

DOI 10.23859/2587-8352-2017-1-4-3

UDC 993: 94 (479.24)

Aydin HajiyevDoctor of Historical Sciences, Vice-rector of
North Institute of Enterprise
Arkhangelsk
west011@bk.ru

Socio-economic and military-political status of the Southwestern Caucasus on the eve of collapse of the Russian empire

Abstract. The article considers the insufficiently studied factors of socio-economic and socio-political development of the Southwestern Caucasus during the revolutionary events of 1917 – early 1918, which served as prerequisites for the establishment of the democratic republics of the Caucasus. The indicators of socio-economic development of Kars Oblast on the eve of the Revolution were analyzed, which became a good foundation for its independence. The democratic ideals of the February Revolution contributed to raising certain hopes on part of the population of the areas in the Southwestern Caucasus to gain territorial and political autonomy. The revolutionary turmoil of 1917 caused the naturally expected growth of national movements in the Caucasus, and the Bolsheviks coming to power and then withdrawing from World War I created conditions to change the state-territorial status of the regions and provinces in the Caucasus. Under such circumstances, the creation of independent republics in the Caucasus was inevitable. The attitudes of the Provisional government, Soviet Russia, the Transcaucasian government and the Ottoman Empire to the territorial and political autonomy of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic and Kars Oblast are shown in the article, as well as the struggle of various political and nationalist forces of the southwestern Caucasus for dominance in the region.

Keywords: Southwestern Caucasus, the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, Kars Oblast, the Caucasian Frontline of the First World War, OZAKOM, the Transcaucasian Commissariat, Treaty of Brest-Litovsk

Introduction

The problem of nation building in the South Caucasus is traditionally one of the most urgent, which relates to open interethnic conflicts and territorial disputes. The first attempt of the peoples of Transcaucasia to gain independence was made during the most difficult period at the end of World War I, when, along with other nations, the South-Western Caucasian Democratic Republic was built. In Soviet historiography, the problems of socio-political development of the Southwestern Caucasus were considered in the context of general questions of revolutionary time,

with natural emphasis on the activity of Bolshevik organizations in Kars Oblast¹. In modern historiography, both the socio-political situation in Transcaucasia as a whole² and the experience of building a nation in the republics of the Southwestern Caucasus³ are studied. Abroad, there is also a certain historiographic tradition of studying the problems of socio-economic and political development of Transcaucasia during the turning points of the history of the beginning of the 20th century⁴. We will note the works of the American researchers Firuz Kazzadeh and Richard Hovhannisyan, who, based on the memoirs of British and American officers, touch upon important aspects of political and military history of the Southwestern Caucasus⁵. The focus of this article is the factors of socio-economic and socio-political development that served as prerequisites for the formation of democratic republics of the Southwestern Caucasus in 1918.

Main body

The Russian czar's demise in February 1917 had an impact on the political and economic state of Kars Oblast, Nakhichevan and Sharur-Daralagez Uyezds of Erivan Governorate⁶, matching its scale and nature. The First World War continued, and

¹ Zavriev D.S. *To the Recent History of the North-Eastern Vilayets of Turkey*. Tbilisi, 1947; Kadishev A.B. *Intervention and Civil War in Transcaucasia*. Moscow, 1960; Pogosian A.M. *Kars Oblast as part of Russia*. Yerevan, 1983.

² Mikhailov V.V. To the question of the political situation in Transcaucasia at the final stage of World War I. *Bulletin of St. Petersburg State University. Ser. 2: Historical Studies*. Issue. 4. St Petersburg, 2006, pp. 125–137; Idem. *The Ottoman Intervention of the First Half of 1918 and the Separation of Transcaucasia from Russia. 1918 in the Fate of Russia and the World: Triggering off a Large-scale Civil War and International Intervention*. Arkhangelsk, 2008, pp. 181–187; Idem. Features of the political and national situation in Transcaucasia after October 1917 and position of Muslim factions of the Transcaucasian governments. *Clio*, 2009, no. 3 (46), pp. 59–65; Idem. On the question of formation and tactical activities of Armenian volunteer units on the Turkish fronts during World War I. *The New Watch*, 2010, no. 19–20, pp. 77–85; Idem. 'The Muslim Question' and the Russian Revolution: Turkey, Russia and Transcaucasia in the period since February 1917 to March 1918. *Clio*, 2016, no. 9 (117), pp. 140–146; Oreshkova S.F., Ul'chenko N. Y. *Russia and Turkey: The problem of the Borders Delimitation*. Moscow, 2006.

³ Hajiev A.N. *Democratic Republics of Southwestern Caucasus (Kars and Republic of Aras)*. Baku, 2004.

⁴ Hovannisian R.G. *The Republic of Armenia*, Volume I: The First Year, 1918–1919 Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1996; Kappeler A. *Russland als Vielvolkerreich: Entstehung, Geschichte, Zerfall*. Munchen, 1992; Reynolds M.A. *Shattering Empires: The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires 1908–1918*. Cambridge, 2011; Smith M.G. Anatomy of a Rumour: Murder Scandal, the Musavat Party and Narratives of the Russian Revolution in Baku. *Journal of Contemporary History*, 2001, vol. 36, no. 2, April, pp. 211–240; Swietochowski T. *Russian Azerbaijan, 1905–1920*. Cambridge, 1985.

⁵ Hovannisian R.G. *Armenia on the Road to Independence*, 1918. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1984; Kazemzadeh F. *The Struggle for Transcaucasia (1917–1921)*. New York, 1951.

⁶ Mikhailov V.V. 'The Muslim Question' and the Russian Revolution: Turkey, Russia and Transcaucasia in the period since February 1917 to March 1918. *Clio*, 2016, no. 9 (117), pp. 140–146.

these areas remained front-line territories, the socio-economic status of which was influenced by the proximity of the vast theater of military operations. After February 1917, the Russian Caucasus Army began to desintegrate, and the acute need for food made the army's quartermaster services develop their activities in the front-line regions, including in Kars Oblast and Nakhichevan exclave.

