

## AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE DISSIDENT PARADIGM AND INTERSECTING CIVIL PROTESTS IN SOVIET ARMENIA: EQUAL BUT DIFFERENT?

ARMENAK MANUKYAN 

### Abstract

The article analyzes alternative dimensions of dissidence and civil protests in Soviet Armenia, which covers the period from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s, from the Khrushchev Thaw to Gorbachev's Perestroika. Comparative study of the dissident paradigm has political and civilizational significance. The dissident paradigm is precisely associated with the entire human rights movement, and human rights activists were those who were called dissidents. Thanks to them, ideas of an alternative development of Soviet society and public authorities emerged.

At the present stage, the democratic rights of citizens, for which the intelligentsia and human rights activists fought in the 1960s-1980s, are proclaimed and enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia. But this does not mean that the issue of human rights has been resolved in reality, since in reality human rights are often violated, first of all, by the public authorities themselves. The experience of the first generation of human rights defenders continues to be of interest to numerous committees and commissions advocating respect for the constitutional and legal rights of citizens.

The relevance of the research topic is due to the fact that the processes of formation of a democratic society and the rule of law in modern Armenia put forward the task of effectively protecting human rights and freedoms. Given the fact that the recognition of human rights as a basic value was the result of a long evolution of society, it is important to see that their prerequisite was the struggle of the most socially active people for the possibility of civilizational development.

**Keywords:** dissident paradigm, totalitarian ideology, Soviet Armenia, Soviet power, socialism, intelligentsia, anti-Soviet organizations, Armenian diaspora.

### Introduction

The relevance of this article is that dissent as a political and social phenomenon did not disappear without a trace along with the collapse of the totalitarian system of the Soviet Union, but only received new forms and ideological directions.

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\* Armenak Manukyan is a Doctor of History, Professor of the Chair of Political Science of the Faculty of International Relations at Yerevan State University.

Email: [armenak.manukyan@ysu.am](mailto:armenak.manukyan@ysu.am)

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Soviet dissidence had a key influence on the development of oppositional processes in other countries of the socialist bloc, and became a significant international factor during the existence of the Soviet Union. Open opposition to the government on the part of the left political forces, aggravated interethnic conflicts, sometimes developing into armed conflicts, the threat of a hybrid war, increased xenophobia and aggressive religious organizations, make it the most important moment of the modern historical situation. Being a reflection of the ideological and spiritual crisis of Soviet society, the dissident movement clearly reflected the struggle of opinions on the essential issues of our time, revealed a wide range of development alternatives related to the choice between West and East, between European and Eurasian values, originality and borrowing world experience, religious morality and atheism, internationalism and nationalism.

Dissidence in Armenian society, including the Soviet period of its development, has always existed, both at the social and personal levels, making itself felt most during the years of crisis for Soviet society. The manifestations of crisis phenomena for the last decades of Soviet power are especially characteristic. Nevertheless, for many years in the Armenian historical science of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, almost nothing was said about dissidents in the Soviet Union, about the existence of this movement in general. This, first of all, was connected with the political regime that existed in our Soviet Armenia. The current state of social and political life in Armenia necessitates a scientific critical analysis of the entire spectrum of views on the very recent past in order to scientifically comprehend the events in order to determine the further direction of development of the Armenian society.

In a country of 'developed' socialism, civil dissent and the dissident movement were ideologically prohibited and, naturally, fell under the totalitarian regime and repressive bureaucracy of the Soviet Union (Alexeyeva 1985; Alexeyeva and Goldberg 1990; Bergman 1992; Kukulin 2011). In this sense, in the context of the transformation of political systems in the post-Soviet republics, special attention should be paid to the comparative study of the limited civic activity and political life of the Soviet Union. Political studies of the dissident movement that formed in the 1960s, with its ups and downs, played a humanistic role in the political transformation of Soviet society, so its study is important from the point of view of a complete understanding of the political life of those years (Nathans 2015; Sharlet 1977, 1978; Laycock 2016).

The dissident movement also formed in Soviet Armenia in the 1960s, had its own characteristics, was purely national in nature, and its leaders also played an important role in the political events of this period. Taking into account that the materials of the archive of the National Security Service of the Republic of Armenia on this issue cannot fully reflect the reality, therefore, one should pay attention and use sentences to dissidents, as well as publications in the media. The few articles, memoirs and other publications found here are compared with similar processes that took place in the Soviet Union. However, I believe that this study provides a sufficient basis for the formation of a general idea about the Armenian dissident movement, in particular about the reasons for its emergence, national ideological orientation, stages of activity and significance.

Since the 1950s, the Bolshevik 'spirit' of rejection and condemnation of the common system of values for the Armenian people in Soviet Armenia has been internally split and divided between the negative attitudes of the Stalinist type of Bolsheviks and the

attempts of a new generation of Armenian communists to bridge the gap between Marxism-Leninism and national history and traditions. This phenomenon led to the fact that in Soviet Armenia a wave of national and political 'awakening' began, to a certain extent allowed from 'above', and to a certain extent maturing spontaneously. Moreover, unlike the diaspora, in Soviet Armenia, the national ideology penetrated into the consciousness of the people, first of all, breaking through culture and art, and especially literature, which created more opportunities for the legalization of all this through official propaganda. As a result, an ideological and political movement began in Soviet Armenia in the mid-1960s, aimed at restoring national rights, international recognition, condemnation and compensation for the Armenian Genocide.

