

**LAND DIVISION OF THE WESTERN ARMENIAN
REFUGEES ON THE DON IN 1920s-1930s***V.Z. Akopyan**Pyatigorsk State University, Pyatigorsk, Russia
science-almanac@mail.ru*

The article deals with the Soviet state policy on land division of the Western Armenian refugees on the Don in 1920s-1930s. The lands for the Armenian settlements were allocated in the sparsely populated areas, far from the older Armenian communities. The state allowed the use of the native language in the work of the local authorities and cultural and educational institutions in the Armenian settlements until the end of 1930s. When allocating the land for the refugees, the state authorities aimed at getting the strong social support from Armenians. The population of the Armenian settlements supported the Soviet power, demonstrated diligence and during the Great Patriotic War gave the country great warriors, who showed unprecedented valour, bravery and courage. The purposeful forcing of the assimilation at the second half of the 20th century has led to the fact that some Armenian settlements ceased existence, others are currently on the verge of extinction and are losing their national identity. The most viable are the villages Gaikodzor and Shaumyan. Based on the example of the Armenian settlements, the author comes to the conclusion that only in compactly located areas of residence the Russian Armenians manage to a certain extent to keep their national identity, faith and traditions.

Key words: Don district, Rostov region, Western Armenia, refugees, dispersed ethnic groups, refugees, land device.

To the middle of the twentieth century in the south of Russia there were more than 120 Armenian settlements. Most of them were formed in pre-Soviet period. The story of these settlements was described in scientific literature. We can't say the same about Armenian settlements established in the first decades of the Soviet regime [3]. As a result of resettlement policy and land division of predominantly Western Armenian refugees in 1920-30s., in southern Russia there formed dozens of new settlements including Don region. They represent the subject of this article¹.

Those of Western Armenian refugees who escaped the total annihilation settled mostly in Eastern Armenia and other Transcaucasia regions. Many of them in 1918-1920 suffered Turks and Transcaucasian gangs invasion once again. In this regard, the number of refugees rushing to the South of Russia has significantly increased. When reaching this region of Russia, the refugees (25 - 40 thousand) huddled in abandoned buildings, barns and premises belonging to the communities or in dugouts on the outskirts of the city. Many of the refugees hoped to return to Western Armenia occupied by Turkey but these expectations were postponed for indefinite future. The way to motherland was closed for Eastern Armenians as well, because a large part of their lands (Artsakh, Nakhichevan and other) belonged to Azerbaijan, formed by Turkish invaders. The refugees desired to engage in habitual agriculture labor, but the local authorities denied them in land division, citing the fact that they were foreigners not entitled to the land by the law. [6] Besides, Kars, Ardahan and Artvin Armenians, the patriots of Russian Empire - were recorded foreigners as well.

Only NEP period realities forced the ruling party to consider the desire of ethnic groups to be provided with the land as national settlements. The government of North-Caucasian region formed in 1924 came to grips with this problem [1]. At the meeting of the North Caucasian Regional Territory Committee Bureau (25 September 1925), they addressed the issue of Armenian refugees land division, and adopted a resolution in which the territory executive committee was entrusted practical resolution of these matters [9, p. 4]. November 11, 1925 Presidium of the regional executive committee, considered the issue «On Armenian refugees division», and instructed the Regional

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Land Department (RLD) to submit plans and estimates for division of 3000 families (15,000 people) Armenian refugees in the region, to March 1, 1926. [4, д. 173. л. 234.].

From the point of view of the Armenians themselves the optimal model of their land division was settling as individual national communities. In such communities they didn't have traditional national government, church and independent public organizations. At the same time, the state in the context of the indigenization policy allowed them usage of the native language in work of local authorities, cultural institutions and school education [2].

Lands for the refugee settlements, as a rule, were outside the towns and districts where there were old-Armenian communities, for example, the city of Nakhichevan-on-Don and villages of Myasnikovsky district founded in the XVIII century. The government supported only underpopulated areas resettlement. Among the new Armenian settlements on the Don formed by the western Armenian refugees we shall specify farm yards Shahumyan, Ararat, Mikoyan, and others. In this article we do not review the new Armenian villages that were founded within Myasnikovsky district (Leninakan, Krasniy Krym, Leninavan, Vesely farm yard) and a number of Krasnodar Region districts that were a part of Don circuit in the 20-ies. Farm yard Shahumyan of Mechetinsky (since 1935 - Egorlykский) district of Don circuit, is one of the first settlements founded by Western Armenian refugees on the Don in 1924-1925. Before arriving in Mechetinsky area the future residents of Shahumyan languished in poverty in various cities of the North Caucasus: Vladikavkaz, Grozny, Pyatigorsk, Krasnodar, Novorossiysk, etc. In the spring of 1923 using the transit of USSR Central Executive Committee chairman M.I.Kalinin through Grozny, the management of the local Armenian refugees assistance organisation, turned to him with a request to lend a hand in refugees land division. «The Union Steward» in his resolution of 16 May 1923 endorsed this statement, but offered Armenians «a pre-look for a proper piece of land coming to terms with the local authorities for approval of taking this land section by the refugees» [10, p. 113].

