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## Formation of Armenian Political Parties in the Context of Restoration of Independence

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*The process of the restoration of independence along with Nagorno-Karabakh's self-determination issue was the first major political problem the Armenian political parties faced. The article examines the formation of a multiparty system in Armenia in the context of that process. Armenian political parties took their part in the process while having principle disagreements concerning the alternatives of road, timeline and means of achieving the independence. Definitely seeking to independence, Armenian political parties were suggesting completely different roadmaps of handling the process. Simultaneously, these disagreements led to inter-party ideological debate. Thus, this article has an objective to discuss the debate by presenting comprehensive attitude of parties towards independence. It is important to identify the role of political parties and the fight between them in the process of independence in terms of studying the history of the Third Republic and the formation of a multi-party system in Armenia. With the approaching referendum on independence, the stances of the Armenian political forces were crystallized and finally, on the eve of the referendum, all Armenian political forces came to an agreement.*

### Keywords

Independence, the Republic of Armenia, stateness, post-Soviet transformation, collapse of USSR

The issue of Armenia's independence became a key component of the Armenian policy agenda in the last years of the Soviet Union, in particular during the pan-national awakening started in 1988. The idea of independence was institutionalized in the 1960s, the most massive manifestation of which was the creation of an underground National United Party (NUP) in 1967. The party united a group of devotees with a common goal of realizing the idea of independent Armenia<sup>1</sup>. It is impossible to underestimate the creation and functioning of the NUP and secret groups, associations and political organizations pursuing the same

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<sup>1</sup> **Harutyunyan V.**, *Aylakhohutyuny khorhrdayin Hayastanum*, Yerevan, Van Aryan, 2014 (in Armenian).

ideas. Moreover, the influence of the NUP was noticeable even after the restoration of Armenia's independence. Ashot Navasardyan, the founder of the Republican Party of Armenia (RPA) and its leader since 1997, and later Andranik Margaryan who has been heading the party for 10 years were members of the NUP governing body. Some members of the RPA governing body have joined the underground party in the Soviet years. The members of the NUP, in particular its leadership, were being subjected to "heavy blows" by special services of the USSR, i.e. fictitious trials, exile, imprisonment. Nevertheless, the idea of independence was gradually covering new layers of the society. In 1990, when the democratic forces came to power in Armenia, independence finally turned to a central issue of political agenda. It has acquired a predominant status over all the other problems of the Republic<sup>2</sup>.

The idea of independence started to widely circulate on an institutional level at the PANM founding congress held in November 7, 1989, becoming a part of party program. Though separate political organizations, among which the Union for National Self-Determination (UNSD), RPA, and Constitutional Law Union (CLU) have already raised the demand for independence, the pan-national movement was more focused on solving the problem of reunification of Artsakh and Armenia under the Soviet administrative and political influence. As a result of the latest 1990 elections of the Supreme Soviet of the Armenian SSR, a considerable number of candidates entered into the parliament. Most of them appeared in political arena thanks to the Artsakh Movement and did not sympathize with the communist authorities. The abolition of the Soviet power in Armenia took place by a peaceful "velvet revolution"; the Communists lost the majority in the parliament. Due to a good sense of the leadership of the Communist Party and the PANM, Armenia succeeded in avoiding serious internal conflicts<sup>3</sup> in contrast to the other two South Caucasian states - Georgia and Azerbaijan. In those countries, the central problem was the inability of the Communists to abandon their power and the desire to maintain it at all costs. In contrast, the ruling Communist Party in Armenia, under the influence of a massive

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<sup>2</sup> *Hayastani Hanrapetutyun*, March 14, 1991 (in Armenian).

<sup>3</sup> **Liparityan Zh.**, *Petakanutyun martahravernery: hay qaghaqakan mitq ankakhutyunits i ver*, Yerevan, Nairi, 1999, p. 32 (in Armenian).

nationwide wave of Artsakh, transferred power peacefully to the PANM, and the latter assumed responsibility avoiding personal revenge.

### **Inter-party debate and consensus**

The major political forces formed in Armenia by the promotion of the Artsakh movement, in particular, PANM, UNSD, RPA, etc. unhesitatingly sought to independence. This can also be interpreted within the underground political struggle by their leaders, participation in 1988-90 movement, etc. It was clear for them that the Union would yield its positions, and the issue is only about the form and timing of the process. Meanwhile, the situation in the Armenian Diaspora was quite different. The attitude of the Armenian political organizations of Diaspora (traditional political parties) towards the movement started in Armenia has not been unequivocal. Still, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF), the Armenian Democratic Liberal Party (ADLA), the Social Democrat Hunchakian party (SDHP) expressed a common position in October 1988, speaking on behalf of the three organizations as a reaction to the events taking place in Armenia. In that statement, the three political organizations demanded from the authorities of the Soviet Armenia to make the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh a priority, and to initiate its just resolution. The political parties of Diaspora called on the people of Armenia and Artsakh to avoid such extreme actions as labor strikes, student strikes, etc. which undermined country's internal order as well as the normal course of economic, industrial, educational and cultural life. The collective unity of all Armenians above everything else, political parties emphasized the importance of protecting national interests with determination and foresight<sup>4</sup>. This call revealed that at the initial stage of the movement the organizations of Diaspora misinterpreted the events taking place in Armenia. Such a psychological understanding was also dominant in 1991 on the eve of the declaration of independence, expressed by the ideological contrast of PANM and ARF.