All this begins to focus on the national ideology, the provisions of which are gradually adapting to the Armenian environment. It is very precisely determined that in the conditions of totalitarian prohibitions and restraint of human aspirations, a type of socially indifferent people, imbued with irony and pessimism, was formed in the Soviet Union. Under those conditions, joining dissent already required certain human qualities that should be appreciated. The significance of dissident activity lies in the fact that they dared to fight against totalitarianism, and in Soviet Armenia they raised the question of creating an independent statehood.

### **From a dissident intellectual to a human rights movement in the 1960s and 1970s**

In the mid-1960s, a dissident movement was formed in the Soviet Union, which was not homogeneous, as it included people with monarchist, anarchist, technocratic, and nationalist views. Essentially, the dissent united only their public attitude and civil position. In this sense, the dissident movement is classified into the following three main directions: Leninist communist (Roy Medvedev), liberal democratic (Andrei Sakharov), and religious nationalist (Alexander Solzhenitsyn). As can be seen, over time the figures who became the leaders of the aforementioned directions had radical differences in their views, so we cannot talk about the unity of that movement (Boffa 1996, 88). This is even more evident when we compare the manifestations of dissent in Soviet Russia, particularly in its large cities and national republics. When we compare it with the processes taking place in Soviet Armenia (Virabyan 2001), it is obvious that the dissident here was mainly of a national nature and had almost no practical connection with dissident movements of a similar or different nature in other Soviet republics.

In the mid-1960s, the human rights movement was born among the dissident intelligentsia, which became the core of all dissident movements. One of the objective reasons for its occurrence was that the authorities backed away from the course of further democratization of the Soviet society. The arrest of two Moscow writers Andrei Sinyavsky and Yulia Daniel in September 1965 and their conviction under Article 70 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (RSFSR) became an opportunity for the emergence of the human rights movement. This meant that they were charged with anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda aimed at disintegrating or weakening Soviet power (Caute 2010, 219-228, Simmons 1966).

In 1965, on the day of the Constitution of the Soviet Union, several hundred people took to Pushkin Square in Moscow (Litvinov 1969), demanding respect for the basic principles of the Constitution of the USSR, that is, at least to ensure an open trial of Sinyavsky and Daniil. This demonstration was dispersed by the police, and some participants were arrested and expelled from universities and institutes. The trial of Sinyavsky and Daniel was allegedly public, but had no effect. Moreover, their sentences were extremely harsh, as the court sentenced them to life imprisonment under strict conditions. The staging of the process caused a strong reaction in the countries of Western Europe, both at government levels and among civil society activists. About this, Alexander Ginzburg, a well-known Soviet dissident, sentenced to 2 years for publishing the Samizdat journal “Sintaksis” (Johnston 1999; Komaromi 2004, 2012), wrote a “White Book on the Siniavskii-Daniël’ case” (Ginzburg 1967; Skilling 1989; Pieralli 2021). It is no coincidence that already in 1966 a new article 190.1 was added to the Criminal Code of the USSR, according to which up to three years of imprisonment were provided for the dissemination of fabrications discrediting the Soviet state and public order. It should be noted that all this was a sign of the informal civil cultural and activity of that time, since through such publications a shadow space developed for discussing the ideas of humanization of society (Medvedev 1972a, 1972b; Sakharov 1990). It was in such typewritten journals, in which literary works were published, that the obstacles from Soviet censorship disappeared. Many people started talking about “Sintaksis”, it was reprinted quite widely, and it became a noticeable phenomenon in cultural and social life. Ginzburg’s publishing activity thus anticipated some of the key principles of dissident activity in the second half of the 1960s and 1970s (Skilling 1989; Pieralli 2021).

In 1968-1983, the information bulletin “Chronicle of current events”<sup>1</sup> was of great importance for the dissemination of the ideas of the dissident movement in the USSR. The main content was about violations of human rights and freedoms in the USSR and ways to overcome them. From the point of view of the totalitarian regime, the so-called ‘undesirable’ works of Soviet authors are beginning to be published in Western Europe, for example, Roy Medvedev, Andrei Sakharov, Andrei Amalrik, Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s stories, Vladimir Maksimov’s novels and others (Medvedev 1972a, 1972b; Sakharov 1990; Amalrik 1971, 1978). The fact is that the dissident movement has become an integral part of Soviet political history, which manifested itself in its own way in Soviet Armenia. Since the Soviet dissident movement was multilevel, it is difficult to estimate how many people were involved in it, but it is clear that these people have become a symbol of civic courage.

