

9. Post-Soviet Armenia

Nationalism & Its (Dis)contents

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THE NATIONALIST FERVOR that engulfed Soviet Armenia in early 1988 was one of the major flash points that led to the eventual collapse of the USSR. The resulting ethnic conflict over the enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh (*Lernayin Gharabagh* or *Artsakh* in Armenian) evolved into a major undeclared war between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Following the cease-fire of 1994, passions cooled somewhat, and nationalist discourse declined. While ethnonational sentiments still exist in Armenia, they are no longer the basis of politics.

This chapter does not evaluate Armenian nationalism in toto. Diasporan nationalism and politics, for example, are not covered. Rather, the chapter focuses on the politics of nationalism in Armenia since 1988. I argue that nationalist considerations and ideology are no longer prevalent in Armenian politics. Instead, an era of “postnationalist” politics has emerged, in which elites are preoccupied with issues of power and economic gain and the main issues in the political sphere relate to socioeconomic policies and day-to-day concerns. There is a difference between the “politics of nationalism”—that is, policies and acts that emanate from concerns regarding the interest of the nation (however defined)—and the use of nationalism to advance narrow political interests and gains. In Armenia, the shift from the former to the latter occurred between 1992 and 1995. It was epitomized with the September 1996 presidential election, in which nationalist rhetoric, symbols, and slogans were instrumentally used for electoral purposes. Three years later, the parliamentary shootings on October 27, 1999,

killed the spirit of nationalism. On that day, the era of 1988 metaphorically came to an end.

This analysis of the (d)evolution of Armenian nationalism is divided into three parts. The first section provides a brief historical overview of nationalism under Soviet rule. The second deals with the 1988–91 period. The third and longest part covers the postindependence period.

Background: Nationalist *and* Soviet

The Communists first saved Armenia from guaranteed destruction in 1920. They took it out of the mouth of the lion or the crocodile and saved it. After, they began to build it up. By the 1930s, the Communist leadership of Armenia had already developed a sense of national identity and [the drive for] national development. Subsequent first secretaries and other leaders continued this and strengthened it. We prepared the country for independence, to be a strong republic. Hence, we did two things: (a) kept national identity unique and developed it further and (b) built a strong economic base; we developed the country. This was very obvious by the 1960s. . . . I am very proud that as First Secretary, 20 percent of the history of Soviet Armenia belongs to me!¹

This statement from Karen Demirchian, who led Armenia from 1974 to 1988, is indicative of the prevalence of nationalist sentiments within the Soviet Armenian political elite. Needless to say, it was easy for Demirchian to claim to be a nationalist in 1997, and he overstated the point in an ostentatious manner. Nationalist opponents of the Communist regime in 1988 had a long list of grievances and arguments as to why the Communist Party of Armenia was not defending national interests. Nevertheless, Demirchian presented a view that is quite widely accepted in postindependence Armenia: that the Soviet Armenian leadership *used* communism to build the nation and that most Armenian intellectuals, political leaders, and even some party apparatchiks—especially after Stalin’s death—pursued nationalist goals within the confines of the USSR.

Until 1988, Armenians did not tend to contrast communism with a strong projection of national identity. Karlen Dallakian, another member of the pre-1988 Communist Party elite, puts it forcefully in the preface of his memoirs: “I reject with anger any attempt to contrast the Armenian

with the Communist. All the Communists, be they members or leaders, have been the most real and the most authentic Armenians during the entire 70 year period of Armenia's development [and] the construction of its national character."² Even the anti-Communist nationalist leader, Vazgen Manukian, agreed with this point. In a speech during a 1995 visit to the United States, he said that communism was buried in Armenia long before the July 1995 parliamentary elections (which ousted the last remnants of delegates elected under Soviet rule). He then explained that the leadership in Soviet Armenia knew how to successfully "Armenianize" communism by applying it to the Armenian character.³

By 1988, Armenians had a clearly articulated and strong sense of national identity.⁴ Armenian nationalism was linked to and expressed through culture, historiography, architecture, demographic trends, and other seemingly benign forms. It was clear who belonged to the nation: those who were *ethnically* Armenian—wherever they lived. It was a blood-based definition, incorporating within it, at least partially, linguistic and religious characteristics. The threat of survival came from "The Turk." Anti-Turkishness was rooted in the official Soviet view, popular culture, and sense of history. Importantly, *Turk* and *Azeri* were used interchangeably by the Armenians. In general, Armenians were not anti-Russian, although there emerged an anti-Russian phase in the nationalist movement between 1989 and 1990.⁵ Most Armenians had internalized the view that Russia was indispensable to the survival of the country for security reasons. The "quiet nationalism" in Soviet Armenia envisioned the nation to be the ethnic group.

But it also had a powerful territorial component to it, either in the form of land claims or desire for autonomy.⁶ The boundaries of the Armenian SSR were clear-cut, but they were not acceptable to many Armenians. The most immediate concern was Nagorno-Karabakh, the predominantly Armenian enclave in Azerbaijan. There was also Nakhichevan (in Azerbaijan as well), the Javakheti region (in Georgia), and, of course, western Armenia (the "lost lands" in Turkey). The Armenians could not raise some national issues without incurring the wrath of Moscow. If "cultural" nationalism was permitted, territorial demands against other Soviet republics were strictly "off limits." Soviet Armenian authorities, therefore, did not raise the issue of land claims, at least officially, on these territories.⁷ But they were not forgotten, particularly Karabakh.

1988–91: The Storm Begins

The “quiet nationalism” became a very loud explosion on February 20, 1988, when the local Soviet of the Nagorno-Karabakh Oblast voted to request its transfer from the Azerbaijani SSR to the Armenian SSR. This unleashed pent-up frustrations and led to the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, which mostly involved the territorial dispute over Karabakh. The politics of nationalism dominated the Armenian political process between 1988 and early 1992. All other considerations were subjected to the logic of “national interests” and the struggle for Karabakh.

