

**TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE
COMMUNIST PARTY'S
OFFICIAL NEWSPAPER
"SOVIET ARMENIA"
IN 1989**

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Summary

At the end of the 1980s, the Armenian Communist Party had to adapt to a new political environment in the country, one which was conditioned by Gorbachev's policy of democratization and Glasnost on the one hand, and the 1988 National movement on the other. This paper discusses the structural and ideological transformations of the Communist party's official newspaper *Soviet Armenia* and follows a case-study approach based on the oral history interview. It also utilizes data drawn from the publications of *Soviet Armenia* newspaper and the currently declassified archive of the Communist party, to discuss the censorship, personnel policy and functions of the party's newspaper. The investigation of the organizations affiliated with the Communist party in this transitional period can enhance our understanding of the causes of the later post-Soviet developments of the party. The party's most vivid transformation in response to the changing environment was the "restructuring" of the party with a new personnel policy. In a less controlled environment, the new editor-in-chief tried to find new ways to reflect the issues of current interest. However, the party's "invented" reality and the real demands were mutually incompatible. As such, the bottom-up initiative was limited by the party's immutable system.

Key words. Soviet Armenia, Soviet press, Communist Party, Official newspaper, Adaptation, Democratization.

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Introduction

1988-1989 was a turning point for the Communist Party of Armenia. The deepening crisis of socialism, newly introduced policies of Democratization and *Glasnost*¹ on one hand, and the unfolding National Movement² on the other hand, had created a new political reality, to which the party had to adapt. The various adaptation pathways taken by Communist parties during the transitional period yielded a wide range of results in the post-socialist space. In some Eastern European countries – in Hungary for example, the Communist party was able to redesign itself and become one of the main players in the new political system³. In other countries, such as in the Russian Federation, the successor Communist party was able to successfully function for a decade by framing itself as an opposition party. Later however, parallel to the establishment of a more authoritarian regime, the party became a shadow of the new power and lost its political independence⁴. In the newly independent republic of Armenia, the Communist Party took another path: it was only able to secure its presence in the first two parliamentary sessions; later it was pushed out of the political arena altogether. Thus, being the most experienced political power at the start of independence, with its manpower and financial capital, the Communist Party was unable to adapt and actually exhausted its role as a political party. In this regard, the study of the Communist party and its organizations during

¹ Glasnost, lit. openness, policy introduced in the second half of 1980's by Michael Gorbachev which called for increased openness.

² A mass-movement in the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic and Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) started in February of 1988 with the demand to transfer the NKAO from the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic to the jurisdiction of Armenia.

³ Ziblatt, Daniel, "The Adaptation of Ex-Communist Parties to Post-Communist East Central Europe: A Comparative Study of the East German and Hungarian Ex-Communist Parties. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*" (1998): 119-137, doi: 10.1016/S0967-067X(98)00003-8.

⁴ Malfliet, Katlijn, "The Communist Party of the Russian Federation: not Communist per se." *Revue d'études comparatives Est-Ouest*. (2011): 37-63, doi: 10.4074/S0338059911001033.

the transitional period is interesting, as it can provide a better understanding of the underlying causes of the later developments.

This paper examines the transformations of the Armenian Communist party's official newspaper *Soviet Armenia* in the context of the ongoing political changes of 1989. The study of the official newspaper is of interest because, as other organizations became affiliated with the Communist party, it was the mini-model of the party by its hierarchical structure. Moreover, the newspaper was one of the main channels for forming and distributing official discourse. Thus, analyses of the *Soviet Armenia* also provide us an opportunity to view the transformation of narratives in the official discourse. By focusing on the official newspaper of the Communist party, this paper attempts to discuss the structural and ideological transformations of the organizations affiliated with the party in the new realities.

In order to contextualize the transformation process during Perestroika⁵, I start the discussion from an earlier period of 1970s. The text is composed of thematic modules concerning both periods, which provides us an opportunity to explore the events of perestroika in comparison. The presented episodes discuss the newspaper's function inside the party, the censorship and personnel policies.