Among the various manifestations of the intelligentsia in some Soviet republics (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Ukraine, Georgia), manifestations of national revival had the greatest influence. It should be noted that all this was also in Soviet Russia, where the supporters of the national ideology expressed the sharpest position in relation to the state order and totalitarian ideology (Kneen 1998; Martin 2019; Monshipouri 2016).

The Armenian people carried in their national memory the ideas of the Armenian Genocide, the loss of the territories of historical Armenia, and it was thanks to the revival of these ideas that dissident and anti-Soviet organizations arose. Naturally, they

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<sup>1</sup> Historical and educational center “Memorial”. Chronicle of Current Events. Accessed November 1, 2022. <http://old.memo.ru/history/diss/chr/index.htm>.

promoted slogans related to the ideas of independence, statehood and liberalism. And after World War II, thanks to the intelligentsia, the political processes that took place in Soviet Armenia actually contributed to the formation of nationalist ideas in the Armenian society, especially among the intelligentsia. *First*, the participation of the Armenian people in World War II, during which the wave of patriotism rose quite a lot, many patriotic literature and national works were created (Derenik Demirchyan, Stepan Zoryan, Nairi Zaryan and others). *Secondly*, the pressure on the Armenian Apostolic Church eased somewhat, because in 1945, after a long break, the elections of the Catholicos were allowed. *Thirdly*, it was a very encouraging fact for the Soviet Armenian leadership and party activists that after the end of World War II, the Soviet leadership carried out diplomatic work, trying to take back from Turkey and unite a part of the Armenian historical territories with the Soviet Union. The fact that Grigor Harutyunov, the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Armenia, formulates a political question about the reunification of Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia is also evidence of the nationalist views of the Armenian intelligentsia and even the communist party leadership (Virabyan 2001, 74). Naturally, one hundred thousand Diaspora Armenians who immigrated to Soviet Armenia from foreign countries in 1946-1948 contributed to the rise of national feelings.

The presence of national ideas in society was evidenced by the mass demonstrations and rallies held in Yerevan on April 24, 1965, which were related to the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Armenian Genocide. In fact, the main demand of those spontaneous speeches was the restoration of historical justice and the return of the historical homeland (Aleksanyan 2016, 22-25; Harutyunyan 2015). Here, I consider it necessary to pay attention to the fact that thanks to the efforts of the party leadership of Soviet Armenia, the leadership of the USSR allowed for the first time on the occasion of the Armenian Genocide Day to organize a meeting of society representatives in the Opera and Ballet building of Yerevan. Furthermore, a decision was made to build a memorial complex dedicated to the memory of the victims of the Armenian Genocide, and all of this was actively commented on in the central mass media. It was, in fact, the first mass speech with political demands in the territory of the post-war USSR, which was suppressed by law enforcement agencies on the same day. As it is known, Yakov Zarobyan, the first secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia, resigned from his position as a result of those speeches, who had a great contribution to the national 'awakening' of the 1960s. At the same time, it is noteworthy that certain participants of the speeches were sentenced for several days for the so-called 'violation of public order and hooliganism', but there were no political trials or long-term sentences. I believe that one of the main reasons for this is that the leadership of Soviet Armenia in those years and those who participated in public speeches, as well as a significant number of those who did not, had similar approaches to national issues.

In the 1960s and later, the meaning of the strategy of scaring the Soviet authorities was based on the division of people into Soviet and anti-Soviet citizens, thus declaring citizens as anti-Soviet was accompanied by arrest and conviction under Articles<sup>2</sup> 65, 67,

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<sup>2</sup> Criminal Code of the Armenian SSR. (As amended on March 1, 1987). Yerevan: Armenia, 1989.

69, and 206 in the previous version of the Criminal Code of the Armenian SSR<sup>3</sup>. Criminal punishment was drawn up on the basis of the so-called ‘agitation or propaganda in order to destroy or weaken Soviet power’.

From the end of 1962, the secret groups formed on the basis of the commonality of nationalist and anti-Soviet views became active in the Armenian society, which aimed to counter the totalitarian agitation and propaganda. In this regard, I would like to note that the activities of various groups and individuals are presented mainly on the basis of criminal cases against them<sup>4</sup>. It is clear that the real actions may not be complete in them, the so-called ‘anti-Soviet actions’ of this or that person may not be revealed. However, I think that with the existing archival materials, a general idea of their activities can be formed. In general, it is noticeable that one of the priority tasks set before the secret group was to raise the nationalist spirit among politically unstable people, as well as to activate their nationalist ideas and sentiments, in order to involve them in their field of activity.