Using Mikhail Gorbachev’s reforms as their basis, and the slogans of glasnost and perestroika, Armenian protestors, one million strong, demanded the unification of the Karabakh Oblast to their republic. This first wave of nationalism was *not* anti-Soviet or anti-Russian. It did not at all advocate independence. It simply sought to redress a perceived historical injustice and demanded the change of boundaries within the USSR. In the absence of a favorable response from central authorities, and due to the emergence of a non-Communist leadership within the movement, the scope of the demonstrations widened. More general and radical issues were incorporated (democratization, corruption, environmental degradation and other social problems) as part of the nationalist demands. Then the legitimacy of Soviet rule began to be questioned, the nationalist leadership started to vie for political power, and demands for autonomy and eventually independence were articulated—all within a period of two years. In August 1990, the nationalist counterelite assumed power and issued a Declaration *on* Independence, outlining Armenia’s *intention* to secede from the USSR.⁸

The Emergence of Nationalist Organizations

Organizationally, a loose “Karabakh Committee” emerged to guide and coordinate the movement. Some of the early pro-Communist popular leaders and spokespersons (Igor Muradian, Zori Balayan, Sylva Kaputikian, etc.) were pushed aside, and a group of mostly non- or anti-Communist intellectuals (Vazgen Manukian, Rafael Ghazarian, Levon Ter-Petrosian, Babken Ararktsian, Vano Siradeghian, etc.) took over. In the fall of 1988, the committee reorganized itself into the Hayots Hamazgayin Sharjum (Armenian Pan-National Movement [ANM]). Its leaders were arrested in December 1988, during the chaotic weeks after the devastating earthquake

in northern Armenia. Released six months later, they returned to Yerevan as heroes. Between 1990 and 1998, the ANM was the ruling political force in Armenia, with its candidate, Levon Ter-Petrosian, the president of the republic.

In addition to the ANM, two other parties had strong nationalist credentials and were factors in the movement. The first was Paruir Hairikian's *Azgayin Inknoroshum Miavorum* (National Self-Determination Union), which had its roots in the late 1960s anti-Soviet dissidentism. Hairikian had spent many years in Soviet jails for demanding independence for Armenia. Even though he always remained consistent with his demands for self-determination, his party never caught the imagination of the masses. Hairikian came to be known as "Mr. 5 percent" for consistently polling in the range of 5 percent during elections. In 1988, when the "mainstream" nationalists were not yet advocating independence, Hairikian was publishing pamphlet after pamphlet calling for Armenia's secession from the USSR.⁹ This enabled him to maintain that he had always been "ahead of the times."¹⁰

The other important party was the main diaspora-based *Hai Heghapokhakan Dashnaksutiun* (Armenian Revolutionary Federation [ARF or Dashnak]).¹¹ The ARF did not have a presence in Armenia until August 1990, when it formally registered in the country with much fanfare. It was not, therefore, involved in the nationalist mobilization. However, the party had great symbolic value, as the "vanguard" of Armenians' anti-Turkish and anti-Soviet struggle for national rights. It embodied the idea of independence and the "national cause"—including land claims.

In truth, the ARF was no more than a paper tiger. It had long dropped its sharp anti-Soviet stand and in fact came out against the mass protests and work stoppages in 1988. Nevertheless, many people in Soviet Armenia believed in the party's mythical strength and took its nationalistic rhetoric to heart. Forbidden ARF symbols (including the tricolor flag of the 1918–20 independent republic), past heroes, and (revolutionary) songs and literature provided much of the visual and ideological basis of the nationalist movement between 1988 and 1990.¹² Because of this, in the words of one commentator, "the feelings of the people toward the Dashnaksutiun [ARF] in 1988–1989 had reached the level of religious reverence."¹³ Even Levon Ter-Petrosian, who banned the ARF in December 1994, had earlier said that "if in 1988 the ARF had embraced the Armenian National Movement which had come into being on the [basis of an] ideol-

ogy of independence [*an ex post facto assessment*—R.P.], it is highly probable that the Movement would have become assimilated into the ARF. . . . But the Dashnaktsutium did not do that, and rejected us.”¹⁴ Despite the symbolic link between the ARF and the nationalist movement in Armenia, the relationship between them was problematic largely due to the ARF’s incapability to come to terms with the indigenous Yerevan-based leadership of the ANM and its brand of pro-independence nationalism. From 1988 to 1998, relations between the two organizations were almost always adversarial.¹⁵

Nationalism in the Streets

The nationalist movement initially took the form of demonstrations in Yerevan. Up to a million people marched through the streets of the capital in the first week of the protests in February 1988. These were peaceful and orderly events, and they imbued a tremendous sense of solidarity among the participants and the entire nation. Everyone who took part in them spoke of a magical sense of unity and purpose.¹⁶ The slogans were in line with glasnost and perestroika, with portraits of Gorbachev being paraded. People were not demonstrating against the USSR, or against Azerbaijan, but in favor of Karabakh’s unification with Armenia, in the firm belief that justice was on their side and that the central authorities in Moscow would eventually redress past wrongs. The central stage of the demonstrations was Opera Square (eventually renamed Freedom Square), where various unofficial publications with nationalist themes were widely circulated.

As the months passed, it became obvious that Moscow was not going to solve the problem in favor of the Armenians. Even worse, central authorities denounced the Armenian protestors as “extremists” and “hooligans.” Consequently, the demonstrators became more radical in their demands. Anti-Communist sentiments were expressed, Gorbachev was denounced, and forbidden nationalist symbols began to emerge. The means were radicalized as well, with mass work stoppages and hunger strikes becoming common.¹⁷ To the credit of the Armenians, riots and anti-Azerbaijani pogroms did not take place in Yerevan or other Armenian cities, even though anti-Armenian pogroms had taken place in Azerbaijan.

This is not to say that all was well for the Azerbaijanis in Armenia. In late 1988, the entire Azerbaijani population (including Muslim Kurds)—some 167,000 people—was kicked out of the Armenian SSR. In the process, dozens of people died due to isolated Armenian attacks and adverse condi-

tions. This population transfer was partially in response to Armenians being forced out of Azerbaijan, but it was also the last phase of the gradual homogenization of the republic under Soviet rule. The population transfer was the latest, and not so “gentle,” episode of ethnic cleansing that increased Armenia’s homogenization from 90 percent to 98 percent.¹⁸ Nationalists, in collaboration with the Armenian state authorities, were responsible for this exodus. In addition, there were armed skirmishes between Azerbaijanis and Armenians in and around Karabakh, as well as at various border points (with scores of casualties). During this period, volunteer militias were formed by nationalists who went to defend Armenian villages in the Oblast and at the Azerbaijani border.¹⁹ From the summer of 1988 onward, armed skirmishes became common, as central authorities were unable to stop them. Two years later, Gorbachev threatened to declare martial law in Armenia if these militias (most notably the so-called Armenian National Army) were not brought under control. Soon after he was elected chairman of the Armenian Supreme Soviet in August 1990, Levon Ter-Petrosian managed to assert some degree of authority over the militias.

