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THE EVENTS IN ZANGEZUR FROM 1918 TO 1921 AND THE TRANSFER OF ZANGEZUR TO ARMENIA*

(1918-1921 YILLARINDA ZENGEZUR'DA YAŞANAN OLAYLAR
VE ZENGEZUR'UN ERMENİSTAN'A VERİLMESİ)

Ceyda ACİCBE**

Abstract: *The Caucasus is a geography that has preserved its strategic importance throughout history. Many states, acting with economic and political interests, have focused on this geography, especially from the 18th century onwards. In the following centuries, due to the region's political struggle, the Caucasus witnessed many structural changes and transformations. Wars and migrations in the 19th and 20th centuries in this geography paved the way for changes in the political, economic, demographic, and social fields. Following the Tsarist Russian rule, the Soviet Union continued the policies of Tsarist Russia towards the South Caucasus. The conditions created by the policies of these great powers had many consequences. One such consequence was that the transfer of Zangezur to Armenia. The activities of radical-nationalist Armenian groups in and around the Zangezur accelerated the transferring of this region to Armenia. This study aims to review the process of the transfer of Zangezur to Armenia in light of the events in and around Zangezur in 1918-1920.*

Keywords: *The South Caucasus, Zangezur, radical-nationalist groups*

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* ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2525-0658>
Analyst, Center for Eurasian Studies (AVİM), cacicbe@avim.org.tr

Öz: Kafkasya, tarih boyunca stratejik önemini korumuş bir coğrafyadır. Ekonomik ve siyasi çıkarlarla hareket eden pek çok devlet özellikle 18'inci yüzyıldan itibaren bu coğrafyaya ilgi duymaya başlamıştır. Takip eden yüzyıllarda söz konusu coğrafyada meydana gelen siyasi mücadeleler sonucunda Kafkasya çok sayıda yapısal değişim ve dönüşüme tanıklık etmiştir. 19'uncu ve 20'nci yüzyıllarda meydana gelen savaşlar ve göçler, siyasi, ekonomik, demografik ve sosyal alandaki değişimlerin önünü açmıştır. Çarlık Rusya yönetiminin ardından Sovyetler Birliği, Çarlık Rusya'nın Güney Kafkasya'ya yönelik politikalarını sürdürmeye devam etmiştir. Bu büyük güçlerin politikalarının yarattığı koşulların ortaya çıkardığı pek çok sonuç vardır. Bu sonuçlardan biri Zengezur'un Ermenistan'a verilmesidir. Radikal-milliyetçi Ermeni grupların Zengezur ve çevresindeki faaliyetleri, bölgenin Ermenistan'a verilme sürecini hızlandırmıştır. Bu çalışma, Zengezur ve çevresinde 1918-1920 yıllarında yaşanan gelişmeler ışığında Zengezur'un Ermenistan'a verilme sürecini gözden geçirmeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Güney Kafkasya, Zengezur, radikal-milliyetçi gruplar

Introduction

The Caucasus, which has been closely paid attention to by many states throughout history, is a geography that continues to maintain its strategic importance today. For that reason, the whole region has experienced political, economic, and social transformations, and changes over the centuries. Although the frontiers of the Caucasus can be drawn relative to the academic approach, political scientists and geographers predominantly prefer to divide the Caucasus as the North Caucasus and the South Caucasus. Leaving aside the historical, ethnic, and sociological discussions regarding the borders of the region, the northern part of the Greater Caucasus Range including the part of the Russian Federation is called the North Caucasus. The region in the southern part of the mountain range, which is broadly referred to as “Transcaucasia” in the literature, where modern Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan are located, is known as the South Caucasus.

Wars and migrations to the southern part of the region in the 19th and 20th centuries led to political, economic, demographic, and social changes. For centuries, the economic and political interests of great powers have contributed to structural change in the region. For instance, when the Tsarist regime started to dominate the South Caucasus in the 18th century, it put emphasis on the policies considering the geopolitical and strategic importance of the region. The policies of the former regime towards the Caucasus were followed by the Soviet Union as well. The transfer of Zangezur to Armenia in 1921 was a product of the conditions that emerged due to these policies, together with the events that took place in and around Zangezur¹ from 1918 to 1921.

Radical-nationalist Armenian groups started to demand Zangezur and other Azerbaijani territories in the early 1900s, and this paved the way for the territorial disputes between the two nations, as well as the rise of internal disturbances. The territorial disputes between Azerbaijan and Armenia did not stop when both republics declared their independence after the October Revolution of 1917. From 1918 until 1920, atrocities were committed by radical-nationalist Armenian groups under the command of Andranik Ozanian, Drastamat (Dro) Kanayan, and Garegin Nzhdeh against the Turkish-Muslim population living in Baku, Zangezur, Karabakh, Nakhichevan, and other parts of the region. After the Soviet government was established in Azerbaijan and Armenia in 1920, the process of transferring Zangezur to Armenia was completed in 1921. Considering these events in the South Caucasus from 1918 to 1921, the process of transferring Zangezur to Armenia will be comprehensively examined in this study.