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<sup>4</sup> *Droshak*, 13, October 12, 1988 (in Armenian).

Prior to that, in the parliamentary elections of May 20, 1990, the PANM won parliamentary majority. L. Ter-Petrosyan, one of party leaders, was elected as a Chairman of the Supreme Council of RA on August 4, 1990 and Vazgen Manukyan as a President of the Council of Ministers of RA on August 13, 1990. A few days after the changes of power, the Supreme Council adopted the Declaration of Independence of Armenia. Based on the decision of August 4, 1990, the Supreme Soviet of the Armenian SSR created a committee of 15 people to prepare the Declaration of Independence of Armenia<sup>5</sup>. The forces participating in social and political life of the Republic, such as the CPA, CLU, RPA, hurried to submit their proposals to the Committee of the Supreme Soviet, and the joint version prepared by the committee was submitted to the Supreme Soviet on August 20<sup>6</sup>. More than a quarter of a century later, it can be argued that in terms of legal and political perspectives, the choice of any issue and that of a single word included in the Declaration was carefully weighed. It was in complete harmony with world experience, the most successful example of which is the Declaration of independence of the United States<sup>7</sup>. It has often served as a basis for the message addressed to other nations and states adopting the Declaration of Independence; as an application for equality with other states<sup>8</sup>. The issue of the Armenian Genocide was of particular interest during the adoption of the Declaration. Based on political principles, the PANM, under the leadership of L. Ter-Petrosyan, opposed the inclusion of that issue in the Document. Still, a group of deputies, among whom H. Simonyan with its important contribution, insisted on the need to include the issue of the Armenian Genocide in that historical document. Finally, by mutual consent, it was decided to make the provision of the Armenian Genocide one of the key components of the Declaration of Independence<sup>9</sup>. On

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<sup>5</sup> *Hayastani Hanrapetutyun*, October 9, 1990 (in Armenian).

<sup>6</sup> **Poghosyan E.**, *Ankakh petakanutyun hastatman gortsyntatsy Hayastanum (1990-2001)*, Yerevan, 2013, p. 31 (in Armenian).

<sup>7</sup> **Maier P.**, *American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence*, Vintage, 1998.

<sup>8</sup> **Armitage D.**, *The Declaration of Independence*, Harward University Press, 2008, p. 64.

<sup>9</sup> **Minasyan E.**, *Hayastani errord hanrapetutyun patmutyun*, Yerevan, YSU Publishing House, 2013, p. 116 (in Armenian).

August 23, 1990, 183 out of 187 deputies approved the text of the Declaration. After final revisions, on August 24, the Declaration on the Independence of Armenia was approved by a new voting (192 for and 2 abstentions)<sup>10</sup>. One of the most important provisions of the Declaration concerned to the applicability of the USSR laws. It was highlighted that the laws of the USSR, which had not been approved by the Supreme Soviet of RA, could not be applied in Armenia. A year later, the Supreme Soviet put the issue to a national referendum.

The intensification of pressure by the USSR leadership after the declaration of independence was not surprising. It covered almost all areas, i.e. legal political, economic, etc. Among them is the law signed by the USSR President Mikhail Gorbachev on April 3, 1990. The law stipulated a new procedure for the independence of the republics<sup>11</sup>. It did not, however, prevent Lithuania from "demonstratively declaring the independence of the republic" right on the eve of its signing<sup>12</sup>. January 16, 1991 decision of the USSR Supreme Soviet on conducting a referendum on the preservation of the USSR on March 17 of the same year can also be considered a step towards suspension of independence of the USSR member states<sup>13</sup>. No matter how paradoxical it may seem, but that decision of the USSR was important for the achievement of Armenia's independence. It unwittingly raised the question of the independence of Armenia, given the fact that prior to it, the discussions on the referendum of independence did not get a practical form. According to the ruling PANM, the Soviet Union referendum was merely a step towards strengthening the positions of the Soviet central authorities without any chance of changing the real course of events<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> *Khorhrdayin Hayastan*, August 26, 1990, (in Armenian).

<sup>11</sup> *Izvestiya sovetov Narodnykh deputatov SSSR*, April 7, 1990, (in Russian).

<sup>12</sup> **Gorbachev M.**, *On my Country and the World*, Columbia University Press, 2000, p. 101.

<sup>13</sup> *RA Supreme Soviet Bulletin*, 2, (982), 31.01.1991, p. 52.

<sup>14</sup> *Argumenty i fakty*, 14, 1991 (in Russian).