The policy of the Provisional Government concerning the outlying areas of Russia differed little from the policy of the tsarist authorities. The Cadets, who supported the democratic demands for autonomy in the State Duma of all convocations, rose to the position of 'one and indivisible' Russia after the February Revolution. Very clearly, in this regard, the British diplomat George Buchanan noted in his memoirs: "... the government of Russia was not, strictly speaking, republican"⁷. On 2 March 1917, the press published a proclamation of the governor in the Caucasus, Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich of Russia: "Due to various circulating rumors, it is reported that events took place in Petrograd that caused replacement of the highest government officials, and now peace arrived in the capital. The troops of the Caucasus Army are triumphantly advancing to join our gallant English allies. Holding peace among the population of the Caucasus is extremely important, same as ensuring victory of the army and the non-stop supply of food for the population"⁸.

Having come to power on 2 March 1917, the Provisional Government, in solidarity with the basic postulates of the tsarist foreign policy, proclaimed in its appeal on 6 March of the same year that it would cherish the bonds of alliance with other powers and steadfastly carry out the agreements signed with the allies⁹. On 9 March 1917, the Provisional Government decided to form a special committee consisting of members of the State Duma, including V.A. Kharlamov, M. Y. Dzhafarov, A.I. Chkhenkeli, P.A. Pereverzev and I.A. Abashidze. This committee was authorized to act "... on behalf of and with the rights of the Provisional Government with a view to establish the lasting order and arrangement of the Transcaucasian region on the basis publicly proclaimed by the Provisional Government on 6 March 1917, as well as to take measures to organize civil administration in the areas occupied by right of war, on the Caucasian front"¹⁰.

What problems did the new government face in the Southwestern Caucasus? By the beginning of 1917, Kars Oblast was an independent administrative-territorial unit of the Russian Empire and consisted of Ardahan Province, Kagyzmansky, Kars and Oltu regions. These, in turn, were divided into areas, and the latter – into rural districts. Thus, Kars Oblast was divisible into the Agbabinsky, Zardushatsky, Kars, Soganluk and Shuragel regions¹¹.

⁷ Buchanan G. *Memoirs of a Diplomat*. Moscow, 1991, p. 213.

⁸ Piontkovsky S.A. *Reader on the History of the October Revolution*. Moscow, 1923, p. 63.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

¹⁰ *The struggle for the victory of Soviet power in Georgia. Documents and materials*. (1917–1921). Tbilisi, 1958, p. 8.

¹¹ *The Caucasian Calendar for 1917. Department of Statistics*. Tiflis, 1916, pp. 65–75.

On all these territories, the tsarist authorities carried out an active ethno-demographic policy for resettlement of the Armenians from Turkey and Persia to the Russian Empire, which led to the creation of a huge foreign enclave near the indigenous peoples of the Caucasus. In this regard, even the Armenian authors themselves are forced to admit that during the Russo-Turkish wars of 1853–56 and 1877–78, in 1894–96, and during World War I, the flow of Armenians into these areas of the Southwestern Caucasus continued¹². According to the census of 1897, the number of Armenians living in the Caucasus reached 1.1 million people, and in 1914 there were already 2 million¹³. On 1 January 1916, the area of Kars Oblast was 16466 square verst¹⁴. According to the census of 1917, 394,000 people lived in Kars Oblast, of which there were: 205,000 Muslims, 48,000 Greeks, 31,000 Russians, 20,000 Armenians and 5,000 representatives of other nationalities¹⁵.

As for the Greeks, the culmination of their emigration to Kars Oblast for the entire 19th – early 20th centuries reached during the period after the end of the Russo-Turkish war of 1877–78. As pre-revolutionary Russian administrators noted, “... the happily ended Turkish war of 1877–78 endowed us with a whole stream of Asian settlers: 40,000 Greeks were sent to Kars Oblast”¹⁶. In Kars itself, there were more than 30 thousand inhabitants¹⁷ (see the table).

Table

**The number of inhabitants and the composition of population
in Kars Oblast during the period of 1881-1916.**¹⁸

Population	According to administration's data and for 1881	According to the census of 1897	According to administration's data and for 1912	According to administration's data and for 1916
Total number	101 336	290 654	333 917	404 305
Of these, Muslims (Meskhetian Turks, Turks, Azerbaijanis, Kurds, etc.)	74 251	145 781	180 185	170 310
Percentage of Muslims population	74	50	54	42

¹² Grigorian Z.T. *Accession of Eastern Armenia to Russia at the beginning of the 19th century*. Moscow, 1959, pp. 160–161.

¹³ Zavriev D.S. *To the Recent History of the North-Eastern Vilayets of Turkey*. Tbilisi, 1947, p. 16.

¹⁴ *The Caucasian Calendar for 1917. Department of Statistics*. Tiflis, 1916, p. 198.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 198–201.

¹⁶ *Review of Kars Oblast for 1912*. Kars, 1914, pp. 10–11.

¹⁷ *State Archive of the Republic of Azerbaijan (SARA)*, F. 28, Op. 1, D. 171, L. 1, 11, 14 – 15 on the topic; *SARA*, F. 894, Op. 1, D. 59, L. 14.

¹⁸ The table was compiled based on: Zavriev D.S. *To the Recent History of the North-Eastern Vilayets of Turkey*. Tbilisi, 1947, p. 17; Esadze B.S. *Historical Note on the Management of the Caucasus*. Vol. 2. Tiflis, 1907. P. 308; *Review of Kars Oblast for 1912*. Kars, 1914, p. 3; *The Caucasian Calendar for 1917. Department of Statistics*. Tiflis, 1916, pp. 200–201.

Along with this, based on the archival data supplementing the data of ‘Caucasian Calendar’, about 137 thousand lived in Nakhchivan District in 1916, in Surmalin there lived approximately 105 thousand people, and in Sharur-Daralagez there were more than 90 thousand inhabitants¹⁹. Moreover, in the provinces of almost 332 thousand people, the Muslim population was 208.2 thousand (62.1 %). We will note that Kars Oblast was mainly occupied by Sunni Muslims. The data of ‘Caucasian Calendar’ show that only 6,000 people were related to Shia Muslim confession²⁰.

The economy of Kars Oblast and Nakhichevan District was mainly of agrarian nature. According to the pre-revolutionary statistical data, in 1915 about 70 thousand dessiatins was used for grain growing in Kars Oblast, from which quarters of winter wheat were harvested – 198 thousand poods, spring wheat – 2636.3 thousand poods, maize – 457 poods, rye – 461 poods, other grains – 394.4 poods²¹. In Nakhichevan District, quarters of winter wheat were harvested from the area of 30.9 thousand dessiatins – 235.3 thousand poods, spring wheat – 76.8 thousand poods, barley – 61.0 thousand poods²².