The investigation takes the form of a case study and concentrates on the oral history interview of the hero (Hereinafter-N), who had worked for the newspaper *Soviet Armenia* for 20 years, starting his career as a journalist and later becoming head of a department. During the research, the newspaper's publications and the Communist party's

⁵ Perestroika, lit. restructuring, policy meant to reform the economic and political system in the Soviet Union during the late 1980s.

declassified archive have also been used. The chosen methodological approach provides us an opportunity to view the personal experience of the narrator in conjunction with the party's policies and newspaper's work, to better understand the social environment in which the transformations were happening.

The oral history narrative is a specific genre with unique features, which are important to bear in mind when both working with and reading a text based on an oral history. First, it is important to remember that the narrator reconstructs the events of the past in the present⁶. For example, even though our hero used to be a member of the Communist party, his assessments of events are from today's standpoint, having the perspective of the later collapse of the USSR and the Party. Moreover, in post-Soviet Armenia, the Communist party can be viewed in a very negative light by contradicting it with the National Movement. Probably for these reasons, the narrator was trying to justify his affiliation with the Communist Party during the interview.

Another important matter is to whom the story is told. The issue of the researcher's status as an "insider/outsider" is one of the most discussed topics in the social sciences. Even though the hero and I have always lived in the same city, we were born in different states and regimes. Being born three years after the collapse of the USSR, I was not a good fit for an "insider". However, the status of an insider often places the researcher in a position of "carrying some social and cultural knowledge", and the narrator might not talk about certain things, as they would be thought to be already known to the interviewer. Probably

⁶ Kurkowska-budzan, Marta, "Experience and Narrative: Anti-communist Armed Underground in Poland, 1955-1957", *Reclaiming the Personal: Oral History in Post-Socialist Europe*, ed. by Khanenko-Friesen N. and Grichenko G., (2015): 319-28.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3138/j.ctt18dzs3g.22> .

considering my age and supposed inexperience/ ignorance, the narrator was not only sharing his memories, but also found it necessary to “lecture” me and explain, for example, what the Soviet Union or communism is. In this respect, the status of a stranger/ learner might be more useful.⁷

Getting into the newspaper: membership in the Communist Party

N started to work for the newspaper in 1970. His employment came about after an accidental meeting with the then lead editor of *Soviet Armenia*. Since the earliest days of the formation of the censorship system in the 1920's, the reading of plays and public debates on the premieres were a widely accepted practice in the Soviet Union. Loris Kroyan, the editor-in-chief of *Soviet Armenia* was present at one such meetings and made a speech. Afterwards, N, who was a student at the time, was invited from the audience to comment on the play.

“I totally crashed his (the editor's) speech. He provided a typical soviet-style commentary on the play. The play itself was not a bad one, but he totally missed all the sharp-cornered parts. After the discussions, we were chatting and smoking outside, when he approached and told me that he liked my speech. He said: “You know; in my position I cannot say such things”. Then, all of a sudden, he asked if I would like to come work for the newspaper. I was astonished. Me? I was still a student at the time, working on my diploma. Later, I went and stayed there for good.”

⁷ Keval C., Harshad, “Negotiating constructions of ‘insider’ / ‘outsider’ status and exploring the significance of dis/connections”. *ENQUIRE (Electronic Nottingham Quarterly for Ideas, Research and Evaluation)*, (2009):215-232.

The narrator begins his story by opposing himself – the student who was writing a diploma on Charents⁸, who was not afraid to use sharp-cornered phrases, and the editor. As the story continues, the contrast between him and the other employees or, as he calls them, “the elderlies”, between him and the party, deepens.

“And I started writing. At the beginning, I was not given any big stuff, because I was not a communist. The editor, a very humorous man, used to call me to his office, and talk me into joining the party. “Son, dear, you know, even the elevator is a communist here! Up in the CC⁹ they like your writings, but they are surprised that you are not yet a party member””. As it is known, all the state and non-governmental organizations in the Soviet Union were under the control of the Party and were managed by party cadres. Consequently, career advancement inevitably meant membership in the party. This was especially true for the party’s official newspaper, as it was completely attached to the party by its structure: the newspaper’s lead editor and head of departments were even members of the party’s highest governing body – the Central Committee.