Based on March 1, 1991 decision, the referendum would not be held on the territory of Armenia referring to the fact that it contradicts the right of nations to self-determination. By the decision of the RA Supreme Soviet, the results of the USSR referendum could not have legal force for Armenia<sup>15</sup>. Instead, the Supreme Council of RA simultaneously adopted another decree: "On holding the referendum in the territory of Armenia on secession from the USSR". A referendum was scheduled on September 21, 1991. At the same time, the presidency of the SC was granted a right to hold referendum earlier in case of drastic changes of the situation<sup>16</sup>. The proclamation of independence was envisaged to comply with the USSR laws ensuring the legal compliance of the process and the effectiveness of the propaganda carried out by the Armenian social and political organizations. Thereby, the PANM and the political forces supporting it referred to the need to avoid the occurrences, highlighting the urgency of overcoming the lack of preparedness of the state, political organizations and the people<sup>17</sup>. As in other Soviet republics, Armenia also had an "atomized" party system; none of the many political organizations that existed in the country had noticeable priorities<sup>18</sup>. The political parties of Armenia can be conditionally divided into three groups according to their stance on independence. The first group included the radical independence proponents, among which UNSD, RPA, CLU. They put the idea of independence above all, with a clear goal of achieving it as soon as possible. The political parties of this group related the future of Armenia to the achievement of independence. The second group, mostly represented by the ARF, proclaimed itself "the most moderate independents". Having always had the imperative of independence in its program, the ARF gave greater importance to the idea of "united Armenia", from which the Armenian claim stemmed. The ARF considered that independent Armenia could not be proclaimed without Artsakh, and other occupied territories of the Armenian people. The ARF related the realization of national aspirations to its "Free, Independent

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<sup>15</sup> *RA Supreme Soviet Bulletin*, 5 (985), 15.03.1991, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> *RA Supreme Soviet Bulletin*, 5, Op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>17</sup> **Ter-Petrosyan L.**, Yntrani (Yeluytner, hodvatsner, hartsazruytsner), Yerevan, 2006, pp. 176-177 (in Armenian).

<sup>18</sup> **Sartori G.**, *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis*, ECPR Press, 2005, pp. 110-111.

and United Armenia" formula<sup>19</sup>. The third group, headed by the PANM, perceived the realization of the "dream of independence" "calmly, without emotions". The party believed that sharp and unbalanced steps would inevitably undermine the process of independence<sup>20</sup> and offered escaping direct confrontation with the authorities of the union on the path of independence<sup>21</sup>. This approach was first of all contrary to the approaches of the UNSD, which was reflected in timing of Armenia's independence referendum. First of all seeking to legally neutralize Article 72 of the Constitution of the USSR on the right of independence of republics<sup>22</sup>, the above-mentioned law of Gorbachev envisaged that the nationwide referendum on independence was held not earlier than 6 months after the Supreme Soviet decision. However, Article 9 of the same law prescribes that in order to succeed from the Union the republics should have followed a process that would last five years after the referendum. The PANM offered to achieve independence in compliance with the provisions of the USSR law and therefore suggested holding a referendum on independence in September. It expected that in case of a positive outcome of the referendum, the USSR leadership would be bound by its own laws and would recognize the new legal status of the republics<sup>23</sup>. The Communist party also supported the proposal of the referendum as it was obviously in a state of expectation, given the processes taking place throughout the country, especially the uncertainty over the future of the Union<sup>24</sup>. In spite of this, the UNSD insisted on the idea of conducting a referendum as soon as possible, and a number of independent MPs of the Supreme Soviet proposed to hold a referendum in April-May, 1991. The proponents of this idea took into account the rapid development of events in the USSR, the danger of being left out of

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<sup>19</sup> *Yerkir*, September 20, 1991 (in Armenian).

<sup>20</sup> *Hayastani Hanrapetutyun*, March 14, 1991 (in Armenian).

<sup>21</sup> *Argumenty i fakty*, 14, 1991 (in Russian).

<sup>22</sup> *Konstitutsiya (Osnovnoy zakon) Soyuz Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik*, Tashkent, 1978, s. 63 (in Russian).

<sup>23</sup> **Manukyan V.**, *Haykakan yerazanqy goyatevman pakughum (yeluytneri ev hodvatsneri zhoghovatsu)*, "V.I.V. Aysor ev vaghy", Yerevan, 2002, p. 109 (in Armenian).

<sup>24</sup> *Hayq*, March 5, 1991 (in Armenian).