Following this resolution, Akopov - a member of the Committee, appointed by the authorized person of South East RSFSR People's Commissariat for Agriculture in with the relevant documents on hand was sent to Yeisk department to finding a plot of land at the rate of 200 families (2864 persons). In June 19, 1923 Kuban-Black Sea regional land management office reported on the possibility of placing the refugees in an area of about 8,900 arpent in the northeast of Yeisk department. The Commissioner requested an application from the People's Commissariat for Agriculture in accordance with the Art. 223 of the Land Code to the Central Executive Committee of the RSFSR to resolute the group of Armenians to move to vacant land. The Head Office of Land Division and Amelioration by a reference from July 25, 1923 petitioned the Central Executive Committee for a resettlement resolution at reduced resettlement rate. [10, p. 113].

In «Izvestia of CEC USSR» dated August 12, 1923 they reported: «Enable the resettlement of 200 families of Transcaucasus refugees from the living within the North Caucasus, in Yeisk department of Kuban-Black Sea region to the land provided by regional land management office» [7]. After lengthy approvals there began the relocation. It happened at a time when in region they carried out a territorial reform, that culminated in creation of Southeast area on 13 February 1924, then renamed on October 16 in the North-Caucasian region. The newly formed settlement of Shaumyan farm yard as a result of zoning has become a part of Mechetinsky District in Don circuit. Mechetinsky executive committee sabotaged the decisions of central and regional authorities on refugees land division in different ways. After intervention of the regional management it was forced to accelerate the land tenure of Armenians. For a part of the settlers, who did not get land in Shahumyan, they allocated allotments in a few kilometers south to Kavalерki farm yard. As a result, in the mid of the 20-ies. 60 families formed Ararat in close proximity to Shahumyan.

The problems that troubled Shaumyan people were eloquently stated in a letter to the first secretary of the Regional Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) (b) A.I. Mikoyan, compiled by January 26, 1926 by Andranik Babajanov - the head of the Komsomol cell. In the letter Babadjanov wrote: «We, Armenians of Shaumyan farm yard (1500 inhabitants) of Mechetinsky area Don circuit moved to the North Caucasus following the resolution of the Central Executive Committee of 12 August 1923, published in «Izvestia» newspaper № 180. We relocated with-

out any help from the state, despite the fact that the government had promised to assist us. Under these circumstances, we, the poor immigrants could not use peasant or resettlement benefits. The villagers live in mud huts, we have no school, no cooperative or other centers of social culture». Further, the applicant described the problems that troubled the settlers [5, д. 1148. л. 67].

In May 1926 Shahumyan farm yard got national village council status. This was the result of its separation from Novorogovsky village council [5, д. 1045. л. 1]. Mardanov was elected as the first chairman of the village council. News of Armenian Land Division in Mechetinsky area quickly spread through the refugees, scattered in different regions of the region. Groups and individual families began to arrive in Shahumyan, Ararat and other Armenian villages. Shaumyan people supported the party class line on liquidation of the kulaks. The truth is that among them there were neither kulaks, nor even medium peasants. During collectivization all the Armenian population has joined into Shaumyan collective farm. The villagers fully justified expectations of the Soviet power. Even the terrible famine of 1932-1933 could not be compared with the horrors of genocide for refugees recently saved from imminent death in their home country. Collectivisation was supported by Ararat people as well. They have formed a collective farm, that was later integrated into Kirov collective farm with the centre in Kavalerka farm yard.