Dissident groups and their supporters have organized periodic gatherings in Yerevan, Etchmiadzin and elsewhere, attended by 3 to 20 people<sup>5</sup>. In similar gatherings, they discussed issues of national unity, purchasing a printing press, development of the Armenian language, as well as a number of organizational issues. In that period, establishing ties with the Armenian Diaspora was considered key. It is appropriate to pay attention to the fact that the members of the dissident group were discussing the ideas of separating Soviet Armenia from the Soviet Union and creating an independent Armenian state. In order to coordinate the work between the organized groups, to direct these activities and to expand the secret work that has begun on a larger scale, the members of the group formed a management council in one of the gatherings. The latter was supposed to develop the plan of the organization, but the work remained unfinished due to the involvement of members of the secret group. For example, in May 1967, Sergey Melkonyan and Frunze Mkrtychyan were sentenced to 10 years in prison. They created a dissident group and united people, discussing with them the idea of creating an independent Armenian state and separating Armenia from the Soviet Union. It is worth noting that similar informal initiatives discussed the problems of the Leninist policy and social structure of the Soviet state. According to many of them, Armenia is a colonial state, and the Soviet government betrayed the national interests of the Armenian people, depriving them of the right to act in the international arena<sup>6</sup>. One of the steps to get out of that situation should be to cooperate with the political parties of the Armenian Diaspora and Western countries and create a nationwide front for a fair solution to the Armenian Question. A similar example was the Union of Armenian Youth formed in 1967 in School No. 3 in Yerevan, which consisted of 15 people and whose activities

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<sup>3</sup> After the independence of Armenia, on June 14, 1994, the Parliament adopted the Law of the RA “On Repressed Persons”, on the basis of which those people who were convicted for political reasons during the Soviet period were considered repressed.

<sup>4</sup> The Fund of Discontinued Cases of the Archive of the National Security Service of the RA. Case 10652. Sheet 397. Sheet 399.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> The Fund of Discontinued Cases of the Archive of the National Security Service of the RA. Case 10649. Sheet 289-292. Sheet 306.

were considered anti-Soviet<sup>7</sup>. What is interesting here is the fact that a group to study Armenian history was created at the school, which developed a program and charter with the help of Zaven Harutyunyan, a scientific employee of Matenadaran. It is noteworthy that the group was to preserve historical memory and provide knowledge about Armenia to schoolchildren, which included questions about the cultural heritage of Karabakh and Nakhichevan<sup>8</sup>.

It is noteworthy that in 1967 he made a leaflet signed by the 'New Movement' group, where it was written, in particular, that it was necessary to unitedly fight against the racial chaos in the Soviet Union. And in one of the gatherings of that group, it was discussed that the Soviet society was going towards bourgeoisization, that the Soviet people and the intelligentsia had become devoid of ideas, calling on everyone to fight against it. The idea that the Soviet government violates the rights of the Armenian people in favor of Turkey was central to it, because the policy of assimilation and Russification of Armenians is being implemented in the Soviet Union, and the Armenian nation is being destroyed and morally destroyed<sup>9</sup>. Based on this, there was a call to take steps to preserve the Armenian cultural heritage in Nagorno-Karabakh and Nakhichevan, raising the issue of their unification with Armenia.

In 1967, the Union of Armenian Patriots also operated, which wanted to draw public attention to the fact that in the Soviet regime, national feelings were violated, the rights and interests of small nations were disregarded, the principles of democracy were violated, and the Armenian nation was "slowly moving towards moral destruction. It is called to demand the return of Armenian lands from Turkey"<sup>10</sup>.

The difference between the position of this group and the content of the illegal newspaper 'Paros' distributed by the National United Party at the same time is noteworthy, which proves that the idea of secession from the USSR was not very acceptable among the Armenian intelligentsia<sup>11</sup>. This is also evidenced by the approaches of various groups and individuals, in which the issues of preservation of Armenian cultural heritage and reunification of historical lands, democratization of public order were the most prominent. However, it is noticeable that the Union of Armenian Patriots stands out from the existing dissident groups in terms of its number and organization. It is also noteworthy that a large number of students were included there, which also speaks of generational change and intellectual potential. It is difficult, of course, to accurately calculate the actual number of dissident groups, which, of course, were not fully disclosed during the trials. However, if we take the number of persons mentioned in the judgment as an approximate basis, it can be assumed that 40-50 people were involved in this organization.

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<sup>7</sup> The Fund of Discontinued Cases of the Archive of the National Security Service of the RA. Case 11522. Sheet 204-214. Sheet 223. Sheet 224.

<sup>8</sup> The Fund of Discontinued Cases of the Archive of the National Security Service of the RA. Case 10644. Sheet 371-375; Case 12313. Sheet 294-298.

<sup>9</sup> The Fund of Discontinued Cases of the Archive of the National Security Service of the RA. Case 12313. Sheet 64.

<sup>10</sup> The Fund of Discontinued Cases of the Archive of the National Security Service of the RA. Case 10645. Sheet 352. Sheet 343-344.

<sup>11</sup> The Fund of Discontinued Cases of the Archive of the National Security Service of the RA. Case 10645. Sheet 345-346.

### **From the National United Party to the path to self-determination**

Along with the activities of the Union of Armenian Patriots, in the mid-1960s, another dissident organization, the National United Party, was created and operated in Armenia, which had a significant impact on almost all dissidents operating in the republic after them. That group not only tried to establish an informal civil network-party, but also drew up the program, charter and text of the oath<sup>12</sup>. Its leaders, Haykaz Khachatryan, Stepan Zatikyan and Shahen Harutyunyan, were sentenced to prison in 1969.