the major processes taking place<sup>25</sup>. Realizing that the tactics of creating artificial obstacles to the road of independence may easily fail, the USSR central authorities have decided to propose a New Union Treaty to the member states. The initiative seemed to save the Soviet Union from the collapse. To this end, on June 18, 1991, the USSR central authorities introduced the draft of the "Treaty on Sovereign States" composed of 26 provisions<sup>26</sup>. Here again the disagreements of the Armenian political parties came to light. The Communist Party of Armenia, which persistently refused to join the initiatives of the supporters of independence, insisted on signing the New Union Treaty. The ARF also held such a position. It was widely expressed in party's official press in which the PANM was criticized for accelerating the process of independence<sup>27</sup>. The PANM had serious reservations regarding the signing of a New Union Treaty. According to Eduard Yegoryan, if Armenia joined the Treaty it would turn to an adjunct of a new unity, and the independence would simply remain an illusion<sup>28</sup>. The PANM considered the interconnection between the referendum on independence and the New Union Treaty to be artificial given a series of disagreements and uncertainties over the Treaty. During the Union discussions, the PANM held the view that the strengthening of Armenia's position was only possible with the decisive victory of "yes", granting the Republic a more sovereign and free status<sup>29</sup>. The CPA, still not split up, seriously resisted the PANM's policy striving to achieve that all political forces of Armenia back the idea of signing the New Union Treaty by common consensus. Imagining the existence of Armenia only with a powerful force behind, the Communist party was explicitly stating that Armenia's future is only possible within a renewed federation<sup>30</sup>. Another opposition party of the PANM - the ARF - also believed that the USSR could play a major role in the settlement of the Armenian issue<sup>31</sup>. This opinion was highly influenced by the political and ideological shifts of the CPA

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<sup>25</sup> *Hayastani Hanrapetutyun*, March 14, 1991 (in Armenian).

<sup>26</sup> *Izvestiya sovetov Narodnykh deputatov SSSR*, May 21, 1990 (in Russian).

<sup>27</sup> *Hayastani Hanrapetutyun*, July 13, 1991 (in Armenian).

<sup>28</sup> *Hayq*, July 3, 1991 (in Armenian).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Hayq*, June 26, 1991 (in Armenian).

<sup>31</sup> *Yerkir*, September 20, 1991 (in Armenian).



following the change of party's leadership. Since the start of the pan-national movement in 1988, the ARF was advocating for the initiatives of the Armenian Soviet authorities on the protection of national and political rights<sup>32</sup>.

One of the political parties of the Diaspora - Democratic Liberal Party of Armenia (ADLA) - did not exclude the possibility of joining the New Union Treaty stressing the need to act as an independent subject of international law. The approaches of ADLA and PANM in this issue seemed identical<sup>33</sup>. The PANM saw the future of the Soviet Union based on the principle of cooperation between independent states<sup>34</sup>. It was proposed to introduce a common system of horizontally interconnected states in which decisions would be made on the principles of consensus and equality. Thus, the issue of joining the New Union Treaty as a subject of international law has gained fundamental importance for the PANM<sup>35</sup>.

The ARF, one of the major political actors, did not reject the idea of independence, but was convinced that in the foreseeable future independent Armenia had to be found in a renewed Soviet system<sup>36</sup>. The fact of RA Supreme Soviet President Levon Ter-Petrosyan's signing under the statement of Novo-Ogaryovo was viewed by the ARF as a manifestation of the PANM to share a common position; "Independence with realistic assessment of real forces"<sup>37</sup>. The ARF referred to the independence without "united Armenia" with some reservations. Preferring all the troubles brought about by the USSR, the ARF considered the creation of "united Armenia" as part of that geopolitical unit to be quite possible. Thus, he welcomed the aforementioned statement, believing that it was within the logic of his proposed policy<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> **Harutyunyan S.**, *Antsyalı ev nerkayı masın*, Yerevan, Noyyan Tapan, 2011, p. 209.

<sup>33</sup> *Hayastani Hanrapetutyun*, July 11, 1991 (in Armenian).

<sup>34</sup> **Ter-Petrosyan L.**, *Op. cit.*, p. 175.

<sup>35</sup> *Soyuz*, 12, 1991 (in Russian).

<sup>36</sup> **Sargsyan A.**, *The History of PANM*, part II,

[http://www.anm.am/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=79:2011-01-17-14-45-02&catid=53:2011-01-17-14-37-42&Itemid=66](http://www.anm.am/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=79:2011-01-17-14-45-02&catid=53:2011-01-17-14-37-42&Itemid=66) (14.02.2017).

<sup>37</sup> *Azatamart*, 18, 1991 (in Armenian).

<sup>38</sup> *Yerkir*, September 20, 1991 (in Armenian).

Nevertheless, Ter-Petrosyan's participation in meeting with the leaders of the USSR member states held in Novo-Ogaryovo in July 23, 1991 was a diplomatic courtesy and not a practical step towards the creation of a new union<sup>39</sup>. The PANM considered that the Union Treaty relied on the ignorance of the achievements of the already gained sovereignty by the republics and the establishment of a new unified order from scratch<sup>40</sup>. In this regard, the position of the PANM is best illustrated in the following statement by the Head of the Supreme Soviet of Armenia L. Ter-Petrosyan: "The Soviet Union, due to internal and external circumstances, must comply with the international laws of social development. Regardless of how events will develop, what kind of temporary retreats will happen, the Union will sooner or later collapse. It is desirable and likely that the destruction is made in a natural, bloodless, civilized way and that the Union would turn into a solidarity of peoples, such as the cooperation of European countries"<sup>41</sup>. In summer 1991, the situation in the USSR was so intense that changes were taking place at blazing speed, with the potential for revision every second. On August 19, 1991, the last blow to the viability of the Union was inflicted, from which the USSR could no longer recover. On August 18, 1991, the State Committee on the State of Emergency (SCSE) was established on the grounds of "stabilization of the situation in the country". The members were USSR senior officials under the leadership of the vice-president G. Yanayev, who openly stated their position to take the political power into their hands. Yanayev later admitted that the main goal of the SCSE was the prevention of the signing of a New Union Treaty, which would further weaken the Union<sup>42</sup>. The seizure of the state power by the way of such a palace revolution put the USSR's end. Three days later, the Russian democratic forces restored the public order, returning the power to the legitimate president of the USSR, Mikhail Gorbachev. As a result, the

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<sup>39</sup> **Minasyan E.**, *Op. cit.*, p. 128.