In short, the nationalist movement in Armenia started in the form of peaceful demonstrations in solidarity with Karabakh Armenians. But in the absence of a favorable solution, Armenian nationalism was radicalized. Anti-Soviet sentiments emerged, and anti-Azerbaijani feelings were further entrenched. Initially, violence crept in in the form of the murder of Azerbaijanis in Armenia and border skirmishes. Eventually, violence escalated to a full-scale but undeclared war between Armenians and Azerbaijanis in and around Karabakh (i.e., within Azerbaijan).

The mass movement from below, with its alternative and non-Communist leadership, put the Communist Party of Armenia in a very difficult position. First Secretary Karen Demirchian was dismissed in May 1988, and Suren Harutiunian was appointed in his place. Harutiunian tried to appease the protestors by allowing certain freedoms and legalizing nationalist symbols such as the tricolor flag. He sought to bridge the gap between Moscow and the protestors on the streets. His basic approach was that national demands could and should be met through existing Communist structures. But it was increasingly clear to Armenians that as long as the ultimate decision lay in Gorbachev’s Kremlin, their demands would not be met.²⁰

In conclusion, four out of the five variants of nationalism mentioned in Lowell Barrington’s introductory chapter applied to Armenian nationalism at the eve of the country’s declaration of independence. First, there was a

claim to *external territory* (the Karabakh Oblast). Second, Armenian nationalism was a response to *threats of territorial control* insofar as it was challenging Azerbaijani control over the enclave and demanding autonomy from Moscow. Third, the Karabakh movement was clearly driven by *the desire to protect co-nationals* in the Oblast. And, finally, the overarching characteristic of Armenian nationalism was *ethnic nation-protecting*. The only variant that did not apply was nationalism as civic nation-building; there was a strong democratization current between the summer of 1988 and 1991, but this was not about “nation-building” per se since it took the ethnic nation as its basis. At the time of independence, Armenian politics was almost exclusively based on national(ist) goals and interests. This trend—and the nationalism variants mentioned in the preceding—continued into the early postindependence period before giving way to postnationalist, “normal” politics.

1991–2001: The Emergence of Postnationalist Politics

Armenia’s declaration of independence from the Soviet Union came after the failed August coup in Moscow, and it was solidified by the results of the September 21, 1991, referendum (which was scheduled in March to take place in September, i.e., it was planned before the coup attempt). Voter turnout was 95 percent, and the vote in favor of secession was 99 percent.²¹ Although declared in September, Armenia’s independence was not recognized by the international community until late December 1991, once the USSR had formally expired.

Soon after independence, it became clear that the unity around nationalist goals was indeed very fragile. As early as 1991, clearly visible tensions emerged within the elite of the ANM. Prime Minister Vazgen Manukian, one of the key founding members of the organization, and generally considered its ideologue, split from the party just before the 1991 presidential elections and formed the National Democratic Union (NDU). He agreed in 1992 to return and serve in the ANM government as defense minister until the summer of 1993, but he then resigned and became one of the fiercest opponents of Ter-Petrosian.²² Another founding member, Ashot Manucharian, also quit the ANM and joined the ranks of the opposition.

The sharpest political battle up to 1996 was between the ANM and the ARF. The two organizations were at odds with one another from the very beginning of the nationalist movement. They disagreed over such funda-

mental issues as Armenia's independence, the direction of its foreign relations, the meaning of the Armenian Cause, the solution to the Karabakh conflict, the political and economic system that the country should adopt, and the diaspora's role.²³ These disagreements were manifested through drastic political measures. For example, when Dashnaks began to agitate for a coalition government in 1992, despite their disastrous performance in the 1991 presidential election,²⁴ Ter-Petrosian responded by expelling the leader of the party, the Athens-based Hrair Marukhian, from Armenia. As antagonisms sharpened, the most severe blow to the ARF came when Ter-Petrosian banned the organization and its press outright in December 1994, accusing it of assassinations, terrorist activities, drug trafficking, and attempts to destabilize the ANM government. The ARF remained officially banned because it was considered a "foreign organization." A dozen or so of its prominent members, as well as others, were jailed, with charges ranging from the possession of false documents to murder. The ARF was relegalized by Robert Kocharian, and most of its members released from prison, after Ter-Petrosian's forced resignation in February 1998.

Even though there were clear ideological and policy differences between the ANM and the ARF, their struggle was really about power and arrogance, and it was indicative of what was to replace the politics of nationalism of the 1988–92 period. It became clear between 1994 and 1995 that a shift had indeed taken place that led to "postnationalist" politics insofar as (1) the predominant goal in inraelite competition focused exclusively on obtaining or maintaining power, rather than "national interests," and (2) the main issues around which people mobilized related to social problems, economic crisis, corruption, and the impunity of the leadership; nationalism became, at best, a prism through which other issues were often expressed. At this point, nationalist symbols and rhetoric began to be *used* for political advancement rather than being the *basis* of political activity.

By using the term *postnationalist politics* in contrast to the politics of nationalism, I am not at all suggesting some sort of approval or disapproval, or implying a dichotomy of democratic/nondemocratic or good/bad. Postnationalist politics is about "everyday" politics, and it is about power and the administration of society (and in the post-Soviet setting, personal gain). In this sense, it is "normal" politics, as extraordinary or as corrupt as some of its means actually are. Political processes based exclusively or primarily on nationalist considerations, similar to revolutions, are not part of the "normal" politics because day-to-day (mundane)

considerations are suspended or they are made subservient to the nationalist “logic.”

The mass nationalist movement put “everyday” politics on the back burner in Armenia between 1988 and 1992. When normal politics began to reemerge soon after independence, it was kept in check due to the Karabakh war. During the first three years of independence, Armenia suffered the hardships resulting from the dual crisis of near total economic collapse and war with Azerbaijan (including the initially devastating economic blockade imposed by Azerbaijan and Turkey). National solidarity was maintained, people retained their resolve and hope, and nationalism remained the dominant paradigm of politics in the face of war over Karabakh, despite the many political tensions and divisions. Once the war ended (victoriously for the Armenians) and a cease-fire was signed in May 1994, political disagreements led to the fragmentation of national solidarity. Nationalism lost its unifying force and became a political tool.