The National United Party was important for its members to be a part of the entire Armenian people, because thanks to the unity of the Armenian people, it can achieve its good goals and aspirations, being able to restore the lost national statehood and return the native land taken away from the Armenian people through the genocide<sup>13</sup>. Moreover, the National United Party considered its main task to liberate the nation from the foreign yoke, to get out of the slave domination of Russia, to make Armenia a free, independent, politically neutral republic<sup>14</sup>. It is noteworthy that in the illegal newspaper "Paros", which was the information source of that party, a series of articles about national revival were published. Those articles mainly contained the prerequisites for developing an independent Armenian state, criticizing the Marx-Leninist doctrine and the programs of the Communist Party. Considering the given difficult period, all this had a great impact on the dissident movement operating in the republic. Moreover, it received a significant response in a number of periodicals of the Diaspora, which actively covered the events of Soviet Armenia. The document approved by the party's governing body states that the party was organized in Yerevan in 1966, and Haykaz Khachatryan was its founder until 1968.

In 1968, Paruyr Hayrikyan actually became the head of the party. During the years 1967-1975, trials were held in the cases of that party, from which the peculiarity of the Armenian dissident thought became clear. The case also shows that the party tried to establish connections with other dissident groups operating in Armenia. From the judgments regarding some of them, we learn that at the beginning they always had meetings with each other and talked about the historical past of the Armenian people, its territories, as well as preserving the Armenian language and customs. In them, the situation created after the Sovietization of Armenia, in which the Armenian language was Russified and the historical and cultural interests of the Armenian people were violated, was always considered. Then they created a magazine 'For the Fatherland' and secretly printed 343 copies of that magazine already in 1968. It is noteworthy that the members of this group used code names for security purposes.

Thus, it can be concluded from the activities of the dissident groups operating in Armenia that already in the second half of the 1960s, the dissidents used certain steps of secrecy. In the documents prepared by them, it was stated that there was a communist despotism in the Soviet Union, there was no freedom and the Armenian people were

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<sup>12</sup> The Fund of Discontinued Cases of the Archive of the National Security Service of the RA. Case 10643. Sheet 428-429.

<sup>13</sup> The Fund of Discontinued Cases of the Archive of the National Security Service of the RA. Case 10643. Sheet 35-37.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid



being persecuted, as well as that the Bolsheviks had betrayed the interests of the Armenian people. Because of them, they called to fight against the reborn Bolshevik terror and dictatorial power in the Soviet state. Thus, in Armenia, as in other republics of the Soviet Union, the retreat of the so-called 'Khrushchev Thaw' was already noticeable (Warth 1960; Talvoja 2018; Ilic and Smith 2009). In the second half of the 1960s, the appearance of three new articles in the criminal codes of the USSR republics was directed against the dissident movements formed in the USSR: fabrication against the Soviet order, insult to the flag or coat of arms, and group actions that grossly disturb public order. Evidence of the strengthening of ideological pressure was also the fact that in July 1967, units to combat ideological subversion were created in the KGB (Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti or Committee of State Security) of the USSR. That ideological war and psychological war actually existed and it was mutually intransigent. It is also clear that the relevant bodies of the West could not be indifferent to the dissident movement formed in the USSR. It was manifested by many radio voices addressed to the socialist countries, moral and material support to that movement, etc. (Kukulin 2011). The fight against anti-Soviet manifestations becomes one of the tasks of the new units created in the KGB<sup>15</sup>. Unlike the massive illegal repressions that took place in the USSR in the 1930s, those in the 1960s were legal and never became massive. The new working style of the law enforcement agency is evidenced by the fact that, before the arrests, in most cases, they warned those exhibiting anti-Soviet behavior<sup>16</sup>.

The fact that the political persecutions were not of a mass nature can also be judged by the arrests and trials that took place on a union scale in the 1960s and 1970s. Of course, there were other manifestations of persecution of those who allowed ideological deviations in the country, but they did not end with imprisonment. As can be seen, the presence of 37 people convicted of anti-Soviet activities in Armenia in 1960-1970 was quite significant, even compared to the center. The dissident of Armenia was definitely of a national nature, the main demands of which were the reunification of Armenian lands, the protection of the integrity of the language and culture, as well as the creation of an independent Armenia. The national movement experienced a particularly great rise on the eve of 1965 and after that, which was the opportunity provided by the 'Khrushchev Thaw' (Talvoja 2018).

It is also noticeable that during those years attempts were made to unify, consolidate and direct the activities of secret groups<sup>17</sup>. It is still not possible to conclude unequivocally to what extent it was successful, but it is a fact that the devotees involved in that movement knew each other and knew to a certain extent about the processes taking place in that field in the republic. As can be seen, compared to the population of the republic, the number of dissidents is not so large, so it is difficult to assume that they could have a significant impact on the general political-ideological atmosphere.