Recalling one of the dialogues between he and the editor-in-chief, N says, “I told him- no, I do not want to be a member of this corrupt, wicked party¹⁰. My father, my three uncles, my grandfather and my father’s father – all of them were sent to Siberia for no reason. My grandfather had returned, though the poor man died young after such tortures and sufferings. One of my uncles, who was taken away, disappeared. And all of them, all of

⁸ Yeghishe Charents, 1897-1937, Armenian writer and poet, was arrested for Anti-Soviet agitation and died in the prison.

⁹ The Central Committee of the Communist Party.

¹⁰ It is hard to imagine such harsh comments addressed to the Party in the conversation with the lead editor. It is important to bear in mind that the narrator refers the past from the present’s perspective, also reconstructing it with today’s descriptions.

my uncles, all so young and so handsome...” During our conversation, N describes in detail how he felt about the Communist party, but the part of joining the party is short and dry: the career ladder was open only to party members. A few months before becoming a department head, N became a member of the party.

It is interesting to note that even though the narrator was working for a newspaper that was directly attached to the communist party, he clearly makes a distinction between his activities in journalism and the party. During the interview in particular, he cites his own pieces dedicated to the party, calling them "fabricated and factitious".

The control

Still in 1927, during the 15th congress of the party, the concept of “Self-Censorship” was presented by Stalin. Unlike the "anti-Bolshevik" criticism, the “Bolshevik self-criticism” was there to "strengthen the party and Soviet power.¹¹" In fact, this principle legitimized the only criticism allowed— the criticism coming from the party. In "self-criticism", the role of the print media was particularly important: it provided systematic criticism of the Party's organizations. In other words, one of the main functions of the central newspapers was the supervision of Party organizations. In the Soviet Union, it was clearly established not only *who* could criticize, but also *what* could become the subject of criticism. Criticism had to be local, directed to a specific person or territorial organization, and without systematic generalizations. In essence, the criticism was presented as an “exception to the rule”, not a consequence of the failure of the system.

¹¹ Tyurin A. O., “The critique from the bottom” in the organizations of Nijnevosk region in the second half of 1920's- first half of 1930's. Vestnik of Russian New University, series: the History of Russia- N. 3, 2010, p 55.

As N notes, up to the mid-1980s, only the central newspapers *Soviet Armenia*, *Communist*, and to some extent *Avant-garde*, could criticize the organizations affiliated with the party¹². These organizations were obliged to respond to the criticism published in the official paper of the party, and in the case of serious violations, the issue raised in the newspaper could be examined by higher executive bodies.

Because of the seriousness of the possible consequences, those that were criticized, often responded to the newspaper with their own accusations. Thus, the editorial staff had to be constantly on the lookout.

"There was a well-known journalist, and he had taught me something important: if you write a piece about the institution, publish only five facts, and keep the other five for yourself. So when that organization launched a counter attack, you would have these compromising facts with you." In other words, the informal rules of the game regarding internal intrigues has been formed, and they were not only necessary for surviving in the newspaper, but also helped one avoid being placed on the "rejected" or "enemies" list.

On the other hand, the materials printed in the newspaper were also strictly controlled. First, the topics of the pieces were discussed and agreed to with the department head and the editor-in-chief at general meetings. The ready-made articles had to go through several approval stages by the head of the department, the deputy-editor, and afterwards, by the editor-in-chief. Before sending the newspaper for printing, everything was checked by the responsible secretary one last time. Nevertheless, even with this kind of filtering mechanism in place, things sometimes spiraled out of control. One of the more

¹² "Avant-garde" was the official newspaper of the central Committee of the Union of the Leninist Young Communists, and "Communist" was the official newspaper of the Central Committee of Communist Party. By their significance, these two central newspapers were in the second place after "Soviet Armenia".