Elections and the Intensification of Postnationalist Politics

The clearest way to demonstrate the victory of postnationalist politics over the politics of nationalism (and the latter’s instrumentalization) is to analyze the 1996 presidential election,²⁵ the most important political event in between 1991 and the parliamentary assassinations of October 27, 1999. But, before I examine the presidential election, it is important first to mention briefly the 1995 parliamentary election; this was the precursor to the 1996 vote. The election was far from “clean.” It was manipulated to ensure that the ANM and its supporters won enough seats to control the chamber. Simultaneous to the National Assembly election, the new Armenian constitution was accepted in a referendum. Opposition parties cried foul, but they were powerless to stop both the passing of the constitution (by 68 percent of the vote) and the irregularities, which ensured the victory of pro-ANM candidates.²⁶ For the opposition, and most Armenians, the irregularities of the 1995 election became the prism through which they approached the 1996 presidential vote. By 1995, the politics of idealism already had given way to the politics of party interests and material gain.

The September 22, 1996, election signaled the end of the politics of nationalism and the emergence of “normal” or “ordinary” politics. Maintaining power was considered above all else, and it was justified, as always, as being in the “benefit” of the nation. More than a presidential vote, the election was seen as a referendum on Ter-Petrosian’s presidency. When

the campaign officially began on August 23, there were seven candidates: Ter-Petrosian and six opposition leaders. On September 10, twelve days before the election, four of the six candidates, plus the officially banned ARF, joined together and formed a united front—the National Unity Pact (NUP), headed by Vazgen Manukian.²⁷ The hitherto lackluster campaign became an intense two-horse race between Manukian and Ter-Petrosian, two men who had made their political careers as colleagues in the Karabakh movement. The Communist Party's Sergei Badalian was a distant third.

What united the opposition was not a common program or a similar ideology, but simply the desire to unseat Ter-Petrosian and the ANM. It was made up of ideologically unlikely allies—from the right-wing approach of Paruir Hairikian to the nationalist and socialist Dashnaks—all held under the precarious leadership of Vazgen Manukian. The NUP put forth a vague common program, which stressed social issues, and promised to dissolve the National Assembly and to hold new parliamentary elections, as well as to rewrite the constitution in order to reduce the powers of the president. Other promises included increasing wages tenfold. More specifically, the key issues raised by the opposition included:

Corruption in government (viz., using public office for personal gain).

Impunity of state officials and members of government (viz., being above the law due to connections). This was a widespread and highly visible problem.

The very obvious discrepancy of income between the new economic elite (with close government ties) and the overwhelming majority of the population.

Issues of social welfare and the terrible economic conditions of the people.

The destruction of the industrial and productive capacity of the country as a consequence of privatization (often labeled as *looting*), as well as the squandering of Armenia's intellectual and academic resources due to neglect.

And, related to the preceding, the mass exodus of the population from Armenia in order to seek work abroad.

Note that these key issues were not related to nationalism, the Karabakh war, independence, national rights, or any of the other key nationalist

issues. The election campaign centered on socioeconomic factors. The opposition capitalized on people's pent-up anger against the government and against Ter-Petrosian—who was blamed for all of the problems of the country and accused of only looking after his ANM cronies. The opposition leadership promised to put on trial those who had abused their office, and it promised “to clean house.”

The key issues stressed by Ter-Petrosian in his campaign were captured in his election slogan: “Victory, Stability, Progress.” The message was very clear: Yes, there are many problems, including corruption in government and difficult socioeconomic conditions. But there are no quick solutions, conditions are slowly improving, and the economy is growing. We should be realistic about our capabilities and resources. Look how well we have done in the past five years, given our difficult situation: we have won the war in Karabakh and provided some fundamental services, such as restoring a regular supply of electricity. People have more money to spend, and this is obvious with the number of new cars and cafes in Yerevan. A new middle class is emerging, and eventually all will benefit from this prosperity. Armenia is going forward, surely, securely, and with a cool head. We know what we are doing, and it is for the benefit of the country. The theme emphasized the most was stability and the dangers of “rocking the boat” in difficult conditions. The opposition was attacked for being a motley crew of adventurists who wanted power for its own sake, for making false promises, and for the guaranteed instability that would ensue if “extreme” nationalists like Vazgen Manukian came into power.

Despite the nonnationalist *issues*, almost the entire campaign, especially on the opposition side, was couched in the *terminology* and *imagery* of nationalism. The whole debate was put in terms such as *traitors*, *anti-nation* and *anti-Armenian*, *betrayers of national interests*, and so forth. Opposition leaders often said that the government was selling “national treasures” and the country's wealth to foreigners under the guise of privatization or that government leaders were “agents” of external powers under the guise of politicians and (diasporan) advisers. Of course, the same was said of the opposition by Ter-Petrosian supporters, as they accused the opposition of being “fascist,” “extreme nationalist,” and even taking money from Azerbaijani sources! Before the election, Vano Siradeghian of the ANM commented that whoever does not support the ANM is anti-Armenia. Both sides also used images from the nationalist movement of the past. The theme repeated most often by the opposition at its rallies was the similari-

ties between its campaign and the 1988 movement; it maintained that people should unite for the sake of the nation and for the sake of democracy. Ter-Petrosian posters carried images of the 1988 rallies and of the victorious war in Karabakh.

The malicious nature of the vocabulary employed by the opposition reached its peak immediately after the military crackdown on the opposition (discussed in the following). The statements are indicative of the passions roused. On September 25, Paruir Hairikian declared at a rally: "Today, it is being decided who is Armenian and who is anti-Armenian. Whoever is not with us today is not Armenian." At another point, in a rally on November 1, he went further, saying of the government, "not only are they not Armenian, they are not human." Another opposition figure, Samvel Harutiunian, claimed on September 25 that the Armenian government was not different from the rule of Abdul Hamid (the "Red Sultan" responsible for hundreds of thousands of massacred Armenians in the 1890s) and Kemal Ataturk. Others equated Ter-Petrosian to Talaat Pasha, the architect of the 1915 Genocide and the epitome of evil for the Armenians. Of course, the rhetoric of the progovernment and pro-ANM side did not fall too far behind.

The use of such vocabulary was an attempt to redefine the unifying nationalism of 1988–92 in a way that excluded political opponents. Nationalism was made contingent on narrow political interests; who was in the "nation"—that is, who is the "us" versus the "them"—was reduced to the sharp political divisions.²⁸ People did not necessarily believe that their opponents were not actually Armenian, but the discourse utilized to explain internal political antagonisms, which had nothing to do with "core" national issues, was based on nationalistic categories.

