

Mikayel Zolyan  
Satenik Mkrtchyan  
Hovhannes Hovhannisyan

**A NEW BEGINNING:**  
**STATE-BUILDING AND**  
**REPRESENTATION OF THE EVENTS OF**  
**1988-1991**  
**IN THE POLITICAL DISCOURSE OF**  
**REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA**

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“We paid an extremely high price for independence and for the liberation of Artsakh. We did not pay that price unwittingly, but it was a conscious decision. The people suffered, but sustained the suffering, it became frustrated, but it endured, as the goal was noble and uncompromisable... Getting ahead of the time, I think, we have the right to consider this an unheard act of heroism, which will be endlessly revered by the future generations. And, because there is no heroic deed that is not redeemed, there is no noble effort that does not bear fruit, there is no seed that does not spread a spear, our people’s enormous effort also was bound to bear its fruit.”

Levon Ter-Petrosyan, President of the Republic of Armenia The New Year’s Address on January 1 1996

In February 1988, using the opportunities offered by the policy of Perestroika, the Armenian people have taken the path of struggle for liberation, demanding the reunification of Artsakh, which had been illegally transferred to Azerbaijan in 1921. The forceful Artsakh movement and the struggle for independence bore their fruit: on September 2, 1991 the Republic of Mountainous Karabakh was created, and on September 21, based on the results of a popular referendum, the Republic of Armenia became an independent state.

Armenian History (9th grade), Edited by A. Gevorgyan et al. (Yerevan, Zangak, 2014), p. 4

Question: How did the Republic of Armenia become independent?

Answer: Somehow

Focus Group Participant, September 2016, Yerevan

# CHAPTER 1

## The Nation-State and its Foundation Narrative: Introducing the Armenian Case

### 1. Transition, Revolution, National Liberation?

Actions of political actors are often represented and justified through references to “glorious” events of the past.<sup>1</sup> As Karl Marx put it, “men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past... just as they seem to be

occupied with revolutionizing themselves and things, creating something that did not exist before, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service, borrowing from them names, battle slogans, and costumes in order to present this new scene in world history in time-honored disguise and borrowed language.”<sup>2</sup> References to the past are used as a source of legitimacy not only for political figures and movements but also for state institutions. Often, the same historical events, albeit in different interpretations, are utilized by political opponents as a basis for legitimacy of their conflicting claims. Thus, the discourse of politics is full of references to the past, whether distant or recent, which are used to justify the political aims of the current moment.

The late 1980s and early 1990s were a key period for post-socialist countries, including Armenia. This was a time, when totalitarian regimes in the Soviet Union and other countries of Eastern Europe/Central Eurasia collapsed, and in some regions, including the South Caucasus, violent conflicts emerged. In most countries of Central and Eastern Europe, as well as in some post-Soviet countries, this period is viewed as a time of democratic transition brought about by mass movements. It was also a period of regaining fully-fledged national sovereignty (in case of the former Warsaw bloc countries in Central and Eastern Europe) and independent statehood (in the case of post-Soviet countries). In certain areas in former Yugoslavia and the former Soviet Union, it was also a period of emergence of ethnic tensions, which in some cases, led to full-blown ethno-political conflict.

In the countries of Eastern and Central Europe the transition is often described in terms of revolution. Thus, the events in Czechoslovakia in 1989 are known as the “velvet revolution” and a similar movement in Eastern Germany, which led first to the collapse of the Berlin Wall, and then to the unification of Germany, is known as “the peaceful revolution (Friedliche Revolution).”

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<sup>1</sup>The research team for the current paper included Mikayel Zolyan, Satenik Mkrtchyan, Hovhannes Hovhannisyan, Anushik Avetyan, Tarevik Mkrtchyan, and Smbat Hakobyan. The research for has been carried out as a part of a research project “In search of a foundation myth: state-building and representation of the events of 1988-1991 in the political discourse of the Republic of Armenia” supported by Academic Swiss Caucasus Net (ASCN).

<sup>2</sup>Marx K. 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, 1852 <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx-works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch01.htm>

Of course, events that led to the fall of Romania's dictator Ceausescu are remembered as revolution, though, obviously, not a peaceful one. The language that refers to revolution, revolutionary movements, revolutionary change, is to a various extent widely used to describe what happened in the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s in various parts of Eastern and Central Europe.

However, when looking at the Armenian discourse, both in terms of political and academic discourse, the events of the late 1980s and early 1990s are rarely seen as a revolution. In Armenia it is ethnologist and anthropologist Harutyun Marutyan, who has consistently used the term "revolution" to refer to the Karabakh movement and its achievements. Marutyan argued that what he called "the Armenian revolution" was one of the first cases in the context of the wave of democratic transition in Eastern Europe at the time, and had to be analyzed in the same context.<sup>3</sup> As for the political discourse, referring to the events of the late 1980s and early 1990s as a revolution is also not very common in Armenia, as we shall see further in the book. During focus group discussions with current students of Armenian universities, who we consider as the "audience/consumers" for the history education discourses, rather the idea of "(peaceful) revolt," "popular/national mobilization/unification/consolidation" or "the beginning" was being circulated as description to the 1988 movement in Armenia.<sup>4</sup>

Whatever terms are used to describe the events of the late 1980s, it is obvious that similar to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, Armenia experienced a popular movement and a largely peaceful transition to democracy, as a result of free elections and a compromise between the old Communist Party elite and the opposition.<sup>5</sup> Like some other countries of the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, it also went through a process of gradual achievement of independent statehood, which was marked by a conflict with the central authorities. Finally, as some other parts of the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, Armenia became involved in an ethno-political conflict with its neighbor Azerbaijan. In this paper we shall analyze how these three developments, which were most important from the viewpoint of Armenian society, i.e. the democratic transition, the achievement of independence and the emergence of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, are represented in Armenian history education and political discourse.

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<sup>3</sup>Marutyan, H. *Iconography of Armenian Identity*, vol. 1, *the Memory of Genocide and the Karabakh*. (Yerevan: Publishing House of the Academy of Sciences, 2009).

<sup>4</sup>Focus group discussions, Yerevan, September, 2016

<sup>5</sup>There were plenty of incidents of violence throughout this period in the region, but these were part of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict or, in certain cases violent actions by the central Soviet authorities, there were few incidents of internal violence in Armenian society, which allows us to speak about a largely peaceful transition to democracy.

Within the context of collective memory of a society different time periods have various degrees of what, using Eviatar Zerubavel's term, can be called "mnemonic density." For most post-Soviet republics (as well as for the countries of Central-Eastern Europe) the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s was a period of high mnemonic density.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the memory of these events also continues to be a subject of "mnemonic battles" (to borrow another of Zerubavel's terms), as well as a major issue of concern for governments and political elites that are striving to maintain control over the narratives of events of the recent past. In the current study, based on the analysis of history textbooks in post-Soviet Armenia, we shall look precisely at how the state (or the government), with the help of intellectuals (historians), strives to control the narratives of the past and shape the collective memory of its citizens. The analysis will focus on history textbooks, the official discourse, as well as the opposition's response to the official discourse, all of which can be viewed as tools of mnemonic socialization (to use another of Zerubavel's term).

As mentioned, the events of the late 1980s and early 1990s are important in several ways for Armenia. First, this was the period of the emergence of independent nation-states on the ruins of the USSR. Then, it was a period, when a totalitarian system of state socialism was replaced (at least in theory) by a democratic political system, and free market economy. In the case of Armenia, it was also the period when the largest popular movement in the country's modern history took place. Finally, it was during these years that the ethnic conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh began unfolding. Thus, this period is of crucial importance for the newly emerged Armenian state. It has been a subject of debates and various conflicting interpretations, which could range from conceptualizing these events as a democratic revolution to conspiracy theories linking these events to subversive activities of outside forces.

Although a quarter of a century has passed since the break-up of the Soviet Union, it is still not clear whether the fall of the Soviet Empire was a victory for democracy, for nationalism or both. Armenia became one of the first regions of the USSR, where a popular movement, combining elements of a pro-democracy and a nationalist movement, challenged the Soviet order. It started in 1988 with demands of reunification with an Armenian-populated enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh (which at the time was part of the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic). At this first stage, the demands of the movement were voiced within the framework of the Soviet official discourse, or, more precisely, the reformist discourse of "Perestroika" and "Glasnost." However, as the movement encountered a largely hostile reaction from the central authorities, it was transformed into a mass movement that challenged the Soviet order and campaigned for Armenia as an independent democratic nation-state.

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<sup>6</sup>Zerubavel, E. *Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past* (University of Chicago Press, 2003).

When, after the fall of the USSR, Armenia did become an independent state, the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh developed into a full-scale war. When it comes to assessing the success of democratic transition, Armenia's record has been mixed: since the early 1990s it has been fluctuating between democracy and authoritarianism. Therefore, today it is interesting to look at how the events of the late 1980s and early 1990s are represented in history education: are they seen rather as a period of a national resurgence or a democratic revolution, or, in case of the combined interpretation, how the elements of both versions interact with each other?

Three main models of representation, or three “plotlines” of the narrative of events of 1988-1991 in the Armenian political discourse can be outlined. According to the interests and approaches of the ruling elite of the time, as well as the influence of external factors, elements of these other narratives were gaining the upper hand in the official discourse. These narratives can be divided into three main paradigms:

- (1) narrative of democratic struggle against totalitarian regime;
- (2) narrative of struggle of national liberation against foreign domination;
- (3) Nagorno-Karabakh based narrative, which also includes the narrative of conflict with Azerbaijan.

During the 1990s, when Armenia's post-Soviet elites claimed the country was going through a transition to democracy, the first two narratives have been most commonly promoted by the authorities. At the same time, parts of the opposition, which often criticized the government from the position of ethnic nationalism, emphasized the “ethno-nationalist” narrative. Since the late 1990s, when authoritarian tendencies became more obvious, the ruling elite began to gravitate toward the “ethno-nationalist” paradigm. However, “democratic” and “anti-colonial” narratives have not disappeared, as they have been often used by opposition and non-formal social movements. Thus, the “democratic movement” narrative was revived by supporters of Levon Ter-Petrosyan, the first president of the Republic of Armenia, turned opposition leader, who returned to the political scene as the leader of opposition in 2007.

## **2. “3000 years of history” and a “newly independent country”: the peculiarities of the Armenian context**

When it comes to analyzing the historical context of nation-building in Armenia, it is in some ways, a typical post-Soviet country, while in some ways it is a stand alone case. To use Ernest Gellner's term, Armenia was part of the “fourth time zone” of Europe, i.e. the region, where the process of transition from multi-ethnic empires to nation states was frozen as result of the emergence of the USSR, which was essentially a reincarnation of the Russian Empire under the banner of Communist ideology.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>On Gellner's concept of “time zone” see Gellner E. *Nationalism* (New York Press, 1997).

Armenians take pride in being one of the oldest surviving ethnic groups living in the contemporary world and a country known as Armenia has been mentioned in sources at least since 6th century B.C.<sup>8</sup> The Armenian kingdom is also considered to be the first country in the world to adopt Christianity as official religion. It, however, lost its independence in the 5th century to Byzantine and Persian Empires, then re-emerged in the 9th century, and was again conquered by the Byzantines in the 11th century. The last reincarnation of medieval Armenian statehood was represented by the kingdom of Cilicia, on the Mediterranean Sea, which survived until 1375, when it was subdued by the Egyptian Mamelukes. Since then, various Armenian principalities, semi-independent quasi-state formations, had existed in various parts of the geographic territory inhabited by Armenians, surviving up until the 18th century, including the territory known today as Karabakh.

However, the first attempt of building a modern Armenian nation-state took place in 1918-1920, at the same time with attempts to realize similar nation-state projects in various parts of the former Russian, Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires. The attempt to build an Armenian nation-state took place in what was at the time called “Russian” or Eastern Armenia. Although the Armenian national movement had been much more pronounced in the “Turkish” or Western Armenia, that region had been virtually cleansed of its Armenian inhabitants as the result of the Armenian Genocide of 1915.

The majority of nation-state projects on the territory of the Russian Empire were short-lived, as were the three republics of the South Caucasus, Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan. All three were ultimately “Sovietized” a term used by the Soviet historiography to describe what the opponents of the Bolsheviks at the time called “occupation.” In the case of Armenia, however, the occupation by the Bolsheviks was viewed by many as the lesser of the two evils at the time. “Soviet power” was proclaimed on December 2, 1920, when Armenia had already lost a war to the Turkish Kemalist movement. The war cost the short-lived independent Armenia almost half of its territory, which was ceded to Turkey by the Treaty of Alexandropol, signed on the same date, December 2, when the Armenian government surrendered its powers to the so called “revolutionary committee,” controlled by Armenian Bolsheviks. This, however, still amounted to the lesser evil: while in the territories lost to Turkey Armenians faced ethnic cleansing, the part claimed by the Bolsheviks remained formally independent at first, and later became one of the republics of the Soviet Union.

Soviet Armenia, which today in Armenia is often referred to as “the second republic” was a peculiar compromise between a sovereign nation-state and a province of an empire, all under the guise of the formally internationalist Communist ideology. The ethno-federal structure of the Soviet Union itself, as it emerged in the early 1920s, was itself a compromise between a vertically

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<sup>8</sup>The Behistun inscription of the Persian king Darius the Great (522-486 BC).

ruled centralized state, on the one hand, especially when it came to political and economic decisions, and national (or nationalist) projects in such fields as culture, language and education, central for nationalism in its “Eastern” or “ethno-cultural” form. Various studies have shown how the Soviet state, while opposed to nationalism on the level of ideology, and having prosecuted its nationalist opponents, at the same time, made concessions or even encouraged nationalism not only when it came to identity and culture, but also in some respects in the political sphere. So the so-called national republics were, in effect, nation-states in a nutshell, kept together by the network of economic links and the political control of the central authorities. When in the end of the 1980s, both the Soviet economy and the political authority of the Moscow government began to wane, it was not long before these proto-nation-states realized their potential and became sovereign nation-states.<sup>9</sup>

In relation to the process of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the former Soviet republics can be roughly divided into two groups: those that experienced mass movements that in time evolved into pro-independence movements that contributed to the break-up of the USSR itself, and those for which national independence was an outcome of the process of the collapse of USSR rather than a goal attained through a large-scale movement. Armenia can be considered one of the most ardent examples of the first case: here a mass national movement emerged as early as the beginning of 1988. However, unlike for example the Baltics, the Armenian national movement initially was not aiming at independence, at least openly, but had other goals. Initially, the overarching goal of the movement was unification of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, though other issues were also raised, including environment-related issues. At this stage, the issue of independence was raised by more radical groups affiliated with Soviet-era dissidents, and was kept far from the main agenda of the protests, as it was seen as openly “anti-Soviet” and, thus, potentially dangerous.<sup>10</sup>

As a precursor to the events of 1988, a rally took place in Yerevan in 1987 that focused on issues of the environment. In February 1988, the first mass protests took place with the demand of the transfer of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region (NKAR) from the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic (Azerbaijan SSR) to the Armenia SSR. The political phenomenon that emerged is usually referred to as “the Karabakh Movement” and it occupies an important place in the Armenian collective memory and public discourse. As we shall see further in this book, the Karabakh Movement performs the role of a heroic foundation myth for the Armenian state existing today, i.e. what Armenians call “the third Republic” in the same way that for example the American Revolution is crucial for the identity and collective memory in the US, or the French Revolution for identity and collective memory in

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<sup>9</sup>Slezkine, Yu. The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism (Slavic Review 53 no. 2, 1994); Martin, T. The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

<sup>10</sup>L. Abrahamyan and G. Shagoyan, From Carnival Civil Society toward a Real Civil Society: Democracy Trends in Post-Soviet Armenia// Anthropology & Archeology of Eurasia, vol. 50, no. 3 (Winter 2011–12), 2012, pp. 11-50.; Interview with Levon Abrahamyan, Interview with Hranush Kharatyan.

modern France.<sup>11</sup> Focus Group discussions with students of universities in Yerevan also revealed the idea of the “1988 movement” as “the beginning/start/birth” of the Independent Republic of Armenia as part of the students’ perceptions. The Karabakh Movement also became a model emulated by political protests and movements in post-Soviet Armenia: virtually all major opposition protest movements that took place in Armenia in the past 20 years since the early 1990s were to various extent modeled on the Karabakh Movement and made a claim to be the legitimate heirs of the Karabakh movement.<sup>12</sup>

As it is often the case with such mass movements, the Karabakh movement was many things to many people. To some, it was the struggle for reunion with Karabakh that was the main essence of the movement. To others, the main goal of the movement was establishing (or restoring) national independence. In the view of some, the emphasis was on the struggle for political liberties against a totalitarian system. Some combined all three goals. And, probably, many ordinary participants of the rallies hardly had any clear idea of what their goals were, but were motivated by feelings of anger and injustice. In any case, the movement went through a metamorphosis after the first protests in February 1988. Thus, during the first rallies, the participants limited their demands to the issue of transferring Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia. Moreover, the movement framed its claims within the dominant Soviet discourse, quoted Lenin’s support for the principle of national self-determination and did everything they could to emphasize their loyalty to the Soviet system and to the policies of Mikhail Gorbachev. The movement insisted that its demands were based on the USSR constitution, and, even later, when the issue of independence was raised, the whole procedure of independence referendum was conducted in accordance with the Soviet legislation<sup>13</sup> of that time.

However, things started to change after the mass killings of ethnic Armenians in the Azerbaijani town of Sumgait. The failure of the Soviet authorities to prevent the killings and to do justice to the killers (at least that was the dominant perception in Armenia) led to a re-evaluation of the attitude to central authorities. Moscow’s futile attempts to suppress “the disorder” by banning demonstrations, imposing a curfew and deploying troops in central Yerevan only made things worse. Clumsy coverage by the central media,

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<sup>11</sup>On the Karabakh movement and its impact on Armenian politics and identity, see Astourian, S. From Ter-Petrosyan to Kocharyan: Leadership Change in Armenia. Berkeley Programme in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies. UC Berkeley Working Paper Series (Berkeley, 2001); Libaridian, G. (ed.) *Armenia at the Crossroads: Democracy and Nationhood in the Post-Soviet Era* (Blue Crane Books, Watertown, 1991); Libaridian, G. *Modern Armenia: People, Nation, State* (Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick and London, 2007). Malkasian, M. *Gha-Ra-Bagh!: The Emergence of the National Democratic Movement in Armenia* (Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1996); Marutyan, H. *Op. Cit.*, 2009; Suny, R. *Looking Toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History* (Indiana University Press. Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1993); L. Abrahamyan and G. Shagoyan, *op.cit.*

<sup>12</sup>L. Abrahamyan and G. Shagoyan, *op.cit.*

<sup>13</sup>Levon Abrahamyan, interview, L. Abrahamyan, G. Shagoyan, *op. cit*; Michale Ochs, former member of Helsinki Committee, personal communication, Washington DC, September 20, 2016.

which presented Armenian protesters as extremists and radicals, manipulated by criminal elements, did not help either. It was a matter of months before the people gathered in the squares and streets of Yerevan started to demand national independence and an end to the totalitarian system. Parallel to that, confrontation with Azerbaijan also seemed to get out of hand: by the end of 1988, the majority of Armenians from Azerbaijan and Azerbaijanis from Armenia had left their homes. Some Armenians had remained only in Baku, the formerly cosmopolitan capital of Soviet Azerbaijan, but they were also forced to move after the Armenian pogrom in January 1990. The situation in Nagorno-Karabakh was sliding toward war quite fast.

However, even as the movement was radicalizing, the question of independence still seemed to be a dilemma for the majority of Armenians. It is probably here that the differences between the Armenian discourse and those of other Soviet republics were the most ardent. The question of independence was perceived somewhat differently in Armenia as compared to some other Soviet republics that saw mass protests in the late 1980s. Thus, in the Baltic States, and increasingly also in Georgia, the Soviet government was by the end of the 1980s viewed as an occupation force that had brought nothing but suffering and needed to be overthrown. In Armenia, however, as mentioned before, the Soviet option was perceived as "the lesser evil." This is due not just to the circumstances of the Sovietization in 1920, but is also related to the Armenian experience of massacres and genocide in Turkey, as well as the 19th century Russian-Turkish wars. From the point of view of many Armenians, Russia was a natural ally, even a kind of a savior, the only protection against murderous Turkey bent on destroying Armenians as a nation.

It was this pattern of thinking that for long time inhibited the appearance of demands for national independence in the public discourse of Armenia, even at the first stages of the Karabakh movement. It was only when the Moscow authorities came to be perceived as not only unable to solve the Karabakh question, but also as tacitly supporting the Azerbaijani side, that the demand for national independence became a part of the movement's agenda. Criticism of the movement, aired by the central Soviet media, which described the protesters as "extremists" added to the anti-Kremlin mood.<sup>14</sup> Even then, debates about whether national independence is attainable for Armenia remained. Many Armenians both in Armenia and in the Diaspora strongly believed that an independent Armenia, left without the support of the Russian "Big brother" would be left helpless in the face of imminent Turkish aggression.<sup>15</sup> This view, however, was ultimately defeated by the independence agenda, associated with the opposition forces, particularly the Armenian National Movement (ANM) party, which came to power in 1990.

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<sup>14</sup>Interview with Hranush Kharatyan, April, 2016.

<sup>15</sup>For a thorough discussion of these debates see Libaridian, G. *The Challenge of Statehood: Armenian Political Thinking Since Independence* (Blue Crane Books, Watertown, 1999).

As stated above, the model of transition from Communist government in Armenia was not far removed from similar processes in Eastern and Central Europe and some parts of the Soviet Union. Under pressure from the opposition on the one hand, and the weakening of the Soviet leadership in Moscow on the other, the Communist Party was losing its grip on power. It was forced to compete in democratic elections for the first time in its history, and it suffered a defeat at the hands of the democratic opposition, the majority of which gathered under the banner of the Armenian National Movement party. ANM leaders, Levon Ter-Petrosyan and Vazgen Manukyan divided the top jobs in the country: Ter-Petrosyan became the Chairman of the Supreme Council and Vazgen Manukyan the prime-minister. In 1991, Ter-Petrosyan won the first presidential elections in Armenia and became its first president.

In the first half of the 1990s, Armenia was representing itself as “a beacon of democracy” in the South Caucasus. As we shall see further, the Armenian government at the time contrasted its situation with the situation in the neighboring countries: by 1993, when Abulfaz Elchibey in Azerbaijan and Zviad Gamsakhurdia in Georgia had been overthrown and replaced by Heydar Aliyev and Eduard Shevardnadze, Armenia became the only state in the South Caucasus that was not led by a former Communist boss. Although the executive branch of the government could be accused of certain authoritarian tendencies, Armenia’s internal political life followed a largely democratic pattern (see chapter 3). The troubles lay in the economic field: Armenia’s economy was largely destroyed partly as a result of the breakdown of the Soviet system, partly as a result of the war with Azerbaijan and the blockade imposed by Azerbaijan’s ally, Turkey. The corruption that was widespread among the members of the new elite, at least according to its critics, did not help.

As a consequence of all these factors, the initially sky-high ratings of the ANM were replaced by fierce opposition of a significant part of the society. Many former ANM leaders, including Vazgen Manukyan, went into opposition. Things got murky, especially with the accusations of election fraud in the parliamentary elections in 1995 and the presidential election in 1996. Eventually, Ter-Petrosyan felt that he had lost the support of a large part of his own inner circle and had to resign in February 1998. Ter-Petrosyan was removed by a coalition of his former teammates, who installed and brought to power the prime-minister, Robert Kocharyan (see chapters 3, 4). Under Kocharyan, and his successor Serzh Sargsyan, the consolidation of a hybrid regime, or to use the term coined by Lewitsky and Way a competitive authoritarian regime, which had begun in the 1990s reached its logical end.<sup>16</sup>

As is often the case in such regimes, Armenia became bogged in a cycle of disputed elections and protests. The first disputed elections, followed by mass protests took place in 1996, when Ter-Petrosyan, as the incumbent, faced the united opposition

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<sup>16</sup>Lewitsky, S. and Way, L. *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

led by Vazgen Manukyan. Since then the pattern repeated itself practically at every presidential election, with different levels of election fraud, as well as of the violence that followed. Ironically, Ter-Petrosyan found himself in the position of an opposition leader disputing election results in 2008, when official data awarded victory to Serzh Sargsyan, who acted as the government camp candidate. The 2008 protests were also the tensest, and ended in bloodshed that claimed ten victims on March 1, 2008, as government forces used violence to disperse the protesters.<sup>17</sup>

According to a view shared by many in Armenia, one of the reasons why Armenia's democracy failed to become sustainable is the ongoing Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The standoff in Nagorno-Karabakh, degenerated into full-scale war after the USSR collapsed, and Nagorno-Karabakh was proclaimed an independent republic. The fighting between Azerbaijani and Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians' forces, the latter supported by the military of Armenia, raged until 1994, when after a series of military victories of the Armenian side Azerbaijan agreed to a ceasefire. Since then for about two decades the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was considered "frozen" as attempts to find a peaceful solution brokered by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) brought little results. A fragile ceasefire held for about twenty years, until a series of ceasefire violations in 2014-2015 finally led to a short outbreak of war in April 2016 and the situation in and around Nagorno-Karabakh remains tense.<sup>18</sup>

Another major issue that is important for understanding the Armenian context today is the problem of Armenia-Turkey relations. The heritage of the Genocide of 1915 has poisoned the relations between the two countries, however, contrary to common perception, it is not the genocide recognition issue that has led to the closed borders and absence of diplomatic relations between the two sides, at least on the level of formal positions of Turkey and Armenia. Turkey, though being one of the first countries to recognize Armenia's independence, had sealed the border with Armenia and refused to establish diplomatic relations, as a part of its support for its ally, Azerbaijan, with which Turkey has close ethnic and linguistic ties. Armenia has officially proclaimed that it seeks to establish relations with Turkey without any preconditions, but at the same time it has also pursued a policy of promoting genocide recognition in third countries, which had unnerved the Turkish government. An attempt to mend fences between Armenia and Turkey, brokered by the Swiss, and supported by the US, EU and Russia, took place in 2009, when the so-called Armenian-Turkish protocols were signed. However, these protocols, which envisaged a step by step normalization of relations, were never ratified by any of the

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<sup>17</sup>Human Rights Watch, *Democracy on Rocky Ground: Armenia's Disputed 2008 Presidential Election, Post-Election Violence, and the One-Sided Pursuit of Accountability* (New York, 2008).