<sup>40</sup> **Ter-Petrosyan L.**, *Op. cit.*, pp. 171-172.

<sup>41</sup> **Ter-Petrosyan L.**, *Op. cit.*, p. 174.

<sup>42</sup> **Gennady Yanayev**, *Poslednee interv'yu*, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IZ13bB8JNuQ> (18.02.2017).

power remained in the hands of a man who did not have the desire to resist the USSR division or to prevent it<sup>43</sup>.

At the stage of the Soviet Union agony, this crisis caused anxiety in Armenia as well. The opposition parties (ARF, UNSD, CLU, CDU, RPA) critically approached the cautious position of the PANM. Within the framework of a rally organized at Yerevan's Liberty Square, the parties demanded to convene a special session of the Supreme Soviet and to discuss what happened in the days of the revolution. The political parties proposed not to wait till September 21, but by applying the March 1 decision of the Council, to declare Armenia an independent state with Artsakh. This event marked the political correlation of Armenia in 1990-1994, i.e. the framework of the political parties opposing the ruling PANM. A number of other demands also turned into controversial issues of domestic politics in a short period of time. These were recognition of independence of Artsakh or its reunion with Armenia, cancellation of the provisions related to the treaties of Moscow and Kars, as well as the agreements on the Sovietization of Armenia and the creation of the USSR, convocation of the Constituent Assembly, etc<sup>44</sup>.

In the days of the SCSE coup attempt, the UNSD, the ARF and other political parties opposing the PANM were demanding to hastily present their official assessments<sup>45</sup>. Nevertheless, the PANM and the leadership of Armenia chose a wait-and-see stand, which was positively assessed even by its ideological opponents<sup>46</sup>. Levon Ter-Petrosyan, as the chairman of the Supreme Soviet, was calling for coldness, and PANM refused to hastily condemn SCSE, claiming that such an act would have "severe consequences" for Armenia. The overthrow of the coup d'état could have been a long process first of all covering small states seeking independence. Therefore, the decision not to be tempted by the statements of Armenia's neutrality and democracy protection may have been of a preventive significance in case of the triumph of the coup attempt.

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<sup>43</sup> **Hough J.**, *Democratization and Revolution in USSR 1985-91*, Brookings Institution Press, 1997, p. 448.

<sup>44</sup> *Yerkir*, September 3, 1991 (in Armenian).

<sup>45</sup> *Ankakhutyun*, August 30, 1991 (in Armenian).

<sup>46</sup> **Ghazaryan R.**, *Hashvetu em*, Yerevan, 2003, p. 10 (in Armenian).

On August 26, 1991, when the failure of the coup was already known, several members of the Supreme Soviet of RA suggested the immediate declaration of Armenia's independence. It is noteworthy that until September 21, 1991, the idea of the referendum held by the authorities of Armenia was supported by the founders of the future National Democratic Union, ie. Tigran Sargsyan, Davit Vardanyan and the then head of the government Vazgen Manukyan<sup>47</sup>. After all, a compromise was reached; a call to the Armenian citizens by the Supreme Council of Armenia to vote for independence in a referendum of September 21<sup>48</sup>. The August events made it clear that the USSR steadily goes towards the sunset. Looking back at 1991 March events, it should be noted that the process of holding its own referendum on independence was under way in Armenia. To this end, a meeting of the Armenian political organizations was held in March 4, 1991. All the influential parties of Armenia, among which the PANM, CPA, ARF, ADLA, UNSD, RPA, etc took part in it. Levon Ter-Petrosyan, the Chairman of the Supreme Council of RA and Vazgen Manukyan, the President of the Council of Ministers of RA also joined the meeting. In fact, apart from the Communist Party, all other political organizations had no objections to holding a separate referendum on independence in Armenia<sup>49</sup>. This can be considered as the first major manifestation of inter-party solidarity or consensus on the way to independence. The process took place on July 10, 1991, two and a half month before the referendum, when the leading political and social organizations of the Supreme Council of RA (PANM, RPA, ADLA, Conservative Party of Armenia (CPA), Christian Democratic Union of Armenia (CDU) and UNSD) issued a joint statement on the referendum of independence. It was an appeal to the Armenians by which these organizations, with a determination to bring the nation-wide struggle to its logical end, expressed willingness to be fully involved in the establishment of a national independent statehood of the Republic of Armenia. The PANM, UNSD, ADLA, RPA, CDU and CPA emphasized that national development and prosperity could be ensured only under the conditions of independent statehood. "No" voting

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<sup>47</sup> *RA Supreme Soviet Bulletin*, 16 (996), August 31, 1991, p. 16.