1 Zangezur is a mountainous region that completes the natural border between Turkey, Armenia, Iran, and Nakhichevan. By order of the Tsar of Russia Alexander II, Zangezur was included in the administrative units of Elizavetpol (Ganja) Governorate in 1868 and remained part of Elizavetpol until 1917.

A Brief Historical Background of the Developments in the South Caucasus in the 19th and 20th Centuries

The Russian state, which extended control over the Caucasus in the 16th century, maintained its interest in the strategically important South Caucasus through its excursions to the region in the 17th century. In the subsequent century, with the annexation of Crimea during the reign of Catherine II, the Russians continued their “Southward Policy” without slowing down. Russia, which took the Southern Caucasus under its protection by invading Georgia first, and then Baku-Nakhichevan and Yerevan, started to become a crucial power in the region from the early 19th century. Desiring to expand its sovereignty to the south, Russia entered a war with Iran in 1812 and this war ended when the Treaty of Gulistan was concluded between the Russian Empire and Iran in 1813. Russia entered another war with Iran in 1826. To conclude the war, the Treaty of Turkmenchay was signed between the parties. Russia was victorious in both wars, and due to these two agreements, Ganja, Quba, Baku, Shaki, Shirvan, Karabakh, and Talysh Khanate’s control was ceded to Russia.²

In 1827, Russia declared war on the Ottoman Empire following the escalation of tensions between the two sides. According to the Treaty of Edirne (also called the Treaty of Adrianople) signed between the two parties at the end of the war in 1829, the terms favored Russia once again, and Russia further strengthened its position in the South Caucasus. Besides the Russians’ victory, the agreements signed with Iran and the Ottoman Empire had resulted in such a way that they changed the demographic structure of the region, including Zangezur. Together with the 15th article of the Treaty of Turkmenchay, the 13th article of the Treaty of Edirne paved the way for a century-long mass migration process of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire and Iran to the South Caucasus.³ With the Treaty of Turkmenchay, 1300 of the more than 8000 Armenian families from Iran were resettled in Karabakh and Zangezur.⁴ Together with those who came from the Ottoman Empire, it is estimated that there were more than 10,000 Armenian families came to the South Caucasus within three years.⁵ It was aimed to Christianize the region and to create a loyal population there through resettling Armenians near the Iran and Ottoman frontiers, where the Muslim population was densely living. The population and

2 Yusuf Sarıınay (ed.), *Azerbaycan Belgelerinde Ermeni Sorunu (1918-1920)* (Ankara: Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2001), VIII.

3 Nigar Gozalova, “Massacre of The Azerbaijani Turkic Population (1918-1920) According to The Documents of The British Diplomats,” *International Crimes and History*, no. 18 (2017): 49.

4 Nazim Mustafa, “Nahçıvan ile Azerbaycan’ı Birbirinden Ayırmak Üzere Tertiplenen Zengezur’un Ermenistan’a Katılma Süreci,” *Center for Eurasian Studies (AVİM)*, Blog No: 2019/69, December 11, 2019, <https://avim.org.tr/Blog/NAHCIVAN-ILE-AZERBAYCAN-I-BIRBIRINDEN-AYIRMAK-UZERE-TERTIPLENEN-ZENGEZUR-UN-ERMENISTAN-A-KATILMA-SURECI-11-12-2019>

5 Sarıınay, *Azerbaycan Belgelerinde Ermeni Sorunu*, XI.

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migration policies that were instrumentalized by the Russian Empire from the 19th century onwards provide an explanation for the mass resettlement of Armenians onto the South Caucasus lands.⁶ The conflicts between the Armenians, who immigrated to the South Caucasus, and later came under Russian rule and the local people emerged in a very short time, and the Armenians started to demand territories of Azerbaijan.

Besides the cultural and religious differences between Muslims and Armenians, economic and political activities in the region were the factors that increased antagonism between the two peoples. For instance, the Armenian community supported by Russia at that time took advantage of the economic opportunities in the region much faster than Muslims, and soon began to dominate certain economic production fields. Therefore, the economic activities of Muslims were negatively affected, and Muslims were excluded from certain economic spheres. A similar situation was experienced in terms of the labor force. Unlike Muslims, the fact that Armenians were predominantly urbanized workers in highly skilled jobs was among the factors that enabled Armenians to improve their economic conditions.⁷ In addition to the economical dimension, Armenians were also active in the political field contrary to the Muslim community. The radical-nationalist political organizations, spearheaded by the Dashnaksutyun⁸ and acting with the idea of “Great Armenia”, started to demand Azerbaijani lands from the late 19th century onwards. Zangezur, Shusha, Gazakh, and some parts of Ganja were included within the territories of the “Great Armenia” plan, and nationalist Armenian groups carried out terror and propaganda activities in these territories against the Turkish-Muslim people.