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<sup>15</sup> The Fund of Discontinued Cases of the Archive of the National Security Service of the RA. Case 10558. Sheet 236-237; Case 10651. Sheet 377-381; Case 10654. Sheet 243-245.

<sup>16</sup> The Fund of Discontinued Cases of the Archive of the National Security Service of the RA. Case 10602. Sheet 606-623. Sheet 628. Sheet 759; Case 10310. Sheet 168-178; Case 10603. Volume 12. Sheet 177-179; Case 10605. Sheet 300-306.

<sup>17</sup> The Fund of Discontinued Cases of the Archive of the National Security Service of the RA. Case 10648. Sheet 208-212. Sheet 216.

Moreover, even among the groups, all of which were nationalist in nature, there was still some disagreement about the specific issues and tactics being pursued. In fact, not only those involved in dissent, but also a significant number of representatives of the intelligentsia and even the communist party elite were imbued with national ideas in Armenia. In that regard, let's add to the above the fact that Armenia was one of the unique republics whose Constitution stated that the Armenian language is also considered a state language along with Russian. The fact that the overwhelming majority of the population were Armenians certainly contributed to the preservation of national ideas in the republic. In other words, national ideas existed, existed and would exist in the following years, and the Armenian dissident movement formed in the 1960s could not have a significant impact in that regard. Not at all underestimating the importance of that activity of the movement, we believe that, nevertheless, the importance of their activity lay in the fact that they started a struggle against totalitarianism. It should be noted that the various dissident movements<sup>18</sup> operating in the territory of the USSR did not and could not have a significant impact on the broad masses of society. In the Armenian version, it is also important that the issue of an independent state is raised in Armenian conditions, which is the happy wish of any nation. Speaking about it was already a new quality in the public life of the republic.

### **The rise and fall of the dissident movement 1970-1988**

The overthrow of 'Khrushchev's Thaw' brought to power the more conservative wing of the ruling class, led by Leonid Brezhnev, in the totalitarian system of the Soviet Union. A number of researchers called the period of his leadership a period of stagnation, which does not quite correctly characterize that period of the history of the USSR, because it also contained elements of progress in quite a few spheres of economy, science and culture. During the years of his leadership, the idea of the need for stability was introduced into the Soviet reality. It was acceptable to both the elite and society as a whole. The former thereby got rid of the fear of being deprived of power at any moment, and the society was rightfully tired of the turbulent political events and wars that have been taking place since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Therefore, the period of Brezhnev rule is an outwardly stable period in the history of the Soviet country, which, however, was a noticeable setback compared to the revolutionary period of Khrushchev, especially in the ideological sphere. Brezhnev's team quickly took the path of suppression of dissent, significantly narrowing the scope of permissibility. As we have already mentioned, the dissident movement in Armenia was mainly of a nationalist nature, but at the end of May 1968, the human rights protection movement was also formed in the USSR, and then Helsinki groups were formed. Those political processes have their reactions in Armenia as well. It should be noted that the dissident movement in the USSR had quite violent manifestations, especially in the years 1970-1980, after which its decline began in the years 1980-1984. This is explained by a number of circumstances. The idea and content of the human rights activism of the 1960s and 1970s

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<sup>18</sup> The Fund of Discontinued Cases of the Archive of the National Security Service of the RA. Case 10599. Sheet 178. Sheet 272-278; Case 10650, Sheet 140-145.

consisted in the fact that it was almost entirely aimed at informing the public about the government's policy of suppressing the rights of citizens, which, thanks to the spread of 'Samizdat' and foreign radio voices, achieved its goal (Chatterjee 2017; Jhabvala 1985; Remington 1985, 1989). Society had accepted their value and critical statements, as can be concluded from the events of the second half of the 1980s.

The 1980s of the history of the Soviet Union have not yet been fully researched and analyzed. Naturally, it takes time to study and evaluate historical facts and events impartially. It was in that decade that Mikhail Gorbachev's perestroika began in the territory of the Soviet Union, which ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union (Bergman 1998; Boffa 1996). As Gorbachev, the initiator of perestroika, noted, the main goal of those unprecedented political processes taking place in the USSR was the broad democratization of the entire public life, which should decisively overcome the processes of stagnation and accelerate the social and economic development of society (Bacon 1992; Fireside 1989; Rhéaume 2008; Remington 1989). Moreover, it would be based on the creative potential of the masses, the acceleration of the development of the Soviet economy, the priority of science, the social sphere, and social justice. The task was to radically change the totalitarian system. The glasnost introduced in those years provided an opportunity for dissidents who had been working in secret until then to express themselves openly (Edelman 2001; Ellman 2002; Shtromas 1979).

The Soviet authorities again referred to the Stalinist repressions, in particular, on January 16, 1989, the decree of the Presidency of the Supreme Council of the USSR was published, which unanimously declared that those convicted based on the decisions of non-judicial bodies were considered acquitted. During that period, Andrei Sakharov and others were released from house arrest. In such political conditions, it became possible to raise national issues as well. In 1988, the Armenian Nagorno-Karabakh, which was annexed to Azerbaijan, raised the issue of leaving that republic and reuniting with Armenia. It received the support of the masses of the people in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, turning into a powerful national movement. Almost simultaneously, popular movements to leave the Soviet Union began in the Baltic republics.