In Kars Oblast, cattle breeding was developed particularly well, especially sheep breeding: of 544,700 heads of livestock in the whole region, Kars accounted for 211,400, in Ardahan there were 170,300 heads and Kagiz-Mansky accounted for 135,5 thousand heads²³. And this even though the region during the entire 19th century repeatedly became the battle ground between Turkey and Russia. It is not by chance that, having subsequently formed an important northeastern agricultural sub-district of Turkey, this region remained largely cattle-breeding: meat-and-dairy cattle farming with a mixed system of pre-capitalist and capitalist forms of farm management. As of 1 January, 1916, 149.3 thousand heads of cattle were kept in the households of Nakhichevan District, and 122,300 heads of cattle in Sharur-Daralagez Uyezd; it was a region characterized by developed livestock farming²⁴.

Speaking about the city economy, we would emphasize that the City-Fortress of Kars had a completely unique place in the military-political and economic plans of the Russian Empire. This was explained, first, by its strategically advantageous geographical position, which determined its inaccessibility. This strongly fortified fortress played a key role in the Caucasian theater of military operations in almost all Russo-Turkish wars. An interesting fact is that Kars, according to statistical data, occupied a rather high place by the number of educational institutions and enrollment

¹⁹ SARA, F. 28, Op. 1, D. 171, L. 11.

²⁰ *The Caucasian Calendar for 1917. Department of Statistics.* Tiflis, 1916, p. 205.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 198–201.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 253.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 267–268.

²⁴ Komakhidze N.V. The State of Production and the Agriculture of Eastern Turkey. *Turkey. History, Economics, Politics.* Moscow, 1984, p. 162.

of students. Thus, in the city there was a gymnasium for women (383 schoolgirls), the largest in the entire Caucasus Mariinsky women's college – the total number of students on 1 January 1916 was 312, while in Pushkin there were 257 in total; in the high primary school 43 students were enrolled, and in the lower industrial school there were 43 students as well²⁵. In total, in Kars Oblast, as of January 1 1916, there were 11,133 students enrolled, including 8,360 males and 2,953 females²⁶. Higher secondary schools were in the towns of Kagizman, Nakhichevan, Oltu, Ordubad. In Ozurgeti there was a spiritual school (173 pupils)²⁷.

In industrial terms, Kars Oblast, although not an industrial center, had certain manufacturing potential. Asphalt mixing plant, sawmill, brickyard and 12 hulling mills, six lemonade shops, 19 creameries, six cheese factories, six blacksmith's, 14 potteries and 501 mechanical workshops, 30 butter making rooms and one soap plant were manufacturing their products on its territory. In total, there were 599 industrial enterprises of various types, producing goods for the total of 624.7 thousand rubles. The number of workers employed in the production sphere of the region was 905 people²⁸.

In the said region, there was quite developed social and industrial infrastructure for the time. In 1889, the railway with the length of 72 versts from Alexandropol to Kars was put into operation. Later it was brought to Sarygamysh²⁹. In Kars Oblast, there were 11 post-and-telegraph institutions (for comparison, there were only one in Batumi Region)³⁰. In the region, there were 27 forest estates with the total area of 137 thousand dessiatins. Mostly, these were dachas of the governmental department, which were under the supervision of the forestry protection administration³¹.

In Kars Oblast, tobacco production was widespread. In 1916, 728 villages collected and supplied to the processing points 594.4 thousand poods of this raw material of superior quality and 18 thousand poods of mean tobacco. The similar indicator for Nakhichevan enclave accounted for 650 poods of mean tobacco from eight villages, whereas in Sharur-Daralagezsky Uyezd – 122 poods of mean tobacco were collected from 31 villages³². At the same time, Kars Oblast was at the bottom in the trade of spirit and alcoholic beverages, and it was 58 places lower in the rank, as compared for example, with Tiflis Governorate, which ranked first in the Caucasus in this indicator. A similar situation was observed in the wine distillery industry; in Kars

²⁵ *The Caucasian Calendar for 1917. Department of Statistics.* Tiflis, 1916, pp. 272–273.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 310.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 304

²⁸ *The Caucasian Calendar for 1917. Department of Statistics.* Tiflis, 1916, pp. 312–313, 316–317, 320–321.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 338.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 324.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 329.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 349.

Oblast, only 16 dessiatins were allocated for vinelands³³. A significant place in the fiscal policy of the Russian Empire was given to Julfa, Shakhtakhty and Ordubad custom houses located on the territory of the Southwestern Caucasus. By 1917, the first of these occupied the fourth place in the Caucasus in terms of number of duties received in the Russian treasury in the entire Caucasian region.

In terms of trade, Kars Oblast was divided into two regions that gravitated toward various shopping centers. Thus, part of Ardahan Province was in constant contact with Batumi and Kutaisi markets, where the great and small cattle were sent and sold. The southern part of Oltu and the southwestern part of Kagziman districts did not discontinue the trade with the cities and major trade centers of Turkey, selling cattle, leather, fruit, wool and other products there. The eastern parts of these districts had close relations with the markets of Tiflis and Erivan Governorates, where grain, cattle and various livestock products, timber, salt and different products of handicraft industry were exported. Efforts were made by the state officials to develop the salt springs in Nakhichevan Republic, Kagziman and Oltu districts of Kars Oblast. In 1915, 160.5 thousand poods of salt were extracted in the Nakhichevan field; 30.2 thousand poods were mined in Kagziman³⁴.

In Kars, newspaper *Kars* was circulated, which highlighted the socio-political, economic and cultural life of the region³⁵. It is curious that Kars Oblast was one of the most prosperous in the Caucasus in terms of criminal situation. The same was typical for Nakhichevan Republic. For the whole of 1915, there was not a single murder or act of violence, whilst in Erivan Governorate alone only that belonged to the same province, 71 crimes against the person were committed during that year³⁶. Thus, the material reflecting economic position of the regions of the Southwestern Caucasus allows us to conclude that until 1917, Kars Oblast was a relatively developed region, especially in the pastoral sector, whilst Nakhichevan and Sharuro-Daralagez Uyezds can be attributed to territories with underdeveloped agriculture.