The 20th century began with the Russian Revolution of 1905 and this event influenced almost the entire South Caucasus. The revolutionary movements that rose in Russia played a role in escalating the conflicts between the Armenians and Azerbaijanis. Large-scale bloody skirmishes between Armenians and Turkish Muslims took place for the first time following the Russian invasion in 1905-1907. Archive documents signed by the Russians authorities reported clashes in various parts of Azerbaijan and the attacks on the villages around Zangezur by radical-nationalist Armenian groups for the first time in 1905-1906. Nonetheless, Armenians started to revolt against the indigenous people in Nagorno-Karabakh and people in the other settlements in the region and continued their territorial claims on these lands. Likewise,

6 Gozalova, “Massacre of The Azerbaijani Turkic Population,” 49-50.

7 Tadeusz Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan, 1905-1920: The Shaping of A National Identity in A Muslim Community* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 39.

8 The Dashnaksutyun (also known as the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, the Dashnak Party) is a committee founded in Tbilisi in 1890 by the nationalist Armenians to carry out revolutionary activities. In the following years, the committee started to carry out its activities in the form of a political party.

the attempts to seize Zangezur were first carried by the armed forces of the Dashnaktsutyun and Hunchak Party in this period. The events became bloody with the killing of a Muslim in Baku in 1905 by the Dashnaks, spreading to Yerevan, Nakhchivan, and Shusha as of February. As a consequence of these clashes that lasted for about a year, many Armenia and Azerbaijani villages were plundered, and many lives were lost on both sides. It is known that 43 Muslim villages were destroyed in the Zangezur region alone between 1905 and 1906⁹, and local Muslims had to migrate to safer areas.¹⁰

Both the February Revolution of 1917 and the October Revolution (the Bolshevik Revolution) caused serious changes in the history of the South Caucasus as well as in the whole world. The Tsarist regime collapsed in the aftermath of the February Revolution of 1917 and a provisional government was established in its place. Yet another crucial development in September was the declaration of Republic and Vladimir Lenin becoming the head of the new government in Russia. Nevertheless, after the Bolshevik Revolution in October, the provisional government in Russia was overthrown under the leadership of Lenin. Shortly after the revolution, the Bolsheviks gradually strengthened their hand in Baku, and they started to spread the revolution with an intense effort from Baku to the entire South Caucasus. Meanwhile, Lenin appointed Armenian origin Stephan Shaumian, who had experience regarding the conflicts between Armenians and Azerbaijanis in 1905-1906, as “Commissar Extraordinary for the Caucasus” and “the Chairman of the Baku Council of People’s Commissars”. Baku, a city where the Azerbaijani population lived densely, became a center in which the Armenian armed forces started to gather and organize at that time. Therefore, the increasing presence of the Armenian armed forces in the city became a matter of concern for Azerbaijanis.¹¹ Following the October Revolution, while the Soviet rule continued to increase its impact in the South Caucasus, all units in the region tried to act together against this newly emerged threat. During the debates concerning the separation of the South Caucasus from Russia, the Transcaucasian Commissariat, consisting of Georgians, Azerbaijanis, and Armenians, was established on November 28, 1917, and this temporarily established government decided not to recognize the Soviet central government.¹²

Because of the existence of important oil fields in and around Baku, it became a territory in which not only Russia but also Germany and Britain, as well as

9 Mustafa, “Zengezur’un Ermenistan’a Katılma Süreci.”

10 For detailed information regarding the conflict in and around Zangezur after 1905, see Beşir Mustafayev, “Arşiv Kaynaklarına Göre Zengezur Olayları (1905-1920),” *Journal of Qafqaz University-History, Law and Political Sciences*, no. 33 (2012): 32.

11 Fırat Karabayram, *Rusya Federasyonu’nun Güney Kafkasya Politikası* (Ankara: Lalezar Kitabevi, 2007), 46.

12 Karabayram, *Rusya Federasyonu’nun...*, 49.

for various natural causes, the Ottoman Empire was interested in during this period. Therefore, it is worthy to briefly recall the policies of these countries, especially the Ottoman Empire, towards the Caucasus. The Ottoman policies regarding the South Caucasus became apparent after the establishment of the Transcaucasian Commissariat. For instance, relations between the two governments started to be established within the scope of the Trebizond Peace Conference in the early month of 1918. As one of the parties of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk signed on March 3, 1918, the Ottomans made considerable efforts on the South Caucasus administration to convince them to comply with the terms of the treaty. Upon this, the delegation consisting of Georgians, Azerbaijanis, and Armenians fell into a disagreement in a short time, and this process came to an end when the negotiations held for a month produced inconclusive results. Yet, the Turkish side, intending to implement the terms of the treaty, seized Batumi and Ardahan.