memorable moments in the history of *Soviet Armenia* is the publication of the poem entitled "Vladimir Ilyich Lenin" on Lenin's birthday in January of 1969. The author Slavik Chiloyan¹³, who was known by the nickname "Chilo", had a reputation of a dissident. As N recalls, rumors spread throughout the city that the poem was originally dedicated to Jesus Christ. However, in order to get it printed in the newspaper, the author replaced the word "Jesus" with "Lenin". Its publication resulted in such a big splash, that the Bureau of the Central Committee of Armenia submitted it for discussion under the heading of: "the attitude of the newspaper's editorial staff to the piece and the reasons for its publication". At the session, all the responsible officials – the head of the department, the lead editor, the deputy-editor and the responsible secretary, say that since the poem was about Lenin, they did not read it before approving it¹⁴. As a result, based on the majority vote, the entire editorial office was dismissed.

As Yuchak observes, late socialism was characterized by the transition from a semantic model of language to the pragmatic one, where the form becomes more important than the meaning. Unlike the semantic model, where the text has its meaning, regardless of external circumstances, in the pragmatic model, the meaning of the text is neither literal, nor absolute¹⁵. For the party's official newspaper, it was important to maintain formalism: the censors checked the "correct" form of the text. However, the literal meaning of official Soviet discourse was so empty that the meaning of the text was often out of the text itself – in context and interpretation. Although the argument brought by the editorial staff on not

¹³ Slavik Chiloyan, 1940-1975, Armenian poet, translator.

¹⁴ Avetyan N., "Chilo", *168 Jam*, 27/11/2005. <https://archive.168.am/articles/3133>.

¹⁵ Yurchak, Alexei, "Soviet Hegemony of Form: Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*. (July 2003): 491-492, doi: 10.1017/S0010417503000239.

reading the text was only a justification, they could, indeed, miss the other, alternative meanings given to the text in the public discourse. Thus, due to the reputation of the author and the "city legend", even a poem that glorified Lenin and met all the formal standards of form, theme and lexicon, could be interpreted as an anti-Soviet parody.

N recalls that after Chilo's case, the new editor examined everything "under a magnifying glass". "Once I wrote a factitious piece about the unbreakable spirit of internationalism. Someone erased the word "unbreakable "and instead wrote "perpetual". I went to the lead editor's office to ask who had injected that stupid word, and it was him. "What if there is a hickey¹⁶ on that word, and it becomes breakable?", he asked me. The breakable spirit of internationalism! After Chilo's case, he was quite scared."

Thus, the party's official newspaper, being a self-control mechanism for the party and a check-and-balance tool for the middle and lower circles of the party, had certain independence. At the same time, this autonomy was set within clearly defined boundaries, and the newspaper itself was subjected to strict control.

1989: Historical Overview

1989 was characterized by social and political upheavals in Central and Eastern Europe, which occurred parallel with the deepening crisis of socialism¹⁷. In Armenia, however, in this regard 1988 was the turning point, when the republic became the stage of the first mass opposition movement of the Soviet Union. Emerging within the context of declared

¹⁶ Spot or imperfection in printing.

¹⁷ Marutyán H. "The Karabakh Movement or what was happening in Soviet Armenia 30 years ago". EVN Report, 25/02.2018
<https://www.evnreport.com/politics/the-karabakh-movement-or-what-was-happening-in-soviet-armenia-30-years-ago>

democratization and *Glasnost*, the civil movement initially had environmental issues on its agenda. However, in a few months it transformed into a national movement supporting the self-determination of the Armenian population of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous region (NKAO)¹⁸. The Karabakh Movement began with mass petitions delivered to the Soviet central government, demanding the annexation of NKAO to Armenia. This demand was denied by the USSR leadership. This phase of "petitions" was followed by "active disobedience" which was characterized by a phase of mass labor and university strikes¹⁹. In February of 1988, the number of participants in these rallies ballooned to hundreds of thousands, and in March of the same year, the "Karabakh committee" was formed. This committee was a highly reputable organization charged with coordinating the movement. While initially the movement evolved in line with *Perestroika*'s ideas, with the famous "Lenin, Party, Gorbachev" slogan; over time, it gained a clear social and political stance, including demands for democratic freedoms, sovereignty, and, ultimately, independence. Thus, 1988 was the main period for transformations in the political field and discourses in Armenia, while the response to which the party's reorganizations and institutional solutions continued in 1989.

