

## FORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE ARMENIAN LOBBYING ORGANIZATIONS IN THE USA: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

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### **Abstract**

*The United States has one of the most developed Armenian communities, which, since its formation, has strongly supported Armenia and Armenians by lobbying for Armenian interests within the US legislative and executive branches, both at local and federal levels. Lobbying is a vital part of the American political system, playing a decisive role in both domestic and foreign affairs. The significance of lobbying in US political processes, combined with the current political circumstances in Armenia, underscores the importance of studying ethnic lobbying. The article presents the historical context of the formation and development of the Armenian lobby in the US.*

**Keywords:** lobbying, ANCA, AAA, Armenian Genocide, US-Armenia relations, Armenian Revolutionary Federation.

### **Introduction**

The emergence and development of lobbying in the 18<sup>th</sup> century is mainly associated with the political processes of Great Britain and the United States. In 1774, an attempt was made in the US to exert mass pressure on the government, demanding additional benefits. Hundreds of armed soldiers from the Philadelphia garrison attacked the First Continental Congress. Although the soldiers' demands were not met, Congress responded by issuing the Declaration of Rights and Grievances, which affirmed the rights of the American colonies to life, liberty, and property. The adoption of this Declaration promoted the independence of the American colonies from the mother country and ensured their self-government in trade relations.

Proposed by Congress in 1789 and ratified in 1791, the First Amendment to the US Constitution, along with freedoms of speech, religion, and assembly, also proclaimed the right of the people to petition the government for redress of grievances. This marked a significant shift in the development of

democratic institutions in the United States. In practice, the adoption of the First Amendment meant public groups and individuals were free to influence political decision-making. At the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century, US public groups had already begun sending representatives to government bodies with political demands on a range of issues.

In the 1830s, political lobbying became institutionalized, giving rise to a new profession: the lobbyist, a person representing the interests of public groups in parliament. During this time, rules for organizing lobbying activities were developed.

The emergence of lobbying as a political institution significantly improved the efficiency of the US legislative process. In the adoption of new laws, the opinions of individual groups of the population were taken into account. This not only increased the alignment of laws with public needs but also helped to diffuse political tensions. Furthermore, lobbying contributed to the establishment of a healthy social and political discourse, rooted in competition among groups and the proper representation of their interests within government structures. This provided an opportunity for the representation of ethnic interests.

### **Armenians in America**

According to Louis Adamic, Armenians settled in North America at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Avakian, 2021, p. 6). The first recorded mention of Armenians on the continent refers to John Martin, who, in 1618, was invited to the British colony of Jamestown. He may have been a servant of George Yeardley, the governor of Virginia (Adams, 1932, p. 28). In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, small groups of Armenians migrated to Virginia, South Carolina and Georgia from Hungary, Holland and India (Avakian, 2021, p. 11). In the 1770s, the Armenian population in America numbered around 70 people.

The new influx of Armenian migrants to America in the 1830s was a consequence of the propaganda and educational activities of American missionaries in Western Armenia, Cilicia and other Armenian-populated areas of Turkey. During this time, many schools and colleges were established, offering Armenian children's educational opportunities. In 1834, Khachatur Voskanyan, a student at the Constantinople missionary school, organized a mass migration of Armenian youth, who had the opportunity to receive higher education in the best institutions in the United States.

In 1861-1865, after the Civil War, America experienced a period of rapid industrial development, which attracted a large migration stream. Dissatisfied with high taxes and poor life prospects in Turkey, Armenians settled in New York, Worcester and Providence. Over time, the Armenian population spread

to Massachusetts, California, Pennsylvania and Connecticut. In the 1880s, Armenians mainly settled in the northeastern, northern, middle and western regions of the United States.

### **Hamidian Massacres and the Armenian Genocide**

The next mass migration of Armenians to the United States occurred as a result of the Hamidian massacres – a series of brutal murders of the Armenian civilian population in the Ottoman Empire between 1894-1896 – which, according to various estimates, claimed the lives of 50,000 to 300,000 people. By the beginning of World War I, the Armenian population of the United States numbered more than 60,000 people. In 1908, Abdul Hamid II was dethroned and sent to Thessaloniki, and the Young Turks party came to power in the Ottoman Empire. As the famous historian Yevgeny Tarle writes, “in Europe, many circles at first immensely exaggerated the moral height and political depth of thinking of the Young Turk conspirators, who so quickly and, it seemed, easily overthrew the old despot” (Tarle, 1928, p. 112). The Young Turk government was glorified by the French and Russian press. The newspaper *Rech*\* talked about the revolutionary spirit of the schools where representatives of the Young Turk authorities studied. Many predicted their civilized government. However, Tarle notes that “all this is one continuous, blatant misunderstanding and ignorance of the true facts” (Tarle, 1928, p. 113).