The Transcaucasian Democratic Federal Republic, which included Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia, was established on April 22, 1918. Considering the developments after the Trebizond Peace Conferences, this newly emerged government agreed to participate in the conferences planned to be held in Batumi to accept the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. Within the scope of the conferences in Batumi, the first and only plenary session, in which Germans and the North Caucasus delegation also participated, was held on May 11. However, during these meetings, the Transcaucasian Democratic Federal Republic dissolved on May 26, and Georgia declared its independence on the very same day. The following day Azerbaijan, and finally Armenia declared their independence on May 28, 1918. In the light of these developments, the negotiations between the Ottoman Empire and the newly established states continued to be carried out separately. In total, 20 agreements were signed between the parties. According to these agreements, six of which were signed with the Republic of Armenia, Armenia was left with approximately 10,000 square kilometers.

As of August, the Ottoman army moved ahead into the Baku under Soviet rule by being adhering to the agreements concluded between the Ottoman and Azerbaijani states as a consequence of conferences at Batumi, and ended the Russian and Armenian occupation in the region. This period in which the Ottomans were influential in almost the entire Caucasus ended with the Armistice of Mudros dated October 30, 1918. Thus, towards the end of 1919, Baku was occupied by the British forces and the South Caucasus fell under British control. The aftermath of British domination, Azerbaijan, which held its independence for only 23 months, was occupied by the Red Army on April 27, 1920. Soon after, the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic was dissolved and on April 28, 1920, the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic was established.

Before becoming one of the Soviet Socialist Republics in late 1920, Armenia had close relations with Britain until Anton Denikin's armies were defeated by the Red Army. Having territorial disputes with Azerbaijan and Georgia, Armenia's choice to be in alliance with Britain, one of the victorious powers of the First World War, was related to Armenia's belief that Azerbaijan and Georgia would be punished and Armenia's attitude towards these countries would be supported. Moreover, the fact that Armenia did not join the military defense treaty signed between Azerbaijan and Georgia in June 1919 but rather chose to be in alliance with Britain proved that Armenia would follow a different policy from the other two states.¹³ In the context of these historical developments in the South Caucasus, the events that took place in and around Zangezur in the years 1918-1920 and how the process of transferring of Zangezur to Armenia came to end in 1921 will be briefly reviewed in this study.

The Events That Took Place in and around Zangezur in 1918

In 1918, the majority of Zangezur's population consisted of Turkish-Muslim people.¹⁴ However, since the massacres committed against the people of Zangezur carried out by the radical-nationalist Armenian armed forces in 1905 continued in the years 1917-1918 as well, the Turkish-Muslim population in the region began to decrease gradually. Even after Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia gained their independence towards the end of May 1918, the raids of radical-nationalist groups on the Turkish-Muslim villages in Zangezur and the atrocities perpetrated by these groups against the Turkish-Muslim people did not come to an end.

To put an end to the atrocities in Zangezur, a meeting was held between the representatives of the Azerbaijani National Council and the Armenian National Council on May 29, 1918. As a result of this meeting, Fatahi Khan Khoyski¹⁵ stated that the agreement was reached on the condition that Armenia's territorial claims against Azerbaijan and persecutions against the Muslim community

13 Kamil Ağacan, "Kaderdaş Devletler: Azerbaycan-Gürcistan İlişkileri," *Avrasya Dosyası Azerbaycan Özel* 7, no. 1 (2001): 325 ; Gozalova, in her study prepared by using the reports of British diplomats, claims that the government of Armenia believed that the implementation of the "Great Armenia" plans depended especially on aid from Britain and the United States. Furthermore, she emphasizes that while Britain was expected to provide direct military support and political recognition, the US was expected to provide financial aid and adopt a mandate to rule the country (See e.g., Gozalova, "Massacre of The Azerbaijani Turkic Population", 56).

14 Nazim Mustafa states that at the beginning of the twentieth century, there were Muslims living in 314 of the 406 villages in the Zangezur region, while there were Armenians living in 92 villages (See e.g., Mustafa, "Zengezur'un Ermenistan'a Katılma Süreci"). Hacı Fahrettin Seferli states that in 1918, 116 of the 222 households in Zangezur district was consisted of Azerbaijanis (See; Hacı Mustafa Seferli, "Nahçıvan'ın Abluka Durumu Zengezur'un Ermenistan'a Bağışlanması ile Başladı," *Yeni Türkiye*, no. 60 (2014): 2).