<sup>18</sup>On Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, see De Waal, *The Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War* (New York University Press, 2003).

sides and remained on paper.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, another factor which is necessary for understanding the context of our study, is the factor of Armenian Diaspora. The Armenian Diaspora is one of the oldest diasporas in the world. It is also quite significant in number, especially compared with Armenia's decreasing population. While there are different estimates of the number of Armenians around the world, ranging from seven to ten million, it is obvious that in any case there are more ethnic Armenians residing outside of Armenia, than those residing in Armenia. Although the existence of Armenian communities in various countries has been well-documented at least since the middle ages, the majority of contemporary communities are a result of the genocide of 1915. The descendants of the refugees of 1915 form what is often called in Armenian "the old Diaspora." There was another wave of migration from Armenia in the late 1980s and early 1990s, immediately after the break-up of the USSR: these relatively recent migrants formed what is often called "the new Diaspora" Apart from this division there are also numerous political, religious, cultural, linguistic and other divisions within the Armenian Diaspora communities, which make the Armenian Diaspora quite diverse. However, together with all this diversity, there are certain commonalities that characterize the majority of the Diaspora Armenians, among which probably the most importance is the attachment to a model of Armenian identity, in which identification with the Armenian historical heritage plays a decisive role, and within this history the memory of the Armenian Genocide is in the majority of the cases the most important factor.

### **3.State of Research, Methodology and Sources**

While a large volume of research exists related to issues of memory and history, particularly in the post-Soviet context, including the Caucasus, there is still room for more research, particularly when it comes to the post-Soviet Caucasus. Here, for obvious reasons, a large amount of research has focused on clashes of memories, accompanying ethno-political conflicts. It was in this aspect that the relationship between memory and state building has been studied. In this research we shall focus on the role history narratives are playing in the context of dismantling the old discourse, associated with the "imperial" state, and building the discourse of the newly emerging nation-state. These issues, which seemed almost resolved only several years ago, are today acquiring new importance in the new political context defined by competition of various integration projects in the post-Soviet space, particularly the so called "European" and "Eurasian" projects. Both these projects, present a challenge for the post-Soviet nation-state project.

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<sup>19</sup>On the recent developments in Armenia-Turkey relations see De Waal, Th. *Great Catastrophe: Armenians and Turks in the Shadow of Genocide* (Oxford University Press, 2015); Philips, D. *The Armenia-Turkey Protocols: a Diplomatic History* (Institute for the Study of Human Rights Columbia University, 2012).

There have been studies of issues of memory and representation in post-Soviet Armenia, which have focused on various aspects of collective memory and representations of history. Thus, S. Astourian, A. Iskandaryan, and S. Minasyan have analyzed the narratives of distant past in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and its impact on history narratives in Armenia.<sup>20</sup> H. Marutyan and L. Abrahamyan have touched upon the issue of the uses of historical symbolism during the “Karabakh movement” and its aftermath.<sup>21</sup> M. Zolyan, T. Zakaryan, S. Mkrtchyan, T. Matosyan and others have dealt with history textbooks, particularly in the context of representations of the images of “us” and “them” in the historical narratives, presented by the textbooks.<sup>22</sup> V. Shnirelman (2001) has carried out a fundamental study of clashing historical narratives accompanying the ethnic conflict in the South Caucasus, including the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh.<sup>23</sup> Finally, there is a substantial amount of literature addressing problems of nation-building in the post-Soviet context, including works dealing with Armenia’s late Soviet and post-Soviet experience.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Astourian, S. *In Search of Their Forefathers: National Identity and the Historiography and Politics of Armenian and Azerbaijani Ethnogeneses*, in *Nationalism and History: The Politics of Nation building in Post-Soviet Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia*, ed. by D. Schwartz and R. Panossian (Toronto: University of Toronto Centre for Russian and East European Studies, 1994); Iskandaryan, A. *Armenia: “Karabakhization of National History”* [Karbakhization of national history], in *Natsionalnye Istorii v Sovetskom i Postsobetski-kh Gosudarstvakh* [National Histories in Soviet and Post-Soviet States] (Moskva, Airo-X, 1999) [in Russian]; and Minasyan, S. *Armenia’s Attitude Towards its Past: History and Politics* (ETH Zurich; Jefferson Institute, Washington D.C.; Heinrich Böll Foundation, Tbilisi; Research Centre for East European Studies, University of Bremen, 2009).

<sup>21</sup>Marutyan, H. *Op. Cit.*, 2009; Abrahamian, L. *Armenian Identity in a Changing World* (CA: Mazda Publishers, 2006); Dudwick, N. *The Cultural Construction of Political Violence in Armenia and Azerbaijan*. in *Problems of Post-Communism* (July /August 1995).

<sup>22</sup>Zolyan, M. and Zakaryan, T. “Representations of “Us” and “Them” in History Textbooks of Post-Soviet Armenia” in B. Sidikov (ed). *Schulbücher im postsowjetischen Kaukasus und in Zentralasien / (Textbooks in the Post-Soviet Caucasus and in Central Asia, International Textbook Research, Volume 30, Braunschweig, Georg-Eckert-Institut für internationale Schulbuchforschung, 2008)*; Zolyan, M. and Zakaryan, T. “We are a Small Nation, but...” *The Image of the Self, the Image of the Other, and the Image of the Enemy in School Textbooks of History of Armenia,* in *Clio has Many Faces: Battles for History in the Post-Soviet Space* (Georg-Eckert-Institut für Internationale Schulbuchforschung, Braunschweig, 2010); Mkrtchyan, S. *Armenia-Georgia Relations (1918-1921), as Reflected in School Textbooks: “Wars” or a “Dialogue” of Memories in City, Migration, Markets* (New Studies in Social science from the South Caucasus collection of articles 5, Heinrich Beoll Stiftung 2011), 169-184; Mkrtchyan, S. *State and Church in Armenian State Schools: from Atheistic Soviet Education to the Contemporary ‘History of Armenian Church’ Course in Jödicke, Ansgar (ed.) (Religious Education Politics, the State, and Society. Ergon-Verlag GmbH, 2013), 149-165*; Matosyan, T. “Inventing Traditions”: *The Theme of Sovietisation in History Textbooks of Soviet and Post-Soviet Armenia, Myths and Conflict in the South Caucasus, volume 1 (Instrumentalisation of Conflict in Political Discourse, International Alert, 2013).*

<sup>23</sup>Shnirelman, V. *The Value of the Past: Myths. Identity and Politics in Transcaucasia* (Osaka, 2001).

<sup>24</sup>Suny, R. *Op. Cit.*, 1993; Libaridian, G. (ed.) *Armenia at the Crossroads: Democracy and Nationhood in the Post Soviet Era* (Blue Crane Books, Watertown, 1991); Libaridian, G. *Op. Cit.*, 1999; Libaridian, G. *Modern Armenia: People, Nation, State* (Transaction Publishers: New Brunswick and London, 2007); Ishkanyan, A. *Democracy Building and Civil Society in Post-Soviet Armenia* (London, Routledge, 2008).

In the course of research, two main categories of sources were used: school textbooks and media material. School textbooks included mostly history textbooks, including Armenian history textbooks and World history textbooks (these are two separate subjects in the school curriculum of Armenia). Also, textbooks of other social sciences have been scanned for references to the events of the period of interest, focusing on textbooks that may contain references to events of 1988-1991 (e.g. such as civics, introduction into social studies, etc.). These include textbooks currently in use, as well as textbooks, which had been used in Armenian schools during the period of independence, i.e. from 1992 to 2013, which allowed not only an analysis of the narrative that is currently reproduced through school textbooks, but also looking at the dynamics of the different narratives reproduced through several editions of textbooks. As a complementary and auxiliary to the textbook review, we conducted several focus group discussions (in total four groups and 24 participants) with undergraduate students of universities in Yerevan to discuss the issues of teaching modern history as a school subject, as well as to reflect on the events of 1988-1991, “the 1988 movement.”

The second category of sources included archival print media materials, which were used to extract the speeches and statements by political leaders and representatives of the opposition. Newspapers had been chosen, which represented both pro-government and opposition media.<sup>25</sup> The newspapers were studied for the period of 1992-2013: the researchers looked for speeches and statements by the important political figures of the time. For the government camp these were identified as the holders of the most important state offices, that is the president, the head of the National Assembly, the prime-minister, the minister of foreign affairs and the minister of defense. Naturally, similar criteria could not be used when it comes to identifying the leading opposition figures of each period, so the team identified the key representatives of the opposition based on a combination of factors, including the number of votes received by the opposition candidates and parties in presidential and parliamentary elections, the fact of being represented in the National Assembly (parliament), as well as access to media outlets. Of all the speeches and statements the ones that included references to the events of the period of interest were selected.

Both textbook texts and statements by the political figures were subjected to a discourse analysis. The analysis first focused on identifying the main narrative patterns that were used in relation to the description of the events of 1988-1991. Naturally, this was easier in the case of history textbooks, while sometimes in the case of political actors, the researchers were dealing with fragments of a narrative, rather than with a coherent narrative, so in certain cases the narrative had to be “reconstructed.”

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<sup>25</sup>Often this included the same persons, who at different times had a different relation to power (e.g. Levon Ter-Petrosyan, Armenia's first president in 1991-1998, and opposition leader since 2008).

The narrative, after it was extracted from the sources, was analyzed first as a whole, and then in terms of relationship between various parts of the narrative. Thus, the analysis focused on which historical events and developments were being stressed in various versions of the narrative, which were simply outlined or hinted to, and which were altogether silenced or omitted. Specific attention was paid to identifying and comparing the linguistic tools used in various narratives, at what kind of terms techniques are used to construct the narrative. Thus, depending on various contexts and positions, the narrative of the same historical events can be constructed as a narrative of a “struggle for national liberation” or as that of a “democratic movement.” To complement the findings of the text-based discourse analysis, interviews were also held, which included experts from various fields related to the topic of the research – political analysts, historians, sociologists, anthropologists, as well as education specialists.

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<sup>26</sup>In this respect it is important to note the differences between various political figures, in terms of how often and how detailed their references are. Thus, Levon Ter-Petrosyan, himself a historian by profession, in certain cases engages into narrating the events of the past, in a manner that is reminiscent of a work of a historian, while other leaders are not so keen on engaging in discussions of the events of the past.

## CHAPTER 2

Telling the Story:  
Narratives of Events  
of 1988-1991 in  
History Textbooks

### 2.1 Setting the Context: How Textbooks are created in Armenia

This chapter deals with the narrative of the events of 1988-1991, as presented by the school textbooks of history, as well as of other social studies subjects. We shall describe the general model of the narrative and proceed to analyze how various key events or developments are represented, in particular focusing on such developments as the inception of the popular movement in the late 1980s, the beginning of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, the defeat of the Communist Party in Armenia, the declaration of independence, the dissolution of the USSR and the war in Nagorno-Karabakh. We shall also pay attention to how the textbooks are contextualizing these developments both in terms of the Armenian history narrative, and in terms of the global and regional developments such as the end of Cold War and the break-up of the USSR. The chapter will also try to address the question what “echoes” the narratives of the textbooks can get among the students, the “audience/consumers” of the textbook content. Through focus group discussions among the students of universities in Armenia, recent high school graduates, we tried to see what possible range of ideas and reflections the students might get from school, what they could recall from the textbook content and how the textbook and other media interchangeably serve as sources for information on events of the recent past for the students. Particularly, how they have formed perceptions about the events either eyewitnesses or participants of which supposedly their parents might have been.

As we shall see from this chapter, even though there are numerous textbooks used in schools in Armenia and some of them cover overlapping topics, in general, they offer a more or less coherent and homogenous narrative of these events. This is in contrast to some other post-Soviet case, e.g. the Ukrainian case, where Kuzio identifies at least three main narrative models.<sup>27</sup> As we shall see from chapter 3, in the Armenian case, the history textbooks have mostly stayed away from the controversy, creating a hybrid narrative, bringing together elements of various interpretations of events of these years. At the same time, however, the textbooks were hesitant to provide a platform for reflective analyses of the multi-perspective view of the events of the recent past as well as micro-histories to be present in the learning process for the students.

Arguably, the existence of a relatively homogenous narrative in the Armenian textbooks, one which combines elements of various interpretations, can be at least partly explained by the fact that in Armenia the process of textbook

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<sup>27</sup>Kuzio, T. National Identity and History Writing in Ukraine (Nationalities Papers, Vol. 34, No. 4, September 2006); see also Wolczuk, K. History, Europe and the “national idea”: The “official” narrative of national identity in Ukraine (Nationalities Papers, Vol. 38, No. 4, August 2000).

creation is centralized through the officially approved national standards and programs for each subject and the government (Ministry of Education and Science) has to approve the textbooks to be used in the schools, the publication of which is funded from the state budget. In theory, there is a possibility of having more than one officially approved version of textbooks to be taught in the general schools of Armenia. However, any textbooks need to be officially approved by government bodies, which in reality, means a process consisting of several stages, effectively leading to a situation in which there is normally one or two officially approved textbooks for each subject. There are several reasons for this. First, the procedures are set that ensure that the textbooks conform with the key frames of the textbook content, as defined by the so-called “National Standards”, a set of documents that describe the minimum mandatory content, objectives and criteria that the textbook should fulfill. Further, there is a special commission created by the government bodies, which checks whether textbooks correspond to the National Standards. Based on the outcomes of this procedure, the list of the textbooks to be published is defined by ministerial decree.

The state also has an additional leverage, since the publication of the textbook is funded by the state: state budget funds the publication of the textbooks, and the publishing houses actually aim to secure state funds for textbook publication. However, a Textbook Circulation Fund is created with the partial participation of students each year renting the textbooks. The publishers, in cooperation with the group of the authors, develop a proposal for a textbook based on the subject standard, which in turn is developed, based on the National Standard for General Education. The textbook proposals are submitted to a competition. The Ministry of Education and Science organizes the selection of the members of the subject commissions based on preliminary issued criteria. They select the nominees from the submitted bids, and the final composition of the six-member commissions is determined through random selection. These commissions evaluate the textbooks content-wise and decide to what extent they correspond to the requirements of the National Standard for each subject. Based on the competition results, the textbooks that receive the highest assessments, i.e. are getting scores above a certain threshold, are offered to the schools.

The process of working out the National Standard is defined by a Decree of the Government of Armenia (8 April 2010, N 439-N), according to which the National Education Standard is created by the Ministry of Science and Education. Specially created Commissions prepare the standards for each subject, based on which the programs are created, which in turn form a guide for the publishing houses together with their teams to prepare the textbook projects to submit to the competition.

The National Educational Standard document also defines a mandatory minimum of the educational content through the mentioned subject programs. A mandatory core of the content is developed per each education sphere and for basic and high schools separately. The final list of textbooks to

be used for each academic year is adopted by a decree of the Minister of Education and Science. Particularly, the courses “World History” and “Armenian History” are included in the subject field “Society and Social Sciences.”

However, there are two versions of World History<sup>28</sup> and Armenian History<sup>29</sup> decreed by the Ministerial order (N 783, 01.08.2014) for use in the ninth grade in general education institutions of Armenia for the academic year 2014-2015. According to the same order, there are different textbooks in use for Armenian history<sup>30</sup> per sections in the high school, the general and science section and the section of Humanities.

As we can see from the description of the process of textbook creation, the government has a profound role in defining the narratives, which are the core of history education in school. Although the texts are usually written by teams of professional historians, the historians are doing their best to provide a text that corresponds to the standard set out by the government bodies. Thus, the outcome of the process is a version of history that is a product of cooperation between the community of professional historians and the government bureaucracy. In addition, the teams of writers working on the textbooks are quite stable, with several authors taking part in the effort in the course of years. The authors are mostly recruited from the History Faculty of Yerevan State University and the Institute of History of the National Academy of Sciences, which have been traditionally the main intellectual centers of Armenian historiography since the late Soviet years, and have remained so during the independence period.

## **2.2 Events of 1988-1991 in School Textbooks in Armenia**

Textbooks currently in use in schools in Armenia cover the events of 1988-1991. These include both textbooks of world history and textbooks of Armenian history. The latter are called “Hayots Patmutyun,” which is commonly translated either as “History of Armenians” or “History of Armenia.” However, we believe the translation “Armenian history” to be more accurate: in fact, the term “Hayots,” which is derived from ancient Armenian, is more adequately translated into the English term “Armenian.” Just like the English term, the word “hayots” combines both the ethnic (i.e. of Armenians as a people) and territorial (i.e. of Armenia as a country) meanings. Therefore, we shall stick to the form “Armenian history” in the current chapter. Thus, in the Armenian case, the historical tradition offers an interesting solution to the dilemma of whether a term that reflects a certain ethnic group or a people, or a term that is based on a certain territory should be used (compare with “people of Ukraine” vs. “the Ukrainian people” in Ukrainian textbooks, Kuzio, 1998).

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<sup>28</sup>World History (9th grade), Edited by A. Stepanyan et al. (Yerevan, Zangak, 2014); World History (9th grade), Edited by N. Hovhannisyan et al. (Yerevan, Edit Print, 2014).

<sup>29</sup>Armenian History (9th grade), edited by V. Barkhudaryan et al. (Yerevan, Manmar, 2014); Armenian History (9th grade), Edited by A. Gevorgyan et al. (Yerevan, Zangak, 2014).

<sup>30</sup>Armenian History for Humanities Section (12th grade), Edited by A. Gevorgyan et al. (Yerevan, Zangak, 2011); Armenian History for General and Science Section, Edited by Yu. Hovsepian et al. (12th grade) (Yerevan, Zangak, 2011); World History for General/Science sections (12th grade), Edited by A. Nazaryan et al. (Yerevan, Zangak, 2011).

However, in everyday life these intricacies are lost as the term “hayots” is usually perceived in the ethnic meaning “history of Armenians.” This is strengthened by the legacy of the Soviet period term “history of Armenian people” “Hay Zhoghovrdi patmutyun”. The most substantial coverage is provided by the Armenian history textbook for 9th grade.<sup>31</sup> There is also some coverage of this period in the world history textbook.<sup>32</sup> Beside these history textbooks, the period in question is also covered by textbooks of “Social Studies” by the 5th grade textbook “Studies of the homeland” (Hayrenagitutyun) and a 4th grade textbook “Me and the Surrounding World.”

### **Defining the Narrative: Struggle for National Liberation**

The narrative of the events in question can be summarized by a quotation from one of the textbooks:

In February 1988, using the opportunities offered by the policy of “Perestroika”, the Armenian people have taken the path of struggle for liberation, demanding the reunification of Artsakh,<sup>33</sup> which had been illegally transferred to Azerbaijan in 1921. The mighty Artsakh movement and the struggle for independence bore fruit: on September 2, 1991 the Republic of Mountainous Karabakh was created, and on September 21, based on the results of a popular referendum, the Republic of Armenia became an independent state.”<sup>34</sup>

There are two important elements of the narrative embedded in these introductory remarks: the struggle for re-unification of Karabakh with Armenia proper, as well as the struggle for independence of Armenia. Both are presented as interrelated phenomena, and both are seen as results of the popular movement that started in 1988, which is defined as “struggle for liberation.” These two elements were among the students’ ideas raised during the focus group discussions, and in the case of the Karabakh-related component, we see that perceptions were not just about the re-unification of Karabakh but rather about its rescue, physical saving of the lives of the people living there. This idea can be illustrated through the following quote from one of the focus group discussions: “if not for that movement, we would not have independence, and there would be no Karabagh...”.<sup>35</sup> According to another focus group participant, “there was also the issue of life: people could have died there, if we did not carry out that movement. In some places, people may have struggled for their values, but here there was also the issue of human life”

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<sup>31</sup>Gevorgyan et al., 2014.

<sup>32</sup>Stepanyan et al., 2014.

<sup>33</sup>“Artsakh” is the name of one of the provinces of ancient and medieval Armenia, which roughly corresponds to the territory of the self-proclaimed Nagorno-Karabakh Republic today, it is often used today in Armenia as a synonym for “Nagorno-Karabakh.”

<sup>34</sup>Gevorgyan et al., 2014, p. 4.

<sup>35</sup>Focus Group Discussion, September 2016 (female, 1993).

(apparently, the focus group participant here refers to the idea that staying under Azerbaijani rule carried the threat of physical violence for Armenians).<sup>36</sup>

Another paragraph from the same textbook, sets the historical context, which led to this struggle (the policy of “Perestroika”), defines the nature of this struggle (struggle for national liberation) and names the enemies that this struggle was directed against (Azerbaijani and the central authorities). These ideas are elaborated in the summary text of the third section of the textbook, which is dealing with the period of interest to us:

“The policy of Perestroika aimed to save the crumbling Soviet state. Believing the principles declared by the Perestroika, the Armenians of Mountainous Karabakh once again raised the demand of reunification with the Motherland. Azerbaijani authorities, aided by the connivance of the central authorities, and wishing to inhibit the Armenian people’s struggle for liberation, organized the genocide of Armenians in Sumgait. However, neither the earthquake of Spitak, nor the Sumgait genocide did halt the unfolding all-people’s movement.”<sup>37</sup>

The textbook proceeds to describe the daily rallies in the Theater Square<sup>38</sup> in Yerevan and their demands for unification of Artsakh with Armenia:

“on February 20 thousands of protesters gathered on the Theater Square (now Liberty Square) raised the demand of uniting Artsakh with Armenia... On February 22, in order to lead the Karabakh movement, to put it onto the necessary path, the “Karabakh” committee was created. On February 25-26 the number of protesters in Yerevan reached several hundred thousand. This was an unprecedented event in the history of the USSR.”<sup>39</sup>

Thus, the book describes in detail the beginning of the “Karabakh movement,” which should show the students the importance of these events in the light of subsequent developments. In the end of the section there are questions, addressed to the students: “what was the essence of the Artsakh movement?” “What was the outcome of all-people’s movement?”. Apparently, these questions are supposed to be answered in accordance with the interpretation quoted above.

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<sup>36</sup>Focus Group Discussion, September 2016 (female, 1995).

<sup>37</sup>Ibid, p. 141.

<sup>38</sup>In everyday speech in Yerevan it was always known as “Opera Square” or simply “Opera”, but the textbooks use the official title as it was known then – “the Theater Square”.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid, pp. 114-115.

During the focus group discussions, when we were discussing their reflections on the school textbooks about the events of 1988-1991, a general trend in all the groups were that the participants were sure the textbooks did not speak much about the public movement. Part of the participants said they remember the text about the December 1988 earthquake (especially the humanitarian aid and support that the Armenian people received from all over the world), and that the textbook put focus on these events rather than the movement itself. They could not recall the text about the movement, or they were sure there was a very small portion of text about it. However, declaration of independence has been mentioned as something the participants remember from the textbooks. Similarly the most impressive among the images or views on the textbook pages for them was the “picture of a crowded demonstration on Freedom Square.”<sup>40</sup> Another focus group participant mentioned “a huge number of demonstrators, unprecedented numbers something that we cannot repeat again.”<sup>41</sup>

During the Focus group discussions some participants assessed as unsatisfactory the teaching of history of independent Armenia both in terms of the content of the textbooks and the teachers’ approach, also showing concerns over the methodology of teaching modern history (such as providing wider space for students’ own research, using multiple sources and multi-perspective view on the events of the very recent past rather than counting only on a text written by scholars/-textbook authors). Some were pointing to the fact that in the textbook contents they noticed a focus on trauma and victimhood rather than describing the people of the time as being powerful actors, successful in their national consolidation and mass protest. In the words of one participant, “these [the 1988 Movement] were the brilliant pages of the Armenian history, they should have been given a central role.”<sup>42</sup>

In the textbooks, the mass movement is also referred to as “the all-people’s movement” (*hamazhoghovrdakan sharzhum*), as well as “continuing protests,” which are linked to “the genocide of Armenians in Sumgait.” It has to be noted that referring to the mass killings of Armenians in Sumgait in 1988, though quite widespread in Armenia, is not the dominant term for the events, more commonly used terms are “massacre” “pogrom” etc. So, the use of the stronger term “genocide” is a matter of the conscious choice of the authors. Summing up, it is obvious that this assessment of the events puts the focus on the ethno-national “liberation” aspect of the events of the late 1980s.