However, it is impossible to ignore the fact that Kars Oblast, as shown by the comprehensive economic and statistical analysis of all statistical computations, not only because of availability of natural resources, but also due to its favorable geographical location, had considerable potential for more intensive development of agriculture, trade and industry. Nevertheless, concentrating efforts on extracting the maximum from the existing industrial and agrarian objects, the imperial center was not interested in investing funds and resources in the economic development of the region. Probably, this was due to geopolitical interests reflecting the permanent need to retain this territory by force of arms, as the Ottoman Empire craved revenge and

³³ *The Caucasian Calendar for 1917. Department of Statistics.* Tiflis, 1916, p. 351.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 368.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 242–243.

prepared intensively for it. Constant military strengthening of the Castle of Kars alone, based on its important strategic importance, demonstrated the concern of the Russian imperial rulers about the possibility of its retention in the event of a new war with the Turks, despite a number of serious defeats of the Sublime Porte in the military battles that were led on the eve of World War I: Balkan and Tripolitan Wars of 1912–13.

Thus, the economic state of Kars Oblast and Nakhichevansky Uyezd did not boast a high level of development due to the policy of keeping them artificially low, carried out by the tsarist authorities. Nevertheless, favorable climatic conditions, advantageous geographical location, diligence and unpretentiousness of the local population allowed these regions to develop slowly and surely, and in some cases be in advance of the other outskirts of the Russian Empire.

What was the governance system in the southwestern regions of the Caucasus in the Russian Empire like? Kars Oblast was controlled by the military governor, Major General Aleksandr Ilich Sushchinskii serving as a governor in the pre-war years and at the beginning of World War I. The structure of the governor's office included construction, medical and veterinary departments. In the region, there was a department for agronomy, a regional statistical committee and a regional office for compulsory military service (the chairman of the committee and the regional office for compulsory military service was the very same Sushchinskii), the central people's court being headed by an assistant to the military governor. At the same time, the *cadi* and the deputies of the court were Muslims³⁷.

Locally, the power was represented by the district administrations. The police supervision was carried out by the office of a chief of police in Kars. In the city of Nakhchivan there were the Nakhichevan Uyezd Directorate, uyezd office for compulsory military service, province's police department, city public administration, county court, provincial treasury, quarantine-customs station etc.³⁸. The main juridical base for the entire management control system of the provinces in the Southwestern Caucasus were the 'Constitution for administration of Transcaucasian territory' adopted on 10 April 1840, the order of the Caucasian governor dated 30 April 1870 regarding establishing special investigative and court divisions and the law 'On changes in financial management of the Caucasus region' passed in 1897. Thus, the administrative authorities at both regional and district levels in this region were arranged on the same principles as in the internal provinces of the Russian Empire.

³⁷ *The Caucasian Calendar for 1917. Department of Statistics.* Tiflis, 1916, pp. 218–219.

³⁸ *Handbook on the Funds of the Central State Archive of Nakhichevan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic.* Baku, 1989, p. 9–15.

Comparing the organization of provincial areas in Transcaucasia and in Russia, the prominent researcher of the Russian administrative-and-managerial system of the time, V. Ivanenko, emphasized: “In both areas one can find a civil governor (head of oblast) ... a treasury chamber, the public property chamber, criminal and civil courts, provincial and district land surveyors. All these institutions operated based on the common laws of the Russian Empire, and all exceptions to the general laws provided to the Transcaucasian regions have been declared annulled ... Again, the arrangement of provinces’ administrations were the same as in Russia. In each city, there was a governor; in each province, there was a province governor with an assistant, a county court, a county solicitor, a doctor and a treasury”³⁹.

By 1917, the conditions of military confrontation with Turkey dictated to Russia the necessity of creating the so-called ‘fifth column’ in the event of loss of the territories in the Southwestern Caucasus, the role of which, due to certain circumstances, was to be played by the Armenian population of these regions. Preventatively pursued for several decades, the policy of the tsarist authorities aimed at creation and economic strengthening of the Armenian enclave of the Southwestern Caucasus, contributed to breakdown of the economic structure that had developed over the centuries, and introduced an element of disorganization into it. Under the extreme conditions of military operations in the region, this factor significantly aggravated the difficult economic situation that already existed there.

A rather objective assessment of the state of economic affairs in the Russian Empire during World War I was given by the Soviet historian P.V. Volobuev. He regarded decentralization of economic life in the country as a ‘concentrated’ expression denoting collapse of the empire, “its disintegration into separate isolated areas in which ... there was the process of ‘naturalization’ of the economy and replacement of monetary trade with barter”⁴⁰. The unrestrained currency issue and inflation undermined money supply. On the territory of the Southwestern Caucasus, as in the other regions of the disintegrating empire, the monetary circulation had hardly fulfilled its function as the ‘blood circulatory system’ of the economic entity.

Simultaneously with depletion of productive forces in the region, the achieved organization of social production was destroyed, and the relations with other industrial and agricultural regions deteriorated rapidly; the unity of exchange and consumption was weakened, private and state control, accounting and regulation were weakened too, etc. In general, the socio-economic development of the region was closely interwoven with the features of socio-political processes taking place on its territory. Undoubtedly, the relatively prosperous course of economic activity in the

³⁹ Ivanenko V.N. *Civil Administration of Transcaucasia from the accession of Georgia to the viceroyalty of Grand Duke Michael Romanov*. Tiflis, 1901, pp. 304–305.

⁴⁰ Volobuev P.V. *The Economic Policy of the Provisional Government*. Moscow, 1962, p. 470.

Southwestern Caucasus prior to World War I established the economic prerequisites for the future, albeit short-lived, existence of independent governmental associations that sought to emerge from the disintegrating Russian Empire.

After the February Revolution, the socio-political situation in the Southwestern Caucasus formed under the influence of several determining factors. Firstly, the Provisional Government viewed Russia as the successor to the Russian Empire in its southwestern regions, ‘galvanized’ so much that it became fraught with revolutionary speeches dictated not as much by the class struggle as by the interests of national-state self-determination. For Kars Oblast, the return to the bosom of Turkey was topical in this situation, for Nakhichevan – getting rid of its colonial status meant the revival of self-government lost in the 19th century. Secondly, because of remoteness of the Southwestern Caucasus from the center, in the atmosphere of revolutionary disarray and chaos, the actions of state repressive apparatus in this region were clearly weakened. At the same time, the contradictions between the old tsarist administration, which continued to occupy important positions in the regional and county administration, and the new authority of the Provisional Government, represented by the Special Transcaucasian Committee (OZAKOM), intensified. Thirdly, the democratic ideas of the February Revolution began to penetrate and actively spread to Nakhichevan, Sharuro-Daralagez Uyezds and Kars Oblast. This process gave rise to a serious ideological and political discord between the aspirations of certain progressive sections of the population and the local feudal nobility, brave with its retrograde. Fourthly, disintegration of the Russian Empire pushed the expansionist aspirations of several Armenian political forces towards these territories.