15 The first Prime Minister of the independent Azerbaijan Democratic Republic that was established in 1918.

should end. However, with the occupation of Azerbaijani territories by the Armenian forces, this agreement between the two states lost its validity. Andranik Ozanian the commander of the Armenian Special Striking Division moved with around 10,000 men, started to seize the settlements in and around Zangezur by force to expand the borders of Armenia.¹⁶

Andranik, who joined the Hunchak Party in the 1880s and became active in an armed struggle against the Ottoman government, later continued his activities within the scope of the Dashnaksutyun. During the First Balkan War that broke out in 1912, Andranik fought against the Ottomans by following the “bag and baggage”¹⁷ policy based on the idea of removing the Turkish-Muslim population from the Balkans. During the First World War, he led the first Armenian battalion of volunteers within the Tsarist forces and took part in the capture of Van and then Muş.¹⁸ After the October Revolution of 1917, when the Russian army began to withdraw from Eastern Anatolia, the Armenian armed unit was left alone in the fight against the Turkish army. Then, Andranik came to Erzurum on March 2, 1918 and led an unsuccessful defense there. As a result of the counterattack of the Turkish army, the Armenians started to flee from the region. Andranik with his armed forces retreated from Eastern Anatolia and started to occupy the lands up to Zangezur. Moreover, the people of Zangezur were threatened with expulsion from their settlement unless they surrendered to the Armenian government. In retaliation for the rejection of his demands, Andranik destroyed hundreds of Turkish-Muslim villages.¹⁹

On August 15, 1918, the representative of the Azerbaijani government Mammad Yusif Jafarov sent a letter to Arshak Jamalyan, the representative of the Armenian government in Georgia, stating that part of the Zangezur region and the Shusha road was seized by Andranik and the armed forces under his command. In the response letter he sent on behalf of the Armenian government on August 17, Jamalyan stated that these forces were excluded from the Armenian national army since Andranik and his forces did not recognize and obey the authority of the Republic of Armenia. With this decision, the Yerevan government declared that they had no control over Andranik and therefore the government could not be held responsible for his activities.²⁰ After the First

16 Mustafa, “Zengezur’un Ermenistan’a Katılma Süreci.”

17 F. Begüm Yıldızeli, within the framework of the common idea of many authors, explains that this idea, which belongs to William E. Gladstone, who was the prime minister in Britain for four terms, as “sending the Turks with all their belongings from Europe to where they came from”. (For more detail see: F. Begüm Yıldızeli, “Doğu Sorunu Perspektifinden William E. Gladstone ve Ermeniler,” in *Türk-Ermeni Uyuşmazlığı Üzerine Ömer Engin Lütem Konferansları 2019*, ed. Alev Kılıç (Ankara: Terazi Yayıncılık, 2020), 2).

18 Pat Walsh, “When T. P. O’Connor Met General Andranik,” *DrPatWalsh.com*, July 29, 2018, <https://drpatwalsh.com/2018/07/29/when-t-p-oconnor-met-general-andranik/>

19 Mustafa, “Zengezur’un Ermenistan’a Katılma Süreci”.

20 Mustafa, “Zengezur’un Ermenistan’a Katılma Süreci”.

World War, with the signing of the Armistice of Mudros, the Turkish armies in the South Caucasus had to withdraw from the region. This paved the way for Andranik and his forces to act in line with their ambitions in Zangezur. One month after the agreement, Andranik declared himself the commander of the armed groups in Zangezur. Nevertheless, the atrocities committed by these armed forces in Azerbaijan were stopped by the British forces.²¹

All in all, the events that took place from March to May in 1918, 115 Muslim villages in Zangezur were destroyed by the armed Dashnaks under the command of Andranik. 3257 men, 2276 women, and 2196 children were killed in the region; 1060 men, 794 women, and 485 children were critically injured and 10,000 Azerbaijanis were deported.²² In addition to these, the villagers' economic damage was estimated at 1 billion manats.²³

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As of February Andranik, continued his attacks and he occupied the mountainous part of the Jabrayil and Shusha districts, as well as the lands from Zangezur to Xudaferin. To that end, the Azerbaijani government took action to drive Andranik away from Zangezur. Thanks to the intense efforts of the Azerbaijani government, the commander of the British troop in the South Caucasus, General William Thomson interceded and as a result, it was announced that Andranik would move to Armenia with his armed forces. Upon this, the Armenians held the "Sisian and Zangezur Congress" on April 2, and at the congress a decision was made for Andranik to withdraw from Zangezur and for him to depart for Tbilisi. However, after Andranik's withdrawal, the atrocities in Zangezur did not come to an end, and Dro and Nzhdeh took his place.²⁴

Another person who played a role in the events that took place in and around Zangezur in 1919 was Colonel William N. Haskell, who was appointed High

21 According to Pat Walsh, when the geopolitical reasons of the time were considered, it is possible to claim that the prevention of Andranik's activities in Azerbaijan by the British forces was associated with the British need for a buffer state against the Bolsheviks (See e.g., Walsh, "O'Connor Met General Andranik").