The term often by the textbooks to describe the mass movement of the late 1980s is the “movement for national liberation” (*azgayin-azatagrakan sharzhum*). The term

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<sup>40</sup>Focus Group discussion, September 2016; in fact the square was called “Theater Square” in 1988, but the students use the contemporary name for it.

<sup>41</sup>Focus Group discussion, September 2016, (male, 1996).

<sup>42</sup>Focus group discussions, September 2016, (female, 1994).

“struggle for national liberation” is a common term used in Soviet and post-Soviet Armenian historiography, arguably inherited from Soviet historiography, in which the term “natsionalno-osvoboditelnaya bor’ba” was used in those cases when a national/ist movement was presented in a positive light, as opposed to the terms “nationalism” and “nationalist”, which had a negative connotation in the discourse of Soviet historiography. Whether the term “struggle for national liberation” refers to the issue of Karabakh, or it is equally applied to the struggle for independence from Moscow, is not always very clear from the context. In most cases, it could be equally applied to both, moreover, the authors do not seem to separate one from the other. However, the issue of independence is not explicitly mentioned, which brings us to the conclusion that the “struggle for national liberation” first and foremost applies to the struggle for Karabakh.

However, a reference to democracy is included in the summary of the third section of textbook, where it is mentioned, that “the parliament, formed by the first democratic elections on May 20, 1990, adopted the document called ‘Declaration of Armenia’s Independence’.” Here we see that the authors are linking the issues of democracy and independence. Interestingly, the mentioning of “the first democratic elections” plays an auxiliary role here, the main event, which the authors are willing to stress, being the declaration of independence. In this context the fact that the first democratic elections were held in Armenia is valued as a pre-requisite for the adoption of the “Declaration of Independence.” In other words, the passage is aimed at stressing the democratic legitimacy of the newly created independent state, rather than at stressing the importance of achievement of democracy per se. The passage is followed by the discussion of the Belovezh Agreement of December 1991 that ended the Soviet Union, and the agreement that formed the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), thus continuing the narrative of independence through focusing on the external factors which made its realization possible.

Explaining the causes and goals of the movement, the textbook states that re-unification with Armenia was “the dream” of the Armenian people of Artsakh, “which could not be accepted by Azerbaijani leadership.” Karabakh movement is linked to the idea of “historical justice”: “...the Armenian people had come out for a liberation struggle with the demand to re-unite Armenia and Artsakh, which had been illegally and forcibly handed to Azerbaijan in 1921.”<sup>43</sup> Thus, a teleological explanation of the Karabakh movement is offered, explaining it through its purpose, the unification of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, instead of explaining the political, social and economic factors that led to its emergence.

How it all began: Explaining the Karabakh Movement

Having reviewed the general assessments given by the textbook to the period in question, we can proceed further to how these events are described in detail. History of Armenia 9th grade is the main textbook, which Armenian schools use for teaching about the period in question.

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid, pp. 162-167.

The textbook consists of four sections, which are divided into chapters, and the chapters are divided into paragraphs. The period in question is described in the 3rd section, entitled “Soviet Armenia and the Armenian Diaspora in 1945-1991” and the chapter is called the “Artsakh movement [i.e. Karabakh movement] and the Process of Achievement of Armenia's Independence” and, in turn, consists of three “paragraphs”:

1. “Perestroika” and the beginning of the Artsakh movement;
2. upsurge of the pan-national movement and the beginning of the armed struggle;
3. the process of achievement of independence for Armenia.<sup>44</sup>

Some information related to the period in question is also presented in the 4th section of the textbook, entitled “The Republic of Armenia, the Republic of Mountainous Karabakh and the Armenian Diaspora since 1991 to our days”: Chapter 1, paragraph 1: “the process of consolidation of the Republic of Armenia” (p 144-145); paragraph 5, “the Republic of Mountainous Karabakh” (p. 162). Thus, we can see that on the level of the titles there are three important terms, which are used to describe the period in question: “Artsakh movement,” “Process of independence” and “pan-national movement.” The titles reflect the dominance of the narratives (2) and (3): struggle for national independence and ethnic conflict.

The actual description of events starts with the discussion of the policy of “Perestroika”, which is based on the premise that “by the end of the 1980s the Soviet system had exhausted the opportunities for its development... the country had found itself in a deadlock.” In order to find a way out of the deadlock “Gorbachev and his supporters” chose “the path of improving socialism,” creation of “a democratic variant of socialism,” through reforms, which were carried out under such slogans as “reconstruction,” “new thinking,” and “acceleration.”<sup>45</sup> Thus the textbook starts with discussing the deficiencies of the Soviet system and attempts to reform it. The ensuing break-up of the USSR is interpreted in a two-fold way: on the one hand Gorbachev’s mistakes contributed to it, on the other it was a result of a greater historical process. The authors are trying to combine somehow the two conflicting interpretations of the dissolution of Soviet Union, common in the post-Soviet thinking: one that explains the break-up of the USSR by subjective factors (mistakes of the leadership) and one that sees it as consequence of objective historical processes.

The discussions of the faults of the Soviet totalitarian system creates the impression that it would be followed by a narrative of democratization and the struggle against a totalitarian system, however, in the continuation of this excerpt the element of conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh is stressed. The textbook<sup>46</sup> talks about the Artsakh movement as “a movement of Artsakh

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid, pp. 113-130.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid, p. 113.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

Armenians for independence of Artsakh.”<sup>47</sup> The description of the movement starts with narration about the extraordinary session of the Regional Council of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region (NKAO) on February 20, 1988 (ibid.). Then the textbook proceeds to describe the daily rallies in the Theater Square in Yerevan and their demands for unification of Artsakh with Armenia: “on February 20 thousands of protesters gathered on the Theater Square (now Liberty Square) raised the demand of uniting Artsakh with Armenia.” On February 22, in order to lead the Karabakh movement, to put it into the necessary path, the “Karabakh” committee was created. On February 25-26 the number of protesters in Yerevan reached several hundred thousand. This was an unprecedented event in the history of the USSR.” Then the textbook describes the February 26 statement of Gorbachev “to the workers, the peoples of Azerbaijan and Armenia.”<sup>48</sup>

### Explaining the Context: Why did the USSR Collapse?

The structure of the textbooks’ content shows the authors found it necessary to explain to the students the wider context of the last years of the USSR, within which the Karabakh movement was unfolding. The textbook of Armenian history sets the historical context, which led to this struggle - the “Reconstruction” (“Perestroika”):

“The policy of Reconstruction aimed to save the crumbling Soviet state. Believing the principles declared by the Reconstruction, the Armenians of Mountainous Karabakh once again raised the demand of reunification with the Motherland.”<sup>49</sup> It also pays significant attention to the failed policies of the “Perestroika” (“Reconstruction”): “by the end of the 1980s the Soviet system had exhausted the opportunities for its development... the country had found itself in a deadlock.” In order to find a way out of the deadlock “Gorbachev and his supporters” chose “the path of improving socialism,” creation of “a democratic variant of socialism,” through reforms, which were carried out under such slogans as “reconstruction,” “new thinking,” and “acceleration.”<sup>50</sup>

The World History textbook first describes failed attempts of reform by Andropov and Chernenko in the early 1980s and then proceeds with describing Gorbachev’s reforms, “more radical than those of his predecessors,” but still unsuccessful.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, as the situation was becoming tenser, “almost everywhere ethnic conflicts and controversies between the central authorities and the republics became more acute,” with the 1986 Alma-Ata riots, the

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<sup>47</sup>This description somewhat contradicts the historical facts, since in the beginning the Karabakh movement aimed at uniting the region with Armenia within the frames of the Soviet Union, rather than independence of Nagorno-Karabakh.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid, p. 114-115.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid, p. 113.

<sup>51</sup>Nazaryan, et al., 2014, p. 97.

Karabakh movement and massacres of Armenians in Azerbaijan, as well as “serious conflicts” in Georgia, Uzbekistan, and the Baltic republics mentioned as examples of such conflicts.<sup>52</sup> Interethnic relations and contradictions between “the center” and the republics are given significant weight in explaining the collapse of the USSR: “in the situation of deepening national tensions radically minded national democratic forces (popular fronts) started to advocate restoration of national independence since mid-1989... the independence movements weakened the fundament of the Soviet Union”.<sup>53</sup> Thus, the break-up of the USSR is interpreted in a two-fold fashion: on the one hand leaders’ mistakes contributed to it, on the other it was a result of a greater historical process. The authors are trying to combine the two different interpretations of the dissolution of Soviet Union, common in the post-Soviet thinking: one that explains the break-up of the USSR by subjective factors (mistakes of the leadership) and one that sees it as a consequence of objective historical processes.

In general, the fact of the break-up of the USSR itself does not receive an unequivocal evaluation in the textbooks. This is related to the fact that the Soviet experience in general does not receive an unequivocal positive or negative evaluation in the textbooks. While in some post-Soviet countries the Soviet period is simply categorized as occupation, in Armenia the view of the Soviet past is more nuanced. The textbooks’ attitude reflects this circumstance.

Interesting was the narrative revealed through the answers to the question about the “birth of the Republic of Armenia” we have received from the students in the focus groups: the beginning was the national consolidation, revolt, disobedience and eventually the national independence gained. However, all the depictions of “the victorious start” was then followed by a feeling of sorrow that the continuation of building an independent country was not as successful as the start. Differently the students were describing how and why the “nation deviated from the right path of maintaining and strengthening the independence.” Moreover, to many interpretations, the successful and effective strategies of peaceful revolt, demonstrations and civic participation of the 1988 were not repeated afterwards during the 25 years of the political life of independent Armenia.<sup>54</sup>

### **Explaining the Karabakh Conflict: from Sumgait Massacre to “Armed Struggle”**

The representation of the Karabakh conflict follows a narrative pattern common for the Armenian perception of the conflict: Armenians raised political demands and protested peacefully, while, in response, they were subjected to acts of genocidal violence.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid. p. 98.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Focus group discussion, September 2016.

A key moment in the history of the Karabakh conflict is the massacre of Armenians in the Azerbaijani city Sumgait: “on February 27-29 1988 in the city of Sumgait, in conditions of complete inaction of the police and local government, massacres of the Armenian population took place, according to the horrible rules of Turkish barbarism.”<sup>55</sup> The textbook of world history (9th grade) gives a similar, though less emotional description: “In response to the decision of the NKAO regional council’s Decision about reunification with the motherland, adopted in February 1988, Azerbaijani brigands organized massacres of Armenians in Sumgait, Kirovabad, Baku and other places.”<sup>56</sup>

Thus, use of terms like “brigands” or “Turkish ferocity” the passage draws an immediate analogy with the events of late 19th and early 20th century in Ottoman Turkey, particularly the massacres in 1890s and the Armenian Genocide of 1915. Moreover, the term “genocide” is used to describe the killings in Sumgait: “The Sumgait crime is qualified as genocide”.<sup>57</sup> Of course, this is hardly the reflection of a subjective view of the authors of the textbook: analogies between 1915 and anti-Armenian violence in Azerbaijan have been a common perception in the Armenian society since the late 1980s.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, it is those events that are commonly considered in Armenia as the point of no return that made a violent conflict in Karabakh unavoidable and the textbooks simply reflect this perception.

In this narrative the leadership of the Soviet Union shares responsibility for these genocidal acts with Azerbaijani authorities: “Azerbaijani authorities, with the connivance of the central government, wishing to stop the liberation movement of the Armenian people, organized the genocide of Armenians of Sumgait” .<sup>59</sup> It is also interesting to note that the central government of the USSR is listed as one of the culprits in the massacres in Sumgait. This, ironically, is a view shared by some Azerbaijani interpretations of the events, though, naturally, with a completely different explanation of the rationale behind their actions. According to the version of events popular in Azerbaijan, the Sumgait pogrom was organized by the pro-Armenian central authorities in order to discredit the Azerbaijani side.<sup>60</sup>

Another episode where the central Soviet authorities are held responsible is the “Koltso” (“the Ring”) operation, carried out by the Soviet armed forces in cooperation with Azerbaijani special police units against Armenian villages in Nagorno-Karabakh and adjacent regions in 1991:

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<sup>55</sup>Gevorgyan et al., 2014, p. 115.

<sup>56</sup>Stepanyan et al, 2014, p. 118.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid. pp. 115-116.

<sup>58</sup>See Marutyan, Op. Cit., 2009; Abrahamyan, Op. Cit., 2006; Dudwick, Op. Cit., 1995 and others.

<sup>59</sup>Stepanyan et al, 2014, p. 141.

<sup>60</sup>Dudwick, Op. Cit., 1995, De Waal, Op. Cit., 2003.

“with the shelling of the village Getashen... The operation ‘Ring’, planned in Moscow” started”.<sup>61</sup> This is also adding a dimension of struggle for liberation against the imperial center to the narrative. However, this conflict plays an auxiliary role: the main adversary is Azerbaijan. The textbook does not even attempt to explain the reasons of Moscow’s “anti-Armenian” stance, leaving it to the students through the question to the students in the end of the paragraph: “Why did Moscow assume an anti-Armenian approach in the issue of Artsakh?”<sup>62</sup>

Another important element of the narrative of Nagorno-Karabakh movement, which we see in these excerpts is the idea of “historical justice,” which also reflects the perceptions of the late 1980s. Thus, the textbook explains that “...the Armenian people had come out for a liberation struggle with the demand to re-unite Armenia and Artsakh, which had been illegally and forcibly handed to Azerbaijan in 1921.”<sup>63</sup>

The narrative proceeds to describe what is seen as the two subsequent phases of the Karabakh movement: one refers to the surge of the “pan-national movement,” while the second talks about the “armed phase of the liberation struggle.” It starts from the dismissal of the heads of the Soviet republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan in May 1988, proceeds to describe such events as the curfew in Yerevan, declared on November 24 in Yerevan, the Spitak earthquake, visit of Gorbachev to Armenia in its aftermath, the arrests of Armenian activists on January 9, 1989, creation of a “Committee of Special Administration” in NKAR on January 11, continuing rallies and strikes in Armenia and Karabakh. These protests, in particular, are credited with having been instrumental in forcing the Soviet authorities to release the activists detained in the aftermath of the earthquake.<sup>64</sup>

The textbook proceeds to describe the creation of “the National Council of Mountainous Karabakh,” which became the leader of “the national liberation struggle of the Artsakhians.” It calls “historic” the decision of the joint session of the Supreme Council of Armenian SSR and the National Council of Mountainous Karabakh on December 1, 1989, about the reunification of the Armenian SSR and NKAO. It also describes the massacres and deportation of the Armenian population of Baku on January 13-20, 1990. It is at this point that the textbook adds that “thousands of Armenians in Kirovabad (Ganja), Lowland Karabakh, Shamkhor and other places were subject to massacres, plunder, and other barbarities”.<sup>65</sup> It also talks about the “tense situation” in Armenia in 1990, where “the Theater Square had become the center for organization of volunteer armed forces, campaigning for the parliamentary elections to be held in May 1990, as well as material

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<sup>61</sup> Gevorgyan et al., 2014, p. 121.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid. p. 123.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid. p. 121.

and military aid for Artsakh". It also talks about "the new form of Armenian protests, the hunger strikes."<sup>66</sup>

The discussion of the "armed phase of the liberation struggle" refers mostly to the "Koltso" (i.e. "the Ring" in Russian) operation, carried out by the Soviet armed forces in cooperation with Azerbaijani special police units against Armenian villages in and around the Nagorno-Karabakh. This section starts with the statement referring to deportations of Armenian villages north of NKAO, which are referred to as "Northern Artsakh": "the situation in Northern Artsakh was very grave... Armenian villages of the Getabek, Tovuz, Shamkhor and Dashkesan districts of Azerbaijani SSR were emptied, now it was the time of the districts of Shahumyan and Khanlar".<sup>67</sup> Then, with the shelling of the village Getashen, "The operation 'Ring', planned in Moscow" started. However, while it is stressed that the operation was planned in Moscow, these events are also called "a war inflicted on the Armenian population of Artsakh by Azerbaijan."<sup>68</sup> It is also argued that it was in response to this act of war, that the formation of forces of self-defenses started "in Stepanakert and all the districts of the region." On the whole, this section provides an opening to the plotline of the Karabakh conflict narrative, in which the victim of injustice (i.e. the Armenians), are able to eventually overcome this injustice, and emerge as a victor.

The textbooks also devote significant space to substantiating Nagorno-Karabakh's claim to independence. According to the Armenian History textbook Azerbaijan had compromised the legal basis of its claim toward Nagorno-Karabakh by its own "restoration of independence" declaration in 1991 when it declared itself the legal successor of Azerbaijani Democratic Republic of 1918, as the latter did not include Nagorno-Karabakh.<sup>69</sup> The textbook, in bold letters, claims that "Azerbaijan was leaving the USSR, and therefore Mountainous Karabakh could not stay within its borders." This circumstance is presented as the legal basis for the declaration of independence of the Mountainous Karabakh Republic on September 2 1991: "an independent Armenian state, the Republic of Mountainous Karabakh, was founded." The declaration of independence of Nagorno-Karabakh and the military conflict are presented as a consequence of the tense situation, in which "the Armenian people were forced to take up arms and fight for its independence."<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>Ibid.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid. p. 122.

<sup>69</sup>Both Armenia and Azerbaijan claimed the region as their territory in 1918-1920, and eventually engaged in an armed conflict, as control over the region was going back and forth from one side to the other.

<sup>70</sup>Gevorgyan et al. 2014, p. 123.

The declaration of independence of Artsakh and the military conflict are presented as a consequence of the tense situation, in which “the Armenian people were forced to take up arms and fight for its independence.” It explains the state of conflicted relations with Azerbaijan by “radical position of Azerbaijan, which does not wish to recognize the right to self-determination of the people of Karabakh and their independence, which has been won in a heroic struggle.”<sup>71</sup>

The fact that the conflict has not been resolved to this day is explained by “the radical position of Azerbaijan, which does not wish to recognize the right to self-determination of the people of Karabakh and their independence, which has been won in a heroic struggle.”<sup>72</sup> The uncompromising approach of Azerbaijan is contrasted to the supposedly more constructive approach of the Armenian sides:

“both the Republic of Armenia and the Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh support a peaceful resolution of the problem, preservation of the norms of international law, and restoration of historical justice, which cannot be said about Azerbaijan... ways of peaceful resolution of the Artsakh problem are still being sought.”<sup>73</sup>

This excerpt is quite interesting in terms of mixing the official position of the Armenian government that calls for a peaceful resolution of the conflict on the basis of the principle of self-determination with the argument of “historical justice,” which is common for the internal discourse, but absent in Armenian government’s international statements.

Nagorno-Karabakh Republic is also discussed in the World History 12th grade textbook, which explains the concept of “unrecognized state”: it is considered to be the most viable self-proclaimed state in the former Soviet Union, as well as the one with the most effective army. It is also argued that Nagorno-Karabakh has declared its independence in accordance with all international legal norms, but has fallen victim to “double standards,” which have halted the process of its international recognition.<sup>74</sup>

Throughout this whole narrative, it is the Armenians of Artsakh who are the main protagonists, helped by their compatriots. It is Azerbaijani authorities that are described as the “main villain,” and in certain negative language with ethnic connotations referring to is used (“Turkish barbarism,” in the description of the anti-Armenian pogroms). Thus, the dominant narrative is that of ethnic conflict between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. However, at the same time the anti-Armenian position of the Moscow authorities is also stressed

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<sup>71</sup> Stepanyan et al, 2014, p. 142-143.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. p. 142-143.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. p. 168.

<sup>74</sup> Nazaryan, et al., 2012.

throughout this section. This is also adding a dimension of a struggle between for liberation against the imperial center. However, this second conflict plays an auxiliary role: the main adversary is the Azerbaijani government or Azerbaijan in general. Thus, the textbook does not even go into the detail of explaining the reasons of Moscow's "anti-Armenian" stance, leaving it to the students (through questions like "Why did Moscow assume an anti-Armenian approach in the issue of Artsakh?"<sup>75</sup>).

### **"The Age-old Dream of the Armenian people": the Process of Armenia's Independence**

The emergence of independent Armenia is presented as a result of a conscious struggle for independence rather than a mere consequence of the collapse of the USSR. The description of the process that led to Armenia's independence starts with the discussion of the elections in spring 1990, and it is stressed that the members of the Armenian National Movement<sup>76</sup> had chosen "the constitutional form" of struggle for power.<sup>77</sup> Then the textbook proceeds to talk about the Declaration of Armenia's Independence, adopted by the Supreme Council on August 23 1990, which is referred to as "a historical document," according to which "the Armenian SSR was renamed the Republic of Armenia," and with which "in the history of Armenia the chapter of 'the 3rd Republic'<sup>78</sup> began."<sup>79</sup>

The referendum on independence, which took place in September 1991, is presented as part of the process of "strengthening" of Armenia's independence, even though technically Armenia was still part of the USSR at the time:

"thus, at the moment of the de-facto break-up of the USSR, in Armenia a referendum on independence was held... Of those who took part in the referendum on September 21 1991, 2 million 43 thousand people (94.39 % of the voters) voted for independence... the referendum was monitored by 117 observers from 25 countries of the world... based on the results of the democratic referendum, the historical decision was taken to declare Armenia an independent state."<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Gevorgyan, et al., 2014, p. 123.

<sup>76</sup> Armenian National Movement (ANM) – an umbrella organization for various pro-democracy groups, which transformed into a political party and became the first ruling party of independent Armenia.

<sup>77</sup> Gevorgyan et al. 2014, p. 126.

<sup>78</sup> In Armenia the post-Soviet republic of Armenia is commonly referred to as the 3rd republic, in contrast to the 1st (1918-1920) and the 2nd republic, i.e. Soviet Armenia.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. p. 127.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. p. 144.

The whole process is summed up: “the age-old dream of the Armenian people came true.” The authors apparently take pride in their statement that Armenia was the first and only former Soviet republic, where the independence referendum proceeded “in complete correspondence” to the Soviet legislation of the time.<sup>81</sup>

The textbooks cover also the process of international recognition of Armenia’s independence. Particularly, the authors mention that Lithuania was the first country, which recognized Armenia’s independence. They also stress the fact that Turkey, while it recognized Armenia’s independence in 1991, also expressed its concerns about possible Armenian territorial claims. Moreover, the fact that Turkey’s recognition of Armenia was coupled with such hostile approach is interpreted as a sign that Turkey has continued its “centuries-old anti-Armenian policies.”<sup>82</sup>

In the description of the internal development of 1990-1991 in Armenia the main focus is on the process of achieving independence, rather than the democratic transformation that was taking place simultaneously. While the popular nature of the 1988 movement is constantly stressed, there are few references to the fact that the movement had democratic aims, along with the ones related to national program. One of the few references to democracy comes in the discussion of the first elections: “the first democratic and pluralistic elections in the history of Soviet Armenia, took place... the parliament, formed by the first democratic elections on May 20, 1990, adopted the document called ‘Declaration of Armenia’s Independence.’”<sup>83</sup> The reference to “the first ever democratic elections of Soviet Armenia” plays an auxiliary role here: first democratic elections held in Armenia are valued as a pre-requisite for the country’s independence, rather than an achievement on its own right. There are some further references to the democratic transformation, e.g. the reference to a law adopted in November 1990, which prohibited “ideological oppression” and granted “freedom to choose a political or civil organization based on one’s ideas.”<sup>84</sup> Another reference to the democratic nature of the movement can be found in the 9th grade Social Studies textbook, which calls talks about a “democratic” movement and traces it back to environmental protests of 1987, i.e. before Karabakh issue was raised (Ghazinyan et al., 2014). However, in general references to the democratic nature of the transition that took place in Armenia in 1988-1991 are quite limited and are overshadowed by references to “national” issues such as independence from Moscow and the Karabakh issue.

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid. p 145.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. p 145.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. p. 126-127.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. p. 152.