From the first days the most important problem for Shahumyan Armenians was the question of mother tongue school teaching. The Villagers arranged and maintained a primary school on their funds. Public school funding began only in 1927 [5, д. 1341. л. 158.]. Almost at the same time, a native language primary school appeared in Ararat. By the beginning of 1927/28 academic year they completed a separate wooden school construction, which has already have three classes [5, д. 941. л. 44]. Prior to the opening of the seven-year school in 1931, some pupils who have completed elementary school education, continued their studies at Armenian school in Rostov. National School contributed to preservation of language, and through it, to national identity. However, during «Khrushchev thaw» Armenian school was transformed into an eight-year Russian school № 17 (1991 secondary school № 10) [11]. We have little information to what extent Armenian settlements retained ancestral faith under the atheist Soviet era. Rostov-on-Don was the center of Novo-Nakhichevan Diocese of Armenian Church. Diocesan Council tried to organize the service by sending priests from Rostov region and Myasnikovsky area in settlements of Don and neighboring Kuban areas, where there were no churches and spiritual leaders. For example, in May 8, 1945 Priest Ter-Iusig Dzhangulyan was sent to Shahumyan, Mikoyan, Erzurum and Erzindzhan villages of Yegorlyksky District. The villagers welcomed him very warm, causing a hostile reaction from the district authorities. Rural and asset managers of collective farms were subjected to sharp criticism. For some of them, there followed «draw conclusions» for «assisting the priest.» Dzhangulyan repeated the trip in November 1945. The Chairman of Shaumyan village council was pressed to forbade him perform religious rites. They explained that Ter-Iusig should get a permission from the district council. The priest had to walk 25 km to the district center. But even after getting the permission he was prohibited to hold services. The same thing happened in May 1946 in the villages of Shahumyan, Ararat and Erzindzhan, inhabited by 3,500 Armenians.

In May 7, 1952 Diocesan Council addressed to Rostov Region Commissioner of the Council for Religious Affairs A.G. Baikov to provide Ter-Iusig with a reference for his trip with the psalmist Roman Akopov in Novocherkassk «for the purpose of spiritual service required by local Armenians, due to Easter celebration» [8]. The second stage of the Soviet settlement policy in relation to the Armenian refugees is at the end of 20's - early 30-ies. The new settlements organized in this period, were to become collective farms building outposts. Since the beginning of collectivization in the south-east of present Rostov region, 30 km west of Shahumyan appeared Mikoyan farm.

Disenfranchised refugees from the village of Serpatsor, Kars region, were patrials of Russian empire, but for some reason authorities recorded them as Turkish ones. The refugees were ready to accept any form of social order, imposed from above. Thus, in 1929 in the deserted waterless steppe of Mechetinsky district there was founded Mikoyan farm. In a short time the farm has become a relatively large settlement. In 1932, here they founded the farm «Pobeda», that was a regional leader in grain cultivation. In Mikoyan there was built a school, where the lessons were conducted in Ar-

menian native language. Mikoyan had national village council. Alas, in the 50-ies. there began a mass exodus of Mikoyan people. The large farm gradually fell into disrepair, and Mikoyan collective farm has been abolished. There remained about fifteen yards with a population of no more than 50 people and the cemetery, which is the most well-kept place there. On official maps now it is called x. Sovetsky farm yard. Thus, in 1920-30s as a result of the settlement policy and land division in different areas in the South of Russia there appeared new settlements, founded by Western Armenian refugees. The creation of national refugee settlements and their land division was simultaneously solving several problems for the country its' regions authorities: the first - to show the world the Soviet government ability of solving complex national and social problems; the second - economy short time restoration, (as it was devastated by the civil war), the third - provision of tax revenues in the period of NEP, the fourth - to find a supply of agricultural products in years of the great change; finally, to receive social («class») support of the Soviet power on behalf of the Armenians.

These expectations have been met. Armenians supported all the activities carried out by the Soviet authorities in return for their land division. In the first years of «five year plan» Armenian villages showed unprecedented hard work and made a significant contribution to strengthen the country's economic potential. During the Great Patriotic War Armenian villages have given the country unprecedented heroic soldiers. The abolition of national village councils, termination of teaching on the mother tongue at schools, renaming of national place names and other measures have led to mass exodus of the population to the cities and other regions. Some Armenian settlements ceased to exist (v. Ararat), others are currently on the verge of death (f.y. Mikoyan), and others have lost or continue to lose their national identity. Out of all the Armenian villages, founded in the period under review Shahumyan «manifested» the greatest vitality (in 2012 1889 people lived in the village). With all the contradictions of the Soviet settlement policy, the very existence of national settlements away from the motherland, using the native language in office work and work of cultural and educational institutions until mid-twentieth century, the possibility of active participation in political life (of course, on the basis of the Soviet social model) on equal rights with other Soviet people is a positive experience.

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