Therefore, it is understandable that since the mid-1980s, dissent in the USSR, as they say, no longer had anything to do, and it, as a participant in political processes, objectively died out. It was also fully noticeable in the ongoing political developments in Armenia, where the national issue was always of primary importance. During the years of perestroika, the wave of national ideas accumulated in all classes of the Armenian people experienced a new rise<sup>19</sup>. It was a consequence of the developments of the Armenian dissident movement. According to the archives of the RA National Security Service, 29 people were convicted of anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda in 1970-1980, and 14 people were convicted in 1980-1988, and 10 of the latter were convicted in 1981, that is, the main activities were carried out<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> The Fund of Discontinued Cases of the Archive of the National Security Service of the RA. Case 10559. Sheet 180; Case 10600, Sheet 239.

<sup>20</sup> The Fund of Discontinued Cases of the Archive of the National Security Service of the RA. Case 10646. Sheet 307. Sheet 326-327. Sheet 490-492. Sheet 461-473.

In the early 1970s, the first human rights organizations were created in the USSR. In 1970, the Committee of Human Rights in the USSR was founded in Moscow<sup>21</sup>. It was founded as an association of authors, which, according to Soviet laws, did not formally require the permission of the authorities or even a license (Jhabvala 1985, 461-473; Fairbanks 1989). It was the first independent public association formed in the USSR, which was part of the International League of Human Rights. It provided certain guarantees that its members would not be imprisoned. However, in 1972-1973, the totalitarian regime launched an active attack against the movement and most of its members were arrested. Not only for the world community, but also for the legal movement itself in the USSR, the signing of the final act of the Helsinki Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe by the USSR in 1975 was of great importance. In May 1976, physicist Yuri Orlov created a public group promoting the implementation of the Helsinki Agreement in the USSR, which included Yelena Bonner, Petro Grigorenko, Anatoly Shcharansky and others. It was followed by the creation of Helsinki groups in Ukraine, Lithuania, in 1977 in Georgia, Armenia. The Soviet authorities did not accept all that and in 1978 arrested 23 members of these groups and deported 7 people from the country.

In November 1974, Paruyr Hayrikyan, who had served his 4-year sentence in 1970 and had just returned to Armenia, stood before the court again. This time, in his verdict, it is stated that Hayrikyan did not change his political views during and after serving his sentence, and claims that he dedicated his life to the creation of a Free and Independent Armenia. Although he was kept under surveillance, he was in contact with Ashot Navasardyan, Azat Arshakyan, Ruben Khachatryan and others, who were later convicted and had anti-Soviet and nationalist views<sup>22</sup>. Let's pay attention to the fact that after returning from the detention center, Hayrikyan paid special attention to maintaining the norms of confidentiality, as well as to test the credibility of the members of the organization, he checked them with specific anti-Soviet actions<sup>23</sup>, which was new for the Armenian dissident movement. Another remarkable circumstance is that Hayrikyan tried to send materials discrediting the USSR abroad from the detention center, in particular, for this purpose he sent a copy of his verdict to Andranik Margaryan information about those convicted in Armenia for anti-Soviet and nationalist activities, which were published in European countries. It is worth noting that Andranik Margaryan, who joined the National United Party in 1968, was also one of those figures who emphasized Armenia's future independence<sup>24</sup>. It was also reflected in Margaryan's judgment and a number of his works. Despite this difficult situation, in 1970-1980, Ashot Navasardyan, Azat Arshakyan and Paruyr Hayrikyan revised the program and charter of the National

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<sup>21</sup> The Fund of Discontinued Cases of the Archive of the National Security Service of the RA. Case 10604. Sheet 295-298.

<sup>22</sup> The Fund of Discontinued Cases of the Archive of the National Security Service of the RA. Case 10647. Sheet 212-220; Case 10603. Sheet 401-405.

<sup>23</sup> The Fund of Discontinued Cases of the Archive of the National Security Service of the RA. Case 10604. Sheet 300-301.

<sup>24</sup> The Fund of Discontinued Cases of the Archive of the National Security Service of the RA. Case 10601. Sheet 243-249.

United Party, but did not finish it because of their arrest<sup>25</sup>. Later, they managed to send the information about all that to the USA and European countries, which was widely used by Western European radio stations, as well as published in the mass media of the Armenian diaspora. There were mediated and indirect but stable communications between traditional Armenian parties and dissident groups operating in the Diaspora. The dissident actions had their ideological reactions on the Armenian world, all of which had the effort of unity. During that historical period, nationalistic literature was imported into Armenia in different ways, which was also acquired by dissidents. Two undeniable facts can be affirmed here. First, the active part of the society in Diaspora and Armenia was mainly guided by one national ideology, the cornerstone of which was the recognition of the Armenian Genocide by the civilized world. It was supposed to be followed by the re-creation of Independent, free and united Armenia. The other reality was that, especially in the 1970s, there was an increase in concrete steps for the above-mentioned goals, both in the Armenian world and in Soviet Armenia, which is a part of it. In this regard, it is appropriate to note that in April and September of 1981, a number of trials against Armenian dissidents took place in the Armenian SSR. Despite this direction, transformations of the Soviet dissident movement were noticeable in 1980-1984.