In contrast with the textbook discourse the civic component of the Movement were highlighted during the FG discussions in several terms. First, the public mobilization, peaceful protest, crowded demonstrations were assessed as “unprecedented” phenomena, that the people of the time could make them a reality. Second, we had perceptions from students about the mass rallies of 1988 considered as success story for achieving change through democratic mass protest and peaceful revolt. Moreover, according to these views, better teaching about the 1988 Movement could have been an effective civic education instrument in case there would be the will of the ruling political elites of different times to raise the new generation conscious about peaceful protest and rallies. However, the students did not mention “democracy” among the agenda, aims or “national dreams” lying at the bases of the movement of the 1988.<sup>85</sup>

### 2.3 Events of Late 1980s and Early 1990s in the Textbooks of Social Studies and Homeland Studies

Apart from the history textbooks, the period of our interest is also covered by the so called “Social Studies” textbooks (“Hasarakagitutyun”). Thus, there is an indirect reference in 9th grade Social Studies textbook: in a section that explains the concept of “public policy” the textbook says, that “the democratic movement of 1987-1988 started with environmental protests.”<sup>86</sup> This is quite an interesting reference, given that these environmental protests are hardly referred to in the history textbooks, where the movement is referred to as “national liberation movement” and its history starts from 1988 rather than from 1988.

The events in question are also described in the 5th grade “Homeland Studies” (“Hayrenagitutyun”) textbooks. Thus, the textbook contains a chapter called “Mountainous Karabakh Republic: an Armenian state,” which starts with the declaration of independence on September 2 1991: “the creation of this new Armenian state was taking place amid the fire of the liberation struggle”.<sup>87</sup> Further, the textbook also refers to the war in Karabakh as “heroic struggle” and “national liberation struggle.”<sup>88</sup>

A narrative, which is more or less repeating the one we have seen in the history textbook, is also presented in a section called “the creators of Armenian statehood”: “in February 1988 the Artsakh movement started, to which the USSR central authorities reacted with illegal decisions and violence... Soviet Azerbaijan carried out massacres (Sumgait, Baku) and deportations of Armenians.”<sup>89</sup> It is interesting to note that while in the history textbooks the

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<sup>85</sup> Focus Group Discussion, September 2016.

<sup>86</sup> Social Studies, Ghazinyan, Vagharshyan, et al. (Yerevan, Tigran Mets publishing house, 2014). p. 44.

<sup>87</sup> Homeland Studies, Danielyan, Ghukasyan, Ghukasyan (Yerevan, Tigran Mets publishing house, 2007).

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. p. 56-57.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid. p. 89.

main negative protagonist is the leadership of Azerbaijan, which acts with “connivance” of central authorities, in this textbook the central authorities are assigned the role of at least an equally important enemy of the liberation struggle, responsible for “illegal decisions” and “violence.” Moreover, it is stressed that it was the “Soviet” Azerbaijan that was responsible for deportations and massacres of Armenians.

The discourse of national liberation struggle is also dominant in the other Homeland Studies textbook, which states that “with the liberation of Artsakh the Armenian people have proven that it would fight for the return of its historical motherland that had been under foreign domination.”<sup>90</sup> The 2007 edition of the “Homeland Studies” textbook also contains a subchapter titled “the 3rd republic of Armenia,” which states that “in extremely difficult conditions in 1991 the Republic of Armenia started its struggle for existence.”<sup>91</sup>

The 2013 edition of the “Homeland Studies” textbook contains a lesson (number 18), titled “the rebirth of the Armenian statehood.” Here the authors explain that Armenia that there had been three republics of Armenia: the independent republic of 1918-1920, Soviet Armenia and the contemporary Republic of Armenia. At the same time, while Soviet Armenia is mentioned as one of the Armenian states, the students are also offered to think about the question whether Soviet Armenia, as one of the 15 republics of the USSR, was in fact an autonomous state.<sup>92</sup> The section starts with the events of February 1988, when “a popular struggle for the liberty of Artsakh started,” which eventually became “a struggle for independence of Armenia.”<sup>93</sup>

Then the textbook proceeds to describe the 1991 referendum, in which “the absolute majority of Armenia’s population voted for independence, once again confirming the pan-national will for independent statehood.” Then it talks about “numerous difficulties that the newly independent republic of Armenia had to face,” including “clashes on the border of Armenia and Azerbaijan, the presence of hundreds of thousands of refugees from Azerbaijan,” in spite of which “the Armenian people was able to overcome the hardest phase of the difficulties and make solid steps aimed at building the new statehood”.<sup>94</sup> In line with the above-mentioned textbooks, this textbook also claims, that “the Republic of Armenia is the realization of the Armenian nation’s age-old dream

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<sup>90</sup> Homeland Studies, Gyulbudaghyan, Toghanyan et al. (Yerevan, Tigran Mets publishing house, 2013), p. 24.

<sup>91</sup> Danielyan, Ghukasyan, Ghukasyan, 2007, p. 89.

<sup>92</sup> Gyulbudaghyan, Toghanyan, 2013, p. 93.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. p. 89-90.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. p. 90.

dream of independent statehood... Preserving and developing it is the sacred duty of every one of us”.<sup>95</sup>

Finally, there is a reference to the 4th year textbook “Me and the Surrounding World,” which says “in 1988 Artsakh and Armenia started a liberation struggle, which was crowned by the declaration of Armenia’s independence on August 23 1990 and the liberation of Artsakh. From September 21 1991, the independence of Armenia was restored, in the form of the third republic of Armenia.”<sup>96</sup>

## 2.4 Conclusions

Summing up the discussion, it is possible to say that the events of late 1980s and early 1990s are mostly presented in the current textbooks through the lens of «national liberation struggle». Of the three interconnected processes that took place at that time, the transition to democracy, the achievement of national independence and the struggle for unification of Armenia and Karabakh, in the textbooks the latter receives most attention, and the first one receives the least amount of attention.

The narrative presented in the textbooks is combining elements of two models which can be both broadly described as nationalist, though in different meanings of the word: one is the nation-building narrative, which focuses on (re-)establishment of the Armenian statehood, and the other one is the ethnic conflict narrative, which focuses on the conflict with Azerbaijan over Karabakh, and in wider terms, on the conflict between Armenia and its Turkic neighbours. Most textbooks refer to the popular movement of 1988 as “a national liberation movement.” Descriptions of the conflict, and especially of such key events as the massacres in Sumgait and Baku, as well as the beginning of armed clashes in Karabakh, include terms and expressions that suggest analogies with the genocide of Armenians in 1915, a key event for Armenian collective memory.

The other narrative, which focuses on the creation of the independent nation-state, which can be broadly described as “civic nationalist,” or more precisely statist-nationalist, is also present and vocal. However, it plays a secondary role, compared to the narrative constructed around the Karabakh issue. The process of achieving independence is largely presented within the context of the movement for “national liberation” of Karabakh, and as a logical continuation of that movement. Apart from the somewhat irrational claim that independence had been “the age-old dream of the Armenian people,” there is little discussion of whether and why independence was necessary or desirable.

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid. p. 91..

<sup>96</sup> Me and the Surrounding World, Aleksanyan, Torosyan et al. (Yerevan, Tigran Mets publishing house, 2009). p. 130.

The element of the narrative, which can be described as “democratic,” i.e. stressing the role of the movement for democracy against totalitarian Soviet system, is the weakest in the current textbooks. Issues of democracy have a secondary role, usually mentioned in passing, or simply part of the description of events. Achievement of democracy and struggle for human rights are not explicitly presented as the main goals of the popular movement: the issue of democracy is mentioned mostly as auxiliary to other processes. Thus, the element of struggle for democracy, which was obviously present in the mass movement in the late 1980s, is hardly a priority for the Armenian state today, when it comes to educating the younger generation.

## CHAPTER 3

Talking About the  
Recent Past: Narratives  
of Events of the late  
Soviet Period in  
Armenian Political  
Discourse in the 1990s

### 3.1 The political context

Our analysis of the official discourse of post-Soviet Armenia will be divided into two parts, dealing with two different periods: the rule of Armenian National Movement led by Levon Ter-Petrosyan, and the subsequent period of rule of Robert Kocharyan and his successor Serzh Sargsyan. The first period encompasses the most part of the 1990s, which was a transition period, marked by internal instability, war with Azerbaijan, as well as the painful transition from state socialism to

market economy, which in the Armenian case was exacerbated by the consequences of the 1988 earthquake and the conflict with Azerbaijan.

The second period starts with the departure of Ter-Petrosyan, and a large part of the political elite that came to power along with him. This period coincides with the rule of Armenia's 2nd and 3rd presidents, Robert Kocharyan and Serzh Sargsyan. This was a period of relative stability, though this stability came under strain time after time. Thus, there were major political upheavals, such as the attack on the Armenian Parliament of October 27 in 1999, post-election protests in 2003-2004, and the post-election protests and violence of in 2008. In internal politics this was the period when the post-Soviet semi-authoritarian system was crystallized, leading to emergence of a relatively stable regime that has been called alternatively "hybrid," "managed democracy," etc. Probably the most precise definition for this kind of regimes has been offered by Levitsky and Way, who came up with the concept of "competitive authoritarianism," i.e. a regime in which there is a competition between various political forces, but the system is rigged to favor the incumbent political force, which helps it to win elections regularly.<sup>97</sup> In the field of economy this was a period of relative growth, which, however was marred by increasing inequality and the dominance of the so-called "oligarchs" in the country's economic life. The rule of Serzh Sargsyan, a close ally and "successor" of Robert Kocharyan can be described as the continuation of the previous president's rule, albeit in more complicated circumstances as Armenia faced serious challenges including an intensified internal political upheaval, economic crisis and rising geopolitical tensions in the region.

While there was continuity between all these periods, there were also differences in the way the ruling elite positioned itself and the discourse that was employed to legitimize its position in power, particularly, as well shall see further, in relation to the events of 1988-1991. Levon Ter-Petrosyan's government, which emerged as the direct consequence of the processes the last years of the Soviet Union, to a large extent took its legitimacy from the mass movement of the last years of the USSR, and in achievements like the restoration of Armenia's independence, the breakdown of the totalitarian rule, as well as the victory in the war with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh.

<sup>97</sup>For a discussion on post-Soviet hybrid regimes see, Levitsky and Way, op. cit.

For Ter-Petrosyan's successors, who had a background from Nagorno-Karabakh, the mass movement of 1988 or the struggle against the totalitarianism was less important, while the importance of the victory in Nagorno-Karabakh was more significant.

While in power Ter-Petrosyan and ANM positioned themselves as a liberal-democratic force, a part of the wave of democratic movements that overthrew the Soviet totalitarian system, from the revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe to national-democratic movements in some Soviet republics. Therefore, they cherished the image of Armenia as "beacon of democracy," which was the result of the success of the Karabakh movement. However, it was becoming harder and harder to maintain that image as in the course of the 1990s the practices of the government started to deviate from democratic standards. The democratic regress became obvious with the banning of one of the major opposition parties, Dashnaktsutyun, along with pro-Dashnak media, and culminated in the national elections of 1995 and 1996, which were marred by serious violations and fraud, leading to mass protests and government crack-down in 1996.

Since 1998, as a result of internal squabbles, Ter-Petrosyan was deprived of power by members of his own team, the new rulers no longer needed to emphasize the democratic nature of the transition in the early 1990s. On the contrary, having deposed president Ter-Petrosyan as a result of an internal maneuvering, Kocharyan needed to emphasize a clear break with the previous regime. As a result Kocharyan and the ruling coalition, which included the parties that positioned themselves as nationalist, the Republican Party and Dashnaktsutyun, shifted toward a more nation-centered discourse, emphasizing "national" issues like the recognition of the 1915 Genocide and the problem of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Accordingly, the attitude to the events of the late 1980s was changed, as the stress was put on these "national" issues, rather than on democratic achievements. Serzh Sargsyan's rule saw the continuation of the same trends, but the government's political rhetoric at the time also reflected the challenges of the moment and the zigzags of the administration's policies. In foreign policy Sargsyan engaged in an attempt to normalize the Armenian-Turkish relations, which ended in failure, and, also, initiated talks with the EU over Association agreement, which, however, were abandoned under Kremlin's pressure in 2013. Soon afterwards Armenia joined the Eurasian Union, together with Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan (later Kyrgyzstan also joined the EEU). In internal politics, the first years of Sargsyan's presidency were marked by resurgence of a strong opposition under the leadership of Ter-Petrosyan. The political comeback of Ter-Petrosyan and his team is particularly interesting from our point of view, since they widely used the events of late 1980s to legitimize its own political program.

### 3.2. Formation of the narrative: the events 1988-1991 in the political discourse of 1992-1998

The 1990s represent an important period in terms of the formation of the memory of the events of the late 1980s, more specifically in how the present becomes conceptualized as the narrative of the past. As we shall see, while in 1992-1993 the events that accompanied the breakup of the Soviet Union were pretty much a part of their daily reality, by the mid-1990s, a certain canonical version of these events is formed, which performs the function of a foundation myth, around which the official discourse is formed. So, while discussing the perceptions of events of the period of 1988-1991 during the 1990s, we need to realize that these events were perceived not as history, no matter how recent, but as part of the current reality. Events taking place in Armenia during the 1990s were perceived as a logical continuation of the popular movement that started in 1988. During the early 1990s the ruling elites of Armenia were feeling that their responsibility was building an independent state, thus continuing the process that had been commenced with the declaration of 1990 and the referendum of 1991.

This idea of a certain historical responsibility that lies with the current leadership of Armenia is well articulated in president Levon Ter-Petrosyan's and his associates' speeches. For one thing, one of his speeches, at the 5th congress of the Armenian National Movement is entitled "The duty of our generation is to ensure the fulfillment, prosperity and the strengthening of the Armenian statehood."<sup>98</sup> Ter-Petrosyan also often emphasized stability (understood as avoiding internal conflict) as a major achievement of his rule. In one of his early speeches in 1992 he mentions, as one of his the major achievements, the stability of the internal socio-political situation in Armenia, as compared to other post-Soviet countries:

"The most important is the stability of the internal social-political situation in Armenia. I regard that as the dearest value that the Republic of Armenia and the Armenian people have today, especially against the background of those events that were taking place in the republics of the former Soviet Union."

However, he also mentions "democratic freedoms" as the next important achievement.<sup>99</sup> Speaking about the emergence of a popular pro-democratic movement, which he considers a major achievement, he links it to the Karabakh issue. Moreover, its emergence is explained as a response to the situation in which Armenia needed to counter the Azerbaijani "factor" in Soviet politics, and the democratic movement became that tool.

"In the situation of existence of the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan had certain leverages of influence over the central authorities.

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<sup>98</sup> "The Duty of Our Generation is the Establishment of Armenian Statehood", Hayastani Hanrapetutyun, 28 June 1993.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

First of all, it was the threat of violence: oppression and massacres of the Armenian population of Sumgait, Kirovabad, Baku, threats against Russian population and the army. That was the Azerbaijani factor. That was a purely political factor and Azerbaijan successfully employed it. As a matter of fact central authorities were taking that factor into account. To counter that we were trying to create an Armenian factor, and we succeeded in that. It was the all-people's democratic movement, which had a significant response [ardzaganq] from other Soviet Republics."

He continues to note with pride that:

"Armenia was the first republic in the USSR, where massive rallies and massive strikes took place, and what is most important, Armenia was the first one<sup>100</sup> to find the key to changing the government using the [system of] councils".<sup>101</sup>

Some of his speeches give the impression that Ter-Petrosyan was consciously constructing a narrative by which he wished to define the perceptions of the future generation, while at the same time arguing against alternative narratives put forward by political rivals. Ter-Petrosyan's background as a historian (before 1988 he studied medieval history of the Middle East) may be one of the factors why he attached such importance to formulating a coherent narrative of the events that had led to the transition. In this sense, his speech at the 5th Congress of the Armenian National Movement, already mentioned above, is quite important, as it represents probably the most comprehensive assessment of the events of the late 1980s-early 1990s, every given by the head of Armenian government. The speech was given at a time when Ter-Petrosyan's party Armenian National Movement was challenged by various opposition groups in Armenia. In his speech he is answering ANM's critics, but at the same time he also creates a paradigm for explaining and representing the period from Communist rule to independent Armenia.

First of all, Ter-Petrosyan strives to show that his government's legitimacy is derived from a democratic mandate received from the people through the democratic elections that took place as the Soviet system was collapsing:

"Speaking about the legitimacy of Armenia's current government, the best testimony for that are the 45 % votes received by the ANM in the elections of the Supreme Council on May 1990, as well as the 83 % of votes, received by the president in the elections of 1991."<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Ter-Petrosyan obviously refers here to the elections of 1990.

<sup>101</sup> Meeting with the Journalists, Devoted to 1st Anniversary of the Presidential Oath, Hayastani Hanrapetutyun, 11 November 1992.

<sup>102</sup> Speech at the 5th Congress of the Armenian National Movement, in Levon Ter-Petrosyan, Selected speeches, articles, interviews (Yerevan, 2006), p. 371.

While Ter-Petrosyan is emphasizing the democratic legitimacy of the new government, he at the same time considers a major achievement of his party that, unlike other countries of the USSR, there were no repressions against the former functionaries of the Soviet government:

“if we compare [Armenia] to Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, where people’s movements came to power and even to Russia, we can see that only in Armenia there was no settling of accounts with the members of the former Communist regime and its coercive agencies, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Committee of State Security. Communist Party was not prohibited, the Communist officials of the state apparatus, majority of officers of the Militia [i.e. the Soviet police] and KGB were not fired. Moreover, of the 36 members of the last Communist cabinet headed by Margaryants, 14 had preserved their places in Vazgen Manukyan’s [first non-Communist] cabinet, not to mention the deputy ministers, the majority of whom are continuing their work.”<sup>103</sup>

Yet, this emphasis on the continuity between the old and the new government does not mean that Ter-Petrosyan embraces the Soviet past. He criticizes the Soviet period strongly:

“At the same time it is undeniable that... the first [Soviet] building [in Yerevan] was built only in 1928, that hundreds of thousands of Armenians fell victim to the collectivization campaign, that Armenian culture lost its genius representatives, Eghishe Charents and Aksel Bakunts,<sup>104</sup> that thousand years old Armenian churches were mercilessly destroyed, that the Communists’ glorious construction became the cause for martyrdom of tens of thousands of people from Gyumri, Spitak and the earthquake zone,<sup>105</sup> that the same glorious construction was carried out in Yerevan, and God Forbid a similar earthquake happens again”.<sup>106</sup>

However, at the same time, he frames his criticism in terms of establishing a balanced view of the Soviet period:

“when the opposition stresses the positive aspects of the past, which we cannot deny, it is necessary also not to forget the tragic [aspects of the past], rather than putting hopes on the short memory of the people”.<sup>107</sup>

Ter-Petrosyan connects the negative aspects of the Soviet pasts with the difficulties of the transition period:

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid, p. 372.

<sup>104</sup> Armenian writers who perished in the Stalinist repressions of late 1930s.

<sup>105</sup> Ter-Petrosyan refers to the earthquake of 1988, where more than 25 000 perished. The scale of the destruction was related to a large extent to poor quality of construction.

<sup>106</sup> Speech at the 5th Congress of the Armenian National Movement, in Levon Ter-Petrosyan, Selected speeches, articles, interviews, p. 377.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

“...if we add to the negative consequences of systemic changes that were common for all Soviet republics the difficulties that were specific for Armenia, i.e. the issue of reconstruction of the earthquake zone, the issue of adopting 300 000 refugees, and, especially, the continuing war in Nagorno-Karabakh, and almost complete blockade of the republic, the picture will become complete”.<sup>108</sup>

Another interesting aspect of the speech, which characterizes the specificity of the Armenian situation is Ter-Petrosyan’s defense against charges of “Russo-phobia,” which are leveled against the ANM government by its political opponents:

“in the 300 years old history of Armenian-Russian relations, the links between Armenia and Russia have never been so close, so sincere, so amicable, as during the times of Ter-Petrosyan and Yeltsin, and that is solely due to the fact that in both countries truly democratic forces have come to power, whose actions are based on the norms of international law and universal values”.<sup>109</sup>

He also accuses his opponents, Dashnaktsutyun “who are attempting to play the role of be the newly emerged defender of Russian-Armenian friendships” for links with “Russia’s conservative, black-hundred elements,” which in his view “in reality endangers the Armenian-Russian friendship.”<sup>110</sup>

An interesting aspect of this speech, which is probably the most comprehensive account of the period of transition by Ter-Petrosyan during his presidential office, is discussion of specific issues and/or accusations leveled by his opponents in relation to these issues. When comparing to references to the period of transition in his later texts, as well as in the texts of the successor governments, this kind of detail-focused discussion stands in contrast to the more formalized mythical narratives that are employed to talk about the transition period since mid-1990s (see below). Thus he goes into details of the accusation that ANM had purposefully closed the Nairit factory, which was the leader of chemical industry in Soviet Armenia, and explains why he believed that this accusation was unjust.<sup>111</sup>

Ter-Petrosyan also values independence for the influence it has had on the Diaspora Armenian communities. Answering accusations that his government’s policies had divided Armenian diaspora, he counters that.

“The trend of coming together in the Diaspora is, on the contrary, a new trend. The first catalyst of that was the 1988 earthquake, which brought to a mobilization of all Armenians around the world, and the second was the restoration of Armenian independent statehood which had the power of

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid. p. 376.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid. p. 382.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid. pp. 377- 378.

gravity that in the coming years will become the basis for a radical transformation of the Diaspora”.<sup>112</sup>

In another speech of the same period, at the Constitutional Commission Ter-Petrosyan elaborates on the Karabakh movement as a national liberation movement, independence as its high point.<sup>113</sup> At that time work on Armenia's new constitution was carried out and Ter-Petrosyan links the issue of adopting a new constitution to what he calls “Armenian national liberation movement”:

“From the political point of view, the adoption of the Constitution for me is the most vital issue for our state, because through that the Armenian national-liberation movement,<sup>114</sup> which started in 1988, reaches its logical conclusion. The movement has an obligation to reach that conclusion, i.e. to adopt a constitution through a popular referendum.”<sup>115</sup>

The reference to Karabakh movement as a “movement of national liberation” becomes a common trope in Ter-Petrosyan's speeches. Thus, in a speech at Yerevan State University, he once again uses the expression of “Karabakh movement of national liberation”:

“The students and professors of the university massively participated in the Karabakh movement of national liberation that emerged in 1988, thus bringing their huge contribution to the restoration of Armenia's state independence.”

Interesting to note that Ter-Petrosyan does not separate the goals of the national liberation movement from each other: though the movement is referred to as “Karabakh” movement, it seems that the main goal of the national liberation struggle was “the restoration” of Armenian independent state.<sup>116</sup>

“Restoration of the Armenian independence” is another common trope used in this speech. This shows that the creation of the independent republic was seen not simply as a beginning of a new state, but somehow a restoration of the state that had existed prior to that. However, in Ter-Petrosyan's speeches the newly emerged Armenian has a distinct identity, which separates it from previous

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid. p. 383.

<sup>113</sup> L. Ter-Petrosyan, A Speech at the Session of the Constitutional Commission, Hayastani Hanrapetutyun, 27 March 1993.

<sup>114</sup> Interestingly enough, in contrast with the abundance of usage of the term “national liberation” within political figures' discourse (on a certain level, the textbook discourse as well), we have noticed the term not present in the reflections of the students, participants of the FG discussions. In case of those rare usages the students were citing the direct texts from the textbooks.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> L. Ter-Petrosyan, A Speech at the Gathering Devoted to the 75th Anniversary of the Yerevan State University, Hayastani Hanrapetutyun, 11 October, 1994.

