



DAŠNAK

DAŠNAK (Pers. Dāšnāk), short name for Hay Yełap'oxakan Dašnak'ut'iwn (Armenian revolutionary federation [A.R.F.]) or its members. The A.R.F. was founded in Tiflis in 1890 by Russian Armenian intellectuals, including K'ristap'or Mik'ayēlean (1859-1905) and Simon Zawarean (1866-1913), soon joined by Step'an Zōrean (R̄ostom; 1867-1919). By 1905 it had become the most powerful of all Armenian political parties, with branches in Persia, the Russian and Ottoman empires, Europe, and America. The early focus of its activities was the struggle for the political and economic freedom of Ottoman Armenia, but in 1907 it also officially declared itself in favor of an independent, socialist Russian Armenia. It dominated the short-lived Armenian Republic (1918-20), and after the fall of the latter to the Soviets it became the leading anti-Soviet force among Armenians. Throughout this century it has led the struggle for an independent Armenian state comprised of Armenian territory from the former Soviet Union and Turkey, but it has never asserted claims to the small portion of historical Armenia that is under Persian rule.

Although the party is decentralized geographically, its organization is hierarchical. The lowest level consists of groups of five to fifteen members, which are organized into subcommittees. Each regional chapter is governed by a central committee elected by the two lower levels (Hay Yełap'oxakan Dašnak-c'ut'iwn, Amerikayi Kedronakan Kōmitē [H.Y.D., A.K.K.], II, p. 248; Tasnapetean, 1989, pp. 162-63). The regional central committee is responsible to the central committee, or bureau, of the party, though until 1919 there were often two or three bureaus, each responsible for a different global region.



Members of the bureau are appointed by the general assembly, or world congress, which is composed of delegates from the central committees and other important party bodies (Tasnapetean, 1989, pp. 58, 141, 163). At periodic meetings the general assembly defines overall party principles and strategy; it also has the power to amend the A.R.F. charter and bylaws. In 1898 a “body representing the will of the Dašnakč’ut’iwn” was established to conduct the external relations of the party and to act in place of the general assembly between meetings. In 1904 it was renamed the A.R.F. council, and in 1907 it was assigned the role of supreme judiciary for internal party matters. In 1919 the council was abolished; a supreme judicial body was established, and the remaining responsibilities of the council were exercised by conferences of members of various high-level party units until 1947, when they were reassigned to the bureau (Tasnapetean, 1989, pp. 58, 72, 141; idem, 1985a, pp. 111, 153).

Shortly after its foundation the A.R.F. began sending representatives to recruit Armenian members in Persia. Among the earliest A.R.F. leaders in Persia were Yonan Dawt’ean, Ishkhan Yovsēp’ Arlūt’ean, Nikol Duman (Nikołayos Tēr Yovhannisean), Rōstom, Vardan (Sargis Mehrabean), Farhat (Sargis Ōhanjanean), Karō (Aristakēs Zōrean), Step’an Step’anean (Balajan), Zak’k’i (Bagrat Vardapet T’awak’alean), Tsaghik (Sat’enik Matinean), Yovsēp’ Mirzayean, Vrt’anēs P’ap’azean, Yarut’iwn Martirosean, Arsēn Mik’ayēlean, and Yovhannēs Khan Masehean. The main A.R.F. center in Persia was in Azarbaijan, and it was the Tabrīz A.R.F. bureau that first published, in 1309/1892, the call for a world congress to define more clearly the objectives, methods, and structure of the party (H.Y.D., A.K.K., I, p. 95). In 1313/1895 the Tabrīz bureau was replaced by the central committee of the Tabrīz branch, responsible for most of Persia. As the Armenian community in Tehran grew in size and importance, a second central committee was established there, in 1329/1911 (Tasnapetean, 1989, p. 34; idem, 1982, p. 226; *Alik’* [Tehran], 20 December 1990, p. 51). For similar reasons, at some time between 1312 Š./1933 and 1317 Š./1938 two *mekusi* committees (independent local committees) were established for Persia, in Nor Juła (New Jolfā) at Isfahan and at Ābādān in Kūzestān (Tasnapetean, 1985a, p. 149), but, owing to declining membership, the Nor Juła branch was annexed to the Kūzestān committee in 1326 Š./1947 (*Alik’*, 20 December 1990, p. 40). After World War II, owing to Soviet occupation and emigration to Soviet Armenia, the Tabrīz central committee was downgraded to a committee (personal interview with a member of the Persian A.R.F.). The central and *mekusi* committees in Persia coordinate the management of their



internal affairs, as well as maintaining contact with the bureau, which makes all important general political and ideological decisions.