The Young Turks not only exterminated the majority of the Armenian population in 1915 and boasted about it, but they also came to power in 1908 with this firm method: to resolve national issues through physical extermination of all nationalities, except the Turks, and those who agree to immediately become Turks. One of the leaders of the Young Turks, Enver Pasha, directly stated his readiness to exterminate the non-Turkish population of the country. Talat Pasha announced that “the question is settled. There are no more Armenians”. Later, the issue of recognition of the genocide and compensation for damage caused to Armenians become one of the main areas of activity of the Armenian lobby in the United States and around the world. Subsequently, approximately 21,000 Armenians migrated to the United States following the genocide.

### **Problems Faced by Armenians in the USA**

As historian Areg Galstyan notes, the first immigrants from the Ottoman Empire to the United States encountered significant challenges. Armenians

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\**Rech* (lit. “Speech”; originally: Рѣчь) was a Russian daily newspaper and the central organ of the Constitutional Democratic Party.

were uncomfortable being called Turks (Galstyan, 2015, p. 54). Armenians did not have the right to engage in several professions. They were not accepted into white social clubs. Racial conventions made Armenians reluctant to purchase property in certain areas. Representatives of the Armenian communities have done a great job of trying to present to America Armenians who are distinctive in both an ethnic and religious sense.

Designed to resolve misunderstandings and help Armenians to settle into the new country, the Armenian-American League for Relief and Defense was founded in 1891. Armenians were recommended to accept American citizenship. Galstyan also notes that the newly arrived Armenians became victims of the unscrupulous attitude of the Armenian-Americans themselves. An example of their exploitation is the fact that jobs were sold to them at very high prices (Galstyan, 2015, p. 54).

Discussing the problems of Armenians in the USA, historian S. Miller addresses two key reasons for the hostile attitude towards them. In many American cities, Armenians made up a quarter of the foreign-born population and attracted much attention. In some ways, they became a victim of ethnic prejudice. The second reason was the resentment many Americans felt toward the economic success achieved by many Armenians (Miller, 1995, p. 185).

Historical memory, ethnic identity and the common problems facing Armenians in the United States brought them together. Armenian institutions in the United States, ready to provide spiritual and material support to their compatriots overseas, provided the fullest possible access to information and needs emanating from the homeland (Mirak, 1984, p. 51).

### **Internal Separation among Armenians**

Armenian Revolutionary Federation (also known as Dashnaktsutyun) had both supporters and opponents among Armenians. This fact became the subject of misunderstanding and hostility among Armenians in America. The Dashnaks, adherents of the national revolutionary struggle for the independence of Armenia, strongly criticized the Armenian Apostolic Church for exceeding the significance of its spiritual functions. Opponents of the party saw the future of Armenia only under the leadership of the church.

The murder of Archbishop Levon Turyan, the Primate of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church, by political opponents in New York made the misunderstanding between Armenians more severe. The Archbishop had taken an anti-Dashnak position. On July 1, 1933, during the Armenian Day celebration as part of the “Century of Progress” exhibition in Chicago, Turyan ordered the tricolor flag of the Armenian Democratic Republic to be removed from the stage before the start of the prayer. According to Turyan, his appearance at the flag might not have pleased the

government of Soviet Armenia. The Armenian Apostolic Church was the spiritual center of Soviet Armenia, and the Catholicos of All Armenians considered it necessary to maintain friendly relations with the Soviet authorities. Dashnaktsutyun adherents regarded the incident as a betrayal. Soon Turyan was attacked by five party representatives in Worcester, after which he was forced to turn to the services of a bodyguard. On December 24, 1933, the eve of Christmas, after prayers at Manhattan's Holy Cross Church, Turyan was attacked and stabbed multiple times by several men ("The New York Times", 1933). All nine men found guilty in the murder case represented the Armenian Revolutionary Federation.

Subsequently, the community of believers of the Armenian Apostolic Church in the USA was divided between churches associated with Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia and Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin.

### **Formation of the Armenian Lobby**

The Armenian lobby in the United States was formed parallel to the process of self-organization of Armenians, but as an organized community system it has been operating since the 1970s. With the rise of Armenian issues in the legislative and executive bodies of the United States, the need arises to create professional Armenian lobbying organizations. These organizations were established by the Armenian community. Despite the fact that from a legal point of view they do not officially represent the entire Armenian community,\* they maintain close relations with its members. Armenian-Americans fund these organizations and cooperate with them, both on a paid basis and as volunteers (Zarifian, 2010, p. 179).

### **Armenian National Committee of America**

Founded in 1918, the Armenian National Committee of America (ANCA) becomes an influential organization. It carries out a policy of protecting the interests of Armenians in various fields. ANCA is the successor to the American Committee for Independence of Armenia (ACIA), founded by Vahan Kardashyan, the Ottoman Empire's consul in Washington, after the First World War. ACIA had 23 representative offices in 13 states.