<sup>48</sup> *RA Supreme Soviet Bulletin*, 16, Op. cit., pp. 15-16.

<sup>49</sup> *Azg*, March 6, 1991 (in Armenian).

was considered unacceptable by the parties. According to them, the rejection of independence in a popular referendum would be catastrophic; in that case the whole republic and people would be inevitably forced to rely on the mercy of the "others"<sup>50</sup>. That is why, adopting common position, the major political actors of Armenia encouraged the people to say "yes" to independence, realizing the dreams of the ancestors and the free and dignified future of the coming generation<sup>51</sup>.

The position of the PANM on the proclamation of independence was unequivocal. It held the view that the empire was collapsing and Armenia should avoid finding itself under the ruins at any cost. The party explained that its goal was not to go to confrontation with the union authorities. The agenda was the establishment of separate bilateral relations with the Soviet Union and the states beyond its borders<sup>52</sup>. The cautious attitude of the ARF towards the independence was largely conditioned by the anti-Armenian stance of Turkey (its Western neighbor), in particular with the concern of a new genocide<sup>53</sup>. The ARF and its allies warned that it was only the powerful state machine of the Soviet Union that undermined Pan-Turkism, and in case of Armenia's secession, it would find itself under serious danger. In this context, the term "Neo Pan-Turkism" was put into action, according to which the idea of creating a Great Turan was no longer viable and was subjugated to another system of Turkic peoples union. The idea was to create an EU-like structure for Turkish-speaking peoples<sup>54</sup>. The ARF's position was represented by its leader Hrayr Maroukhyan, who stressed that it was an unfavorable time to demand independence, given the need for Russian support<sup>55</sup>.

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<sup>50</sup> **Manukyan V.**, Op. cit., pp. 137-138.

<sup>51</sup> *Hayastani Hanrapetutyun*, July 11, 1991 (in Armenian).

<sup>52</sup> *Argumenty i fakty*, 14, 1991 (in Russian).

<sup>53</sup> **Manukyan V.**, Gnatsqits trchelu zhamanakn e. Vorn e mer janaparhy, Yerevan, Arevik, 1990, pp. 7-43.

<sup>54</sup> **Khurshudyan L.**, Haykakan hartsy, Hamazgayin hay krtakan ev mshakutayin miutyun, Yerevan, 1995, p. 85.

<sup>55</sup> *Droshak*, 7, July 19, 1989 (in Armenian).

In that period, the independence of Armenia was often associated with anti-Russian stances, thus distorting the real chain of events. The debate narrowed between pro-Russian and anti-Russian stances, between the ability to maintain an independent statehood alone, and the age-old complex of deprivation of that ability. In 1988-1990, Armenian intellectuals were often publicly expressing their cautiousness on the alienation from Russia<sup>56</sup>. And this was quite natural given the time-specific features. The counter-argument of the overcautiousness, turning almost into obedience, was the vision of sovereignty and independence<sup>57</sup>. Eventually, there was a confrontation between the ideological perceptions of surviving with the support of "others" and building its own future.

The ARF considered that the RA Supreme Council's decision on holding the referendum on Armenia's independence was a logical continuation of the "Declaration on the Independence of the Republic of Armenia". It emphasized the fact of the establishment of independence rather than its restoration, which demonstrated the unique case of Armenia thereby maneuvering regional disputes with Turkey that seemed inevitable. The political party linked the success of the referendum on independence to legal justification as well as to political and national support<sup>58</sup>. The PANM obviously viewed independence as a necessity for the nation. It was convinced that the Soviet Union had replaced the independence of Armenia with a simple autonomy and principles defining it that had no practical application<sup>59</sup>. The party attached great importance to the consistent application of the term "independence" to pursue the idea of independence in people's consciousness<sup>60</sup>.

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<sup>56</sup> **Sargsyan A.**, Levon Ter-Petrosyan-himnadir nakhagah Hayastani Hanrapetutyun, *L. Ter-Petrosyan, Yntrani (yelyutner, hodvatsner, hartsazruysner)*, Yerevan, 2006, pp. 665-709.

<sup>57</sup> **Siradeghyan V.**, Arajin ev verjin qayly azatutyun janaparhin. Vorn e mer janaparhy, Yerevan, Arevik, 1990, pp. 86-92.

<sup>58</sup> *Hayastani Hanrapetutyun*, May 8, 1991 (in Armenian).

<sup>59</sup> **Manukyan V.**, Speech at Liberty Square, September 23, 1988 (in Armenian).

<sup>60</sup> **Manukyan V.**, Gnatsqits trchelu zhamanakn e..., p 26.