Armenian states, including the independent republic of 1918-1920. At a speech at a pre-election rally on September 17, 1996, he compares the 1st republic to the 3rd one, and says that this time Armenia was better prepared for independence than Georgia and Azerbaijan, while in 1918 the opposite was true:

“For eight years we went through fire and sword. For eight years our people did not make mistakes. Our people proved to the world that this last opportunity was used up to the limit, something that did not happen in 1918-1920, when our neighbors Georgia and Azerbaijan were more prepared for independence than Armenia. Today it is the other way round...”<sup>117</sup>

The references to the mistakes of the First Republic, which are juxtaposed with the current republic, during which for eight years no mistakes were made was not purely a matter of academic interest. In fact, this was part of the electoral strategy: one of main messages of Ter-Petrosyan's campaign at the time was that Ter-Petrosyan's rivals were radicals and adventurists, who, had they come to power, would initiate irrational policies that could lead to war and demise of the fragile new republic. He accuses his opponents of using the same tactics as Nazis and Bolsheviks:

“They promise miracles to our people, they tell tales to our people, that if they are elected they will solve all the issues standing before our nation, they would eradicate corruption, they would lynch all the criminals... But we have seen that, we know the consequences of that. In the same way, manipulating the difficult social situation, in 1917 in Russia the monster of Communism came to power... which took millions of lives... in Germany Hitler came to power... I mention these two cases, you can remember ten times more. And those people who promise a paradise to the people, Lenin to the Russian people, Hitler to the German people, who promised global domination, turned their own country into hell and spilt the blood of their own people.”<sup>118</sup>

It is by the mid-1990s that a certain distance is established between the current period, the “now” in to which the speaker is referring and the period of establishment of the Armenian statehood. Thus, in the 1995 New Year's address the president says that he is convinced that “the coming 1995 will bring an easing of the concerns of our people and the appearance of tangible fruits of our independence”.<sup>119</sup> This line of thought is further developed in the next year's address, In 1996 New Year address Ter-Petrosyan claims that independence is already bearing fruit:

“In the previous New Year's greeting speech I had expressed my hope that 1995 would become a year when the concerns of our people would be eased and

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> L. Ter-Petrosyan, The New Year's Address, 1995, in L. Ter-Petrosyan, Selected..., p. 453.

tangible fruits of our independence would appear. Today I can, with deep feeling of satisfaction, consider that this hope has been fulfilled.”<sup>120</sup>

In the same speech Ter-Petrosyan tries to draw a line under a period which can be described as both heroic and difficult, and says that a return to normal everyday life is now possible: “Dear Compatriots, unlike the previous years, I call upon you not for endurance and patience, but for peaceful, creative work for the glory of our five-year old independent republic.”<sup>121</sup>

This image of the transition years as a heroic and at the same time a difficult period is further explored in the speech:

“We paid an extremely high price for independence and for the liberation of Artsakh. It did not pay that price unwittingly, but it was consciously. The people suffered, but sustained the suffering, it became frustrated, but it endured, as the goal was noble and could not be compromised... Getting ahead of the time, I think, we have the right to consider this an unheard act of heroism, which will be endlessly revered by the future generations. And, because there is no heroic deed that is not redeemed, there is no noble effort that does not bear fruit, there is no seed that does not spread a spear [tsil ardzakel], our people’s enormous effort also was bound to bear its fruit”.<sup>122</sup>

Another programmatic statement by Ter-Petrosyan is his speech at the 1st session of the newly elected Armenian National Assembly in 1995.<sup>123</sup> The speech was taking place immediately after the parliamentary elections, combined with the constitutional referendum, when Armenia’s first Constitution was put forward. ANM claimed victory both at the parliamentary election and at the constitutional referendum, however, the opposition and civil society accused the government of election fraud. In this speech Ter-Petrosyan repeats the idea that the constitution was the successful ending of the national liberation struggle:

“By the proclamation of the constitution, the first stage of the process of formation of independent statehood, which had been started by the mighty national liberation movement of 1988, has been brought to its logical end... a decisive stage... the Armenian people had with honor withstood this cruel test, having avoided the internal shocks and bitter calamities that have befallen other post-Communist societies.”<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> L. Ter-Petrosyan, The New Year’s Address, 1996, 31 December 1995, in L. Ter-Petrosyan, Selected..., p. 507-511.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. p. 510.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid. pp. 507-508.

<sup>123</sup> L. Ter-Petrosyan, A speech at the 1st session of the Armenian National Assembly in 1995, Hayastani Hanrapetutyun, 27 July 1995.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

He also praises the role of the first parliament, the Supreme Council, elected in 1990, though at the same time claims that it might have been controversial at certain times:

“with all the well-known reservations, today it is already clear that the first parliament was destined to play a historical role in the restoration of the Armenian statehood, the formation of democratic order, and economic reforms, a role, which will be evaluated in the future in its essence and all of its volume, when the political passions are calmed down and opportunistic consideration are eliminated.”<sup>125</sup>

Ter-Petrosyan also takes pride in the fact that there was no Communist “revenge” in Armenia:

“I consider as the most important, and, we can say historical, result the fact that Armenia did not become one of the post-Communist countries, where the Communists were able to stage a comeback, moreover they even got a significant quantity of mandates as compared to the previous elections. This is an additional and probably the most ardent proof of the undeniable historical truth that the Communist ideology in Armenia is not based on national roots, but was violently imposed by foreign forces and served exclusively their goals”.<sup>126</sup>

By 1996 the narrative of the establishment of Armenia’s independence becomes more or less formalized. From a discussion of live issues of the moment, it becomes a myth, i.e. a text that is put beyond the time and space continuum and becomes a subject of ritual repetition. Thus, the presidential address devoted to the 5th anniversary of the Armenian republic, already gives a formulaic version of the narrative, which later becomes the basis for most of the references to the events of the late of 1980s by the heads of state and other state officials:

“Our statehood, achieved with a high cost, through losses and blood has reached its 5th anniversary... This is a lot... [even] within the context of our 3000 years’ old history... This is a lot compared to the two and a half years of existence of our first republic, and especially taking into account that the first years for a newborn state are the most difficult and at the same time the most decisive period... for eight years, starting from the from the awakening of the national liberation until today, our people have not made a single fatal error... In the first stage of independence our people was forced to solve existential issues – the war in Artsakh, the creation of the national army,

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

defense of the borders of the country, overcoming blockade and energy crises, curbing the fall of the economy".<sup>127</sup>

One of the most important institutions of Armenian society, the Armenian Church also receives a place within the framework of this narrative. Thus, speaking at the funeral of the Catholicos Vazgen the First who was the head of Armenian Church during the events of 1988-1991, Ter-Petrosyan says: "With youthful vigor he engaged into the sacred cause of strengthening the newly independent republic, considering it be above all the other temporary and transient problems".<sup>128</sup>

In the same speech Ter-Petrosyan also says that "His Holiness Vazgen... had the good fortune to enjoy the victories of his people, to take delight in its memories, experience the excitement of mass immigration, to participate in the postwar redevelopment of Armenia, to witness and support the heroic struggle of the Armenians of Artsakh and to welcome the restoration of Armenian statehood."<sup>129</sup>

It is interesting to note, that here as well Ter-Petrosyan talks about "the restoration" of Armenian statehood. The idea that Armenian Church has a role in building independent statehood is also mentioned in an interview devoted to the elections of the new Catholicos.<sup>130</sup> In particular, Ter-Petrosyan says: "Did the Armenian Apostolic Church cease to perform its national function with the restoration of Armenian independence? No... It is true that with the restoration of the statehood the church has been relieved of the necessity to substitute for secular authorities, but as long as a substantial amount of Armenians live outside of Armenia, it will continue to preserve its role as a factor of national unity between the homeland and the Diaspora".<sup>131</sup>

One of the oldest and most respected institutions of Armenian society, the Church, becomes was integrated into the narrative of the struggle for democracy and independence. In a speech given soon after the death of the Catholicos Vazgen, chairman of the parliament Babken Ararktsyan calls him "one of the founders" of the independent Republic of Armenia, as all the democratic elections have taken place with his blessing. Ararktsyan also says that "with his balanced speech, his thoughtful advice he contributed greatly to avoiding approaching calamities and unreasonable actions." Therefore, in addition to his contribution to "preserving Armenian identity worldwide [hayapahpanutyun],"

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<sup>127</sup> L. Ter-Petrosyan, Congratulatory Message Devoted to the 5th Anniversary of the Independence of the Republic of Armenia, Hayastani Hanrapetutyun, 21 September 1996.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> L. Ter-Petrosyan, Interview to "Armenpress" on the Elections of the Catholicos (March 8, 1995), L. Ter-Petrosyan, Selected..., p. 469-473.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid. p. 470.

“building the Church,” “strengthening the homeland-diaspora ties,” he has also “a great contribution” to the establishment “of our independent republic.” It is interesting to note that this speech also has the anti-Soviet ethos that some of Ter-Petrosyan’s previously quoted speeches have shown: while describing the deeds of the Catholicos he says that those have taken place during “the long years of Stalin’s terror and Soviet dictatorship,” as well as “throughout the whole course of the national revival.”<sup>132</sup>

By the mid-1990s, the “myth” of the events of the late 1980s had already been established and it was beginning to be used in actual politics as a mobilization tool. Thus, this myth is becoming part of the ruling party’s appeal for voters’ support in the presidential elections of 1996. In a speech at a pre-election rally on September 17, 1996 Ter-Petrosyan not only draws an analogy between the activities of his supporters and the events of 1988, but also represents these events as a struggle of epic proportions:

“...There has been no such populous rally in Armenia since 1988. You were here in the same number on November 7 1988 in this square, under the eerie gaze of the global monster, and you were not scared by this gaze...”

Ter-Petrosyan continues to describe the aim of the struggle of 1988 and to compare it with the current issues of the moment:

“Then you gathered in order to throw off the yoke of totalitarianism, to re-gain your freedom and independence... Through these 7 years we have gone a long road together with you and I would not want to repeat that road... through that time we have had eternal achievements, but we are experiencing temporary difficulties... I am sure our people understands what I mean” .<sup>133</sup>

This excerpt contains several important tropes that define the discursive strategies of Ter-Petrosyan when he relates to the events of 1988 and subsequent years. One of these is the equation of the people who participated in the 1988 movement with his supporters, hence the use of the pronoun “you,” which helps to establish continuity between the Karabakh movement and the supporters of Ter-Petrosyan. This discursive strategy is employed once again in the ending of the speech, when Ter-Petrosyan calls upon his supporters to chant together “Mi-a-tsum” (i.e. “unity”), one of the most common slogans of 1988, which of course had little practical meaning in 1996 as it referred to the demand of unification of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh:

“And since we have already made a small lyrical detour, let us remember our unity of 1988, I want to revive a chant, which at the time had a different meaning, and today in it we see the symbol of the unity of all Armenians, Armenia

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<sup>132</sup> B. Ararktsyan, Speech of the Chairman of the Parliament Babken Ararktsyan at the opening of the 9th session of the RA Supreme Council, Hayastani Hanrapetutyun, 13 September 1994.

<sup>133</sup> L. Ter-Petrosyan, A speech at a pre-election rally on 17 September 1996, in L. Ter-Petrosyan, Selected..., p. 525.

and Artsakh – “Mi-a-tsum! Mi-a-tsum!”<sup>134</sup>

Ter-Petrosyan also glorifies the events of the late 1980s, as a struggle of epic proportions against a “global monster,” in order to shake off “the yoke of totalitarianism.” Finally, the narrative that is being constructed also allows to contextualize, explain and ultimately redeem the “temporary difficulties,” i.e. the negative consequences of the events of the late 1980s, early 1990s. This idea seems so central for Ter-Petrosyan that he repeats it twice in the same speech: “Economic difficulties, social concerns, will be solved by our nation, sooner or later... whether under Ter-Petrosyan, or under a different president... What will remain is the independence of Armenia, the liberated Artsakh, and free democratic Armenia.”<sup>135</sup>

The speech also draws a parallel between political rivals and those who failed to support the movement of 1988:

“As always, there were some who did not believe in our achievements, did not believe in the independence of Armenia, did not believe in the liberation of Artsakh, did not believe in the victory of democracy, and did not believe that through free market economy our people will be able to take the course of normal development of humanity...”<sup>136</sup>

Another important element of Ter-Petrosyan’s discourse of this period, addressed in particular by this speech, is the comparison of the Armenian independent state created in 1991 with the republic that existed in 1918-1920. Ter-Petrosyan compares the first republic to the third one, and says that now Armenia was better prepared for independence than Georgia and Azerbaijan, while in 1918 the opposite was true:

“Through these eight years we went through fire and sword. For eight years our people did not make mistakes. Our people proved to the world that it used to the utmost this last opportunity to restore independence, something that did not happen in 1918, when our neighbors, Georgia and Azerbaijan proved to be better prepared for independence than Armenia. Today it is the other way round...”<sup>137</sup>

At the same time, while stressing the contrast between the not so successful attempt at independence in 1918-1920 and the success of 1991, Ter-Petrosyan also stresses the continuity between the efforts of the past and those of today: “Let no one doubt this: we shall never lose the independence won by the bloodshed through hundreds of years... This time we have won our independence in order to keep it eternally.”

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid. p. 529.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid. pp. 525-526.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid. p. 528.

Thus, while stressing continuity, Ter-Petrosyan by using the construction “this time” again underlines that the current moment is different from the past experience, which, though deserving respect and memory, has not been necessarily successful.<sup>138</sup>

Finally, the speech discussed is important as it contains an important topic, which helps us to understand why Ter-Petrosyan and his supporters refrained from using the rhetoric of revolution while talking about 1988. Though talking about events of 1988 Ter-Petrosyan uses the word “movement,” he refrains from using terms that have connotations of revolutionary activities. However, when he discusses his opponents in the 1996 elections, whom he accuses of using social issues to manipulate the population in order to come to power he compares them to the Bolshevik takeover in 1917, as well as Nazism in Germany:

“Our people are promised miracles, our people are given assurances that in case they [i.e. Ter-Petrosyan’s opponents] are elected they will solve all the issues standing before our people... they will uproot corruption, they will lynch all the criminals... But we have seen that, this has happened and the consequences are known. Using the same kind of manipulation of the social situation in Russia in 1917 the monster of Communism came to power, which took tens of millions of lives. Using the same opportunities of demagoguery and the objective reality Hitler came to power in Germany. I mention these two cases, you can remember ten times more [cases like this]. And those who promised paradise to the people, Lenin to the Russian people, Hitler to the German people, those who promised world domination, first of all they made hell of their own country, and spilt the blood of their own people.”<sup>139</sup>

In another speech, from 1997, i.e. already after the presidential elections, Ter-Petrosyan elaborates on the dangers of what he calls “revolutionism” [“heghapokhakanutyun”]. He associates this term with his political opponents, whom he accuses of demagoguery and manipulating the objective difficulties that Armenia experienced at the time of the transition:

“the other current, benefitting from the fact that independence did not bring immediate achievements, exploiting the social difficulties typical for a transition period, and the natural grievances of the people, adopts a policy of promising miracles and putting forward unrealistic programs... however meeting with the caution and skepticism of a significant part of the people, it loses its psychological balance and goes for violence and adventurism, completely falling into the arms of revolutionism. The outcome is either an armed takeover of government and creation of dictatorship, examples of which are countless, or a national catastrophe, like the one, which happened before our eyes in

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid. p. 529.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid. p. 528.

Azerbaijan and Georgia, under Elchibey and Gamsakhurdia...”<sup>140</sup>

Having defined what he means by the term “revolutionism,” Ter-Petrosyan moves to describe what it means for Armenia’s political landscape:

“In the political life of Armenia both currents exist, the one that represents the evolutionary development, and the one that preaches revolutionism. The first one, exemplified by the ANM and the current government, and the other one, exemplified by the National-Democratic Union and its allies. In honor of our people, Armenia has so far managed to evade the catastrophic threats of the revolutionism. In seven years only two times a critical political situation has occurred: during the dissolution of the Armenian National Army, and on September 25, 1996.”<sup>141</sup>

Moreover, Ter-Petrosyan’s dislike of what he calls “revolutionism” is not limited to the danger of violence that it brings. He proceeds to explain why the revolutionary approach is unacceptable for him in general:

“Apart from the probability of violence, the revolutionism presents a danger in another aspect, if you will, the ideological or purely political aspect. Revolutionary opposition does not debate with the government on specific socio-economic questions or certain issues of internal and external politics, in order to assist successful resolution of these issues, but it questions the complete structure and activities of the government...”

He also adds that the intellectuals of Armenia have an extremely important role in “curbing the dangers of revolutionary adventurism.”<sup>142</sup>

In another context Ter-Petrosyan once again equates the behavior of his political opponents to fascism. The comparison of opponents to Fascism, which implies social demagoguery and irresponsibility, is a common trope of the ruling party’s language at the time of the electoral campaign. Thus, in a televised pre-election speech on September 20, Ter-Petrosyan says:

“our people have seen foreign yoke, has seen first republic, has seen democratic government, it is only fascism that it has not seen, however, the ghost of fascism is now knocking at our door.”<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Speech at the 9th Congress of the Armenian National Movement, 13 July 1997, in L. Ter-Petrosyan, *Selected Speeches...*, p. 561.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.* p. 567.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.* p. 569.

<sup>143</sup> L. Ter-Petrosyan, Pre-election Speech on State Television, 20 September 1996, published in *Hayastani Hanrapetutyun*, 21 September 1996.

Though this approach to “revolutionism” as a negative and dangerous phenomenon, may have been influenced by the political developments of the moment, particularly the severe confrontation with the opposition, which led to disputed elections and post-elections protests in 1996, it also reflects the general mode of Ter-Petrosyan and his supporters when it comes to both the term “revolution” itself and the methods of struggle that are associated with it. As one of the long-time supporters of Levon Ter-Petrosyan, historian Ashot Sargsyan explained, the activists of the Karabakh movement, and later the ANM members often avoided describing what was happening in Armenia as a revolution, since the very concept of revolution was associated with the Bolshevik “October Revolution.” Therefore, though the changes that took place in Armenia at the time were of the scale that could be considered revolutionary, both the participants of the movement and the wider public rarely used the term “revolution” in order to describe them.<sup>144</sup>

The negative evaluation of what Ter-Petrosyan calls “revolutionism” is also present in his famous article “Time to Get Serious,” an article published in November 1997, which, as it is commonly considered, had become one of the reasons for his fall from power several months later.<sup>145</sup> In the article he argues for necessity to make concessions in order to solve the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, and contrasts his approach to the radicalism of the first post-Soviet leaders of Georgia and Azerbaijan:

“Let us remember the fate of our neighbors. In front of our eyes Gamsakhurdia and Elchibey chose the path of ‘becoming a hero’, became national idols, but brought uncountable catastrophes upon their own peoples.”<sup>146</sup>

The above-mentioned elements of the discourse are also present, albeit in a more schematic form, in the electoral program of Levon Ter-Petrosyan for the presidential elections of 1996. The preamble of the program states explicitly the belief that the ANM government derives its legitimacy from the events of the late 1980s:

“The [political] forces that have been in power as a result of the national people’s movement since 1990 to this day, which in the upcoming presidential elections are again defending my candidacy, are presenting to the judgment of the people the results of their six years of activities, with the following balance.”<sup>147</sup>

Then the program proceeds to name the successes and the losses of the Pan-national people’s movement, among which it mentions particularly the “the restoration of the independence of Armenia and the preservation of the internal stability,” as well as “establishing Armenia’s international credibility through

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<sup>144</sup> Ashot Sargsyan, personal communication, February 2015.

<sup>145</sup> L. Ter-Petrosyan, “War or Peace: Time to Get Serious,” *Hayastani Hanrapetutyun*, 1 November 1997.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> Electoral program of candidate for president of Armenia Levon Ter-Petrosyan, *Hayk*, 31 August 1996, pp. 511- 519.

implementation of balanced foreign policies.” The program also lists as achievement of the party of power “the fact that Nagorno-Karabakh has been able to assure its own independence and its security.” The program also concedes that “along with the existing achievements, in the same period Armenia has had painful losses,” which include the loss of life in the Karabakh conflict, the “the serious fall in economy and in quality of life of the population,” emigration of many Armenians, the loss of “Shahumyan district, certain areas of Martakert and Martuni, of Artsvashen” He also mentions that the authorities of Armenia do not intend to evade responsibility for those losses, and at the same time leaves the ultimate judgment to history: “As to what extent these losses had objective causes and to what extent they were dependent on the direct actions of the government, will be decided by the people and history.”<sup>148</sup> Another case when the term “national liberation” is mentioned by Ter-Petrosyan is a victory speech given in 1996, after the presidential elections, where he compared his win in 1991 to the one in 1996. He claimed that while his first victory in 1991 presidential election was achieved on the wave of the romantic of national, he valued more the one in 1996, since in that case it was a “reflection of the will of a mature democratic society” liberation struggle.<sup>149</sup>

There is a reference to the achievement of independence also in the resignation speech of Ter-Petrosyan:

“I call upon you to exercise restraint, maintain calm in the country and to hold legal, civilized elections for a new president. This will be a sign of maturity of the state which we had created together with you through these eight years, and a guarantee of preservation of its external credibility.”<sup>150</sup>

The term “struggle for national liberation” for the description of the events of the late 1980s is used also by other officials. Thus, at in a speech of the 1st congress of the organization of military volunteers “Defenders of land” (Yerkrapah) the minister of defense Vazgen Sargsyan said that the congress was the outcome of several years of struggle of “armed groups and regiments” created during the current phase of the struggle for national liberation.<sup>151</sup> In this phrase shows that the events that started unfolding in 1988 are seen as part of a larger narrative of a struggle of national liberation, which apparently started long time before 1988. Whether in this phrase the term “national liberation” refers to the struggle against the central authorities for Armenia’s independence or against the Azerbaijanis for Nagorno-Karabakh it is not clear from the context. Moreover, most probably the speaker does not distinguish between the two. However, it is interesting to note that contrary to the rhetoric employed

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> L. Ter-Petrosyan, “A Speech on Presidential Elections,” Hayatani Hanrapetutyun, 1 October 1996.

<sup>150</sup> L. Ter-Petrosyan, Statement of Resignation of the President of the Republic of Armenia Levon Ter-Petrosyan, Hayastani Hanrapetutyun, February 3, 1998.

<sup>151</sup> V. Sargsyan, Speech at the 1st Congress of Yerkrapah, Hayastani Hanrapetutyun, 24 July 1993.

by the minister of defense, the president, Levon Ter-Petrosyan in his speech at the same congress, talks about the role of the “defenders of land” in “the victory of the democratic forces against the former system.”

Engaging in romanticizing the events of 1988 Vazgen Sargsyan says in an interview given on December 27, 1997:

“Our history has not had a more perfect case of mutual understanding between the individual and the society than 1988... If there had been such a case we would have won long ago.”

He also claims that 1988 “allowed us to keep our spirituality” and “we should that the Armenian people is a more well-formed nation” [aveli dzeavorvats azg]. He also says that “if in 1988 someone said that 8-9 years ago we would have independent statehood, army, liberated Artsakh, nobody would have believed that, but today that is reality.” He also adds that “independence is not something that can be discussed... simply philosophizing about it would be absurd,”<sup>152</sup> The same ideas are repeated in another interview given by Vazgen Sargsyan several months later, in connection with the 10 years’ anniversary of the beginning of the Karabakh movement.<sup>153</sup>

While for Vazgen Sargsyan the main essence of the events of the late 1980s is the “national liberation struggle” for Armenia’s prime-minister in early 1990s, Hrant Bagratyan it is the “victory of democratic forces.” Thus, in one of his speeches he talks about the “victory achieved by the democratic forces in 1990, which became the basis for proclaiming independent statehood”.<sup>154</sup> He also connects the economic reforms with the events of that period claiming that the first comprehensive agenda of economic reforms was adopted in 1992.

Of the higher level officials the only one that came close to interpreting the events of the late 1980s and early 1990s as “a revolution” was the head of National Assembly through the most of the 1990s Babken Ararktsyan. In a 1993 interview Ararktsyan says:

“Armenian National Movement was created in August 1988, when its program was published, which, I can say, became a turning point for changing the social consciousness of our society. This program, as much as I don’t like the word ‘revolution’, contains theses, which were to transform the political thought of our society.”<sup>155</sup>

<sup>152</sup> “If the war is yours, the peace will be yours as well,” interview with Vazgen Sargsyan, Hayastani Hanrapetutyun, December 27, 1997.

<sup>153</sup> V. Sargsyan, “We have never been Closer to a Final Victory,” Interview by Sirvard Margaryan, February, 1998. <http://www.artsakhtert.com/arm/politics/item/4402-%D5%A5%D5%AC%D5%A1%D5%B6%D6%84-%D5%B8%D6%80%D5%BA%D5%A5%D5%BD-%D5%AF%D5%A1%D5%B4%D6%84-%D5%B8%D6%82-%D5%B8%D5%A3%D5%AB>

<sup>154</sup> H. Bagratyan, “My Choice is Developing Armenia,” Hayastani Hanrapetutyun, 20 September 1996.

<sup>155</sup> B. Ararktsyan, “It is Necessary to Ensure the Irreversibility of the Processes Launched,” Hayastani Hanrapetutyun, 29 June 1993.

He also adds that after the 1990 elections “totalitarianism had not been defeated completely” and only in August 1990 when Levon Ter-Petrosyan became the head of the Supreme Council “it was possible to claim that democracy and the Movement had achieved a final victory, putting an end to the Communist monarchy.”<sup>156</sup>

Ararktsyan credits the Armenian National Movement with several achievements:

“The ANM created the basis for democracy in Armenia, ushered in an atmosphere of multi-partyism, taking losses on this road, but at the same time becoming more pure, of course there was a big temptation to become a party, pursue narrow party aims, assume a pyramidal structure characteristic of a party and more clearly dominate the situation.”

Another official who has laid out extensive views on the processes that took place in the late 1980s was Ara Sahakyan, the deputy head of the Supreme Council, Ararktsyan’s deputy. Sahakyan’s narrative combines the ideas of the national liberation struggle with that of a struggle for democracy. In particular, Sahakyan claims that in the process of transition from the Communist regime to independence a change of values took place. He accuses the Communists of “stupefying, castrating thought, terrorizing people.” The course of the movement is described like a transition from a “national liberation struggle” to a struggle for democracy:

“The national liberation struggle of the people, for which Nagorno-Karabakh was the trigger, received a different course, that of democratization and independence, because, the memory and self-consciousness of the people preserved and strengthened the liberating desire to achieve statehood, to be equal to all other nations, to command one’s own destiny,” which was supported by the “national memory” of “lost statehood.”<sup>157</sup>

In Sahakyan’s interpretation the people stood up in order to create a democratic order, against the Soviet system, which had been built on terror.