Dissent's transformations were conditioned by the strengthening of civil and political repression. In fact, it can be assumed that the dissident movements fulfilled their historical mission. It was mainly to raise awareness and knowledge about the suppression of civil rights and violation of human rights by the totalitarian authorities in the closed society, as well as about universal values. It is obvious that after 1985 the political events taking place in the space of the Soviet Union, the politically active and intelligentsia part of the society lived by these values. Moreover, at the end of 1970, it was noticeable that the KGB was brutally punishing the leaders of the dissident movement and their active followers, and the courts regularly handed down new sentences against the arrested dissidents. It naturally had a psychological effect on the dissident movement participants, keeping them in an atmosphere of fear.

In the 1990s, the cases of people accused of dissidents in Armenia during the Soviet years were reviewed. All of them were acquitted by the decisions of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Armenia, and the criminal cases were dismissed due to the lack of elements of the crime. It should be noted that already in February 1988, the Artsakh movement, unprecedented in the Armenian reality, started, which became the Armenian National Movement. In such conditions, the attitude of the still functioning Soviet authorities towards civil activists and intelligentsia convicted for political reasons was quite controversial. A good example of this was the criminal case initiated against Paruyr Hayrikyan for political reasons in July 1988. It was connected with the activation of popular movements, under the conditions of which Paruyr Hayrikyan founded the 'Union for National Self-Determination' in September 1987 and published "Independence" weekly newspapers.

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<sup>25</sup> The Fund of Discontinued Cases of the Archive of the National Security Service of the RA. Case 10600. Sheet 242-243; Case 10641. Sheet 369.

## Conclusion and discussion

During the years of the totalitarian system of the USSR, there were civic activists and groups in it that opposed the dominance of the dominant bureaucracy and non-humanistic tendencies in political life, both at the Soviet and at the republican level. Protest activity to a certain extent contributed to the radical changes in the economic and political system of the USSR that followed in the mid-1980s. It was a struggle for the establishment of liberal forms and values in Soviet society, the establishment of a dialogue between it and the political elite.

A comparative analysis of dissent in Soviet Armenia has political significance and a civilized dimension. This allows us to trace the evolution of relations between the authorities and society during the years of the growing systemic crisis of totalitarianism. In the Armenian SSR and other republics, the reasons for the dissatisfaction of the intelligentsia of the Soviet society with political and cultural development were revealed. For the post-Soviet Armenian society, it is important to show the origins of the formation and manifestation of dissent among a small group of intelligentsia, for which the term dissidents have been assigned.

The historical lessons of opposition resistance in the Armenian SSR should be used in the process of achieving a dialogue between public authorities and civil society at the present stage of Armenia's development. The construction of a civilized dialogue is part of the political stability of the Armenian society, the continued strengthening of its integration and democratic potential.

Armenian dissidence developed as oppositional protest actions of a part of the society aimed at public criticism of public policy and social order, leading to an open conflict with the public authorities and their repressive reaction. Nevertheless, samizdat has become the most historically significant way, from the point of view of the formation of a dissident mentality, to distribute artistic and cultural texts bypassing censorship. Samizdat became a form of individual self-expression and self-realization; it was an independent creative process carried out outside the settings of official structures. For the province, the spread of samizdat became one of the most important factors in the formation of dissent, including in the Armenian SSR.

In the mid-1960s and early 1980s, openly and definitely disagreement with the political course of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union expressed only a small part of the Soviet intelligentsia of the capitals and large cities, which formed a real dissident movement. I am sure that a political study of dissident movements should be carried out in order to make timely decisions, prevent crises and understand the legitimate demands of their citizens by public authorities. Moreover, for the ruling political elite, it is key to understand the importance of various aspects of the dialogue between public authorities and civil society, to see the problems and prospects for such interaction.

Dissidence reflects any deviation from the ideological dictate in an explicit or covert form, regardless of subsequent repressive measures of the authorities. Therefore, in this work, I took into account the following typology of the dissident movement: a) civil movements, which included the movement for human rights, socialists and participants in the speeches for social and economic rights; b) national movements; c) religious

movements; d) the movement of creative people in the field of culture and intellectuals in the field of science.

Thus, ideological diversity was observed among dissidents, but their common distinguishing feature was the protection of individual rights, requiring the totalitarian authorities to comply with the Constitution and laws of the Soviet Union.

Further research, dealing with the topic of civil society and public authorities and reconstructing the experience of the past, will make it possible to critically assess the events that took place in the past and the phenomena that are taking place at the present stage. The guarantees of rights and freedoms enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia must always be observed by the state, as demanded by the dissidents.

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