In the early years the Tabrīz A.R.F. remained particularly important, owing to the strategic location of Azarbaijan and its native Armenian population, which provided a base for activities across the Ottoman and Russian borders. Arms were assembled or repaired in the Xarixx (Anchor) arms workshop in Tabrīz, which was opened in 1308/1891. The monasteries of St. Astuacacin (Derik) in the Salmās district and then St. T'adēos in Mākū and St. Step'anos Naxavkay in Jolfā were convenient stations for the smuggling of weapons, fighters, and literature into Turkish Armenia; a secondary route passed through K̄voy to Van. Anzalī, Rašt, and Āstārā were important centers for communication with Baku (Malxas, pp. 145-47, 254-55, 314; Vrac'ean; Hangoyc', August 1923, p. 82, March 1924, p. 142, May 1924, p. 143; H.Y.D, 1982, p. 231, 1985, pp. 141, 143; idem, A.K.K., I, p. 104; Varantean, II, p. 130; Amurean, 1950, pp. 12-13, 16-17, 19, 30, 32; Step'anean, February 1930, p. 88; *Alik'*, 20 December 1990, pp. 47, 49-51).

Guerrilla groups crossed the Ottoman border from Azarbaijan to fight Turkish military units and Kurdish tribes encouraged by the Ottoman government to massacre Armenians settled there. In general the Persian monarchy permitted such guerrilla operations in order to weaken Ottoman authority over these tribes, which occasionally also caused trouble on the Persian side of the border. It interfered only under pressure from the Russian or Ottoman governments; for example, after the Xanasor expedition to the province of Van in 1314/1897 many A.R.F. fighters were arrested and nine executed. Party operations were hampered by continued foreign pressure, and during the economic crisis of 1319/1901 the attention of the Armenian community was turned elsewhere. But from 1322/1904 to 1324/1906, during the ferment of the Persian [Constitutional Revolution](#), the A.R.F. regained much of its strength (Amurean, 1950, pp. 29-30; Tasnapetean, 1982, pp. 228-30, 235; H.Y.D., A.K.K., II, pp. 97-109). For example, as a result of clashes between Armenians and Tatars in the Caucasus in 1905-06 it was the party that prepared to defend the Persian Armenian population should the conflict spread across the border, which fortunately did not happen (Amurean, 1950, pp. 104-06; Tasnapetean, 1982, pp. 233, 310).

For the A.R.F. the most important period in Persian history was that of the Constitutional Revolution. Individual party members were active among the constitutionalists as early as 1324/1906, and by the time of the



anticonstitutional coup by Moḥammad-‘Alī Shah (1324-27/1907-09) in 1326/1908 (see [CONSTITUTIONAL REVOLUTION ii](#)) the party was providing weapons and ammunition, in addition to advice, to the revolutionary leaders in Tabrīz. Monarchist pillaging of Armenian villages, Ottoman incursions into Azarbaijan, and concurrent Kurdish attacks led the party to full involvement by the autumn of that year, an involvement that was further fueled by the success of the Ottoman constitutional revolution and the perceived benefits of democracy for Armenians. The party’s commitment can be gauged from the participation of one of the most important A.R.F. leaders, Rōstom, in such revolutionary activity (Tasnapetean, 1979, pp. 164-69; idem, 1982, pp. 235, 282, 310; Ēlmar, pp. 104-35; Chaqueri, p. 10; Varantean, II, pp. 61-62). In Tabrīz during several episodes in the autumn of 1326/1908 and early 1327/1909 Armenian fighters formed crucial portions of the revolutionary forces led by Sattār Khan and [Bāqer Khan](#) (Kasrawī, *Mašrūṭa*, p. 713; Browne, *Persian Revolution*, pp. 269-70; Varantean, II, pp. 73-76; “Martiros Č‘aruxč‘ian), and they helped the constitutionalists to gain control of various parts of Azarbaijan (Ēlmar, pp. 135-63, 170-81; Kasrawī, *Mašrūṭa*, pp. 873-76). Russian occupation of Tabrīz on 9 Rabī‘ II 1327/30 April 1909 halted these activities, but by then the rebellion had spread to other parts of Persia.