The new editor

If the change of power in democratic states usually means a change in the ruling party,

¹⁸ Marutyan H., (Winter 2000) Iconography of Gharabagh Movement: An Index of the Transformation of Armenian Identity.// Armenian Forum. A Journal of Contemporary Affairs 2, no. 4, 39-55.

¹⁹ The formulation of "periods of petitions and disobedience" belongs to co-founder of the "Karabakh Committee" Manvel Sargsyan. Araratyan A., "The movement was like a sea", MediaMax, 26/02/2013. <https://www.mediamax.am/am/news/sharjum25/6963/> .

during Soviet times, it was marked by the internal rearrangements of the only political party. In this way the new leaders coming to power usually neutralized their political opponents. Although this practice of personnel changes was typical to almost all phases of Soviet history, the changes of personnel that began during the first years of Gorbachev's leadership were also under the announced policy of "party reorganization". The latter's goal was to "fill the party apparatus with politically mature and trained communists who would be able to ensure the fulfillment of new tasks under the conditions of Political Reconstruction"²⁰.

In the *Soviet Armenia*, personnel changes were marked by the appointment of a new editor-in-chief. At the end of 1988, Shchors Davtyan was appointed as the lead editor of the newspaper. Prior to the appointment, he had worked at Sisian's Vorotan newspaper. Shchors's appointment was a practice that out of the ordinary. The high-ranking editorial staff would typically work for many years for the party newspapers before being appointed as a lead editor. For example, one of the former editors of the *Soviet Armenia* newspaper, Loris Kroyan, was invited to the official newspaper only after working for ten years as editor for another party newspaper called *Avangard*. Our narrator also worked for the newspaper for twenty years, starting as a journalist and becoming a head of a department in the span of two decades. Shchors Davtyan, however, was out of the narrow circle of party-newspaper staff, and thus his appointment was unprecedented. Nevertheless, the change of the editor-in-chief was the only cadre change that took place in the newspaper. At the same time, it should be noted that the new editor still had the same powers, limited

²⁰ On the reorganization of the party's committee's' apparatus and the consequent objectives on improving the party's leadership// Meeting of the Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia, January 14, 1989. National Archive of Armenia, Department of Social-Political documents (NAA DSPD), Fund-1, List-83, Case-6.

by the hierarchical bureaucracy. For example, in order to dismiss a head of a department, the editor would need to receive the consent of the first secretary of the party.

"Reflection" of the Reality

In conjunction with the policy of publicity or *Glasnost*, proclaimed during *Perestroika*, the departments responsible for the ideology of the party also revised their structure and policies.

Thus, in 1989, the Department of Ideology of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia was formed on the basis of the previously existing departments of Propaganda, Science and education and Culture. As such, the newly formed Ideology Department included all the text-producing institutes, namely the party's press, universities, research institutes, and cultural institutions.

The reorganized department also reformulated its work mechanisms. As noted at one of the panel sessions, "...under the conditions of publicity, democracy and pluralism, the ideological work should rely on the real processes that take place in society; it should take [into consideration] a fuller account of public opinion. ... Times of order have changed, now it is the time to convince people. It is important to work with people, to persuade them, to sustain the party's position."²¹ Moreover, at the beginning of 1989, the Ideological Commission was discussing the proposal of founding a Public Opinion Research Center,

²¹ Meeting of the Ideological Committee of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia, February 29th, 1989, "Soviet Armenia".

a coordinating body that would provide the party with analytical materials and practical recommendations.²²

With such policy, the Ideological Department was in fact admitting that the party was no longer able to manage the processes in society. In order to reorganize their work in a more open, less controlled system, the party organizations now had to rely on the "reality". This is important for understanding how the work and function of the party's press was changing.