Subsequent military and political events in the region actively and comprehensively generated small governmental formations in the Southwestern Caucasus. As noted above, the February Revolution in Russia contributed to the rapid development of the national movement throughout the Caucasus. A new qualitative stage of this movement was distinguished by the change of its character. Whereas the earlier enlightening motives prevailed, under the conditions of the revolutionary upheavals of 1917, the political tasks began to dominate its actions and programs quite clearly. The Southwestern Caucasus was not an exception in this respect.

The Special Transcaucasian Committee created on 9 March 1917 in Tiflis, from among the members of the 4th State Duma, headed by the cadet V.A. Kharlamov, and was forced to share power locally with the Soviets of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies, as well as with various national committees and organizations that emerged immediately after the revolution. On 23 May 1917 in Kars Oblast, the Regional Executive Committee was created, and in June – there appeared Ardahan and Oltu

province peasant committees⁴¹. The first Soviets in Nakhichevan appeared in the spring of 1917 in the cities of Nakhichevan and Julfa. The Soviets of Soldiers' Deputies appeared at Shakhtakhty railway station, which included, partially, deputies of railway workers, and later by the end of the summer of 1917 – deputies from the peasants⁴².

The social-democratic ideas in Nakhichevan and Kars were spread rather poorly. It is known that until October 1917 in the city of Kars, a small organization RSDLP (B) operated, headed by Russian serviceman Y. Lavrov. In the summer of 1917, he left for Petrograd, and then, due to illness, lived in Baku until 27 September. After returning to Kars, his authorities were questioned, since the military unit in which he served was relocated. Lavrov did not co-opt into the executive committee, which resulted in the delegation of certain Marcaryan instead of him to the Congress of Soviets. In this connection, Lavrov sent a complaint to the Central Committee of the RSDLP (b). The center, as a certain compensation for this case, could only recommend appointing this like-minded person as one of the leaders of Kars Committee of RSDLP (B). The top figure in it was Baumgart⁴³.

In Nakhichevan, the Social-Democratic organization did not actually exist during this period. Only in the autumn of 1917, the long and stubborn work of the Bolsheviks brought specific political dividends in the form of gaining certain influence in the Soviets of Soldiers' Deputies of Nakhichevan and Shakhtakhty. By mid-October 1917, the Council of Shakhtakhty garrison represented not only the military units, but also workers of the railway station and neighboring villages⁴⁴. Almost all power in this region was concentrated in their hands: The Council controlled the railway, supervised the public order in the villages and set prices for agricultural products. He had great influence on the local executive committee of public organizations.

In April 1917, OZAKOM began appointing its authorized commissars to Nakhichevan and Sharuro-Daralagez provinces, which since May started to establish their district and village executive committees. Thus, the position of authorized officer in Nakhichevan province was taken by the former tsarist Burkhan bek Maksudbekov, whereas and in Ordubad it was assigned to the former policeman Bendukidze⁴⁵. By the summer of 1917, the imposition of OZAKOM authority was formally completed, and elections to executive rural and food committees were held.

⁴¹ *Central State Archives of the Democratic Republic of Georgia (CSA GR)*, F. 10, Op. 1, D. 3, L. 27.

⁴² *Central State Archives of Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic*, F. 8, Op. 1, D. 395, L. 6; *CSA NR*, F. 1432, Op. 1, D. 395, L. 6; *CSA NR*, F. 24, Op. 1, D. 43, L. 5–6.

⁴³ *The Great October Socialist Revolution and the Victory of Soviet power in Armenia*. Yerevan, 1957, pp. 91–92.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

⁴⁵ *CSA NR*, F. 8, Op. 1, D. 395, L. 6.

It is noteworthy that representatives of the feudal-patriarchal strata of the population lost significantly in these elections. But, despite this, they managed to get ahead of the democratically-minded applicants in several localities. It is characteristic that persistence of tribal and clan relations also manifested itself during this seemingly purely democratic process. An example of the Safiev beks, who succeeded in appointing all their relatives in some villages of Sharur-Daralagez district, was not so odious⁴⁶.

After the October Revolution in Petrograd, OZAKOM lost their powers due to refusal to cooperate with the Social Democratic parties that dominated the Transcaucasia. Instead, the Transcaucasian Commissariat was established in Tiflis as a coalition government led by the Menshevik E.P. Gegechkori⁴⁷. On 23 (10) February 1918, the Transcaucasian Seim opened in Tiflis, which was the legislative body of the commissariat. In its structure, along with representatives of Armenia and Georgia, 44 deputies from the Azerbaijani population of Transcaucasia were represented⁴⁸. In the event of problems related to the internal political situation in Kars and Nakhichevan, the members of Azerbaijani faction invariably acted as defenders of the interests of Muslim population of the Southwestern Caucasus.

Seizure of power by the Bolsheviks put Russian Caucasian army in a difficult position. Commander of the troops of the Caucasian Front, General M.A. Przheval'skii and Chief of Staff of the Front Major-General E.V. Lebedinskii were in confusion. The General Headquarters was abolished; the political forces represented by the Bolsheviks, left SRs and anarchists who came to power in Russia, radically changed the entire military policy of the state, which to a significant degree demoralized the Russian army. And this happened at the time when the euphoria from the brilliantly developed Erzurum operation by the former commander of the Caucasian army General N.N. Iudenich was not over yet⁴⁹.

This situation has also made corrections to the military policy of Turkey. In November 1917, M.A. Przheval'skii received a letter from the commander of the Turkish army on the Caucasian front, Ferik Vekhib-pasha, proposing a truce. On 21 November, the letter was discussed at the meeting of the Transcaucasian Commissariat. Followed by difficult discussions, they decided to accept the Turkish

⁴⁶ CSA NR, F. 1432, Op. 1, D. 395, L. 6.

⁴⁷ Mikhailov V.V. On the Political Situation in Transcaucasia at the Final Stage of World War I. *Bulletin of St Petersburg State University. Ser. 2: Historical Studies*. Issue. 4, 2006, pp. 131–133.