Following Ter-Petrosian's dubious "victory" with 51.75 percent of the vote in the first round of the election,²⁹ the NUP organized a series of mass rallies. The opposition was not willing to allow Ter-Petrosian and the ANM to get away with stealing the election as they had done in the 1995 parliamentary vote. On September 25, the largest of these rallies turned violent as the opposition crowd, led by *some* of the leaders of the NUP (e.g., Arshak Sadoyan and Kim Balayan), attacked the Armenian parliament building. An unprecedented recourse to extralegal and violent means to obtain political power was thus introduced into Armenian politics. Parts of the National Assembly were ransacked, and the speaker and his deputy were beaten and taken hostage for a few hours. The government responded with

a military crackdown: soldiers fired in the air, water cannons and tear gas were used on the night of the attack, and tanks and soldiers were stationed in the streets of Yerevan for weeks to come. Although the violence was limited, and there were no deaths, a taboo—that Armenians would not resort to violence against one another for political purposes—was broken on September 25, 1996. Power politics, in its brutal form, had clearly replaced national solidarity and nationalist goals, once considered “above” narrow political interests.

From Ter-Petrosian to Kocharian

Ter-Petrosian attempted to normalize Armenian politics between 1996 and 1998. His primary goals were to regain some legitimacy for his rule and, directly related to this, to improve the economic situation of the country. He appointed Armen Sarkissian as prime minister in November 1996, giving him a “*carte blanche*” to govern Armenia. Sarkissian, Armenia’s ambassador to the United Kingdom, was a popular choice because of his clean image, his international connections, and his status as an “outsider” to the tarnished political process in Yerevan. However, Sarkissian had to resign within four months due to ill health.

In March 1997, Ter-Petrosian appointed Robert Kocharian, the president of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, as prime minister of Armenia. This surprised many Armenians, but Kocharian’s appointment was welcomed as well. Being from Nagorno-Karabakh, he too was an “outsider” to the Yerevan scene. Whatever he lacked in terms of administrative experience, he made up for in terms of impeccable credentials as a war hero, although the political logic in Armenia at that point was that Kocharian’s long-term success or failure was to be determined by his ability to deliver the “economic goods.”

Kocharian’s appointment proved to be Ter-Petrosian’s undoing. Part of the latter’s calculation in appointing Kocharian to a high office in Yerevan seemed to be related to his desire to negotiate a permanent peace settlement with Azerbaijan. Hence, it would have been useful to have Karabakh’s popular leader as part of the team that would sign a potential peace agreement. The job of “selling” an accord with Azerbaijan—clearly based on compromises—to the Armenians of both Armenia and Karabakh would be easier if Kocharian, the prominent Karabakh leader, was backing it as prime minister. This calculation, however, backfired on Ter-Petrosian.

Kocharian was unwilling to compromise on Karabakh and astute enough to orchestrate the removal of Ter-Petrosian from office.

Ter-Petrosian was forced to resign in February 1998, less than a year after Kocharian's appointment. The intraelite power struggles, combined with the "core" nationalist issue of Nagorno-Karabakh, was a potent mix. Although politics had ceased to be about nationalism, compromise on Karabakh was still a potential pitfall for any politician, especially one whose legitimacy was so severely questioned. The pressure on Ter-Petrosian came from within the political elite and, more important, from within his own entourage: Kocharian, Interior Minister Serge Sargsian (from Karabakh as well), and the "kingmaker," Defense Minister Vazgen Sargsian (not related to Serge). It was made clear that neither the army nor the interior ministry troops would bail out Ter-Petrosian this time. Sensing which way the mood of the top officials had swung, the majority of the parliamentarians—former supporters of Ter-Petrosian—turned against him as well. With not much of a support base, the president had no choice but to resign.³⁰

It is important to note that the pressure on Ter-Petrosian did not come from a mass movement, although most Armenians were happy to see him go. He resigned due to "palace intrigues" that were aptly labeled "a velvet coup." Nevertheless, the events that forced him to leave office were precipitated over, and justified by, considerations of Karabakh's well-being—in other words, the most fundamental nationalist issue. The president's opponents claimed that he was getting ready "to sell out" Karabakh by agreeing to a permanent peace accord that would have left the enclave in official Azerbaijani jurisdiction.³¹ Although nationalism was no longer central in Armenian politics, it was both the reason and the instrument for some elites to dislodge Ter-Petrosian and his ANM supporters. No one doubted Kocharian's (and some of his supporters') total commitment to the enclave's security. But it is also clear that, to an important extent, the Karabakh issue was instrumentalized and nationalism *used* to legitimate a fundamental political change.

In March 1998, presidential elections were held once again. The main race was between Robert Kocharian and Karen Demirchian, the former first secretary of the Armenian SSR (1974–88), who emerged—rather suddenly and surprisingly—out of political retirement. Kocharian won the election in the second round, with close to 60 percent of the vote. Once

again, the main election issues were not related to nationalism (e.g., Karabakh) but socioeconomic considerations. Demirchian was running a populist campaign, based on the nostalgia of the “Soviet days of plenty.” The election did not rouse much passion.

A significant outcome of the 1998 election—and affirmed by the May 1999 parliamentary election—was the almost complete disappearance of the ANM from the Armenian political landscape. It did not place a candidate in the presidential race, and in the parliamentary election it received only 1.17 percent of the vote. Its chairman, Vano Siradeghian (formerly a high-ranking ANM minister), was the only ANM member elected to the National Assembly through the majoritarian system.³² This election provided further evidence of the end of nationalist politics based on the popular movement of 1988.

Vazgen Manukian and his organization ceased to be a major political force as well. As the mirror image of Ter-Petrosian, Manukian’s presence at the center of Armenian politics no longer made sense. He ran as a presidential candidate in 1998 but came in third with 12 percent of the vote in the first round. In general, Dashnaks supported Kocharian (the ARF was relegalized by Kocharian in February 1998), but the ARF too became a “normal” party, with limited participation in the government and having dropped a good part of its nationalist discourse.