22 Thomas De Waal, *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan Through Peace and War* (New York University Press, 2003), 80 ; Nigar Gozalova states that in 1918, 7729 Azerbaijani Turks were killed in Zangezur and 50,000 people left Zangezur and became refugees (Gozalova, "Massacre of The Azerbaijani Turkic Population", 59).

23 Ayten Mustafayeva, *The Facts of The Crimes Committed by Armenian Bandit and Terrorist Organizations on The Territory of Azerbaijan* (Bakü, 2011), 36.

24 Mustafa, "Zengezur'un Ermenistan'a Katılma Süreci" ; Gozalova states that Britain's High Commissioner in the Caucasus Oliver Wardrop wrote in a report he sent to the British Foreign Office that Andranik had distributed all the weapons he had received from British Army Major Gibbon among Armenian detachments (See e.g., Gozalova, "Massacre of The Azerbaijani Turkic Population," 64).

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Commissioner to Armenia, representing the US, Britain, France, and Italy. Considering Haskell's early stance regarding the territorial claims of Armenians, it would not be wrong to argue that he encouraged them about those unfair claims. However, it is also true that he changed his attitude after the meeting with the Prime Minister Nasib Yusifbeyli and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan Democratic Republic in 1919. In other words, he started to support the idea that Zangezur and Karabakh were an integral part of Azerbaijan. Armenians, on the other hand, felt threatened because they thought that the Azerbaijani government would take control in Zangezur again. About a month after these developments, the Prime Minister of Armenia Alexander Khatisian sent an urgent telegram to the Armenian delegations at the Paris Peace Conference and reported that, by taking control of Zangezur, Azerbaijan was planning to establish contact with Turkey. Moreover, the telegram contained his explanations that several military operations had been started as a consequence of secret military agreements signed between the two states.²⁵ Unsurprisingly, the Azerbaijani government formed a special team and started military operations to restore order in and around Zangezur. Yet, the military operation called "Dığ" failed.²⁶ Following this operation, the representatives of Azerbaijani, Georgian, and Armenian government came together in Tbilisi within the scope of the peace conference and an agreement was reached on solving all problems only through peaceful ways. Despite the agreement, the Armenian side continued to occupy the Turkish-Muslim villages in Zangezur.²⁷ On December 7, it was stated by the Dashnaksutyun that Zangezur was an integral part of Armenia and that they were ready to take every measure necessary to bring these lands under the control of the Armenians.²⁸

In the context of the events that took place in and around Zangezur in 1919, it is possible to argue that the Armenians acted to realize the idea of the "Great

25 Mustafa, "Zengezur'un Ermenistan'a Katılma Süreci".

26 Nazim Mustafa states that the Azerbaijani government's military units under the command of Zangezur and Karabakh governor Khosrow Sultanov were included in the operation to ensure order and public security in Zangezur (See e.g., Mustafa, "Zengezur'un Ermenistan'a Katılma Süreci", 5). In a publication of "Nakhijevan" Institute of Canada, it is stated that through the mediation of the Dashnaksutyun, Nzhdeh was sent to Zangezur along with Ghazar Kocharian and Nzhdeh entered Zangezur with a group of 180 troops armed with bayonets (See; *Selected Works of Garegin Nzhdeh*, trans. Eduard L. Danielyan (Canada: Nakhijevan Institute of Canada, 2011), 138-139).

27 Hacı Fahrettin Seferli emphasizes that the Azerbaijani government had withdrawn its troops in Zangezur by adhering to an agreement consisting of 5 articles signed with Armenia in Tbilisi, however, on the contrary, the Armenian side did not send additional troops to Zangezur (See e.g., Seferli, "Zengezur'un Ermenistan'a Bağışlanması", 2). Gozalova states that in a report of December 3, 1919, Britain's High Commissioner in the Caucasus, Sir Oliver Wardrop mentioned that the Prime Minister of ADR informed him that, despite the agreement, the Armenian government was continuing military operations in Zangezur and had destroyed nine villages. In addition to that, Gozalova mentions that in a report of Wardrop sent the next day, he noted that the massacre of hundreds and the destruction of fifteen villages in Zangezur and Deralagauz (See e.g., Gozalova, "Massacre of The Azerbaijani Turkic Population", 62).

28 Mustafa, "Zengezur'un Ermenistan'a Katılma Süreci".

Armenia”, which was expressed in an international conference for the first time and later accepted by the Dashnak Parliament on 28 May 1919.