Yeprem Khan (Ep‘rem Dawt‘ean), a member of the Persian A.R.F. since 1896, helped to organize the revolutionaries, including many Armenians, in Rašt and Anzalī. They captured those cities on 27 Moḥarram/8 February and Qazvīn on 14 Rabī‘ II/5 May 1909. Yeprem also organized troops to participate in the march to Tehran, which he entered with Moḥammad-Walī Sepahdār-e A‘zam and Baḳtīārī troops on 24 Jomādā II/13 July (Yeprem, pp. 23-34, 40-59; Kasrawī, *Ād‘arbāyjān*, pp. 23, 52-59; Shuster, pp. xlii, xlvi; Varantean, II, pp. 82-85; Farrō, November 1924, pp. 67, 71-72). In November the Second Majles appointed him chief of the Tehran police and then of the gendarmerie; during his tenure he instituted a number of reforms (Ēlmar, 290-93). In the winter of 1327-28/1909-10 his forces (including A.R.F. recruits) and the Baḳtīārīs suppressed the counterrevolutionary uprisings of Raḥīm Khan [Čalabīānlū](#) in the region of Ardabīl and Mollā Qorbān-‘Ālī in Zanjān. In April they brought Šāhsevan tribesmen under control (Amurean, 1976, pp. 86-112; Ēlmar, pp. 296-343; Shuster, p. lii; Alka, p. 13; Farrō, December 1924, pp. 68-77, January 1925, pp. 131-37, February 1925, pp. 90-94). After the exiled Moḥammad-‘Alī landed on Persian soil in July 1911, Yeprem Khan organized three armies and in September successfully halted the former shah’s forces (Ēlmar, pp. 457-93; Shuster, pp. 117-35; Farrō, March 1925, pp. 112-16).



Meanwhile, Duman led the constitutionalist forces defending Tabrīz until December, when Russian troops crushed all opposition and arrested and executed many constitutionalists, including some A.R.F. members (Ēlmar, pp. 184-93; Varantean, II, p. 88; “Parskastan”; Kasrawī, *Ādarbāyjān*, pp. 356-58; Dēoyeanc’, pp. 77-90). Yeprem Khan died on 2 Jomādā II 1330/19 May 1912, during a second campaign against the forces of the former shah and his brother Sālār-al-Dawla; another A.R.F. leader, K’eri (Aršak Gafawean) brought the campaign to a successful close (Ēlmar, pp. 480-93, 522-35; Kasrawī, *Ād’arbāyjān*, pp. 510-27; Farrō, April 1925, pp. 88-93; “Parskastan”).

By December 1912, however, the A.R.F. had withdrawn support from what it viewed as a “capitulationist” Persian government, though it helped to ensure that elections were held for the Third Majles before World War I (Abrahamian, 1982, pp. 109-11; Amurean, 1976, pp. 120-22; Ēlmar, pp. 123-24; H.Y.D. Šahstani Kedronakan Kōmitē [Š.K.K.], p. 190; see [CONSTITUTIONAL REVOLUTION](#) iii). Party forces continued to defend Armenians in Azarbaijan during three Ottoman occupations, Kurdish attacks, and the chaotic period of World War I and its aftermath. When A.R.F. revolts against the sovietization of Russian Armenia were crushed in mid-1921, approximately 10,000 party leaders, intellectuals, fighters, and their families crossed the Aras and found refuge in Persia (Afanasyan, p. 175; Gēorgean; Minaxorean, pp. 89-97). Their presence ensured A.R.F. predominance over other traditional Armenian parties of Persia and indeed the entire Armenian community, which was centered around the Armenian church.

Despite the party’s commitment to socialism in principle, unfavorable conditions in Persia had led to the downplaying of attempts to introduce it there. In the early period village conditions were not conducive to socialist activities (see, e.g., Hangoyc’, July 1924, pp. 139-40), and in the 20th century Persian governments usually persecuted leftists. Furthermore, following its expulsion from Soviet Armenia after 1921, the A.R.F. became fiercely anti-Soviet throughout the world, though it did not completely abandon its socialist principles.

In Persia the A.R.F. published a series of newspapers to disseminate party views, beginning with *Arawōt* (Tabrīz, 1327-29/1909-11); *Alik’*, established in Tehran in 1310 Š./1931, is the only Armenian-language newspaper still published in Persia (*Alik’*, 20 December 1990, pp. 22-23, 31, 62-63).

Azarbaijan remained the main center of the party in the early 1920s, when its



leaders at Tabrīz maintained contact with exiled leaders of the short-lived Republic of [Azarbaijan iv](#) and encouraged Kurdish rebellions in Turkey. As a result Turkish and Soviet pressure led the Persian government to arrest some party members (Amurean, 1987, p. 10; Kendal, pp. 64-5; Šahan).