⁴⁸ Mikhailov V.V. Features of the political and national situation in Transcaucasia after October 1917 and position of Muslim factions of the Transcaucasian governments. *Clio*, 2009, no. 3 (46), p. 62.

⁴⁹ Mikhailov V.V. The defeat of the Turkish army and forcing of a first-class fortress. *Military-Historical Journal*, 2006, no. 8, pp. 49–53.

proposal⁵⁰. The next day, the relevant document was sent to the commander of the Islamic Army of the Caucasus⁵¹.

On 5 December 1917, the text of the armistice was signed in Erzincan, and a telegram with the explanations was sent to the corps of the Caucasian army. It is noteworthy that all the names in the Russian text of the act of armistice were taken from the map published by the Turkish General Staff⁵². In fact, this meant that the command of the Russian troops on the Caucasian front was inclined to recognize all the areas at the operational theatre and the areas adjacent to them as the sphere of Turkey's interests and influence.

Due to political chaos and uncontrollability in Russia, the military command was negotiating with a representative of the 'independent Caucasian government'. This unexpected nuance for the Turks was immediately reported to Enver Pasha, Commander-in-Chief of the Turkish Armed Forces, who assessed it properly. Immediately followed the instruction of Wehib Pasha on "the soonest recovery of the just peace so much wished for"⁵³. The unexpectedness of such a proposal locked the Transcaucasian Commissariat in a dead end. After taking a three-week time out, the leadership of the commissariat began frantically searching for advice from Lorenzo Valerie, the elder of the consular representation of foreign powers in the Caucasus, as well as sending telegrams to the Central Ukrainian Rada and the chairman of the "South East Union of Cossack Troops, Caucasus Mountaineers and Free Peoples of the Steppe" I. Makarenko⁵⁴.

In this context, it must be emphasized that immediately after signing the armistice, spontaneous departure of the Russian units began. Based on the draft of the chairman of Caucasian Volunteer Army's Regional Council, socialist revolutionary D. Donsky, it was decided to replace them with Armenian and Georgian national units⁵⁵. This fact caused far from adequate reaction of the Caucasian public. Even the Baku Bolshevik press organ, newspaper *the Baku Worker*, stressed that the formation of national Armenian military units and disarmament of the old army completely disorganized the front, created incredible anarchy in the internal life of the region, and "deprecated the existence of the Caucasian peoples"⁵⁶.

Per the orders of the Commander of the Caucasian Front dated 26 December 1917, No. 136 the Armenian Corps consisting of the 1st and 2nd Armenian infantry divisions was formed. They consisted of the Armenian volunteer units (commander –

⁵⁰ *Documents and materials on the foreign policy of Transcaucasia and Georgia*. Tiflis, 1919, pp. 11–12.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 24–25.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 36–40.

⁵⁵ Ludshuwait E.F. *Turkey during World War I*. Moscow, 1966, p. 61.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

General Andranik Ozanian), the Armenian cavalry brigade (commander – Colonel G. Korganov), four territorial regiments, five territorial battalions, a march brigade and small irregular units⁵⁷. Colonel Chardigny, Chief of the French Military Mission in the Caucasus, took an active part in the formation of these units⁵⁸. The numerical force of the three divisions was only 17,000 bayonets; and the artillery equipment totaled 16 batteries. The lieutenant-general of the tsarist army F.I. Nazarbekov was appointed the corps commander⁵⁹.

During the negotiations in Brest-Litovsk, the delegation of Soviet Russia agreed to surrender Ardahan, Kars and Batumi districts to Turkey. The fourth article of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, concerning the Caucasian Front, declared: “Russia will do everything in its power to facilitate the early cleansing of the provinces of Eastern Anatolia and their orderly return to Turkey”⁶⁰. To avoid any friction with Turkey, Russia assumed the obligation to demobilize and disband the Armenian armed forces on its own territory and on the territory occupied by Armenian militia units. The RSFSR also undertook not to concentrate troops on the Soviet-Turkish border of more than one division. Along with this, the agreement envisaged creation of conditions for emigration of citizens who practice Islam, to Turkey.

On 7 February (2 March) 1918, the Transcaucasian government was notified of the essence of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. Soon followed the radiogram from Wehib Pasha with a request for evacuation of all formations subordinate to the Transcaucasian Seim from the said territories. The protest of the Transcaucasian government had no effect. The further fate of the territories of the Southwestern Caucasus became object of discussion at the negotiations between Turkey and the Transcaucasian Seim during the Trebizond Peace Conference, which opened on 1 (14) March 1918. The delegation of the Transcaucasian Seim included A.I. Chkhenkeli (Chairman), G.B. Abashidze, M.G. Gadzhinsky, O.F. Heydarov, G.B. Gvazava, R.I. Kachaznuni, G.M. Lashishvili, H.B. Hasmamedov, A.I. Khatsov, A.A. Shaykhulislamov⁶¹. The Turkish delegation, demanding recognition of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk by the Seim, was headed by the Prime Minister Rauf Bey. On 7 (20) March, the Transcaucasian delegation announced the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk non-binding and unacceptable for the Transcaucasia. Immediately after that, on the following day, they made a statement regarding conditions of the peace, in which they insisted on restoring the state Russian-Turkish borders that existed at the time of

⁵⁷ Mikhailov V.V. To the question on creation and tactical activities of Armenian volunteer units on the Turkish fronts during World War I. *New Guard*, 2010, no. 19–20, pp. 82–84.

⁵⁸ Ludshuwait E.F. *Turkey during World War I*. Moscow, 1966, pp. 160–161.

⁵⁹ *National Archive of Armenia (NARA)*, F. 45, Op. 1, D. 41, L. 12–13.

⁶⁰ *Peace Negotiations in Brest-Litovsk*. Moscow, 1920, p. 19.

⁶¹ *Documents and materials on the foreign policy of Transcaucasia and Georgia*. Tiflis, 1919, p. 107.

outbreak of the hostilities in 1914. In this statement, the delegation asserted that “it seeks the right of self-determination for the peoples of Eastern Anatolia, in particular, autonomy within the framework of the Turkish statehood”⁶². As the documents show, the contradictions that arose around the problems of Kars, Ardahan and Batum, became both the most important reason for failure of the Trebizond Peace Conference, and the subsequent disintegration of the Transcaucasian Federative Republic⁶³.

