

THE POLICY OF SOVIET RUSSIA AND THE QUESTION OF WESTERN ARMENIA'S INDEPENDENCE IN 1917-1918

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the emergence and the failed implementation of the idea of Western Armenia's independence in the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution. The study explores the political dynamics, internal and external factors, and the overlooked opportunities that could have shaped a different outcome for the Armenian cause in this critical period. While previous scholarly works have extensively addressed the reasons behind the failure of this initiative, they predominantly interpret the events through the lens of external pressures such as the geopolitical interests of the great powers, the rise of Turkish nationalism, and the Sovietization of the South Caucasus. These interpretations, though valid to an extent, often overlook or understate the internal dynamics within the Armenian political leadership and society itself. From a methodological standpoint, the article employs a historical comparative approach. The objective of this article is to shift the narrative by bringing into focus the missed opportunities, strategic miscalculations, and internal fragmentation that contributed to the downfall of the independence movement. The fundamental argument is that even within extremely constrained and hostile international conditions, certain political solutions or initiatives could have been pursued more effectively, had there been a different configuration of leadership, unity, and vision among the Armenian elite.

Keywords: Western Armenia, Armenian Independence, Soviet Russia, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, the Transcaucasian Commissariat

INTRODUCTION

History is full of events that change the fate of nations or even all of humanity. These events can create opportunities that previously seemed unimaginable. The Bolshevik Revolution of October 25 (November 7), 1917, became a new and profound challenge in both Russian and global

history. The new Russian government led by Vladimir Lenin — the Council of People's Commissars — took steps that were unexpected both for the Allied Powers of the Entente and for the opposing states of the Central Powers. These actions also disregarded Russia's broader national interests. The goal of our study is to shed light on the impact of Lenin's principles, decrees, and the defeatist Treaty of Brest-Litovsk on Western Armenia.

The Bolsheviks' policy of concluding peace without territorial annexations or war indemnities, which was expressed in the Decree on Peace adopted on October 26 (November 8) (1, p. 11-14), implied the withdrawal of Russian troops from the territories of Western Armenia as well. In fact, the October coup cast doubt on the future of Western Armenia. Although the decree proposed granting freedom to all subjugated nationalities,