The A.R.F. usually supported the Pahlavi regime (1304-57 Š./1925-79), which in turn generally regarded the party's anti-Soviet stance and lack of claim to Persian territory with favor. The party was generally influential in the Majles, as the two representatives allotted to the Armenian community beginning with the Fifth Majles (1304-06 Š./1925-27) were generally members or willing to cooperate. Only during periods of strong anti-Pahlavi sentiment and the first few years of the Islamic Revolution were leftist Armenians able to elect a representative (P'ahlevanyan, pp. 106-08; Abrahamian, 1982, pp. 100-01; Połosean, p. 656; Balean Tēr-Yakobean, pp. 74-75, 252-54). The party's only real opposition to the Persian government was focused on the assimilationist policies of Režā Shah (1304-20 Š./1925-41). From 1315 Š./1936 to 1321 Š./1942 most Armenian and other minority schools were closed; all segments of the Armenian community then united to ensure the perpetuation of the Armenian language and culture. Because of its generally close association with the government, the A.R.F. lost some support during this period (Abrahamian, 1982, p. 163; Amurean, 1987, p. 11; Balean Tēr-Yakobean, pp. 159-61, 230; P'ahlevanyan, pp. 110-11, 143-44, 191), and in the constitutional crisis at the beginning of World War II a leftist opposition developed among Persian Armenians (*Alik'*, 20 December 1990, pp. 39, 41-43). During the Soviet occupation of northern Persia in 1320-25 Š./1941-46 (see [Azarbaijan v](#)) Persian Armenians elected parliamentary representatives hostile to the A.R.F. (Abrahamian, 1982, pp. 198, 292; Minasean; Demirjean, pp. 105-13), and the Soviets imprisoned and exiled some A.R.F. leaders.

At the end of 1945 the A.R.F. did not officially oppose a movement to repatriate Armenians to Soviet Armenia, and some individual party members supported it, but the onset of the Cold War, the withdrawal of Soviet territorial claims against Turkey on behalf of Soviet Armenia, and anti-A.R.F. measures during the repatriation process caused the party to shift gradually over the next two years to outright opposition to repatriation (Mandalian, pp. 90-91; P'ahlevanyan, pp. 181-87; Mouradian; *Alik'*, 20 December 1990, p. 46; Atamian, pp. 407-11). The A.R.F. seems to have remained neutral during the period of Moḥammad Mo-šaddeq (Cottam, p. 81; see [COUP D'ÉTAT OF 1332 Š./1953](#)).

In 1958 the three dioceses of the Armenian church in Persia shifted allegiance



from the see of Echmiadzin in Soviet Armenia to that of Cilicia, in Antelias, a village northeast of Beirut. The A.R.F. throughout the world had supported the see of Cilicia since 1956, whereas other Armenian political parties had remained loyal to that of Echmiadzin. The shift in Persia was a result of pressure from the government (and probably from Western powers as well), which, like the A.R.F., feared Soviet influence; it probably also reflected the desire of the A.R.F. to maintain its predominance among Persian Armenians (Ternon, pp. 136-37; Eliayean, pp. 724-28; Indoyean).

During the Persian Revolution of 1357 Š./1978-79 the Armenian left again regained prominence; the A.R.F. was initially mistrusted by the new government, in which the leftists had some influence, and a number of party members were arrested and interrogated. Members of the Persian left, including the Armenian left, were themselves soon subjected to persecution, however. The leaders of the Islamic Republic became convinced that the A.R.F. was not working against them, and relations returned to normal. Nevertheless, the status of Armenian schools, the religious and cultural rights of the Armenian church, and, in the early 1990s, reverberations of the conflict between Armenians and Azarbaijanis in Karabagh all required negotiation between the Armenian community and the Persian government (*Alik'*, 12 March 1990, p. 1, 7 March 1993, p. 2; Balean Tēr-Yakobean, pp. 240-45; P'ahlevanyan, p. 264; Zenian, pp. 8-9; Abrahamian, 1993, pp. 48, 51; interview with an A.R.F. leader from Persia). Today the A.R.F. is one of the most important political parties among the Armenian diaspora, the only Armenian party permitted to exist (semiofficially) in Persia, and a leading force in the parliamentary opposition in the newly established Republic of Armenia.

See also [ARMENIA AND IRAN](#) vi.

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