The Events That Took Place in and around Zangezur in 1920

The Azerbaijani lands, which became vulnerable to the Russian conquest, were occupied on April 27, 1920. Hence, Azerbaijan’s independence was lost after 23 months and the Soviet rule was established in Azerbaijan on April 28. The arrival of Soviet forces seriously worried the Armenians who took control of a significant part of Zangezur by seizing 51 more villages. Predictably, the first move that the Soviet government did was sending a note to the Armenians government for withdrawal of the Armenians units from Karabakh and Zangezur. On the very same day, a telegram was sent to the People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union Georgy Chicherin by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia. In the telegram, it was noted that the Red Army was approaching towards Karabakh and Zangezur to unite with Turkey. In another telegram sent by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan on 3 May, it was stated that Karabakh and Zangezur were integral parts of Armenia. In addition, it was claimed that Zangezur was never under Azerbaijan’s rule and it was ruled by the Armenian National Council.

As a result of insufficient support from Russian circles related to the liberation of Zangezur, Nakhchivan, and Karabakh, the Azerbaijan Revolutionary Committee decided to establish an emergency commission in Karabakh and Zangezur districts with a decree dated May 18, 1920. In the following days, Sergo Ordzhonikidze came to control the situation in Karabakh and Zangezur. In the light of his observation in the region, he informed Chicherin on June 19 that the people felt a belonging to the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic.²⁹ In a period in which the telegram traffic was intense, the chairman of the Azerbaijan Revolutionary Committee Nariman Narimanov sent a telegram to the members of the Communist Party. In his message, he stated that Zangezur and Karabakh should remain within the borders of Azerbaijan. However, Chicherin disagreed with Narimanov and interpreted his effort as his desire for the controversial regions to be captured by the intervention of Russia and given to Azerbaijan.³⁰ At the end of the negotiations between Soviet Russia and Armenia in May and June, it was understood that the Armenians would not accept to voluntarily give the territories to Russia, except for Karabakh. All in all, in a telegram sent by Sergo Ordzhonikidze and Boris Legran to Chicherin on July 14, it was stated that Karabakh was left to Azerbaijan, whereas the remaining parts to Armenia.

29 Mustafa, “Zengezur’un Ermenistan’a Katılma Süreci”.

30 Mustafa, “Zengezur’un Ermenistan’a Katılma Süreci”.

Meanwhile, deciding to liberate Zangezur and establish Soviet power there, Red Army Commander Alexander Todorsky entered Nakhichevan on July 28. Dro and Nzhdeh attacked the Bolshevik troops and captured Goris. However, through the 11th Army's counterattack, Dro, Nzhdeh, and their units were deported. Thus, Sisian, Qafan, and Goris were liberated, and a peace agreement was signed between Russian and Dashnak Armenians on August 10. Yet, the agreement did not solve the problem of where the territories occupied by Soviet forces belonged to. The Armenian government announced that the agreement was not official, as the Entente States were skeptical about the agreement. Disregarding this declaration of his government, the armed forces under the command of General Dro and Nzhdeh attacked Zangezur once again. In September, Nzhdeh declared himself the commander of all Armenian armed units in Zangezur.

The deadlock regarding the Zangezur's current situation continued until the Soviet rule was established in Armenia on November 29, 1920. Following the decision on the establishment of the Soviet rule in Armenia, the Armenian Revolutionary Committee decided that Zangezur would be transferred to Soviet Armenia and the people in the mountainous part of Karabakh would have the right to self-determination. In December, Nariman Narimanov announced at a meeting that the people of Nagorno-Karabakh were given the right to self-determination, on the other hand, all military operations in Zangezur ended and the Soviet Azerbaijani army was removed from the region.³¹ As a consequence of military and political agreement signed between the representatives of Soviet Russia and the Armenians including Dro on December 2, 1920, it was decided that in return for the Sovietization of Armenia, Russia should give Zangezur, Qazakh, and former Yerevan Provinces to Armenia without any hesitation. Following this, with his troops, Nzhdeh seized the two regions of Zangezur.³²

31 Nazim Mustafa claims that in a telegram sent by Ordzhonikidze to Lenin and Joseph Stalin on December 2, he changed Narimanov's statement and made another statement that Azerbaijan announced that Nakhichevan, Zangezur, and Nagorno-Karabakh were given to Soviet Armenia (See e.g., Mustafa, "Zengezur'un Ermenistan'a Katılma Süreci", 9). On the other hand, Svante Cornell states that this statement of the Azerbaijan Revolutionary Committee concerning the transfer of Karabakh, Zangezur, and Nakhichevan to Armenia was made under Soviet pressure (See; Svante E. Cornell, "Turkey and the conflict in Nagorno Karabakh: a delicate balance", *Middle Eastern Studies* 34, no. 1 (1998): 53, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00263209808701209>). In addition to that, Hacı Fahrettin Seferli asserts that Narimanov was opposed to the transferring of Zangezur and Nakhchivan to Armenia, and in his letter to Lenin, it was emphasized that this concession to Armenia was a huge mistake (See e.g., "Zengezur'un Ermenistan'a Bağışlanması", 3).