October 1999: The Death of Vazgen Sargsian and of Armenian Nationalist Politics

The last of the nationalist politicians who remained a prominent figure in the Armenian government was Vazgen Sargsian.³³ He was the defense minister in both the Ter-Petrosian and Kocharian administrations. A man of tremendous power and charisma, he was also known for his brutality, temper, and nonchalant attitude toward the law. On the one hand, he embodied Armenian nationalism in his words and deeds; on the other, he was, par excellence, the master at the game of power politics. After the Republican Party, which he had come to patronize, in alliance with Karen Demirchian’s People’s Party,³⁴ won the most seats in the National Assembly (63 out of 131), Sargsian was appointed prime minister in June 1999. His combination of everyday political concerns with the discourse of nationalism is clear in the following toast-speech:

Our fate is in our hands. Let us not blame anyone for our failure. So let us drink to this country, the country which we had dreamt about in

1988. If in 1988, at the Square, when we were demanding the freedom of Artsakh, and Armenia's independence, and the unity of Armenians, a prophet had appeared and said that in seven to eight years Armenia is to be independent, Artsakh is to be independent and liberated, Artsakh is to be with Armenia, but because of this you are to have difficult social conditions, not enough sausages, less gas, less water, would you agree to this? We would all have responded: yes! So now Armenia is independent, Artsakh is independent, and together [with Armenia], and recognized by the world [*sic*]. So what's wrong? All that has remained is the lack of sausages? We can overcome this too, and there will be plenty of sausages!³⁵

A month after this speech, on October 27, 1999, Sargsian was assassinated in the National Assembly, along with Demirchian (the speaker of parliament) and six other deputies. The murderers, led by Nairi Hunanian, were extreme nationalists who were hoping that their act would instigate a popular uprising. They referred to the Armenian leadership as the "blood-suckers" of the nation and in their statement declared, "Under our very eyes, during several years, our country was being tormented and turned into a country that's being left by everybody. . . . Everything that happened [in the National Assembly] was provoked by our filial desire to protect our homeland from final destruction and to recover the infringed rights of the nation."³⁶ But there was no mass uprising, no nationalist fervor in favor or against the terrorists. Armenians were shocked that such a thing could happen but remained mostly passive. Ironically, it took an extremely violent act, in the name of the nation, to finish the process in Armenia of the transformation from the politics of nationalism to normal politics.

The shootings were both symbolic of the death of nationalism, and its literal death—killing the last significant nationalist politician whose commitment to Karabakh *and* Armenia—was not doubted by anyone. Prior to the parliamentary election of 1999, a new, overtly nationalist force had emerged under the leadership of Vazgen Sargsian. This organization, the Yerkrpah Union of War Veterans,³⁷ was directly tied to the Karabakh *war* rather than the movement. Essentially an organization of soldiers, with limited intellectual leadership (unlike the early ANM and other parties), the Yerkrpah has been militant in its views on national issues and Karabakh. Yerkrpah members failed to generate a mass support base, and their input in politics after Sargsian's death decreased considerably.

Kocharian's skillful manipulation to diffuse the threat posed by the Yerkrpahs, and the latter's incapacity to see politics as anything more than a power struggle against the president, meant that their brand of fierce nationalism has not taken root beyond their limited constituency of people directly related to the war against Azerbaijan. Moreover, the Yerkrpah Union of War Veterans has fragmented into various camps loyal to, neutral to, or against President Kocharian.

Thus, by the end of 2000 and beginning of 2001, there was no longer a nationalist political force in Armenia of any significance. There were nationalist individuals, parties, and a president and defense minister (Serge Sargsian) who were unlikely to compromise much on Karabakh. But the dominant political discourse was no longer about nationalist issues, and no leading individuals or organizations were willing to subsume their interests for the sake of nationalism. The postnationalist mood was epitomized by Kocharian's appointment in May 2000 of Andranik Margarian of the Republican Party as the new prime minister. Once an "extreme" nationalist with "Nzhdehian" views,³⁸ he and his party nevertheless supported Ter-Petrosian because it was beneficial for the Republican Party to be close to the center of power. Upon Ter-Petrosian's resignation, the Republican Party supported Kocharian. As prime minister, Margarian has been preoccupied neither with ideological concerns nor with nationalist issues. His main task has been to maintain political power and to deal with the everyday issues of running the country and benefiting his supporters. In other words, he has been a perfectly "normal" politician driven by pragmatic issues.

Conclusion

The case of Armenia demonstrates that nationalism is a complex ideology and political phenomenon. It does not emerge or disappear suddenly. It can coexist with other ideologies, and of course, it is quite compatible with power politics. The years between 1988 and 2001 can be divided into two periods in Armenia, based on the balance between nationalist politics and "normal" politics. The 1988–92 period was clearly in favor of the nationalist side of the scale—with all other interests being subordinated for the sake of the nation. After 1992, the balance began to shift, and "normal" politics, preoccupied with power and specific interests, started to become more and more prominent. After the 1994 cease-fire with Azerbaijan, the causal fac-

tor of the “external threat” weakened significantly. There was no longer an explicit nationalist project to prevent the victory of postnationalist politics.

Nationalist considerations did not die out completely. They were behind Ter-Petrosian’s resignation in early 1998. However, the assassination of Vazgen Sargsian, Karen Demirchian, and the six other parliamentarians was the final blow, killing the spirit of nationalism aroused in 1988. The *politics* of nationalism had arguably died much earlier, with the 1996 presidential election. October 27, 1999, will be remembered by Armenians as day when the *dreams* of the nationalism of 1988 and 1991 were assassinated as well—ironically by someone who claimed that he wanted to resuscitate those dreams.

In 2002, for better or worse, a period of postnationalist, “normal” politics has been solidified in Armenia. Party and individual interests dominate the political landscape and power politics drives Yerevan. The economy is the declared main concern of all in government, but as elsewhere, everyone wants to hold onto his (or her) position for as long as possible. This, after all, is the best guarantee for economic well-being for the holder of the position.

I am not suggesting that Armenian nationalism has disappeared entirely from the political scene. Armenians, on the whole, remain profoundly committed to their country and people. But this drive is no longer manifested in their politics. A major crisis, another war, or too much compromise on the Karabakh issue could, for example, once again rekindle passions and lead to the politics of nationalism. But this is an unlikely scenario for the time being. In the foreseeable future, politics in Armenia will remain “normal,” mundane, and nonnationalist. Nationalism will be used in imagery to justify the power of certain individuals, but it will not be the driving force of the system.

NOTES

I would like to thank Dr. Ara Sanjian for his helpful suggestions on this chapter.

