective relations with its neighbours.

Interestingly, the memorandum noted that if no state proved willing to accept a mandate for Armenia, the Council of the League would still maintain an interest in the country. Specifically it would discuss with the Supreme Council whether other measures could be devised to protect Armenia. Naturally a copy of the memorandum was forwarded to the Supreme Council itself and this was discussed by the body on 26 April in San Remo.<sup>23</sup> Amazingly, it suggested that the document displayed a ‘misapprehension’, since the Supreme Council had wanted to know the degree of support and level of assistance likely to derive from the League of Nations if an Armenian state were established—i.e. rather than suggest that the League itself accept a mandate.

The Supreme Council in fact assumed that only the USA would be in a position to accept a mandate for Armenia.<sup>24</sup> The organisations believed it was only in a position to help Armenia itself by sending it arms and munitions, and admitted great difficulties when it came to fixing frontiers for the state. Consequently, on April 26 the Supreme Council made an

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<sup>23</sup> J. Kirakoysan (ed.), *Armenia in the Documents of International Diplomacy and Soviet Foreign Policy*. Yerevan, 1972. pp.632–704

<sup>24</sup> T.M. Asoyan, *The Territorial Problems of the Republic of Armenia and the Policy of Great Britain (1918–1920)*. Moscow, 2005. p.193 (Russian)

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appeal to Wilson, asking that the USA accept a mandate, that the President arbitrate Armenia's borders, and that the peace treaties stipulate that Wilson's recommendations (including issues relating to access to the sea and frontiers with Turkey) be recognised generally.<sup>25</sup>

Unfortunately, on 1 July the US Senate refused to accept a mandate for Armenia and President Wilson did not make a decision about borders until 22 November.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore the First Assembly of the League did not discuss a mandate for Armenia because on 25 September the Armenian delegation to the Peace Conference requested direct membership of the organisation.

### **Conclusion**

The Supreme Council had hoped to solve the Turkish Question by the application of a mandate; but the actual process whereby the solution was attempted only began to subvert the credibility of the whole strategy. The Armenians of the Six Vilayets begged for a mandatory and found none; the Arabs of Syria and Mesopotamia were placed under mandates against their wishes. The contrast between the two cases was glaring. Mesopotamia was one of the Ottoman provinces in which there had been fewest complaints about oppression and atrocity. By contrast, in Armenia, Turkish misrule had reached its apogee.

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<sup>25</sup> G. Ghorganyan, *The Republic of Armenia and the States*. *VEM journal* (1934, N 3- 4). p.40–41 (Armenian)

<sup>26</sup> C. A. Vertanes, *Armenia Reborn*. New York, 1947. p.155.

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### **About the author**

Edita Gzoyan is completing her PhD in the Faculty of International Relations, Yerevan State University. Her research concerns the relations between the League of Nations and Armenia. In the past, she has worked in the UN Library Archives and Armenia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Her email address is **editahovikn@yahoo.com**.