The organization was founded by representatives of the Dashnaktsutyun and to this day maintains close ties with the party. The main goals of ANCA's activities are to increase public awareness in support of a free and independent Republic of Armenia, to direct US policy based on the interests of the Armenians, to represent their general approaches to public policy in relations

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\* Official representation of interests, according to the US law, occurs in accordance with democratic principles, through elections.

between voters and officials. ANCA actively works towards the establishment and strengthening of the Republic of Armenia as a safe, promising and democratic country. It also advocates for international recognition of the Armenian Genocide, works to end the political and economic blockade of Armenia by Turkey and Azerbaijan, and seeks to increase US financial assistance to Armenia for economic and democratic development. ANCA was supporting the right of the people of the Nagorno-Karabakh (NKR) to self-determination and its independence, also providing financial assistance to the NKR. It should also be noted that the Committee, starting in the 1990s, took an active part in the adoption of Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act.

### **Armenian Assembly of America**

The Armenian Assembly of America (AAA) was established in 1972 through the efforts of non-Dashnak representatives of the Armenian community (Veranyan, 2010, p. 119). The organization provided enormous socio-political and informational assistance in the movements for the independence of the Republic of Armenia and NKR. By intensifying the activities of the US legislative and executive authorities to assist the Armenians, the AAA had a tangible contribution to the issue of providing financial aid for both Armenia and NKR from Washington.

Through its lobbying activities, the AAA contributed to the inclusion of representatives of the Congress in solving the problems of the Armenians, as a result of which the Congress Committee on the Armenian Question was formed. Thanks to the activities of the Armenian lobby in the United States, the Committee became one of the major ethnic lobbying institutions, actively collaborating with the AAA to strengthen US-Armenian ties and protecting Armenian interests.

Following the collapse of the bipolar world order and the establishment of the sovereign Republic of Armenia, the activities of the Armenian lobby in the United States became more complicated and received new vectors of development. New opportunities have been opened up to protect the interests of the Armenian population of the USA and the Republic of Armenia, in particular, in the context of cooperation between the Republic of Armenia and the Armenian diaspora. In 1988, the AAA opened its first Western office in Yerevan to improve relations between Armenia and the United States, intensify the activities of the Armenians and involve Armenian figures and organizations in lobbying activities.

In order to increase the efficiency of the process of international recognition of the Armenian Genocide, the Armenian National Institute was founded within the AAA in 1997. Its activities focus on the study of historical archives of genocide. The main AAA institution carrying out information and

propaganda activities in American society is the Armenian-American Action Committee (ARAMAC). The latter provides Congress with reliable information and analysis and counters the spread of anti-Armenian disinformation.

Thus, the main directions of activity of the Armenian Assembly of America can be presented as follows: increasing the potential of the organization, based on the interests of Armenians of America, providing maximum opportunities for the active participation of Armenian figures and organizations in the democratic processes of the United States at the local, state and federal levels, expanding research and educational initiatives focused on the recognition of the Armenian Genocide, deepening US-Armenia relations on the basis of democracy, the rule of law, free market relations, common approaches to solving regional security issues.

### **Other Armenian Lobbying Organizations in the USA**

The Armenian American Political Action Committee is an independent lobbying organization. The Committee provides assistance to those federal candidates who, through their actions, contribute to the establishment of peace and stability in the Transcaucasia region and the solution of the problems of Armenians in the United States. The Committee carries out activities to replenish the members of the Congressional Committee on Armenian Affairs and develop the activities of the latter, based on Armenian interests.

In December 2006, another Armenian lobbying organization, US-Armenia Public Affairs Committee (USAPAC), was founded. The USAPAC highly appreciates the rapprochement between the United States and Armenia and is doing significant work in this area. Another vector of the USAPAC's activities is the establishment of friendly relations and cooperation with US Jewish lobbyists.

### **Conclusion**

The existence of two big Armenian lobbying organizations in the United States has historical background. The goals and objectives of these organizations come from both Armenia's history of and the history of the Armenian community in the United States. Their main missions include providing support to Armenia, advocating for the recognition of the Armenian Genocide, and increasing the participation of the Armenian community in US domestic and foreign policy.

It's difficult to determine whether the Armenian lobby in the US would be more effective if it were represented by one single institution. This is just one of the circumstances, and unfortunately, the promotion of Armenian interests in American politics was often hampered by more objective circumstances,

such as the strong resistance of the Turkish-Azerbaijani lobby and the economic advantages of US cooperation with Turkey and Azerbaijan. Nevertheless, the institution of lobbying still has a decisive role in US politics, and work in the direction of ethnic lobbying is very important for Armenia and Armenians.

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