32 Nazim Mustafa states that on December 25, 1920, Nzhdeh established the "Self-governing Siunik" (See e.g., Mustafa, "Zengezur'un Ermenistan'a Katılma Süreci", 10). In a book published by the "Nakhijevan" Institute of Canada, it is stated that at the All National Armenian Congress held in the Tatev Monastery, Zangezur was proclaimed "Mountainous Armenia" as long as the political situation would allow it to join with the rest of the Armenian state and Nzhdeh was recognized as the "Commander-in-Chief of Siunik" (See e.g., *Selected Works of Garegin Nzhdeh*, 58).

The Process of Transferring of Zangezur to Armenia was Completed in 1921

In the early 1921, Dashnaks revolted against the Soviet government in Armenia and on February 18, they entered Yerevan. As a consequence of revolt, the Bolsheviks and the Red Army retreated. However, the Armenian rule in Yerevan did not last long. Yerevan was recaptured by the Bolsheviks on April 2 and the Dashnak armed forces were sent to Zangezur. Considering the regions being controlled by Nzhdeh in Zangezur as an obstacle between Yerevan and Karabakh, the Soviet Armenian administration started to negotiate with the “Mountainous Armenia” for the unification of Upper Zangezur with Armenia.³³ On April 21, 1921, Nzhdeh accepted the transferring of Zangezur to Armenia on the condition that Nagorno-Karabakh should unified with Armenia. However, on July 2, 1921, the 11th Army carried out new military operations in the region, and as a consequence of these operations, with his units, Nzhdeh had to flee to Iran on July 9.³⁴



Map 1) Zangezur, whose borders are highlighted in the red map above, is a strategically important region for Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Iran. Today, it is a province located within the borders of Armenia. By the transferring of Zangezur to Armenia in 1921, Azerbaijan’s access to Nakhichevan, and thus to Turkey, was physically cut off. Moreover, Zangezur subsequently started to act as a corridor that would facilitate access between Armenia and Iran.

33 Zakharov and Law state that because Nzhdeh led the defense of Zangezur in 1921, this paved the way for the purging and expulsion of the Turkish-Muslim minority in the region (See Nikolay Zakharov ve Ian Law, *Post-Soviet Racisms* (United Kingdom: Springer, 2017), 105-106).

34 Nzhdeh was tried by the Dashnaksutyun in Tabriz and condemned for the surrender of “Siunik” to the Bolsheviks. Later, he was expelled from the Dashnaksutyun (See e.g., *Selected Works of Garegin Nzhdeh*, 141).

Conclusion

The strategic foresight of Britain about Zangezur enabling the uninterrupted connection between Azerbaijan and Turkey that would have paved the way for Turkey's access to the Turkish community in Central Asia (part of the Turkic world) was taken notice by the Soviet administration and a wedge was thus created between Turkey and Azerbaijan, as well as Turkey and the Turkic world.³⁵ On August 31, 1921, Zangezur was divided into two parts, east and west, and the western part of Zangezur was administratively assigned to Armenia as the 9th district.

In 1988, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict broke out between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and Armenians raided Azerbaijani lands. In 1991-1994, the battles between the two country intensified and the armed forces of Armenia occupied the seven regions surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh. All in all, part of the Azerbaijani territories -the eastern part of Zangezur- fell under the control of the Armenian armed forces and more than 150 thousand people were displaced.

As in the case of Zangezur, considering the geopolitical interests, it is possible to see the policy followed by Tsarist Russia was also followed similarly in the Soviet period. Although it cannot be regarded as a single cause, it would not be wrong to argue that the transfer of Zangezur to Armenia in 1921 was a product of that policy aiming at the creation an obstacle in the establishment of relations between Azerbaijan and the rest of the Turkic world.

35 Within the scope of this widely shared opinion, Swietochowski and Collins claim that although Zangezur was a part of Azerbaijan, through the regulations that defined the border between Azerbaijan and Armenian SSR, Zangezur was transferred to Armenia and thus Moscow was able to prevent access between Azerbaijan and Turkey (See; Tadeusz Swietochowski and Brian C. Collins, *Historical Dictionary of Azerbaijan* (Scarecrow Press, 1999), 134). In addition to that, Hacı Fahrettin Seferli argues that the transfer of a large part of Zangezur to Armenia contrary to international law by the "Soviet administration" was meant by physically cut off Nakhichevan from Azerbaijan in order to cut the ties between Azerbaijan and Turkey (See e.g., "Zengezur'un Ermenistan'a Bağışlanması," 6).

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