In the context of the relative liberalization of the media field and active dissemination of alternative media, the official media was losing its monopoly. In order to function properly, it had to satisfy the emerging demand of "reflecting the reality". In this regard, it is interesting to discuss one of the newspaper's practices. During the Glasnost period, the publication of the readers' letters was a widely used practice in the print media. Moreover, these were not random cases, but rather segments that occupied a considerable part of the newspaper – be it in separate articles or whole thematic series²³. This practice was largely used in *Soviet Armenia*. Some of the series published in 1989 are, for example, "The workers of the Republic express their gratitude for the fateful decisions of the party and the government", "The Phone of reflections", and so on. These kinds of "citizen sections" in the party's official media were not only altering access patterns, but also creating an impression of a two-way communication in the top-down discourse and giving the appearances of "collective text" in the professionally-made media.

²² On the establishment of a Public opinion research center at the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia// meeting of the Ideological commission of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia, February 1989, NAA DSPD, Fund-1, List-83, Case-83.

²³ Boyarskich E.G and other, ed. By Rozhanski, M., "Letters on and for history:1988-1989", Irkutsk, 2014, p. 8/

Giving much importance to the citizen sections, the editorial staff of *Soviet Armenia* were writing the texts instead of the citizens. N recounts that “When something important was happening in the party, the readers had to “react” to it. The newspaper was contacting ordinary members of the party, asking if they would like to get a piece published from their names. And I, sitting in the office, without even talking to that person, was writing a letter using their their name. People were receiving some 7-10 rubles for each piece.”

Thus, even during *Glasnost*, with the official demand to “to reflect the reality”, the central newspaper hadn’t lost another function – that of “creating the reality”. This was especially important for directing the discourse of the sensitive topics and providing the readers with opinion-models to follow.

National Movement: the limits of reflection of reality;

In 1989, the official newspaper faced other obstacles in its attempt at "reflecting the reality." Although the proposal of the NKAO to join Armenia was denied, there was a wave of violence between the Armenian and Azerbaijani population. Inter-ethnic clashes were a thing that neither the Party, nor the party’s newspaper were ready for. The only counterbalance to the national problem that the party had was internationalism.

As N recalls, "In 1988, when Sumgait²⁴ happened, we were told by the CC that the spirit of internationalism should be maintained. The editor called us heads of departments, and said that we should write about the Armenian-Azerbaijani brotherhood and internationalism. He then started providing specific instructions for each department.

²⁴ Massacres targeting Armenian population of the town of Sumgait in Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan in late February 1988. At least 27 people were killed and 200 were injured.

When my turn came, he told me to write about Jabarli's theater. I told him, "I won't write that. You just came from the CC, don't you have the information? Don't you know what has happened? Everyone was looking at me astonished, nobody knew about the genocide yet."

The newspaper was very cautious in its comments on the Sumgait case. The incident was mostly presented as hooliganism, without politically contextualizing it. However N, like almost all the members of the editorial staff, refused to write about things that were meant to distract from the inter-ethnic clashes. As a result, all the pieces on internationalism that were published in *Soviet Armenia* were almost entirely official statements, without any journalistic reporting. The newspaper's policy was criticized by the Central Committee of Armenia. For example, during one of the Secretariat sessions, it was noted that in the party press, including *Soviet Armenia*, the coverage of the topics on the new special form of governance in the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region, inter-ethnic relations, internationalism and patriotic education were not satisfactory.²⁵

The newspaper was indeed covering those issues with the utmost caution. In fact, the materials related to the issues of NKAO published in the months of January, February and March of 1989, are either a reprint of the Russian periodicals *Izvestia* and *Pravda*, or comments made by the first secretary of the Central Committee. It is interesting to note that the presence of the first secretary seems to "legitimize" the coverage of certain topics. For example, on March 1, 1989, the newspaper covered the meeting of the first secretary of the Communist Party of Armenia Suren Harutyunyan with the *intelligentsia*, during