1. Karen Demirchian, interview with author, Yerevan, December 3, 1997.
2. Karlen Dallakian, *Hushapatum* (Memoir) (Yerevan: n.p., 1999), 6–7. All translations from Armenian sources are the author’s.
3. As reported in *Armenian Reporter International* (New York), November 11, 1995, 10. Similar sentiments and views were expressed to me during various interviews I conducted during my research in Yerevan. Some examples from November 1996 interviews include Vazgen Manukian, who elaborated on the above-mentioned point: the postwar generation of Communist leaders “were pragmatic people. They did not share Communist ideology so deeply—they were not Khanchians or Miasnikians [i.e., the first generation of leaders]. They did not feel a contradiction between the national

and the Communist.” Sergei Badalian and Tital Tavrishian (of the Communist Party) naturally lionized the role of the Communists in nation-building but without giving too much credit to the actual leaders, especially Demirchian. Razmik Davoyan, a poet with Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) sympathies, said that despite the awful system, in the past twenty to thirty years “leaders realized that Soviet ideology was a veil . . . underneath which national culture and values were being built.” In addition to the elite, there was almost universal appraisal of Demirchian, and before him Kochinian, as “nation-builders” among the general populace.

4. For further analysis of Armenian nationalism under Soviet rule, see Vahakn Dadrian, “Nationalism in Soviet Armenia: A Case Study of Ethnocentrism,” in *Nationalism in the USSR and Eastern Europe*, ed. George Simmonds (Detroit: University of Detroit Press, 1977); Ronald Suny, *Looking toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); and Razmik Panossian, “The Evolution of Multilocal National Identity and the Contemporary Politics of Nationalism: Armenia and Its Diaspora” (Ph.D. dissertation, London School of Economics and Political Science, 2000).

5. The clearest articulation of this view is found in Rafayel Ishkhanian, *Yerrorrduzhi patsarman orenke* (The Law of Excluding the Third Force) (Yerevan: Azat Khosk, 1991), 49–73, 128–35 (a collection of essays from 1988 to 1990); and in Vazgen Manukian, “It Is Time to Jump off the Train,” in *Armenia at the Crossroads*, ed. Gerard Libaridian (Watertown: Blue Crane Books, 1991), 51–86 (originally published in Armenia in May–June 1990).

6. The territorial demands of Armenian nationalism were expressed forcefully in April 1965 when thousands of protesters marched in Yerevan on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Genocide, shouting, “Our Lands! Our Lands!” After 1965, the Soviet regime allowed Armenians more freedoms to express “officially” sanctioned ethnocultural nationalism; the Soviets calculated that this would deflect attention from nationalist issues related to independence and territorial claims.

7. In the context of post–World War II geopolitical posturing, Stalin demanded the historical Armenian territories of Kars and Ardahan from Turkey between 1945 and 1948. Of course, the Armenian leadership fully supported these claims. The demands came to naught, and they were formally withdrawn in 1953 after Stalin’s death.

8. The best source on the early stages of the Karabakh movement (based on an eyewitness account) is Mark Malkasian, “*Gha-ra-bagh!*” *The Emergence of the National Democratic Movement in Armenia* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996). Two studies that explore the links between identity and the nationalist movement are Nora Dudwick, “Memory, Identity and Politics in Armenia” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1994); and Stephanie Platz, “Pasts and Futures: Space, History, and Armenian Identity, 1988–1994” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1996). See also Michael Croissant, *The Armenian-Azerbaijan Conflict: Causes and Implications* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998); and Levon Chorbajian, ed., *The Making of Nagorno-Karabagh: From Secession to Republic* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001).

9. Some of these hard to find “samizdats” include the weekly newsletter called *Ankakhutiun* (Independence), which Hairikian began to publish in October 1987. He also published the journal-like monthly called *Hairenik* (Fatherland) from May 1988 onward. These were printed and sold illegally, although the “price” of being caught no longer entailed imprisonment, especially after February 1988. Other pro-independence

organizations were also established at this point (e.g., National Independence Party of Armenia), but they were mostly short-lived and insignificant.

10. Interview with author, August 20, 1996.

11. The ARF is one of the “historical” Armenian political parties. It was founded in Tiflis (Tbilisi) in 1890. It became an exclusively diasporan organization after the elimination of the Armenians in the 1915 Ottoman genocide in western Armenia and the sovietization of eastern Armenia in 1920.

12. The samizdat literature is full of ARF slogans, images, and biographies of its heroes. One ARF figure from the first half of the century, Garegin Nzhdeh, was particularly revered and written about. Nzhdeh was a staunch nationalist, to the point of being kicked out of the ARF in 1937 for his extremism, racist views, and sympathy for fascism. He was captured by Soviet troops in 1945 in Bulgaria and perished in 1954 as a prisoner in the USSR. The ARF rehabilitated Nzhdeh in the 1960s. Two other diaspora-based parties established themselves in Armenia in the summer of 1990: the liberal Ramkavar party and the socialist Hnchak party. These organizations did not have any significant impact on Armenian nationalism or politics.

13. S. Melik-Hakobian, “Establishment of the Second Republic of Armenia and the Dashnaksutiun (ARF),” *Nor Gyank* (New Life), November 28, 1996, 51.

14. As quoted in *ibid.* Original quote comes from *Nor Gyank*, October 3, 1992.

15. I have analyzed the ARF-ANM relationship elsewhere, and in the context of Armenia-diaspora relations. See Razmik Panossian, “The Diaspora and the Karabagh Movement: Oppositional Politics between the Armenian Revolutionary Federation and the Armenian National Movement,” in *The Making of Nagorno-Karabagh: From Secession to Republic*, ed. Levon Chorbajian (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001). See also Razmik Panossian, “Between Ambivalence and Intrusion: Politics and Identity in Armenia-Diaspora Relations,” *Diaspora* 7, no. 2 (fall 1998) (particularly pp. 165–75).

16. Dudwick makes this point quite clearly in her study. For example, she examines the protests as a form of “communion” (p. 180) and as “rituals of purification” (p. 195ff.); see Nora Dudwick, “Memory, Identity and Politics in Armenia,” particularly chapter 4, 144–98. See also Nora Dudwick, “Armenia: The Nation Awakens,” in *Nations and Politics in the Soviet Successor States*, ed. Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 275–76; and Malkasian, “*Gha-ra-bagh!*” 35, 43, 47.