After proclamation of the Democratic Republic of Georgia on 26 May 1918, its government was concerned about delimitation of its southern boundaries – Akhaltsikhe and Akhalkalaki Municipality. This helped to distance Georgia from the problems of Kars and Nakhichevan, which, in fact, the Armenian representatives in the Transcaucasian Seim wanted. Moreover, in October 1918, an armed conflict broke out between the Georgian and Armenian republics, symbolizing collapse of the ideas of Georgian-Armenian consolidation aimed at securing the rights to Kars, Ardahan, Nakhichevan and other territories of the Southwestern Caucasus for Armenia. At the same time, the Turkish military campaign of May 1918 culminated in the establishment of military and political control throughout Kars Oblast, and because of the military presence of the Turks in Julfa, a bridgehead was created to establish control over Nakhichevan⁶⁴. The proclamation of Independent Azerbaijan, ethnically and religiously close to the bulk of the population of the southwestern territories of the Caucasus, on 28 May 1918, a new geopolitical reality appeared, capable of significantly influencing the dynamics of socio-political events in this region.

Conclusion

Thus, inference should be drawn on which factors influenced the main political prerequisites for the formation of democratic republics in the Southwestern Caucasus. Before the revolution, Kars Oblast, which became the basis for the South-Western Caucasian Democratic Republic, was characterized by rather high indicators of socio-economic development, which created a good foundation for gaining independence. During World War I, the Southwestern Caucasus became the main arena of military operations, the civilian population suffered enormous damage, which in many respects contributed to the growth of both revolutionary sentiments and national movements striving for independence.

⁶² Ludshuwait E.F. *Turkey during World War I*. Moscow, 1966, p. 186.

⁶³ *Documents and materials on the foreign policy of Transcaucasia and Georgia*. Tiflis, 1919, p. 266.

⁶⁴ Mikhailov V.V. *The Ottoman intervention of the first half of 1918 and separation of Transcaucasia from Russia. 1918 in the Fate of Russia and the World: Triggering off a Large-scale Civil War and International Intervention*. Arkhangelsk, 2008, pp. 183–184.

The Provisional Government and its body in the Caucasus, OZAKOM, that was formed after the February Revolution, did not factually implement Nakhichevan's desire to revive the lost self-government, whilst Kars Oblast continued to remain within Russia. Nevertheless, the democratic demagogy of the Provisional Government and its promises of cardinal reforms contributed to raising certain hopes for the population of the regions in the Southwestern Caucasus to carry out the democratic process in the future. The revolutionary upheavals of 1917 caused the naturally expected growth of national movements throughout the territory of the former Russian Empire, including Transcaucasia. The Bolsheviks coming to power and their virtually capitulatory withdrawal from World War I created real conditions for changing the state-territorial status of the Caucasian regions and provinces. Under such conditions, the establishment of independent republics in Transcaucasia became inevitable. The emergence of the Armenian, Georgian and Azerbaijani republics stimulated the process of state self-determination in the regions of the Southwestern Caucasus. As a result, in December 1918, after the end of World War I and withdrawal of Turkish troops from the occupied territories in Transcaucasia, the South-Western Caucasian Republic (Kars Republic) was created.

References

1. Esadze B. S. *Istoricheskaja zapiska ob upravlenii Kavkazom* [Historical Note on the Management of the Caucasus]. Vol. 2. Tiflis: Tip. 'Guttenberg', 1907. 246 p. (In Russ.)
2. Hajiev A.N. *Demokraticheskie respubliki Yugo-Zapadnogo Kavkaza (Karskaya i Araz-Tyurkskaya respubliki)* [The Democratic Republics of Southwestern Caucasus (Kars and the Republic of Aras)]. Baku: Nurlan, 2004. 279 p. (In Russ.)
3. Grigorian Z.T. *Prisoedinenie Vostochnoj Armenii k Rossii v nachale XIX veka* [Accession of Eastern Armenia to Russia in the Early 19th century]. Moscow: Sotsegiz, 1959. 186 p. (In Russ.)
4. Hovannisian R.G. *Armenia on the Road to Independence, 1918*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1984. 364 p.
5. Hovannisian R.G. *The Republic of Armenia, Volume I: The First Year, 1918–1919*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1996. 547 p.
6. Ivanenko V.N. *Grazhdanskoe upravlenie Zakavkaz'em ot prisoedineniya Gruzii do namestnichestva velikogo knyazya Mihaila Romanova* [Civilian Control of the Caucasus from the Annexation of Georgia to the Viceroyalty of the Grand Duke Mikhail Romanov]. Tiflis, 1901. 527 p. (In Russ.)
7. Kadishev A.B. *Interventsiya i grazhdanskaya voina v Zakavkaz'e* [Intervention and Civil War in Transcaucasia]. Moscow: Voenizdat, 1960. 510 p. (In Russ.)
8. Kappeler A. *Russland als Vielvolkerreich: Entstehung, Geschichte, Zerfall*. Munchen: Beck, 1992. 395 p.
9. Kazemzadeh F. *The Struggle for Transcaucasia (1917–1921)*. New York: Philosophical Library, 1951. 356 p.
10. Kazemzadeh F. *The Struggle for Transcaucasia (1917–1921)*. New York: Philosophical Library, 1951. 356 p.



