

The involvement of *amiras* in these negotiations for unity and discussions was prompted as much by their position as leaders of the *millet*, as by pursuit of governmental policy. During the first two attempts they acted on their own, in defense of what they considered the best interests of the church and nation, but they were cognizant of the tacit approval of their actions by the government. In the aftermath of the third instance, if some of the *amiras* were exiled and even one of them was hanged while another converted to Islam to save his life, the punishments were not meted out as a consequence of the government's disapproval of their policy of unity, but as a result of the upheaval and disturbances by the populace.

The most potent challenge to *amira* leadership came from the *esnafs*. The concept, structure and function of the *esnaf* is beyond the scope of this study. Suffice it to mention that, according to one source, the Armenian craftsmen and merchants of the capital were organized into 65 *esnafs* about the end of the eighteenth century.⁵⁸ As we have noted, the *esnafs* participated, to a limited extent, in the administration of the *millet* affairs. They took part in the general assembly of 1725. But their participation was more a temporary and symbolic victory than a real and abiding one. In general, they rubber stamped the decisions made and the policies charted by the *amiras*.

This passive and acquiescent attitude changed when the *esnafs* began to share in the financial burden of the national institutions. At the General Assembly of 20 November 1831 leaders of various *esnafs* pledged in writing to financially support schools assigned to their sponsorship. As a result of this pledge, the guild of merchants (*tüccar*) supported the school at Top Kapu, that of jewelers financed the school at Langa, while the *esnaf* of tavern-keepers (*meyhanaci*) provided financial assistance for the school at Kanli Kilise.⁵⁹ *Amiras*, however, would not relinquish any power to the *esnafs* of their own volition. Thus, the Advisory Board, elected by the

In the aftermath of the Russo-Turkish war of 1828-1829 and the signing of the Treaty of Adrianople in 1829, the Catholics were granted the status of a separate *millet* on 6 January 1830.

⁵⁸ *Divan Hayots Patmutedan* [Archives of Armenian History]. vol. 10 (Tiflis, 1912), p. 338.

⁵⁹ **Iutiudjian**, "Hishatakner," p. 148.