17. Malkasian, “*Gha-ra-bagh!*” 95ff.

18. Generally, this homogenization process is seen as a positive development in Armenia. As one intellectual—who was not even a nationalist politician—put it, “One benefit of this war [over Karabakh], despite its many hardships, is that Armenia was cleaned [or cleansed] of this weed [i.e., of Azerbaijanis].” Gurgen Geghamian, an economist at Academy of Sciences, interview with author, November 28, 1997.

19. See, Malkasian, “*Gha-ra-bagh!*” 143–47. Throughout his book, he speaks of other skirmishes in 1988.

20. For example, Yegor Ligachev declared in Baku (in May 1988) that Karabakh’s unification with Armenia was a closed issue—that is, it was not going to take place. See Malkasian, “*Gha-ra-bagh!*” 82.

21. Joseph Masih and Robert Krikorian, *Armenia: At the Crossroads* (Amsterdam: Harwood, 1999), 34.

22. The main difference between Manukian and Ter-Petrosian lies in their attitudes toward the relationship between politics and nationalism. According to Manukian, the

uniqueness of the nation must be the basis of its politics, whereas Ter-Petrosian would reject this “national ideology” as false and insist that Armenia is like any other nation (Vazgen Manukian, interview with author, November 2, 1996).

23. For further elaboration see Panossian, “The Diaspora and the Karabagh Movement.” Some of the key articles in the ARF organ *Droshak* (Banner) (published in Athens) before Armenia’s independence set the tone of the oppositional politics to come; see, for example, July 5, 1989, 6–11; November 22, 1989, 7–12; January 16, 1991, 3–14; June 19, 1991, 10–12; and August 14, 1991, 2.

24. The first direct election for the position of president took place in October 1991, during the euphoria of independence. Ter-Petrosian won with 83 percent of the vote. Paruir Hairikian polled at 8 percent, and the ARF candidate, popular actor Sos Sargsian, was humiliated with less than 5 percent of the vote. This was a major blow to the (self-) image of the ARF as the “vanguard” of the nation. Ter-Petrosian’s victory was also a victory for the ANM, which consolidated its control over the political process in Armenia.

25. As far as I am aware, no systematic analysis of the 1996 election has yet been published in the academic press. The discussion that follows is based on my own research notes and interviews in Armenia before, during, and after the election.

26. Some of the irregularities were noted by international observers, although the overall results of the election were not dismissed. *Armenia: Assessment and Observations on the 5 July Elections by the United Kingdom Observers Attached to the UN/OSCE Joint Operation* (London: Electoral Reform Society, July 1995).

27. The National Unity Pact was composed of five organizations: National Democratic Union (led by Vazgen Manukian), Union for National Self-Determination (led by Paruir Hairikian), Democratic Party of Armenia (led by Aram Sargsian [not related to Vazgen Sargsian]), Artsakh-Hayastan union (led by Lenser Aghalovian), and Armenian Revolutionary Federation (led by its central committee in Armenia). Two opposition parties did not join the NUP: Ashot Manucharian and Rafael Ghazarian’s Scientific Industrial Union and the Communist Party of Armenia (led by Sergei Badalian).

28. This sentiment was also echoed in the views of ordinary citizens. One lamented that “this was ‘our’ city, now it is ‘their’ city. We no longer belong to this country.”

29. Ter-Petrosian cleared the 50 percent mark (to avoid a second round of voting) by approximately twenty thousand ballots. This was almost exactly the number of ballots missing in the final count. For a report on the election, see International Foundation for Election Systems, “Technical Assessment, Armenian Presidential Election” (Washington, DC, October 8, 1996).

30. For an interpretation of the crisis sympathetic to Ter-Petrosian, see Gerard Libaridian, *The Challenge of Statehood: Armenian Political Thinking since Independence* (Watertown, MA: Blue Crane Books, 1999), particularly chapter 2.

31. Ter-Petrosian laid out his position on Karabakh to the Armenian public in the autumn of 1997. He called for a “public debate” on the issue, but he was severely criticized by many (opposition) commentators for “giving in.” His key ministers and the leadership in Karabakh also made it clear that they did not approve of his compromises. The first of his pronouncements was in the form of a lengthy press conference; the second, in the form of an article. See Levon Ter-Petrosian, “Hajord serundneri gaghaparakhosutiune petk e lini mer petakanutian amrapndume” (The Ideology of the Next Generation Must Be the Strengthening of Our Statehood), *Hayastani Hanrapetutium* (Republic of Armenia) 187 (September 27, 1997): 1–3; and Levon Ter-Petrosian, “Pat-

erazm, te khaghaghutiun? Lrjanalu Pahe” (War or Peace? The Moment to Get Serious), *Hayastani Hanrapetutiun* 212 (November 1, 1997): 1–2.

32. Siradeghian is currently a fugitive who has fled Armenia. He is implicated in the murder of opponents—that is, for ordering the killings as interior minister.

33. This is not to suggest that President Kocharian is not a nationalist. He certainly is. But his nationalist outlook is confined to Karabakh’s security. In all other respects, he is much more of a pragmatist than a nationalist in the style of 1988.

34. The two had formed the “Unity Bloc.” Sargsian was the “senior” partner in the alliance because of his control of the defense ministry and the Yekrapah Union.

35. This is part of a toast-speech given at the closing reception (at Sardarapat) of the Armenia-Diaspora conference on September 24, 1999. As far as I am aware, it has not appeared anywhere in print. Author’s audio recording.

36. As read out to the Armenian media and reported (in translation) on Armenian News Network Groong (e-mail news service), October 28, 1999.

37. *Yerkrapah* means keeper or defender of the country. The organization was led by Vazgen Sargsian when he was defense minister, and its members were personally loyal to him. It had been set up as a nonpolitical organization promoting the interests of the war veterans. However, it was politicized, and a substantial chunk of its members merged with the Republican Party to become Vazgen Sargsian’s support base in the 1999 parliamentary election.

38. Andranik Margarian, interview with author, November 12, 1997 (see n. 12 on Nzhdeh). Margarian is not a charismatic individual, and he did not have much experience with government at the time of his appointment. He was very much a second-tier politician who had become the leader of the Republican Party—an insignificant political organization at that point in 1997—upon the death of its founder, the former Soviet-era dissident Ashot Navasardian. Margarian rose to national prominence due to Vazgen Sargsian’s patronage of the Republican Party. Margarian was appointed as prime minister after the Sargsian assassination because he represented, by default, the largest bloc of parliamentarians.