11. Kliukin E.V. *Yugo-Zapadnaya Kavkazskaya respublika (1918 – 1919 gg.) i vozrozhdenie gosudarstvennosti na Yuzhnom Kavkaze* [South-West Caucasia (1918 – 1919), and statehood in the South Caucasus: author's summary of PhD dissertation]. St Peterburg, 2004. 30 p. (In Russ.)
12. Komahidze N.V. Sostoyanie proizvodstvennyh sil i sel'skom hozyajstve vostochnoj Turcii [The state of productive and agriculture in Eastern Turkey]. *Turciya. Istoriya, ehkonomika, politika: sbornik statej* [Turkey. History, Economics, politics: Collection of Articles]. Moscow, 1984. (In Russ.)
13. Ludshuveit E.F. *Turciya v gody pervoj mirovoj vojny* [Turkey during World War I]. Moscow: Izd-vo Moskovskogo universiteta [Publishing house of Moscow University], 1966. 386 p. (In Russ.)
14. Mihailov V.V. K voprosu o politicheskoy situacii v Zakavkaz'e na zaklyuchitel'nom ehtape Pervoj mirovoj vojny [To the question about political situation in Transcaucasia at the final stage of World War I]. *Vestnik Sankt-Peterburgskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta. Ser. 2. Istoricheskie nauki* [Vestnik of Saint Petersburg State University. Ser. 2. Historical Studies], vol. 4, 2006, pp. 125–137. (In Russ.)
15. Mihailov V.V. 'Musul'manskii vopros' i Rossiiskaya revoliuciia: Turciya, Rossia i Zakavkaz'e v period s fevralya 1917 g. po mart 1918 g. ['Muslim question' and the Russian Revolution: Turkey, Russia and the Caucasus in the period of February 1917 – March 1918]. *Klio* [Clio], 2016, no. 9 (117), pp. 140–146. (In Russ.)
16. Mihailov V.V. Razgrom tureckoi armii i ovladenie pervoklassnoj krepost'yu [Defeat of the Turkish army and forcing the first-class fortress]. *Voенно-istoricheskij zhurnal* [Military-Historical Journal], 2006, no. 8, pp. 49–53. (In Russ.)
17. Mihailov V.V. Osmanskaia intervenciia pervoi poloviny 1918 goda i otdelenie Zakavkaz'ya ot Rossii [Ottoman intervention in the first half of 1918 and separation of Transcaucasia from Russia]. *1918 god v sud'bah Rossii i mira: razvertyvanie shirokomasshtabnoj Grazhdanskoj vojny i mezhdunarodnoj intervencii. Sb. materialov nauchnoj konferencii. – Tematicheskii sb. mezhdunarodnoj konferencii 28–29 oktiabria 2008g.* [1918 in the Fate of Russia and the World: Triggering off large-scale Civil War and International Intervention. Collection of materials of the scientific conference. Subject Proceedings of the International Conference on 28–29 October 2008], Arhangel'sk: Solti, 2008, pp. 181–187. (In Russ.)
18. Mihailov V.V. Osobennosti politicheskoi i nacional'noi situacii v Zakavkaz'e posle oktiabria 1917 goda i poziciia musul'manskih frakcii zakavkazskih pravitel'stv [Peculiarities of the political and national situation in Transcaucasia after the October revolution of 1917 and position of Muslim faction in the Transcaucasian Commissariat]. *Klio* [Clio], 2009, no. 3 (46), pp. 59–65. (In Russ.)
19. Mihailov V.V. K voprosu o sozdanii i boevyh deistviyah armianskih dobrovol'cheskih formirovanii na tureckih frontah Pervoi mirovoj vojny [To the question on creation and tactical activities of Armenian volunteer units on Turkish fronts during World War I]. *Novyi chasovoi* [New Guard], 2010, no. 19–20, pp. 77–85. (In Russ.)
20. *Obzor Karskoj oblasti za 1912 god* [Review of Kars Oblast for 1912]. Kars: Tip. Kantseliarii voen. Gubernatora Karskoj obl., 1914. 45 p.
21. Oreshkova S.F., Ul'chenko N.Iu. *Rossiya i Turtsiya: problema formirovaniya granits* [Russian and Turkey: The Problem of Borders Delimitation]. Moscow: Akad. gumanitarnykh issledovanii, 2006. 244 p. (In Russ.)
22. Piontkovskii S.A. *Hrestomatiia po istorii Oktyabr'skoj revolyucii* [Anthology of History of the October Revolution]. Moscow: Krasnaya nov', 1923. 269 p. (In Russ.)

23. Pogosian A.M. *Karskaia oblast' v sostave Rossii* [Kars Oblast as part of Russia]. Erevan: Aiastan, 1983. 285 p. (In Russ.)
24. Reynolds M.A. *Shattering Empires: The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires 1908–1918*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. 304 p.
25. Smith M.G. Anatomy of a Rumour: Murder Scandal, the Musavat Party and Narratives of the Russian Revolution in Baku. *Journal of Contemporary History*, 2001, vol. 36, no. 2, April, pp. 211–240.
26. Swietochowski T. *Russian Azerbaijan, 1905–1920*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985. 258 p.
27. Volobuev P.V. *Ehkonomicheskaya politika Vremennogo pravitel'stva* [Economic Policy of the Provisional Government]. Moscow: Akad. nauk SSSR, 1962. 483 p. (In Russ.)
28. Zavriev D.S. *K novejshej istorii severo-vostochnyh vilajetov Turcii* [To Modern History of North-Eastern Vilayets of Turkey]. Tbilisi: Tip. im. Myasnikova [Publishing house named after Myasnikov], 1947. 369 p. (In Russ.)

DOI 10.23859/2587-8352-2017-1-4-4

UDC 930.2+328+329

Denis Shchukin

PhD in Historical Sciences, Associate Professor
Yelets State Ivan Bunin University
(Yelets, Russia)
dionysios@yandex.ru



**The revolutionary year of 1917 in Russia – reaction to events
and everyday life in the diaries and memoirs of political figures of the era:
From the Kadets to monarchists**

Abstract. The article is devoted to consideration and reflection upon the image of historical figures and revolutionary events of 1917 in diaries, memoirs and letters by political figures of that period: Members of the People's Freedom party, Union of October 17, monarchist and social democratic movements.

The focus of the author's attention is the reaction of the Russian society, representatives of the political space of Russia in the early 20th century, revolutionary events of 1917 and their perception of the image of 'revolutionary changes'. The article emphasizes that these events left strongly pronounced emotional coloring in the memory of contemporaries, which passed on to the historiography of the Russian Revolution from the private sources. The author notes that an important place in the memoirs and diaries of contemporaries of the revolutionary upheavals in the early 20th century in Russia is taken by the question regarding responsibility for these historical events; also, reflections on their results for Russia are provided.

Keywords: revolution of 1917, party of People's Freedom, the Russian Empire, diary, memoirs, history of Russia

*From October 1917 in Russia ... everything turned out as in France:
there was not only its own Bastille, its Directoire, but also its Marats and Robespierres.*
A.V. Yeropkin

Introduction

After a lapse of 100 years, the revolutionary events of February-October 1917 in Petrograd, which historically transformed the development of Russian statehood, still belong to the most controversial and politicized pages of Russian history of the 20th century.

The interest of modernity in the events of the Russian Revolution of 1917 is dictated not only by the need for some 'consensus' in the assessments of this historical