²⁵ About the coverage of the election campaign of People's Deputies by the mass media// Session of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia, March 13, 1989, NAA DSPD, Fund-1, List-83, Case-83.

which some of the writers raised questions about the memorial service for the Sumgayit massacres and the political activists detained in January²⁶. These topics, which had not formerly been covered in the newspaper, were now being voiced. At the same meeting, the new editor of *Soviet Armenia* Shchors Davtyan, addressing the first secretary, says: "Cautiousness has recently reached extremes. Now every article that contains the word "Karabakh," has been removed. For example, one author wrote: "When I think of Sumgayit, I'm terrified." The author expressed his personal attitude towards what happened, but this also seemed "extreme" for someone. ... Surely, inter-ethnic issues should be covered as widely as possible, but there should also be an opportunity to write about Karabakh, as people are very sensitive to the topic. We should deny the groundless assumptions, we should clarify the truth and we should provide information every day. For that reasons, it would be good for us to have our own correspondent in Karabakh." In fact, Davtyan speaks out about the censorship imposed on the newspaper, and not only criticizes the press censorship in his speech, but also gets his speech published in the newspaper. This was something unprecedented: the newspaper's new editor-in-chief was trying to find ways to access the forbidden discourses.

Besides the "legitimization of topics through the first secretary," another technique that was occasionally used by the new editor was the discussion of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue through social, cultural and economic topics. One remarkable example is the trilogy- "The Revelation. Struggle²⁷ / Light²⁸ / Hope²⁹", published in March of 1989. And while the

²⁶ Meeting of the first secretary of the Central Committee of Armenia Suren Harutyunyan with the intelligentsia// *Soviet Armenia*, 01.03.1989.

²⁷ Martuni, Hakob, "Revelation: Struggle"// *Soviet Armenia*, 17.03.1989.

²⁸ Martuni, Hakob, "Revelation: Light"// *Soviet Armenia*, 18.03.1989.

²⁹ Martuni, Hakob, "Revelation: Hope"//*Soviet Armenia*, 19.03.1989.

author does not provide any political commentary and only covers the socio-economic issues in the NKAO, the political context of the material was obvious even in the headlines.

Conclusions

I started the discussion of the two periods of *Soviet Armenia* from the personnel policy. The two heroes of the article appear in *Soviet Armenia* newspaper with a difference of 20 years, and during very different conditions. The first hero is chosen and invited as a student, recruited into the party and taught to work in accordance with all the formal and informal rules of the party, while the new editor is invited into the threshold of 1989, contrary to the previously adopted personnel policy and, in fact, with greater freedoms. The appointment of a person who was outside the narrow party's press circle was meant to go in line with the party's "restructuring" policy, with the aim to make it more open and less controllable.

The change of censorship policy can also be observed in two periods. In Chilo's case in 1969, the text without any anti-Soviet elements could be interpreted as such, whereas during *Perestroika*, the newspaper had more flexibility. In 1989, the newspaper was trying to extract itself from the stagnation of pragmatic language, where the literal text was formal and meaningless. Moreover, the new editor found new semantic and symbolic means for fitting the mattering issues in the accepted format, such as writing in-between the lines or using the presence of party elites to raise some issues.

However, the main characteristic feature of the official newspaper in 1989 is the contradiction. On the one hand, due to the news policy of the party and general situation, the newspaper had to "reflect the reality". On the other hand, that reality did not fit into the party's ideology. The factitious letters on behalf of the readers, best describes the clash of the newspaper with the reality and the party's self-absorption.

Being a connecting link between the upper and middle circles of the party, between the party and the public, the party's official newspaper had to balance its policy and provide two-way messages. However, because the "invented" reality of the party and the real demands were mutually incompatible, the transformation potential of the newspaper was very weak. The transformations in the newspaper were predominantly limited by changes in personnel policy, whereas the personal initiative from the bottom was still limited by the immutable system of the party.

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