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## Belgrade memories of the Tehlirians

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*No matter how valuable and understandable Soghomon Tehlirian's bright image and his deed are, his life is still full of mysteries. Few people might know that after the terrorist act against Taleat on March 15, 1921 when he was declared innocent by the court of Berlin he moved to Serbia and lived there until 1950. Back in 1884 Soghomon's father, Khachatur, moved to the Serb town of Valevo and opened a store there. Then the 1915 Genocide took place and he never returned to his homeland Bagarich.*

During the seven years I lived and worked in Serbia I have visited Valevo many times. I have visited the Tehlirian's tombs and his old and young relatives that live in Belgrade. I met Soghomon's elder son, Shahen, in 1988. He told me many interesting and valuable things about his father. I wrote down his memories hoping that I would be able to complete his memoirs about his father.

In November 2006, I visited Shahen several times. We mainly spoke in Serbian, and from time to time - in Armenian. He showed me an old folder full of manuscripts, documents, letters, photos, documents in Serbian language. I asked him to tell about his father's life in Belgrade.

From Shahen's memoirs.

"After committing the terrorist act against Taleat my father lived in Serbia for three decades. The Serbian Armenians knew my father very well and frequently visited our house. I remember Vahan Minakhorian. He would come to our house and my father would tell him about the horrors of the Genocide. I was listening to those terrible stories and could not stay indifferent. My father preferred not to speak about what had happened in Berlin. He never imagined himself as a hero. Vahan Minakhorian, a friend of our family, was writing down my father's memoirs.

He published the memoirs of the Genocide and the court trial in Berlin. The book was titled "Memories" and was published in 1956 in Cairo. I want to note something important connected with the notes Vahan was taking from my father's stories. In 1948-1950, before the book "Memories" was published my father was making copies of Vahan's notes.

In 1950, in the times of communist regime in Yugoslavia, our family was planning to move to another country. We moved to Morocco where my daughter Anica was born.

My father thought that the copies of Vahan's notes he had made might arouse suspicion of the customs officers when we were leaving the country. This is why he left the package with my father-in-law hoping that in this way the manuscript would be safer. These notes might have been stolen, we don't know.

My brother Zaven never returned to Serbia. In 1957 he left to San Francisco with my father. I returned to Belgrade together with my wife and daughter".

Shahen tells about his family adding that one of his relatives, Vazgen Tehlirian, visited Bagarich in 1980's trying to find the Tehlirians' family house. Shahen remembers Khachatur, his grandfather. They spread a handful of soil Vazgen Tehlirian brought back from Bagarich on their grandfather's tomb...

Soghomon brought up his sons in the spirit of patriotism and told them to keep the image of Armenia bright in their minds as long as the criminal Turks have seized our sacred places, as long as the historical homeland of the Armenian nation is not unified.

From Shahan's memoirs.

"I remember another story my father was telling. He was telling that before the World War II the Turkish security services sent an inquiry to the Yugoslavian authorities saying that the terrorist Soghomon Tehlirian was living in Belgrade. However, my father had a different last name when he lived in Belgrade. The Yugoslavian police informed Turkey that there was no one by the last name Tehlirian living in the country.

My father was a good hunter. There were many different people in the hunters' association. The head of the Belgrade police was one of them. He had very good relations with my father and respected him a lot. One day the head of the police invites my father for a meeting. Before going for this meeting Soghomon knew that the Turkish authorities were looking for a person with the last name Tehlirian. The head of the police asked my father if he knew this person. My father was a very brave person and he told the police head that Tehlirian was him. He told him the true story of the Genocide. The head of the police listened to Soghomon and advised him to be cautious and not to appear in public at least temporarily till the days of chaos were over.

All Armenians living in Serbia in those times were under supervision because many of them were of the same age as Soghomon and knew him very well. The head of the Belgrade police had of course understood the story my father told him and this story reminded him of the Ottoman rule to which the Serb nation was subjected for 500 years".

Unforgettable memories of the past that are valuable not only for the successors of the Tehlirians but for the entire Armenian nation because this memories are not merely the story of one family but the story of one nation, a nation that awaits with hope and faith the unification of the lost parts of its homeland.

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