An interesting nuance of Sahakyan’s interpretation is that he claims that Soviet special services did not want the movement to turn from one of national liberation to a democratic pro-independence movement and did everything to prevent it. In his view, the branch of the movement, which advocated struggle only for Nagorno-Karabakh, left the movement in May 1988, and the movement became a democratic one. As the date of the victory of the democratic forces against the Communist regime Sahakyan considers the parliamentary

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ara Sahakyan, “The ideology of the ANM was a turning point in the history of Armenian Political Thought,” *Hayastani Hanrapetutyun*, 10 September, 1993.

elections of 1990, among the MPs who were elected then Sahakyan mentions Levon Ter-Petrosyan, Ashot Manucharyan, Robert Kocharyan, Rafayel Ghazaryan and others. Sahakyan says that “we could have led the people against the Central Committee and swept it away,” but that would have been against the logic of a democratic movement and that was why “a democratic path” was chosen, and power was taken through elections. Bringing the examples of Gamsakhurdia and Elchibey he claims that the one who takes power through force would also leave by force, while coming to power through a democratic path is part of the democratic value system, which they have “always advocated.”

Sahakyan contrasts “the Armenian Dream” and the pragmatically achievable aims, such as establishment of independence and democratization, claiming that though ANM members share the former, in their policies they focus on the latter:

“ANM is a national movement, created on the Armenian soil, its every member shares the Armenian dream, i.e. the solution of the Armenian Question (Hay Dat), the idea of the suffering and losses that our nation had to endure... but as a political force ANM separates from the overall spectrum of the Armenian dream and makes a matter of current politics those issues that are soluble... It solved the most important one of these: independent Armenian statehood was recreated on the Armenian soil, and that is the only guarantee of the solution of the other national issues, of the future prosperity... This is the biggest service to the people and history: consolidation of democratic traditions in the life of the state and society, which was achieved by the ANM. Today democracy is a reality, the law of life, and in the eyes of the international community, democracy has become our trademark.”<sup>158</sup>

The idea that democracy is a trademark for post-Soviet Armenia was a common part of the discourse of the ruling elite in the 1990s. This was also connected to the role of Armenia as one of the frontrunners of the struggle against the totalitarian system in the USSR. Thus, head of parliament Babken Ararktsyan boasted of the achievements of Armenia in the struggle against totalitarianism for democracy and independence in a speech in Strasbourg on January 20, 1994. Speaking about struggle against “totalitarian empire” Ararktsyan proceeds to mention the key stages of what he calls “Armenia’s movement toward independence and democracy.” Among them he mentions the following:

“In May 1990, still under the Communist system, a powerful democratic movement was able to form a parliament, which predefined the creation of the independent democratic state, liberalization of the political and economic systems”.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> The Speech of the Head of the Supreme Council in Strasbourg, Hayastani Hanrapetutyun, 20 January 1994.

In the speech Ararktsyan also seems to be taking particular pride in the fact that “The parliament of the Republic of Armenia refused to take part in Gorbachev’s referendum on preservation of the USSR on March 17, and on September 21, 1991 through a democratic referendum (by the way, in accordance to all the laws of the USSR), Armenia was proclaimed an independent state.”<sup>160</sup>

At the same time, the leaders of the government also explained that transition to democracy is a complicated process and the break-up of the USSR did not automatically mean a successful transition to democracy. Thus, Ararktsyan says in an interview with a title that speaks for itself “Democracy is not established by itself”:

“In the course of the dissolution of the Soviet empire and the formation of new states almost everywhere there was the idea that the peoples that have stood up for a struggle against totalitarianism, upon achieving victory would unconditionally strive toward a democratic system. Often this idea was taken to the extreme, and the dissolution of totalitarianism was automatically equalized with the victory of democracy. In reality this is not the case and in order to create a democratic state with a rule of law there is need for years of persistent and consistent work.”<sup>161</sup>

At the same time Ararktsyan also describes Armenia as a “democratic country,” which has “a multi-party system, freedom of speech and of the media,” and where “every citizen, every NGO or political organization has the opportunity for free expression and defending their convictions,” considering what he describes as a victory of democracy a major achievement for Armenia.<sup>162</sup>

In a 1996 speech Ararktsyan talking about the May 1990 elections, Ararktsyan describes that as a time when the Armenian National Movement transformed the popular movement into “a democratic movement with the aims of creation of an independent nation-state, solving the Artsakh problem establish democratic principles of the state governance.”

He proceeds to talk about how those democratic principles were implemented in the activities of the first post-Soviet parliament of Armenia, the Supreme Council elected in 1990, even though he does mention the fact that the Dashnaktsutyun faction in the parliament had been dissolved when the party itself was banned by the Supreme Court. While talking about the victory of democracy, he considers a major achievement for democracy the election of Ter-Petrosyan as the chairman of the parliament in 1990, which in his view paved the way to the declaration of independence of August 23, which set the democratic principles, on which the future Republic of Armenia would be based. In the same speech he also blames “the leadership of the USSR for

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> B. Ararktsyan, “Democracy is not established by itself,” Hayastani Hanrapetutyun, 10 September 1993.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

leading the Karabakh issue into a dangerous deadlock.”<sup>163</sup>

In one of the latest speeches, in 1997, Ararktsyan sums up the narrative of the process which led to the independence of Armenia:

“Republic of Armenia became independent. That was a whole process: Declaration, Referendum, Constitution... The complete spectrum of social and political relations has changed. National army has been created.”

He also describes, what he believes was the beginning of that process:

“only 8 years ago in 1989 deputies of the Armenian National Movement in the Supreme Council suggested certain changes to the constitution: to remove the 6th article [i.e. the article on the leading role of the Communist Party]. That was perceived as a process undermining the bases of the state.”<sup>164</sup>

### **The opposition’s perspective**

As for the opposition reactions to the narrative promoted by the government’s discourse during the 1990s, one can identify approaches. One, which can be with a degree of simplification called “nostalgic,” consisted in distancing from the independence narrative and focusing on a negative interpretation of the break-up of the Soviet Union, together with positive or nostalgic representation of the Soviet past. This model of perception of the events of the late 1980s, which was and still is widespread in the former Soviet Union, was relatively marginal in the 1990s Armenia when it comes to political parties. Of course, among the population this model could have been quite widespread.<sup>165</sup> However, it was somewhat marginalized in the political field. Of major parties, which played a role in the political life of Armenia at the time, only representatives of the Communist Party of Armenia sometimes promoted this view. Even the Communists, however, were not calling for a restoration of the Soviet Union in any form, or challenging the idea of independence itself, but rather criticized the “radicalism” of the independence movement of the early 1990s and advocated integration with Russia.

Thus, as late as 1998, the head of the Communist Party of Armenia, Sergey Badalyan, criticized the Armenian National Movement (ANM) for “short-sighted” policies at the time of the break-up of the USSR and the

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<sup>163</sup> B. Ararktsyan, Several Issues of Development of Parliamentarism in the Republic of Armenia, Hayastani Hanrapetutyun, 20 January 1996.

<sup>164</sup> B. Ararktsyan, “We need to make the transition from politics of “shock” to the politics of a regular parliamentary party,” Hayastani Hanrapetutyun, 15 June 1997.

<sup>165</sup> There are few reliable data to assess these claims, but in some expert interviews the opinion was expressed that the view of break-up of the USSR as a catastrophe and the newly created Armenian state as a failure was quite widespread among the population in the 1990s, and is still quite common currently (expert interview, February, 2016). Echoes of these views have also been expressed by the younger generation participants of the focus groups (focus group, September, 2016).

inception of independence. Instead, he advocated he advocates closer cooperation with Russia, arguing that “neither the [spring] water of Jermuk, nor the molybdenum of Kajaran” is a source of survival of the people, but, instead the future fate of the Armenian people is connected to Russia. In this excerpt, Badalyan’s reference to “Jermuk spring water” and “molybdenum of Kajaran” is an obvious ridicule of the independence narrative, as he takes aim at the idea that Armenia’s natural resources could allow it to exist and prosper independently of Russia.

However, this “nostalgic” discursive model that rejects, questions or ridicules the narrative of independence as a major achievement was a relatively marginal model in the political discourse of the 1990s, represented largely by the Communists. The Communists had a steady electorate and had their representation in both the Supreme Council, elected in 1990, and the National Assembly elected in 1995, and Sergey Badalyan polled more than 6% as a presidential candidate in 1996. However, the majority of the political parties active in Armenia in the 1990s, were the ones that either took part in the independence movement, or supported it, and they adhered to another model of representation of the events of the 1988-1991. Among these parties were the National Democratic Union, which split from ANM in the early 1990s, led by prominent “Karabakh” committee member and Armenia’s first prime-minister Vazgen Manukyan, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaksutyun), the National Self-Determination Union led by Soviet-era dissident Paruyr Hayrikyan, the Union of Constitutional Right, and other parties.

Representatives of these parties shared with the ANM government the perception of the popular movement of the late 1980s as a struggle for national liberation, independence and democracy. However, they criticized the role of the ANM in the transition and questioned the claims of the ANM about successful transition, particularly when it came to issues of democracy and human rights. Within this model two trends can be noted. On the one hand, the opposition accused ANM in general, and Ter-Petrosyan in particular, in overturning democratic achievements of the late 1980s and building a dictatorship under the guise of democratic rhetoric, thus questioning the democratic credentials of ANM and challenging ANM’s narrative of successful democratic transition. On the other hand, the opposition also accused ANM of selling out national interests, of being too soft or even treacherous on the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh, thus questioning the narrative of “national liberation” promoted by ANM, or rather ANM’s role in “the national liberation.” In the opposition’s version of the narrative, ANM’s contribution to the independence of Armenia and especially to the victory in Nagorno-Karabakh is put under a question mark. The criticism which stressed the “national issues” like Nagorno-Karabakh narrative was closer associated with Dashnaksutyun, which occupied the niche of a nationalist force, while the other, which focused on ANM’s failure to establish democracy, is more characteristic of NDU, led by Vazgen Manukyan, which consisted mostly of dissident members of ANM who split from ANM in the beginning of the 1990s. However, this division is highly schematic, since Dashnaksutyun accused ANM of dictatorship and infringement of democratic freedoms, while NDU accused ANM of abandoning the national liberation

struggle. Both lines of criticism are also apparent in the text produced by other opposition forces, such as the National Self-Determination Union, led by former dissident Paruyr Hayrikyan or the Union of Constitutional Right party.

Thus, several of the leaders of the Dashnaktsutyun parties routinely used the terms “national liberation struggle” referring to the Karabakh movement and the subsequent developments.<sup>166</sup> A member of the Bureau of the Dashnaktsutyun Hrach Tasnapetyan describes the “struggle for liberation of Karabakh” as stemming from “national ideology,” which in turn stems from “our national collective memory” and, thus, is a priority issue “for all Armenians.” He also criticizes ANM for rejecting the concept of “national ideology” and claims that ANM itself would not have been possible without that “national ideology.”<sup>167</sup>

Another leader of Dashnaktsutyun, Vahan Hovhannisyan accuses the ANM of compromising the demands of the Karabakh movement, for being too soft on the issue of the Shahumyan district, which had been by them occupied by the Azerbaijani forces, as well as for alleged readiness to accept the status of autonomy for Nagorno-Karabakh:

“I want to remind 1988, when the whole people stood up for the struggle. What did we say then? We didn’t say the Autonomous Region of Nagorno-Karabakh, we said ‘Karabakh’ and Karabakh, by the way, reaches out to the Kur river... our issue is saving Karabakh, and not the creation of an Armenian autonomy within the borders defined by Azerbaijan or someone else.”<sup>168</sup>

At the same time, another leader of Dashnaktsutyun, accuses ANM of falling short of democratic standards. Acknowledging that ANM has come to power as a result of a democratic vote, he at the same time accuses them, and particularly the Interior Minister Vano Siradeghyan for initiating repressions against their opponents:

“Dashnaktsutyun will not tolerate such democracy in Armenia, this is not democracy, this is a policy that leads to an atmosphere of KGB.”<sup>169</sup>

The criticism of ANM coming from NDU, particularly from its leader Vazgen Manukyan was particularly harsh. This is especially interesting, given that Manukyan himself was one of the founders of the ANM, one of those who helped shape its ideology, and, was the head of the executive during the first months after ANM formed its first government in 1990. However, internal struggle within the ANM resulted in a situation when Ter-Petrosyan ultimately

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<sup>166</sup> V. Hovhannisyan, “The Solution of the Problem is in Victory Only,” Yerkir, 25 April 1992; Hrayr Karapetyan, Determination and foresight, Yerkir, 31 December 1992.

<sup>167</sup> “The Restraint Exercised by Dashnaktsutyun Comes from our National Interests,” Interview with Representative of the ARFD Bureau Hrach Tasnapetyan, Yerkir, 3 May 1994.

<sup>168</sup> Speech of Vahan Hovannisyan at a Round Table, Yerkir, October 1994.

<sup>169</sup> H. Marukhyan, “Let us Face Together the Powers that Endanger the Fate of our People,” Yerkir, 9 December 1992.

became the sole leader of the party, and was elected president in 1991. Manukyan and his supporters left the ANM and formed their own National Democratic Union party. Manukyan became the opposition frontrunner in 1996, when the majority of opposition decided to support his candidacy against incumbent Ter-Petrosyan. It was against this background that Manukyan harshly criticized ANM for failing to fulfill the promises of the national democratic movement. In one of the interviews, he compares ANM to the Communists and argues that “the deeds of a government that has come to power on the tide of a national struggle need to receive a harsher assessment than those of the Communists.”

In September 1996, the presidential elections were awarded to Ter-Petrosyan, though Manukyan’s supporters believed fraud had been committed and protested in the streets. After the protests led to clashes and were met with a government crackdown, Manukyan gave another interview in which he accused the government of renegeing on the spirit of the 1988 movement. In this interview he also compared his supporters to the movement of 1988:

“if 1988 was our generation’s movement, this movement is the movement of the younger generation, which would not tolerate for this country to have an illegal and undemocratic government.”<sup>170</sup>

The comparison of the protest movement that sought to overturn the official results of the 1996 election to the movement of 1988 is repeated by Manukyan in a later interview as well: “we were doing the same in 1988... the same happened in Poland [in 1989] and everywhere else.”<sup>171</sup> As we shall see later in the text, this comparison of protest movements with the movement of 1988 becomes a part of the opposition political discourse in Armenia. The 1988 movement becomes the reference point or the standard against which any further opposition movement is measured. Thus, the same was the case in 2008, when the opposition movement was led by none other than the same Ter-Petrosyan, the main target of the 1996 protests.

Thus, the opposition, with the exception of the Communists, largely shared the narrative models of national liberation struggle and the struggle for democracy, however, at the same time exposing the ANM government for not being genuine fighter neither for the national cause, nor for democracy. In the first case ANM is accused of softness or even treason on the national issues, in the second case it is accused of building a dictatorship, under the disguise of democratic rhetoric. However, overall in the 1990s the general pattern of the narrative which blended the ideas of national liberation struggle and that of struggle for democracy was not contested by the opposition forces. What was contested was the role of specific political forces or specific political leaders in the process, as well as the assessment of the degree to which the whole process was

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<sup>170</sup> V. Manukyan, *Illegal Government Cannot Be Strong*, Iravunq, October 1996.

<sup>171</sup> V. Manukyan on the Political Spring, Iravunq, 4-10 April 1997.

successful (especially when it came to building democracy).

Summing up the discussion of the political discourse of the 1990s we can make the following observations. In the speeches of Levon Ter-Petrosyan and other members of the administration a certain narrative was formed. That narrative emphasized several aspects of the events of the late 1980s- early 1990s:  
The nature of the Karabakh movement as “a people’s movement”;  
The nature of the Karabakh movement as “a national liberation” movement;  
Independence is “restored,” as a result of national liberation movement,  
Struggle for democracy is also emphasized.

The narrative did not portray the events of the 1980s as a revolution. In fact there is not a single time that Ter-Petrosyan has used this word to address the events, moreover, as it becomes clear from his other uses of words like “revolutionary methods of struggle” his and most his supporters’ attitude to the very idea of “revolution” is negative.

The memories of the Karabakh movement were also used to legitimize the current government and its actions, for example the Constitution which had been put forward by the ANM in 1995, is presented as a logical continuation of the process of national liberation struggle. At the same time, the opposition also used the memory of the popular movement of 1988 to legitimize its own actions, particularly by comparing its own protests against the government to the mass movement of the late 1980s.

The peaceful and non-radical nature of transition was emphasized, for example the fact that many former soviet officials continued to work in the new government, was mentioned as an achievement; at the same time it was a matter of pride, that there was no “revenge” of former communist leaders, as was the case in Georgia and Azerbaijan.

A moderately negative view of the Soviet past was promoted, though with a stress on the negative, which was explained by the necessity to keep the balance, since our opponents are advancing the positive view. However, the Soviet past is not presented as completely negative, its positive sides are acknowledged, and it is not presented as foreign occupation. Difficulties and negative consequences of the transition were acknowledged, but were presented as a result of objective factors, at the same time, they are also redeemed and romanticized in terms of a “heroic deed,” “sacrifice,” etc.

The Armenian government led by Ter-Petrosyan and ANM felt that it derived its legitimacy from the events of the late 1980s and early 1990s, hence the attention that is given to these events.<sup>172</sup> This was not necessarily true of the next two periods: under Robert Kocharyan and Serzh Sargsyan situation is changing: coming from Nagorno-Karabakh, they derive legitimacy in the

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<sup>172</sup> Interview with Aghasi Tadevosyan.

Nagorno-Karabakh issue, hence the accents are changing: from democracy and independence the accent is shifting to the liberation of Nagorno-Karabakh.

The general pattern of the narrative, which blended the ideas of national liberation struggle and that of struggle for democracy was not contested by the majority of the opposition forces. What was contested was the role of specific political forces or specific political leaders in the process, as well as the assessment of the degree to which the whole process was successful (especially when it came to building democracy. The exception were the Communists, however, questioned the independence narrative in general, promoting instead a “nostalgic” discourse, which questioned the achievements of independence and advocated closer integration with Russia.

## CHAPTER 4

Contesting the Legacy  
of 1988: Government,  
Opposition and the  
Political Discourse in  
1998-2013

### 4.1 The political context

The 1990s were the period when the narrative of the events of 1988-1991 was formed. As we shall see, since then the main paradigm remained the same, though some elements of the narrative did go through some changes. The theme of struggle for democracy against a totalitarian system became less pronounced, while the importance of the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh became more accentuated.

When it comes to the government discourse, the narrative of the events of 1988-1991 became reduced to a schematic formula, reproduced in a ritual fashion by the government representatives, whenever the occasion suited it. However, this period is interesting in another respect: the memory of the popular movement of 1988 became a powerful tool for mobilization for the Armenian opposition. In this context, while the narrative of events of the 1988 was not modified, the question of who has the right to claim the heritage of 1988 and subsequent years became a contested issue, a subject of a symbolic struggle between the opposition and the government, as well as between various groups of opposition.

In order to understand why the memory of 1988 became such an important tool for internal political struggle in Armenia it is first necessary to outline the dynamic of internal political process in Armenia since the late 1990s. One of the peculiarities of Armenia's internal politics, especially compared to some other post-Soviet countries, is the role played by protest movements. Street protests have been an integral part of the Armenian internal politics throughout Armenia's independence. Internal politics in Armenia during that period followed a cyclic model, established by the 1996 elections: disputed elections, in which the incumbent is declared the winner, opposition's refusal to recognize the official results amid allegations of vote rigging, mass protests against the government, government crackdown, and a subsequent "liberalization." By the time the cycle was over the next elections were approaching, so the opposition under a new leader challenged the incumbent and the whole cycle reproduced itself. The only exception was the presidential election of 1998, in which the opposition leader was the former Communist leader of Armenia, Karen Demirchyan, who chose not to call on his supporters to go out to the streets, and instead created a coalition with the powerful minister of defense in the incumbent government, Vazgen Sargsyan. This, however, was the exception that confirms the rule. In 2003 as the incumbent Robert Kocharyan was declared the winner he was challenged by opposition that rallied around Karen Demirchyan's son, Stepan Demirchyan. The protests lasted until 2004, when a crackdown on the opposition took place.

In 2007 Armenia's first president Ter-Petrosyan returned to politics, this time in the capacity of the leader of opposition, and became the main challenger of Robert Kocharyan's "successor" Serzh Sargsyan in the presidential elections. In February 2008 Sargsyan was declared the winner, but this outcome led to mass

protests, which were suppressed through violence on March 1, 2008. The March 1 clashes, which left ten people dead and dozens injured, were followed by a crackdown on the opposition, media and civil society, however, when the immediate threat of government overthrow passed, another “liberalization” followed. In 2013 Serzh Sargsyan was again declared the winner, as the opposition vote went to former Foreign Affairs minister Raffi Hovannisyan. Hovannisyan also refused to recognize the official results of the elections, and called on his supporters to the streets, however, the protests did not have a clear agenda and soon died out. In addition to the post-election protests, which were the most massive, Armenia also experienced smaller, but quite significant protests related to various issues, including socio-economic, environmental, issues of urban development, etc.

Most of these protest movements have in one way or another evoked the memory of the popular movement of 1988. The rallies of 1988-1991 became a master paradigm, which any subsequent protests were trying to emulate. Moreover, the movement of 1988, which by all accounts ended in success, became the standard by which any subsequent protests are measured in Armenia. Often a protest movement is considered successful, when it is able to reproduce “the spirit of 1988,” as it is called in Armenian political discourse.<sup>173</sup>

#### **4.2 Shifting the focus on Karabakh: the official narrative**

During the period in question we can witness the emergence of at least two narratives, or sub-narratives of the events of the late 1980s and early 1990s. One of them, which can be called “the government narrative” focuses on nation-building, i.e. the independence of Armenia and the struggle for Nagorno-Karabakh, and is used as a symbolic tool to provide legitimacy to the ruling political system. The other, which can be described as the “opposition” narrative, focuses on the themes of popular struggle against an “unjust” government and is used to provide legitimacy to opposition’s actions, particularly mass protests led by the opposition.

The first version of the narrative can be found in speeches of presidents and other officials of the time. Compared to Levon Ter-Petrosyan, both Robert Kocharyan and Serzh Sargsyan show less interest in the events of 1988-1991. Partly, this is a result of the distance from these events, however, it is not the only reason for this. While for Ter-Petrosyan, the leader of the ANM, which came to power as the result of 1990 elections, those events were directly the basis for legitimizing his power, this was not the case for Robert Kocharyan and Serzh Sargsyan. They both came from Nagorno-Karabakh, and remained there during most of the late 1980s and early 1990s, taking part in the war of 1992-1994. Therefore, if for Ter-Petrosyan and the ANM the overthrow of the Soviet totalitarianism and independence of Armenia were the main achievements that gave them the symbolic “right to power,” in case of Kocharyan and

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<sup>173</sup> Interview with Levon Abrahamyan. April, 2016.

Sargsyan a similar role was played by the victory in the Nagorno-Karabakh war. Hence, the accents in the official discourse were shifted from the achievement of independence and the overthrow of the Soviet system to the struggle in Nagorno-Karabakh, particularly the military victory and the creation of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (of which Kocharyan has been the first president, before moving to Armenia and becoming first the prime-minister, then the president).

Thus, in one of his first interviews, given in the run-up to 1998 presidential elections, when Robert Kocharyan was the caretaker president, he highlights what he calls “the war for liberation,” in which, according to Kocharyan, “we all have won, the people have won”.<sup>174</sup> He goes back to the events of the late 1980s using a trope that links the war in Nagorno-Karabakh to the 1988 earthquake: he the war to the 1988 earthquake, but says that “a people that have endured the earthquake of Aghdam [i.e. the bombardment of Stepanakert carried out by the Azerbaijani forces from the city of Aghdam] have no choice but to win.”<sup>175</sup>

The importance of the victory in Karabakh is reflected in the “day of victory and peace,” observed on May 9, and is devoted both to remembering the Soviet victory in the war against Nazi Germany and the victories in Nagorno-Karabakh. The choice of the date is related to the events of May 8-9 1992, when after a two-day battle Nagorno-Karabakh Armenian forces entered the city of Shushi in Nagorno-Karabakh. May 9 became the main holiday devoted to the Nagorno-Karabakh war. Kocharyan’s statements on that day follow a certain pattern:

“In 1992 the day of May 9th received a new meaning and significance in the consciousness of our people. By the liberation of Shushi the Armenian people expressed its unbreakable will to live peacefully and develop freely within its own homeland, showed that it would not tolerate any transgression of its national and human rights.”<sup>176</sup>

Subsequent statements devoted to “the day of victory and peace” developed the same formula:

“By the liberation of Shushi on May 9 1992 the Victory Day received a new meaning. In our national self-consciousness it received a new significance and a new content. That symbolic day is a testimony and a proof that we have once and for all chosen the path of free and peaceful development, and the transgressions of the national and human rights of the Armenian people from now on are in the past.”<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> R. Kocharyan, “I am one of you,” Hayastani Hanrapetutyun, 11 March 1998.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> President Robert Kocharyan's Congratulatory Message of Victory and Peace Day, Hayastani Hanrapetutyun, 8 May 1999.

