

# ARMENIA

## The Survival of a Nation

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### The Conditions of the New Republic

The land was rocky and scrubby, lacking cultivation or industry. The fields of Erevan had been seized by the Turks, as had the industrial centre of Alexandropol. On the land which remained in the republic there were 200,000 Armenians, and another 200,000 hungry, homeless refugees, and a further 200,000 Turks. The circumstances of the birth of the Armenian republic – war, chaos and disaster – could not have been less propitious.

The Armenian National Council, which had declared the independence of Armenia, now chose the new state's first prime minister: Hrachya Agha, now, a highly educated Dashnak leader from Ardahan. This distinguished looking figure was able, unlike others in his party, to compromise with non-Dashnaks. His cabinet – also at the behest of the National Council, and echoing the wishes of Dashnakdom – was to be a coalition.<sup>42</sup> There were colleagues were to be the Populists, but the Populists, believing what they saw as Dashnak authoritarianism, democracy and managed democracy, feared Dashnakdom for the sake of others, and refused to join. Moreover, it is doubtful whether the Populists could have done any better, and it is also arguable that in a period of extreme crisis, such as a post-Turkish offensive, a strongly motivated authoritarian regime is better able to cope than a group of open-minded liberals.

It was the end of June – a month after the independence declaration – that Hrachya formed his five-man Cabinet, all Dashnaks, except for the non-partisan member of war.<sup>43</sup> But until 19 July 1918 did the Cabinet reach Yerevan, only with difficulty, and regrettably, did Armenia's leaders relinquish non-violent politics. They must have seen the irony of the situation in which there were more Armenians in Tiflis, now the capital of Georgia, than in the backward desert called the Republic of Armenia.

In the seven-week absence of the official government, Dashnaktsutun had shown its strength at dealing with situations at grass-roots level. In January 1918 Dro and Aram had established a tough 'popular dictatorship' in the Yerevan province, which was able to keep control and stave off disaster in the isolated, friendless republic.<sup>43</sup>

A republic had to be constructed from virtually nothing. The state apparatus had left almost nothing in Yerevan, no machinery of government that could be taken over and modified, as we are used to seeing in the new states of Africa and Asia today. All that the Armenian government inherited were a few government offices and police cells. The country itself presented a bleak and cruel scene of destitution, suffering, homeless refugees, famines, ragged and homeless, locked in every shattering spot. For some of the people

<sup>42</sup> Prime Minister: Hrachya Agha  
 Foreign Minister: Alexander Khachaturian  
 Minister of the Interior: Aram Manukyan  
 Minister of Finance: Hrachya Agha  
 Minister of War: Hrachya Agha