Ideologically, the ARF's struggle for "united Armenia" was aimed at freedom and independence of the whole homeland. The Armenian Cause was proclaimed by the party as the major goal of the Armenian nation, which could never come down to its own parts, just like the independence and freedom of the Armenian nation - to a part of it. In the same way, "united Armenia" could not mean joining one part of it (for example, Artsakh) to another (Republic of Armenia). Consequently, though Artsakh and Armenia expressed the Armenian Cause without the other parts of the Homeland, they could not encompass the major goal of the Armenian nation. Thus, it was concluded that no part of the Armenian Cause could contradict to the other, such as Artsakh to Western Armenia, Nakhijevan to Javakhk, etc. The ARF, in fact, viewed the solution of the Armenian Cause in the context of a chain of events, considering the establishment of "united Armenia" and further collective independence as a priority<sup>61</sup>. The ARF directly linked the independence of Armenia to the return of the Armenian territories occupied by Turkey<sup>62</sup>. The party believed that without historical lands there could not be an independent and free Armenia. In contrast, the PANM considered the return and union of territories of historical Armenia impracticable in that particular period. Thus, it associated the position of ARF on the issues of "united Armenia" and remaining within the USSR to that held by the Communist Party<sup>63</sup>. The PANM strictly opposed the organizations that demanded the cancellation of the Moscow and Kars agreements. The party believed that such an "adventure" at the time of state establishment could threaten Armenia's security<sup>64</sup>. The party temporarily considered unrealistic to overload the state policy of Armenia with the issue of the Armenian Claim highlighting that the newly-created state had no ability and right to take such heavy burden on its shoulders. Considering the Armenian Claim as a "strait to be blocked in the empire's bonds", the party declared

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<sup>61</sup> *Azatamart*, 24, June 18, 1992 (in Armenian).

<sup>62</sup> *Yerkir*, August 31, 1991 (in Armenian).

<sup>63</sup> *Hayq*, March 20, 1991 (in Armenian).

<sup>64</sup> *Hayq*, March 19, 1991 (in Armenian).

the achievement of independence as a priority, linking its future to the success and power of the state<sup>65</sup>.

One of the main arguments of the political forces referring to declaration of independence with some reservations was the organization of the economy. As the Communist Party claimed, the USSR would continue to survive, and if Armenia left apart from its economic system, it would face a disaster. The ARF, in its turn, was concerned about the issue of hostility between Armenia and its neighboring states. The core argument of this concern was related to the Armenian Cause and Claim as a key issue of the Armenian nation, the solution of which was only possible in case of being part of a powerful empire<sup>66</sup>. In contrast, the PANM considered the collapse of the USSR inevitable, and emphasized the prospect for building free economic relations with other states. According to PANM, the contradictions with Turkey and Azerbaijan, already turned into hostility, were temporary. It considered that the land claims could not prevail over independence, while normalization of relations with neighbors seemed more and more realistic. The cornerstone of the party was that independent statehood was the supreme value for every nation enabling it to overcome its challenges step by step<sup>67</sup>.

The PANM considered the liberalization of the economy as the best way to expand Armenia's sovereignty and to secede from the USSR on favorable occasion. The party opposed the option of confederation claiming that this form of state is unstable. The PANM did not view the future of the USSR in a positive light believing that under such geopolitical conditions, and especially with such economic opportunities, the USSR had no chance of survival. It also rejected the idea that Armenia's economy could develop if it remained within the USSR. Pointing to low economic indicators of the Soviet Union, the representatives of this political wing considered the collapse of the Union inevitable and proposed the path of independence to avoid new strokes<sup>68</sup>.

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<sup>65</sup> **Yegoryan E.**, *Ter kangnenq mer vaghva orvan*, Yerevan, Nairi, 2003, p. 73 (in Armenian).

<sup>66</sup> **Sargsyan A.**, *Op. cit.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> **Manukyan V.**, *Gnatsqits trchelu zhamanakn e...*



Other political parties were also involved in the heated debate on the issue of independence, among which the UNSD's position was the most radical one concerning the delay of referendum. The party called on the people to take advantage of the opportunity provided and to proclaim independence<sup>69</sup>. The UNSD and the CLU came out with the suggestion of proclaiming Armenia's independence with Nagorno-Karabakh. It was proposed to make constitutional amendments to the borders of the state, including Shahumyan, Getashen and NKAO in the administrative district. At the same time, these political parties wanted to send an official request to the UN to ensure peacekeeping troops in the Persian Gulf along the new frontiers of Armenia thereby securing the reunited Armenia's independence. The CLU was not limited by the achievement of independence, considering it merely a means of solving urgent national issues and nothing more<sup>70</sup>. Another traditional political organization, the ADLA, considered the establishment of freedom and independence as a priority. It fully supported the efforts of the authorities towards the achievement of independence. The party referred to September 21, 1991 as a "focal point of attention" that would stand out for a true expression of the people's will as a necessary condition for continuing the process of independence<sup>71</sup>. The ADLA's position on the referendum of independence was indisputable; it considered the supreme right to independently determine its political status as a priority<sup>72</sup>. The National Democratic Union (NDU) which had been separated from the PANM during the period of referendum, maintained a principal stand on this issue. The party was inclined to believe that independence was not the end point of the process but merely the intermediate link within the framework of the "global nation" concept<sup>73</sup>. The RPA considered independent state as a necessary condition for the Armenian renaissance, and the September 21 referendum as a unique opportunity for it. The CDU considered that the index of the internal Armenian unity is the

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<sup>69</sup> *Hayastani Hanrapetutyun*, July 11, 1991 (in Armenian).