<sup>177</sup> President Robert Kocharyan's Congratulatory Message of Victory and Peace Day, Hayastani Hanrapetutyun, 7 May 2000.

In a later version of the address we can see the more or less the same message, in a different packaging:

“In 1992 a new victory was added to our May victories<sup>178</sup> - the liberation of Shushi. In a war that was imposed on us we once again proved that we are ready to defend the right of our people to live in peace.”<sup>179</sup>

The narrative of achievement of independence in Kocharyan’s version is a continuation of the interpretation that was offered by officials during Ter-Petrosyan’s period in power. It contains the themes of struggle for independence and democracy and puts a special stress on the “struggle for Artsakh.” Thus, in a 2001 address Kocharyan says:

“10 years ago, by the people’s referendum of September 21 1991 the people of Armenia opened a new page of its history. By choosing freedom, independence and democracy it assumed the difficult and sacred task of re-building [veraker-tum] of Armenian statehood.”<sup>180</sup>

In addition to the idea that the Armenian people paid a high price for regaining independence, which we have seen in Ter-Petrosyan’s version of the address Kocharyan also says that “the Armenian statehood is the guarantee of the self-expression of the Armenian people, the tool for expressing its thought, spirit and its entrepreneurship,” revealing a certain tendency toward an ethno-essentialist understanding of the nation. At the same time it does not prevent Kocharyan from stressing that “our notions of freedom of speech, human rights, liberal economy and rule of law correspond to the the notions of developed countries.” A special stress is made on “the struggle for Artsakh,” which in Kocharyan’s interpretation is conceptualized as a reference to the war in Nagorno-Karabakh:

“The upward journey of our independence originated with the struggle for Artsakh. In the memory of our people these two are intertwined. The Armenian army was born on the battlefield, where thousands of Armenians sacrificed their lives.”<sup>181</sup>

Similar motives appear also on the later addresses devoted to the independence. While in general, Kocharyan remains within the framework of the narrative, which was formed during Ter-Petrosyan’s years, the references to the war in Nagorno-Karabakh as a major part of the struggle for independence and subsequently the role of the Armenian army are probably the most important element that distinguish Kocharyan’s narrative of independence from Ter-Petrosyan’s version.

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<sup>178</sup> Probably here Kocharyan is referring not just to May 1945 but also to Armenian victories over Turkish forces in May 1918.

<sup>179</sup> President Robert Kocharyan’s Congratulatory Message of Victory and Peace Day, Hayastani Hanrapetutyun, 9 May 2005.

<sup>180</sup> President Robert Kocharyan’s speech at the 10th anniversary of the proclamation of independence, Hayastani Hanrapetutyun, 21 September 2001.

<sup>181</sup> President Robert Kocharyan’s speech at the 10th anniversary of the proclamation of independence, Hayastani Hanrapetutyun, 21 September 2001.

Ter-Petrosyan's version. He also mentions the Karabakh issues as one of the main issues that Armenia as an independent countries will be striving to solve. There are also references to the current events, for example in 2005 Kocharyan refers to the upcoming referendum on constitutional amendments, which he compares to the 1991 referendum:

“In the very near future in Armenia the referendum for constitutional amendments will take place. 14 years ago on this day the people of Armenia made its historical choice: to build a free, democratic and prosperous country... We are committed to the peaceful resolution of the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh, which has to be built upon on the factual existence of the NKR and the principle of the right of peoples to self-determination... Our country is safe and secure thanks to the armed forces of Armenia, which are the creation of independence and at the same time its shield. At the origins of independence are those heroes, who paid with their blood for those strong foundations upon which today stands the Republic of Armenia, the homeland of all Armenians.”<sup>182</sup>

Similar narrative, with some references to the current events (in this case, the parliamentary elections won by the ruling coalition parties, which “showed the trust of the people toward the policies implemented”), is presented by Kocharyan's last day of independence address in the capacity of president made in September 2007:

“The restoration of statehood was a historically unique event in the lives of Armenians. During the independence referendum our people expressed its will to build a free, democratic and prosperous country. During the subsequent 16 years it continued to develop and on that road many challenges were overcome honorably.”<sup>183</sup>

In 2008, after disputed elections and post-election clashes (see below), Kocharyan's long-time ally Serzh Sargsyan became the president. Sargsyan, who, like Kocharyan, had a background from Nagorno-Karabakh, having risen to prominence due to the war Nagorno-Karabakh, was perceived as “the successor” to Kocharyan. Whether that perception was adequate or not, in terms of political ideology there was not much difference between the two, both were pragmatics, ready to shift gears under the imperative of the moment. Sargsyan, in terms of his political rhetoric, on the one hand, espoused the conservative-nationalist ideology of the Republican Party, the main party of the ruling coalition, on the other employed the rhetoric of democracy and human rights, which was necessary to make sure that Armenia was seen as a legitimate partner by the international community.

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<sup>182</sup> President R. Kocharyan's speech on Independence Day, Hayastani Hanrapetutyun, 21 September 2005.

<sup>183</sup> President R. Kocharyan's speech on Independence Day, Hayastani Hanrapetutyun, 21 September 2007.

The main difference between Kocharyan and Sargsyan in terms of their approach to ideology was the approach to the ruling party and its ideology. While Kocharyan maintained a certain distance from all political parties of the ruling coalition, Sargsyan, who became the chairman of the ruling Republican Party in 2007, identified himself with the party and its ideology to a larger extent. Another difference was rather a matter of style than of content: while Kocharyan's speeches were laconic and specific, Sargsyan's speeches were longer and contained more reflexive and theoretic elements. Under Serzh Sargsyan a tendency can be observed of a further ritualization of the narrative of the events of 1988-1991. However, there is also a change of style. If Kocharyan's style was laconic and schematic, Sargsyan (or rather his speechwriters) engages in eloquent speech-making, reminding a sermon, with philosophic thoughts centered around abstract concepts such as "independence," "liberty," "justice," and use of quasi-religious metaphors characteristic for conservative nationalism (e.g. "sacrifice on the sacred altar of Homeland").

Thus, in his first independence address in the capacity of the president Serzh Sargsyan starts with laying out a narrative that more or less reproduces the model we already know from Ter-Petrosyan and Kocharyan:

"Today is our main state holiday. 17 years ago, thanks to the expression of its collective will the dream of numerous generations of the Armenian people became an irreversible reality... The creation of the independent Armenian state was a historical imperative. Our people have never accepted the loss of independence. And it could not: not the nation whose historians and writers ages ago had decried as wrongful the lack of freedom and alien rule. 17 years ago, the citizens of the Republic of Armenia who had given their vote for independence were creating the history of today's and tomorrow's Armenia..."<sup>184</sup>

While this excerpt is largely a reformulation of the narrative model that we have already seen employed by the previous presidents, Sargsyan goes on to ask "philosophical" questions related to the phenomenon of independence and himself answers them:

"Today every one of us in their mind responds to the questions:

- What is independence for me?
- What achievements did Armenia have on that road?
- Which has to be the path of development of our country?
- What traditions of statehood shall we leave to our children who are born in freedom?

... Independence is the realization of our dream, our biography: a period full of ups and downs, struggle and battles, the possibility and ability to defend our national dignity, the right to make sacrifices, and, with the price of those sacrifices, to have achievements, the right to take pride in those achievements together... Independence

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<sup>184</sup> Speech of the president Serzh Sargsyan on the occasion of the 17th anniversary of independence, 21 September 2008. <http://www.president.am/hy/statements-and-messages/item/2008/09/21/news-16/>

is the right to make history by our will, which is now indispensable and indisputable.”<sup>185</sup>

The high-brow style of the address is kept in the remaining part of the speech: “This is why for us September 21 is a celebration of national pride... Our pride is not fed only by our glorious history, the achievements and victories of our ancestors, but will be based on those traditions of statehood that are established today... From one year to the next the terms ‘liberty’ and ‘independence’ for us are filled with new content and meaning. We were able to overcome difficulties, we did not retreat. It became obvious for us that only independence makes possible to defend fully the rights of Armenia and the Armenian people. We shall continue to defend those by all means.”<sup>186</sup>

Sargsyan also adds a critical note to the address, though it contains as little specific references to concrete issues as the previous part of the address: “From the declaration of independence till today we are forming new traditions of the Armenian statehood. Next to wonderful traditions, unfortunately, there are such traditions, which are unacceptable. From now on we are a mature state and we need to uproot those phenomena that block our progress and to encourage that what is positive: those values for which generations have fought, those values that we believe in – freedom, democracy, and equality before the law.”<sup>187</sup>

As this address shows, Sargsyan’s approach to the events of 1988-1991 presents a further step in the ritualization of the memory of that period. Ter-Petrosyan’s speeches already contain the main elements of the “mythological” narrative of events of the late 1980s, but at the same time, especially in the early years of his presidency, he also engaged in discussion of specific issues and policies. Through Kocharyan’s years, the events of 1988-1991 are represented through a schematic narrative, which is repeated through the years in a ritualized fashion. And Sargsyan, repeats the same narrative in a more pompous style, but also treats it as a pretext for expressing certain abstract ideas about his perceptions of what statehood and citizenship mean. In fact, in terms of style and structure Sargsyan’s address reminds a priest’s sermon: as the priest tells a story from the Bible and then uses it to preach about certain virtues, Sargsyan recites the “sacred text” of the myth and then engages in what can be described as “secular preaching.”

A similar narrative model and a similar style is also used in Sargsyan’s address to the 14th Party Congress of the Republican Party of Armenia:

“Two decades ago our people received one more opportunity to create independent state. And, thanks God, it did not lose that opportunity. During the first five years of independence our people withstood most difficult trials.

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

The people carved a victory in a war imposed [on us]. From the ashes of the crumbling economy it set the bases for a liberal economy. Created a state structure characteristic for an independent country. Often surrounded on all sides, sometimes completely cut off from the outside world, within closed borders it was able to move ahead with the thought and vigor of its sons. It was able to prove to itself and the world its ability to live independently. To prove its right to exist in the 21st century. The right to have a state. The right to have a future. The first years of independence were years of fighting and struggle, creation and formation. It was during these years that the Armenian people shaped the main arguments for our life and activities during the following years. Everything good and kind. Also what is controversial and problematic? Shaped, based on the spiritual, intellectual and material values accumulated during the previous decades. Shaped the way it could. Shaped as it wanted. Sometimes, as it had to.”<sup>188</sup>

Sargsyan also seeks to boost the role of the Republican Party of Armenia in the process of the achievement of independence. Even though in fact the RPA was a small party created by a few nationalist dissidents which was a minor ally of the Armenian National Movement until 1998, Sargsyan rhetorically boosts the role of the RPA in various fields, from formation of military regiments and to advancing the idea of independence. Thus, in a speech devoted to the 20th anniversary of the RPA Sargsyan he praises RPA for its efforts in the armed struggle:

“Being a proponent of exclusively peaceful and constitutional struggle, our party, from the day of its establishment had the understanding of the necessity of armed self-defense for Armenians. It was obvious that our people, especially in Artsakh, were facing an imposed war, it was obvious that the war was eminent. Our party was one of those forces that were ready for it, as exemplified by ‘the army of independence’ and its selfless fighters. At a crucial moment together with the Armenian people we stood up for a fight for freedom and in that the Republican Party of Armenia had its significant contribution.”<sup>189</sup>

Sargsyan also talks about the participation of the RPA in the struggle for independence, highlighting the role of the party’s founder, Ashot Navasardyan, a nationalist dissident, who died in 1996, long time before Sargsyan himself joined the RPA:

“Ashot Navasardyan was an incarnation of live emotion and energy. At a time when many even in the depth of their soul could not hold the hope of having an independent state, he openly preached this noble goal. He opposed a system that was considered terrifying and unshakable. Ashot Navasardyan had a dream and had a goal: a goal, which today is reality – the restoration of Armenia’s

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<sup>188</sup> Statement by President Serzh Sargsyan at the RPA 14th extraordinary congress, 15 December 2012, <http://www.president.am/hy/statements-and-messages/item/2012/12/15/Address-by-Serzh-Sargsyan-at-the-14th-Republican-Convention-speech/>

<sup>189</sup> Statement of the President Serzh Sargsyan on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the RPA, 18 December 2010, <http://www.president.am/hy/statements-and-messages/item/2010/12/18/news-81/>

independent statehood. For that goal he endangered his well-being, sacrificed the comfort of his family, his opportunity to receive education. It is thanks to him and his comrades-in-arms that the Armenian freedom-loving spirit was preserved and today we had the opportunity to establish the third republic of Armenia.”<sup>190</sup>

This speech fits Sargsyan’s political strategy as president: during Sargsyan’s rule the role of the ruling party became greater than in the past. Kocharyan, even though he was supported by a coalition of several parties led by the largest party, the Republican Party of Armenia, used to stress that he was above parties: even one of his election slogans was “my party is my people”.<sup>191</sup> Sargsyan, however, identified himself with the Republican Party, chairman of which he became prior to becoming president and remained during his whole term. Moreover, there were times during Sargsyan’s reign when the Republican Party ruled alone, without any coalition partners.

Another interesting detail of the speech is that Sargsyan, though he praises early RPA Navasardyan for “opposing the system” in the Soviet years, just like his predecessors, does not see the events of 1988-1991 as revolution. Moreover, as another passage of the same speech suggests, the term “revolution” has a negative connotation in Sargsyan’s discourse:

“On the one hand we need to exclude any revolutionary shocks, which have never brought prosperity to any country, on the other hand we need to exclude the danger of staying at one place, we need to add a fast pace to our steps.”<sup>192</sup>

Continuing the trends established by his predecessors, especially Kocharyan, Sargsyan also connects the struggle for independence with the war in Nagorno-Karabakh, and attaches utmost significance to the armed forces as one of the most vital attributes of independent statehood. In case of Sargsyan, the rhetorical elevation of the role of the armed forces is also important, given his personal background: Sargsyan has been the minister of defense for years before becoming the prime-minister in 2007, and in this capacity, and this has played an important role in his elevation to the position of “successor” who replaced Kocharyan in 2008.

Thus, in his first address on the occasion of the Day of the Army in the capacity of president, Sargsyan says:

“17 years ago, when our independence was under threat, the creation of the army became the most urgent imperative of the day. Armenian army was formed and shaped in the fire of a war, from the first days of its existence exhibiting its best qualities - boundless dedication to the Motherland, unbending

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> S. Sargsyan, “My Party is not My People any More,” Aravot, 7 November 2007, <http://en.ara.vot.am/2007/11/07/160086/>

<sup>192</sup> Statement of the President Serzh Sargsyan on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the RPA, 18 December 2010, <http://www.president.am/hy/statements-and-messages/item/2010/12/18/news-81/>

will of struggle and the spirit of victory. Thanks to all this we were able to win an uneven struggle for existence and secure the liberty to live with our own values... For us the Armenian army is national pride, and for the enemy it is a strong factor that forces restraint and caution, which, through force and combat readiness supports the fragile peace. We know that for that calm we are indebted to the soldiers, our officers and commanders, our courageous sons, who go to service every day, who are in their positions and trenches.”<sup>193</sup>

The link between independence and army as its most important attribute is developed in a 2012 address of Serzh Sargsyan on the same occasion:

“Since the loss of independent statehood the Armenian people had given birth to many soldiers, but never had the fortune of having its own army. Armenian soldiers, officers and generals have brought fame to many countries through their personal courage and heroic deeds, but our people’s courageous sons have been deprived of the opportunity to defend together the interests of their homeland and their compatriots... 20 years ago we turned the wheel of history. Through that key period our people re-created its independent statehood, completely taking upon itself the responsibility for its rights and defense of its national interests. One of the most important achievements of that historical moment of ascension was the Armenian army... There was a necessity to prevent the threat of genocide that was hanging upon the head of the Armenian people and especially the people of Artsakh. That breakthrough event – the creation of the army was the imperative of the time... The volunteers that had risen to fight against intolerance, evil and blind hatred became the core of the Armenian regular army. At this moment of national resurgence many of those volunteers sacrificed their lives on the altar of security and defense of the homeland.”<sup>194</sup>

Thus, in this speech, we can see that Sargsyan reproduces the same narrative model he “inherited” from his predecessors, but he also elevates it to an epic scale, using the quasi-religious rhetoric (“sacred goal,” “fight against intolerance, evil and blind hatred,” “sacrifice on the altar,” etc.) that distinguishes him from the previous presidents. In the next year’s address on the Day of the Army, Sargsyan further develops the idea already present in the previous speeches, that the creation of the army, as an element of independent statehood, was the response of the Armenian people to the threat of genocide:

“It is worth mentioning that we, as a nation and society, did not have the intention of creating and sustaining an army of the kind that we have today. We were forced to organize our forces for defending ourselves in the struggle that was imposed on us...

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<sup>193</sup> President Serzh Sargsyan’s Address on the Occasion of the Day of the Army, 27 January 2009, <http://www.president.am/hy/statements-and-messages/item/2009/01/27/news-28/>

<sup>194</sup> President Serzh Sargsyan’s Congratulatory on the Occasion of the 20th Anniversary of the Creation of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Armenia, 28 October 2012, <http://www.president.am/hy/statements-and-messages/item/2012/01/28/news-126/>

to prevent those massacres and ethnic cleansing acts, which were methodically implemented before our eyes and eyes of the world. Moreover, we were publicly threatened by massacres and ethnic cleansing. These threats were more than real. Some of these threats were realized, both during those days and later... It was at that fateful moment when the people created its army, almost from scratch. At a time of war, blockade and hunger the Armenian people created its army to say just one sentence: ‘Enough!’ It is impossible to talk to the Armenian or to anyone in the world using the language of yataghan<sup>195</sup> and threats... Heroes died, who, by the price of their lives, returned to us our right to live and our dignity. We bow our heads to the memory of those, whose courage earned our army the title of ‘victorious army’. The force that imposed a cease-fire and a relative peace on the enemy. The force that guards that peace and stability in our region, which is and will be a reliable backing for Artsakh.”<sup>196</sup>

The Armenian military becomes in Sargsyan’s discourse an important part of founding myth of Armenian statehood, as the focus is shifted from the struggle for independence and democracy against the USSR to the “struggle for survival” in Nagorno-Karabakh. Accordingly, Nagorno-Karabakh Republic also becomes an important part of the narrative of independence. This may be somewhat paradoxical, since NKR as a self-proclaimed republic seeks international recognition of its independence, a stance supported by Armenia. However, within the official discourse it becomes one of the achievements of Armenian independence, one of its attributes, just like the army or other institutions. In fact, with a mixed record in internal politics and economy, NKR becomes almost the only tangible undeniable achievement of independent period, around which a consensus exists in Armenia, an achievement, which is not contested by the opposition or other groups critical of the political system. Hence, the importance that the Independence Day of NKR, September 2, receives in the symbolical landscape. Even though the day is not an official holiday in Armenia, it becomes an important focal point in the official discourse. Sargsyan stresses the importance of NKR for all Armenians in his speech devoted to the 20th anniversary of the NKR:

“Tomorrow is a celebration not just for the Armenians of Artsakh, but for all Armenians. It is a celebration of dignity of man and nation, a celebration of restoration of all abused rights, a celebration of a historical victory of justice... Everyone’s right to live free and safe, to raise their kids in the grip of their own culture and church is given from above. Neither the centuries full of struggle and suffering, neither the decades of anti-Armenian dictatorship were able or could be able to put break our determination, did not and could not deprive us of our right... This cruel, long and monstrous war, which was imposed in us, could have rendered hopeless anyone, but not the Artsakhtsi [i.e. inhabitant of Artsakh]...

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<sup>195</sup> The crooked sword that was widely used by the Ottomans. In Armenian public discourse is associated with massacres and genocide in Turkey.

<sup>196</sup> President Serzh Sargsyan’s Congratulatory Address on the Occasion of the Day of the Army, 28 January 2013, <http://www.president.am/hy/statements-and-messages/item/2013/01/28/Congratulatory-Message-by-President-Serzh-Sargsyan-on-the-occasion-of-Army-Day-speech/>

We chose live and today we are celebrating the victory of life over death.”<sup>197</sup>

The idea that independence of NKR is the biggest achievement of independent Armenian statehood and a source of pride for all Armenians is further developed in the speech:

“If before Artsakh was the pain of Armenians, today it is the pride of Armenians. The Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh is an established state... All of us, various parts of the Armenian nation, are the continuation of one another. We shall do everything not only for strengthening the peace and security of Artsakh, but also for its socio-economic and cultural development.”<sup>198</sup>

Interestingly, the topic of democracy is also included in the speech, in the context of comparison between NKR and Azerbaijan, which (without naming it) is contrasted with NKR as a non-democratic aggressive state:

“Even in the conditions of the threat of war it is incomparably more democratic than those who constantly air threats of an upcoming war against Armenians and speak about democracy and ethnic tolerance during their free time... Armenia, Artsakh and Diaspora are one unit.”<sup>199</sup>

Another stable element of the official discourse is the link between the first republic (1918-1920) and the contemporary Republic of Armenia. In this sense Sargsyan continues the trend established by Ter-Petrosyan, treating the 1st republic, as “the first attempt” at independence, which was unsuccessful, but still deserves respect and celebration, as it became a basis and an inspiration for the current Republic of Armenia. At the same time, having ultimately ended in a failure, the first attempt at independence helps to highlight the successes of the contemporary Republic of Armenia. Thus, in his address on May 28, 2011 Sargsyan says:

“On May 28 the Armenian people adopted a new value system, that of independence and democracy. If today’s Armenia is the successor of the First Republic (and that is the case), then first and foremost it is the successor of that value system... That, what due to historical circumstances the Armenia resurrected on May 28 did was not able to accomplish, in spite of its sincere and stubborn efforts, Armenia resurrected on September 21 needs to accomplish.”<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> President Serzh Sargsyan’s Congratulatory Address on the Occasion of the 20th Anniversary of Independence of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, 1 September 2011, <http://www.president.am/hy/statements-and-messages/item/2011/09/01/news-93/>

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> President Serzh Sargsyan’s Address on the Occasion of the Day of the Republic, 28 May 2011 <http://www.president.am/hy/statements-and-messages/item/2011/05/28/news-90/>

A year later Sargsyan in his address devoted to the celebration of the first republic Sargsyan repeats some of the metaphors and topics (“to turn the wheel of history around,” the importance of the army, etc.) he used when talking about the establishment of the contemporary republic:

“On that day we turned the wheel of history around and turned it in a desirable direction. In reality, however, that crucial change had taken place earlier, it had taken place in our psychology and political thinking, when the Armenians living in their homeland understood that we need to live on our soil not as a community, but as a state, we need to fight not as a “fidayi” [Armenian “freedom fighters,” equivalent to “hayduk” or “kleft” in the Balkans] group, but as an army. To live and to fight as Armenia: this was the new psychology and political thinking. And the heroic battles of May were built on this first and foremost. On May 28 what had happened in our thinking and on the field of a battle was written down on paper.”<sup>201</sup>

As we have noticed, Serzh Sargsyan’s speeches are full of quasi-religious imagery. Naturally, he also noted the role of the Armenian Church in the events that were connected with the establishment of the contemporary Armenian state. Thus in a speech, congratulating the current Catholicos of All Armenians Garegin the 2nd he also referred to the role played by the Armenian Apostolic Church and its Catholicos Vazgen the 1st in the late 1980s and early 1990s:

“This road of spiritual service [i.e. of the Church to the homeland] started with the blessing of Vazgen the 1st ... who was a real symbol of the loyalty of our people to its spiritual roots... Vazgen the 1st and his disciples, among them our patriarch [i.e. Garegin the 2nd], did not allow to break the link of times. They prevented the attempts to replace real values with false idols. They came to assume the mission of the shepherds of the resurrection Armenian Apostolic Saint Church.”<sup>202</sup>

It is interesting to note that while in their remarks about Vazgen the 1st Ter-Petrosyan and Ararktsyan displayed a more secularist outlook emphasizing the role of Vazgen the 1st as an intellectual and moral authority without references to religion per se, Sargsyan highlights the religious aspect, talking about “loyalty of Armenian people to its church,” the need to fight “false idols” and “the resurrection of the Church.”

### 4.3 The Contested Heritage of 1988: the Opposition Discourse

Thus, the image of the events of 1988-1991 in the government discourse was becoming more schematic and was being reduced to certain formulas, repeated in a ritualistic fashion in certain situations. However, the other version of the

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<sup>201</sup> President Serzh Sargsyan’s Address on the Occasion of the Day of the Republic, 28 May 2012 <http://www.president.am/hy/statements-and-messages/item/2012/05/28/news-126/>

<sup>202</sup> President Serzh Sargsyan’s Speech on the Occasion of 60th Anniversary of His Holiness Garegin the 2nd Catholicos of All Armenians, 4 November 2011 <http://www.president.am/hy/statements-and-messages/item/2011/11/04/news-115/>

narrative, the one that was used by the opposition was a more dynamic one, as it went through various transformations shaped by the political context and debates.

The tendency to compare current protests to 1988 became obvious already in 1990s. Thus, the united opposition candidate and the leader of the opposition protests in 1996, Vazgen Manukyan, compared the protests to the popular movement of 1988, talking about 1996, being “the 1988” for the new generation (see chapter 3). However, this discourse, for obvious reasons was not reproduced by Karen Demirchyan, the most popular non-governmental candidate in the 1998 elections. Demirchyan, the former Communist leader of Armenia, who was forced as a result of the popular protest in 1988, on the contrary, appealed to the nostalgia many Armenians had for the calmer pre-1988 times. For that Demirchyan’s supporters were branded as “sausage-worshippers” by some of his competitors.<sup>203</sup> Demirchyan, no longer a Communist, presented a vision that was based on the nostalgia for Soviet stability and “assumed” abundance, though it was stripped from ideological components, such as adherence to Communism. Obviously, not only Demirchyan did not appeal to the legacy of 1988, but his whole candidacy seemed to dismantle the positive narrative of 1988-1991. Interestingly, the discursive positioning of Demirchyan may help to explain, why there were no major protests, when he was declared the loser of the election in 1998: taking to the streets would have meant reproducing the “movement” of 1988, which neither Demirchyan nor many of his supporters were ready to do.<sup>204</sup>

In 2003 Karen Demirchyan’s son Stepan became the most popular opposition candidate, who challenged the incumbent Robert Kocharyan in the presidential elections of 2003. Kocharyan was declared the winner, the opposition took to the streets, but the protests faded out after the Constitutional Court upheld the election results. The Constitutional Court, however, while upholding the official election results, suggested to hold a referendum of confidence to the president as a way to resolve the issue. In 2004 this suggestion was used by the opposition to mount new protests, which were in part inspired by the successful Rose Revolution in Georgia. Opposition protests were growing until a government crackdown took place on April 12, 2004: the riot police dispersed a rally that was taking place close to the presidential palace.<sup>205</sup>

In the protests of 2003-2004 the comparison with the 1988 Karabakh movement had already become a significant part of the discourse, at least among some of the leading figures, as well as among the activists and pro-opposition media.

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<sup>203</sup> “Those who vote for K. Demirchyan are not the supporters of cheap sausages,” video, A1Plus TV Channel, 25 February 2016, <http://www.a1plus.am/1437460.html>

<sup>204</sup> On the election of 1998 and the subsequent events see Stephan H. Astourian, *Op Cit.*, 2001; L. Abrahamian, G. Shagoyan, *Op Cit.*, vol. 50, no. 3 (Winter 2011-12), pp. 11-50, 2012

<sup>205</sup> On these events see M. Zolyan, “Armenia” chapter, in A. Polese and D. O’ Beachain (eds). *The Color Revolutions in the Former Soviet Republics* (London, Routledge, 2010).

Stepan Demirchyan himself had an ambiguous relationship to the 1988 movement, which had led to his father's resignation. Thus, in a 2003 interview he said:

"In spite of all that [i.e. events leading to his father's resignation] 1988 as a political event for me is not something negative. Of course, national independent statehood is above all, the freedom of speech, freedom of expression, which has taken root in Armenia since independence and we need to do everything possible to make those values irreversible."<sup>206</sup>

In the same interview, however, he also said that his aim was "to make Armenia's independent statehood loved by the people," which by implication meant that in his view independent statehood was not "loved" by the Armenian people.<sup>207</sup>

Other leaders of the opposition at the time, however, used the imagery of 1988 and compared contemporary protests to the events of 1988. Thus, an opposition politician Shavarsh Kocharyan said in an interview that "In 1988-1990 rallies took place which were as big as today's rallies... the behavior of the regime is the same as the behavior of the regime then."<sup>208</sup> Thus, here we can see that the rallies of late 1980s are seen as a standard against which current protests are measured, a theme which is commonly repeated in the opposition's discourse in Armenia.

From the leaders of the protests of 2003-2004 it was Vazgen Manukyan, in the past a leading figure of Karabakh movement and Armenia's first prime-minister, who made analogies to 1988 an important part of the discourse. Thus, in a 2005 interview said that "the opposition is trying to start an all-people's movement, as it was done in 1988"<sup>209</sup> Interestingly, the term "all-people's movement" (hamazhoghovrdakan sharzhum) was later used in 2007-2008 by supporters of Ter-Petrosyan. In the same interview Manukyan states that the practices of 1988 are a model for the protest leaders at the time, but also acknowledges the limitations of that approach:

"Of course, like then, now we are trying to create certain structures, though the difference of times means that it is impossible to repeat everything exactly the way it was done then. As for ambitions today we cannot be as ambitious as in 1988... Unlike 1988, we need to do something in another way, if you ask me how, I can say that I do know how to do certain things, but others I still have not made sense of... If in 1988 the rallies were the most efficient and the only tool, today I consider the role of rallies smaller."<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> "Stepan Demirchyan as He is," Haykakan Zhamanak, 15 February 2003.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> "Kocharyan Does not Have Votes, he has only Ballot Papers (rally at Matenadaran)," Haykakan Zhamanak, 27 February 2003.

<sup>209</sup> Interview with V. Manukyan (by Naira Zohrabyan), Haykakan Zhamanak, 15 December 2005.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

In another interview of the same period with a telling name “The pan-national movement should not be forgotten” Manukyan focuses more specifically on issues of remembering the events of the late 1980s.<sup>211</sup> The interview itself is devoted to Manukyan’s participation in a celebration of 25 year anniversary of “Solidarity” (Solidarność) movement in Poland, and in it Manukyan tells at length about his interpretation of the events of the late 1980s. He says that “our movement played a fundamental role” in “changing the life of Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.” He proceeds to tell about “elements of cooperation” between “our movement and the Poland’s movement,” particularly about a letter from prominent Polish dissident “the ideologue of Solidarity” Adam Michnik, who allegedly thanked “Karabakh committee” for showing the road to “continuing the activities in the format of parliament...” Manukyan explains that when all movements found themselves in a deadlock, Karabakh movement showed that is possible to use the mechanism of elections, to struggle for our principles from within the government.” Here he refers to the fact that three Karabakh Committee members were elected into the Supreme Soviet of Armenia in late 1988 as a result of by-elections, and, though it still had a Communist majority was able to use it as a platform for advancing the movement’s agenda.<sup>212</sup>

Manukyan also laments that the role of the Armenian movement in the process that brought down the Soviet system is little known outside of Armenia and is being forgotten:

“...Partly it is our fault, we were not able to keep that political weight, which Armenia received thanks to this movement, on the other hand we did not get involved in PR activities... We need to present it [to the world] to show what role Armenia, the Karabakh movement has played in shaping this new map of the world.”<sup>213</sup>

Continuing this topic, Manukyan argues that in Poland people were unhappy about a lot of things, including the dismemberment of the movement and injustice, but never got disenchanted in ideas of liberty, democracy and independence: “they never said ‘we did not need independence, democracy, we do not need private property’, nobody said ‘let’s go back’ or ‘destruction of the Soviet Union was a crime’.” Unlike Poland, however, in the Armenian case “our movement is becoming a forgotten movement both in the international sphere and inside Armenia, because we did not receive the fruit that we expected... And mostly the accusation is leveled not against persons, but against principles,

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<sup>211</sup> “Pan-national Movement Should not be Forgotten,” Interview with Vazgen Manukyan (by Anna Hakobyan), Haykakan Zhamanak, 6 September 2005.

<sup>212</sup> Anthropologist Levon Abrahamian believes this was a crucial stage of the Karabakh movement which significantly changed not just the political situation but also the perceptions of what was possible to reach through protest activities (Interview with Levon Abrahamian, May 10, 2016).

<sup>213</sup> “Pan-national Movement Should not be Forgotten,” Interview with Vazgen Manukyan (by Anna Hakobyan), Haykakan Zhamanak, 6 September 2005.

which for me is terrible”.<sup>214</sup> He explains this disenchantment by the behavior of the ruling elites, who defied democratic principles, particularly through violating the elections.

In any case the events of 1988 did not have the same significance for other leaders of the opposition protests in 2003-2004, as they had for Vazgen Manukyan, one of the leaders of the 1988 movement. Things were different during the election campaign of 2007-2008 and subsequent protests. It was then that the mobilizing potential of the narrative of 1988 was to a full extent used by the opposition. In part it had to do with the personalities of the opposition leaders. In 2007 Ter-Petrosyan returned to politics and became the most influential opposition candidate. In the elections that took place in February Kocharyan's chosen “successor” Serzh Sargsyan was declared the winner. Ter-Petrosyan, who, had lost according to the official results, challenged claimed that the election had been rigged and mass protests against what was perceived by many as a falsified election started.<sup>215</sup> The government crackdown on March 1 led to clashes, after which hundreds of opposition activists were detained or went into hiding.<sup>216</sup> Ter-Petrosyan's supporters, however, did not stop challenging the government. The parties that had supported Ter-Petrosyan created an opposition block “Armenian National Congress,” which continued to challenge Sargsyan's power for several years.

For Ter-Petrosyan and many of his associates, who were also part of the Karabakh movement and of the government that led Armenia in the early 1990s, the historical connection to the 1988 movement was obvious. Ter-Petrosyan and the other leaders realized the mobilizing potential that the narrative of the events of the late 1980s carried, so they used it in their rhetoric quite extensively. Armenian anthropologists Levon Abrahamian and Gayane Shagoyan describe this process, comparing Ter-Petrosyan's appeal to the voters in 2008 with that of Karen Demirchyan, another former ruler of Armenia, ten years earlier:

“Karen Demirchyan recalled the “happy” Soviet times and Levon Ter-Petrosyan remembered the unforgettable political “festival” of 1988. Meanwhile people had to forget the former's lack of popularity in 1988 and the latter's demise in 1996, as well as the “dark and cold years” of 1992–94. [referring to socio-economic difficulties of those years] While Demirchyan did not need to manipulate people's memory—it happened by itself—Ter-Petrosyan had to manage this during his electoral campaign. He used his rhetorical skills and, more important in the context of this article, appealed to the need to uproot the

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> S. Tavernise, “Thousands in Armenia Protest Results of Presidential Election,” 2 February 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/21/world/europe/21armenia.html>

<sup>216</sup> G. Abrahamyan, Armenia: Crackdown Victims' Families Have Little Hope for Justice, Eurasia.net, 28 June 2009, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insightb/articles/eav062909as.html>

existing unfair electoral machine in order to establish democratic elections.”<sup>217</sup>

The link between the 1988 movement and the opposition movement in 2007-2008 was promoted by Ter-Petrosyan and other opposition leaders in their speeches. In one of his pre-election speeches, in which Ter-Petrosyan expressed his readiness to be “the instrument” of the people to be used against the regime, he also presents himself as “a bridge” between the 1988 movement and current times:

“It is my deepest conviction that today in Armenia a new movement is starting, a movement of a new generation. 17-19 years have passed from our first pan-national movement. A generation has changed: those who in 1988 were 10-15 years old, today are 30-35 years old. I am only the link between that first movement and this new movement that is being formed now. The new movement has completely new content, new goals, new issues.”<sup>218</sup>

Even some of the slogans of the opposition in 2007-2008 simply repeated the slogans of 1988. Among them was “payqar, payqar minchev verj” i.e. “struggle, struggle till the end,” as well as “miatsum,” i.e. “unification.” The latter in 1988 meant “unification of Armenia and Karabakh,” while in 2008 it was a call to the bystanders to join the rallies. An additional aspect of the symbolic claim to the heritage of 1988 made by protest movements in Armenia was the location of the protests: in 1988 the movement started with mass rallies at what then was called “the Theater Square,” the square in front of the building of the Opera Theater.<sup>219</sup> The square, which is usually informally referred to by Yerevan inhabitants as “Opera,” was later renamed “Liberty Square.” Since the early 1990s all the major protests were taking place in this square. This included the rallies in 1996, 2003-2004, 2008 and 2013. Of course, the square did not have purely symbolic significance: it was also the most convenient large square in the center of Yerevan. However, another square, which is also situated in the center of Yerevan, the Republic Square, where some of the government buildings are located rarely became the site of protest rallies. Partly this is also conditioned by the fact that rallies can be held in Liberty Square without obstructing the transport movement in Yerevan. A rally in the Republic Square would mean closing some of the important transport arteries and thus holding a rally there would be a much more confrontational step, and Armenian opposition has usually stressed the peaceful character of its actions. However, obviously, the symbolic significance of the Liberty Square, as the site where the 1988 movement had begun plays a significant role in the choice of venue for protest rallies.

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<sup>217</sup> L. Abrahamian, G. Shagoyan, *Op Cit.*, vol. 50, no. 3 (Winter 2011-12), pp. 11-50, 2012.

<sup>218</sup> L. Ter-Petrosyan, “I am only Your Instrument,” *Haykakan Zhamanak*, 7 November 2007.

<sup>219</sup> Interview with Levon Abrahamian, 10 May 2016.

Moreover, the government also realized the symbolic significance of the square, which has led to attempts to deprive the protesters from the opportunity to hold protests there. After the protests of 2003, the square was put under reconstruction, obviously, in order to prevent opposition rallies there. In 2008, it was by an attack on the protesters in the Square in the early morning of March 1 that the crackdown started. After March 1, 2008, the Liberty Square was for a long time sealed off. Even when the emergency was lifted and opposition rallies were finally allowed, for some time the Liberty Square remained sealed off, and only in 2011 the opposition under Levon Ter-Petrosyan was able to hold rallies there.<sup>220</sup>

The use of the legacy of the 1988 movement by Ter-Petrosyan and his supporters put the government in a complicated situation. Since the Karabakh movement served as a “foundation myth” that provided legitimacy to the post-Soviet political system of independent Armenia it was difficult to counter that mythology without destroying their own legitimacy as the ruling elite. What the government camp could do, however, was 1) to focus on the so called “cold and dark years,” i.e. the socio-economic difficulties of early 1990s, for which Ter-Petrosyan and his party Armenian National Movement were blamed, and 2) to focus on the perceived weakness of Ter-Petrosyan and Armenian National Movement in the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia-Turkey relations. Moreover, Ter-Petrosyan and ANM were accused of willingness to surrender Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan, of pro-Azerbaijani and pro-Turkish attitudes. Thus, in a statement from December 7, 2007, with a telling title “Before Levon Ter-Petrosyan’s resignation all negotiations were taking place in the context of Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity,” Kocharyan attacked Ter-Petrosyan and ANM, claiming the responsibility of ANM for the economic catastrophe of the 1990s and accusing ANM of pro-Turkish and pro-Azerbaijani attitudes:

“Today I openly tell you that ANM has misused the trust of the people. ANM destroyed the economy of the country, making Armenia one of the poorest countries in the world. ANM came to power riding the wave of Karabakh movement and betrayed it. National ideology is alien to ANM, it is ready to forget the genocide and to turn Armenia into a satellite of Turkey. All this has been said hundreds of times, but I have avoided evaluations.”<sup>221</sup>

Ter-Petrosyan countered these accusations by referring to the difficulties of war, and, in turn, accusing current authorities of mismanaging the country and provoking economic difficulties that lead to emigration. Interestingly, he acknowledges partial responsibility for some difficulties of the 1990s, but at the same stresses objective factors such as the war and the break-up of the USSR, factors that were no longer present during Kocharyan’s and Sargsyan’s rule.

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<sup>220</sup> M. Grigoryan, “Opposition Activists in Armenia Try to Reclaim Freedom Square,” 3 June 2010, Eurasia.net, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/61213>

<sup>221</sup> “Before Levon Ter-Petrosyan’s Resignation All Negotiations were taking place in the context of Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity”, Hayastani Hanrapetutyun, 7 December 2007.

Thus, in a speech in Gyumri, in July 2008 he says:

“[during the rule of Kocharyan and Sargsyan] half a million people emigrated from Armenia. Before that, people also emigrated, in our times, during our government, but it was dark, it was cold, it was a blockade, it was the period of overcoming the consequences of the break-up of the Soviet Union. It was understandable. If I am guilty for this, I acknowledge my guilt, I am not afraid, I have explained and will continue to explain. If you believe me, believe me, if not, let God judge... But at a time of peace, at a time of double-digit economic growth, emigration of half a million people from Armenia cannot be called anything but a crime.”<sup>222</sup>

Moreover, while government camp was rhetorically trying to erase Ter-Petrosyan's and ANM's role from the narrative of independence, Ter-Petrosyan countered by accusing his opponents of having opposed independence at the time, and having “desecrated” the idea of independence today, when they are in the government. In a speech at a rally held on the day of independence, September 21, 2011, Ter-Petrosyan says, obviously countering a speech said earlier in the day by Serzh Sargsyan (see above):

“you [i.e. the rally participants] are not the ones who need an explanation about the importance of Independence, its value, its meaning, because you knew all that before Independence and you were the ones who built that Independence. If there are people who need an explanation what all that means, they are the ones that are not here: they are at another place, in the morning they were at the central square [reference to members of the government]. People who had nothing to do with the achievement of Independence, moreover many of them fought against that Independence. And today from the stages they say such speeches, as if they were the ones who built that Independence. With that they desecrate one more time that sacred idea... Unfortunately, today, 20 years after the restoration of Independence we are facing almost the same issue. Today we need to re-conquer our Independence. Because those people who rule today Armenia in the depth of their soul do not feel independent. Today too they consider themselves slaves of foreigners, and until we get rid of this government, Armenia will not be have complete Independence. It means that you will have the fortune to re-conquer Independence.”<sup>223</sup>

By 2012 Ter-Petrosyan's Armenian National Congress, which presented a formidable opposition force in 2008-2010 had become significantly weaker, and in parliamentary elections in 2012 it was barely able to enter the National Assembly. The last representative of opposition who had immediate connection to the events of late 1980s and early 1990s was the opposition candidate in the elections of 2013 Raffi Hovannisian, who served as the first minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia in 1991-1992. Developments in 2013, after the presidential election, repeated the pattern of 2008, as Sargsyan was declared

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<sup>222</sup> The Speech of Levon Ter-Petrosyan in Gyumri, Haykakan Zhamanak, 1 July 2008.

<sup>223</sup> L. Ter-Petrosyan's Speech, 22 September 2011, <http://armtimes.com/hy/read/28132>

and Hovannisian refused to acknowledge the official results. However, this time the protests were significantly weaker and subsided several weeks after the election. The new opposition forces, as well as various civic activist groups and initiatives no longer had immediate connections to the movements of late 1980s. Hence, the rhetoric that focused on the events of 1988 and Karabakh movement also received less importance in their discourse. However, events of late 1980s continue to hold important significance for the opposition and civic activists in Armenia, remaining an inspiration to protesters and a warning to the governments.

## Conclusion

Various participants and observers of the mass movement that started in 1988 in Armenia had different perspectives on what the movement was about, what were its goals, and ultimately, what were its achievements and failures. To many participants of the movement, what mattered the most was the fate of the Nagorno-Karabakh region, others attached the greatest significance to the struggle for independence from Moscow, and for some, the most important aspect was the rejection of the totalitarian Soviet regime in favour of a more open and democratic political system.

Each of these three elements became part of the narrative of events of the late 1980s and early 1990s which was created afterwards. In our work, we observed how the official discourse remembered and represented these events. We analysed the memory policy of post-Soviet Armenian state, as represented by the direct statements of various officials, and by the policies behind the history textbooks. In other words, we analyzed how the state mandates its citizens to remember certain events, which aspects of these events are stressed and which are downplayed, which details are highlighted and which are omitted. Through the official speeches and statements, as well as through the history textbooks a certain narrative of history appears, which is offered to the society as the basis for remembrance and serves as a legitimization for the existing political order.

As we have seen from the history textbooks, the events of late 1980s and early 1990s are seen through the lens of “national liberation struggle.” Under this term, both the struggle for Nagorno-Karabakh and the struggle for achievement of national independence are united. Thus, the narrative presented in the textbooks is combining elements of two models which can be both broadly described as nationalist, though in different meanings of the word: one is the nation-building narrative, which focuses on (re-)establishment of the Armenian statehood, and the other one is the ethnic conflict narrative, which focuses on the conflict with Azerbaijan over Karabakh, and in wider terms, on the conflict between Armenia and its Turkic neighbours. The other narrative, which focuses on the creation of the independent nation-state, which can be broadly described as “civic nationalist,” or more precisely statist-nationalist, is also present and vocal. However, it plays a secondary role compared to the narrative constructed around the Karabakh issue. The process of achieving independence is largely presented within the context of the movement for “national liberation” of Karabakh and as a logical continuation of that movement.

The element of the narrative, which can be described as “democratic,” i.e. stressing the role of the movement for democracy against totalitarian Soviet system, is the weakest in the current textbooks. Issues of democracy have a secondary role, usually mentioned in passing or simply part of the description of events. Achievement of democracy and struggle for human rights are not explicitly presented as the main goals of the popular movement: the issue of democracy is mentioned mostly as auxiliary to other processes.

Thus, the element of struggle for democracy, which was obviously present in the mass movement in the late 1980s, is hardly a priority for the Armenian state today when it comes to educating the younger generation.

When it comes to the official discourse, as represented by speeches and statements of various officials we can see the evolution of the narrative since the early 1990s to the late 2000s. In the 1990s, already the most important elements of the narrative can be witnessed, including the view of the nature of the Karabakh movement as “a people’s movement” and as a “national liberation” movement, the view at achievement of independence as “restoration.” What distinguished the 1990s from the later period was the emphasis that was put on struggle for democracy against “the totalitarian system.” However, while structurally similar events in some other countries of Eastern Europe and post-Soviet space have come to be seen as “peaceful” or “velvet” (or in some cases non-peaceful) revolutions, Armenian officials of the 1990s refrain from looking at these events as revolution. In fact, for some members of the political elite that came to power in 1990, terms like “revolutionary methods of struggle” conveyed a negative meaning. The peaceful and non-radical nature of transition was emphasized, for example the fact that many former soviet officials continued to work in the new government, was mentioned as an achievement; at the same time it was a matter of pride, that there was no “revenge” of former communist leaders, as was the case in some neighboring countries. At the same time, a moderately negative view of the Soviet past was promoted, though with a stress on the negative, which was explained by the necessity to keep the balance, since a nostalgic backlash was beginning to influence the views of some Armenians.

Memories of the Karabakh movement were also used to legitimize the current government and its policies. Difficulties and negative consequences of the transition were acknowledged, but were presented as a result of objective factors, at the same time, they are also redeemed and romanticized in terms of a “heroic deed,” “sacrifice,” etc. Interestingly, by the mid-1990s the opposition also started to use the memory of the popular movement of 1988 to legitimize its own actions, particularly by comparing its own protests against the government to the mass movement of the late 1980s. The general pattern of the narrative, which blended the ideas of national liberation struggle and that of struggle for democracy was not contested by the majority of the opposition forces. What was contested was the role of specific political forces or specific political leaders in the process, as well as the assessment of the degree to which the whole process was successful. The exception were the Communists, however, who questioned the independence narrative in general, promoting instead a “nostalgic” discourse, which questioned the achievements of independence and advocated closer integration with Russia.

While for the ANM and Ter-Petrosyan the aspect of struggle for independence and democracy was the most important, since the ANM felt that it derived its legitimacy from the events of the late 1980s and early 1990s, this was not

necessarily true of the next two presidents. Under Robert Kocharyan and Serzh Sargsyan a large part of the political elite, including the two presidents, was deriving its legitimacy in the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, hence the accents are changing: from democracy and independence the accent is shifting to the liberation of Nagorno-Karabakh. In general, throughout 2000s and early 2010s, the narrative of the events of 1988-1991 occupied less place in the official discourse, and was represented largely by either more or less schematic formulae repeated for ceremonial purposes, or abstract statements about the value of independence for the Armenian people.

However, throughout this period the importance of the events of late 1980s increases in the eyes of the opposition. As a result the memory of the late 1980s and early 1990s becomes a contested issue. The opposition, which since 2007 was headed by Ter-Petrosyan, who had returned the politics, utilized the narrative of the mass popular movement of 1988 as a tool for mobilizing support, while at the same time, undermining the legitimacy of the current government. In turn, the government camp's response was to challenge the opposition's view of the events of the period in question, particularly focusing on the deficiencies of the rule of Ter-Petrosyan and the ANM.

Thus, summing up our discussion of the memory of the events of the late 1980s and early 1990s, it is possible to say that it has acquired a dual significance for the Armenian political discourse. From the point of view of the government, it provides ideological legitimacy for the existing state structure. However, at the same time, the memory of 1988 serves as a mobilization tool for the opposition, and serves as a standard against which the degree of success or failure of a protest movement is measured.

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