<sup>70</sup> *Hayq*, May 14, 1991 (in Armenian).

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *Hayastani Hanrapetutyun*, July 11, 1991 (in Armenian).

<sup>73</sup> *Hayastani Hanrapetutyun*, December 16, 1990 (in Armenian).

consolidation of political parties having various contradictions<sup>74</sup>. The position of the Communist Party of Armenia was radically different. It sharply opposed the PANM's policy of succeeding from the USSR and declaring independence. The CPA did not imagine the possibility of Armenia's existence after September 21, and thus denied the idea of the achievement of independence at all<sup>75</sup>. In contrast to this, the ARF announced that it sought not a declarative, but a practical independence. Different stances of the PANM and the ARF in this issue brought a new wave of controversy; the first criticized the latter for being "against the independence" and the latter criticized the first for "random acts".<sup>76</sup> At the same time, it should be underlined that partly due to the August condemnation, the ARF finally adopted positive stance towards the declaration of independence. Accordingly, the visit of Hrayr Marukhyan/the representative of ARF bureau to Armenia in those days was a sign of positive stance on the historical event of September 21. Marukhyan considered the high-level support for independence as an important starting point for the Armenian people to carry the process of independence in a more secure way<sup>77</sup>. A number of the Armenian political organizations among which the UNSD, RPA, ADL, CLU, ARF, CDU, PANM, jointly created a Coordinating Council on the referendum of independence. The creation of the latter pursued the goal of achieving the highest positive outcome of the Referendum. Considering the deprivation of independence as the greatest misfortune of the nation, the Armenian political forces have urged citizens to restore their lost statehood through the right of self-determination. To this end, the Council was established<sup>78</sup>. However, the activities of the latter should not be overestimated given the peculiarities of the multi-party system at that time, in particular the fact that political parties dealt solely with the issues of communication and mutual assistance, leaving apart vertical communication between social groups and the state<sup>79</sup>.

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<sup>74</sup> *Hayastani Hanrapetutyun*, July 11, 1991 (in Armenian).

<sup>75</sup> *Hayq*, June 21, 1991 (in Armenian).

<sup>76</sup> *Hayastani Hanrapetutyun*, July 13, 1991 (in Armenian).

<sup>77</sup> *Yerkir*, September 20, 1991 (in Armenian).

<sup>78</sup> *Ankakhutyun*, August 23, 1991 (in Armenian).

<sup>79</sup> **Lawson K.**, *Political Parties and Linkage*, New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1980, p. 187.

The referendum on independence was held on September 21, 1991. Out of the 2.163.967 citizens entitled to take part in the referendum, the number of registered voters was 2.056.758 (about 95.5 percent). 2.042.627 citizens (94.39 percent ) voted for, 10.002 citizens (0.46 percent) against the independence. 4.129 ballot papers (0.19%) were declared invalid. Two days later, on September 23, the Supreme Council of Armenia made a historical decision: "Being faithful to the Declaration on the Independence of Armenia, relying on international standards of human rights and nations' self-determination, with a view of creating democratic and legal social system, based on the results of the referendum on seceding from the USSR on September 21, the Supreme Council of the Republic of Armenia declares the Republic of Armenia as an independent state"<sup>80</sup>.

The development of events in the next 26 years showed that the restoration of independence of the Republic of Armenia was the issue on which the Armenian political parties, despite some initial disagreements, adopted a common position.

## **Conclusion**

The Armenian political organizations were conditionally divided into three groups during the period of restoration of independence. The first group included RPA, UNSD, CLU, the active proponents of independence. The second group headed by the ARF viewed independence only in the reunification of the lands of historical Armenia. The third group, among which the PANM, related the achievement of independence to the policy of "peaceful course and escape of confrontations". In 1988-91, conflicting road maps of the independence were introduced and the contradictions between political parties reached their peak. At the same time, all of the above-mentioned political powers referred to the idea of independence with some reservations, seeing the ideal way to achieve it in the context of their own projects and visions.

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<sup>80</sup> *RA Supreme Soviet Bulletin*, 18 (998), September 30, 1991, p. 21.

Nevertheless, prior to September 21, 1991, tactical contradictions were sidelined by the preference of all parties for full independence. Almost all parties were positive about the September 21 referendum. Only the Communist party was an exception, which did not imagine Armenia's existence independent from Russia. Nearly all political organizations played a pivotal role in the achievement of Armenia's independence by advancing this process with a unique inter-party solidarity. The preliminary reservations and cautiousness of Armenian political forces towards independence were significantly overcome by the victory of the PANM in 1990 parliamentary elections. The change of power in 1990 proved that Armenia has chosen the path of independence and the secession from the Soviet Union. Thus, the inter-party consensus on the issue of independence was an exceptional phenomenon that was of no less importance on the path of the achievement of independence.