



Akademik Tarih ve Düşünce Dergisi

Academic Journal of History and Idea

ISSN: 2148-2292

10 (6) 2023

<https://doi.org/10.46868/atdd.2023>.

Araştırma Makalesi | Research Article

Geliş tarihi | Received : 11.10.2023

Kabul tarihi | Accepted: 30.11.2023

Yayın tarihi | Published : 25.12.2023

**Sehran Safarov**

<https://orcid.org/0009-0000-4040-2969>

Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences, Institute of History named after A.A.Bakikhanov, Azerbaijan, sehran.safarov@mail.ru

*Atf Künyesi | Citation Info*

Safarov, S. (2023). Relations of the Azerbaijan USSR with Great Britain after the Soviet Occupation. *Akademik Tarih ve Düşünce Dergisi*, 10 (6), 2562-2569.

## **Relations of the Azerbaijan USSR with Great Britain after the Soviet Occupation**

### **Abstract**

*The article deals with the relations of Azerbaijan with the United Kingdom after the Soviet occupation. The Soviet government in Azerbaijan, which emerged as a result of the April occupation, radically changed the system of diplomatic relations that existed during the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic. Relations between the two countries began to deteriorate shortly after the new government saw Britain as an enemy of the working class and the peasantry. One of the main factors in the breakdown of relations was the arrest of foreign nationals in Soviet Azerbaijan, including representatives of the United Kingdom, and the failure to ensure the interests of Britain in the subsequent stages. The article examines the further development of Azerbaijan's relations with the United Kingdom and the impact of the Genoa Conference on these relations.*

**Keywords:** Soviet power, April coup, military mission, Azerbaijan People's Republic, Great Britain, Soviet Russia

## **Sovyet İşgali Sonrasında Azerbaycan SSCB'nin Büyük Britanya ile İlişkileri**

### **Öz**

*Bu makale, Sovyet işgali sonrasında Azerbaycan'ın Birleşik Krallık ile ilişkilerini ele almaktadır. Nisan işgalinin bir sonucu olarak Azerbaycan'da ortaya çıkan Sovyet hükümeti, Azerbaycan Demokratik Cumhuriyeti döneminde var olan diplomatik ilişkiler sistemini kökten değiştirdi. İki ülke arasındaki ilişkiler, yeni hükümetin İngiltere'yi işçi sınıfı ve köylülüğün düşmanı olarak görmesinden kısa bir süre sonra bozulmaya başladı. İlişkilerin bozulmasındaki ana faktörlerden biri, Sovyet Azerbaycan'ında Birleşik Krallık temsilcileri de dahil olmak üzere yabancı uyrukluların tutuklanması ve sonraki*

*aşamalarda İngiltere'nin çıkarlarının sağlanamamasıydı. Makale, Azerbaycan'ın Birleşik Krallık ile ilişkilerinin daha sonraki gelişimini ve Cenova Konferansı'nun bu ilişkiler üzerindeki etkisini incelemektedir.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Sovyet iktidarı, Nisan darbesi, askeri misyon, Azerbaycan Halk Cumhuriyeti, Büyük Britanya, Sovyet Rusya*

### **Introduction**

The Soviet government that emerged in Azerbaijan with the April occupation radically changed the system of diplomatic relations that existed during the Popular Front. Azerbaijan's former allies have become enemies of the new government. The new government called Britain "the enemy of the working class and the peasantry," "the great protector of the world's colonial powers," and a great supporter of the anti-Soviet and anti-Soviet forces against the Soviet regime. However, despite all this, a number of countries have already begun to recognize the Soviet government in Azerbaijan (Baykara, 1975, p. 184).

Diplomatic missions of several foreign countries were already operating in Azerbaijan. Among them was the British Vice-Consul Tevelk. However, these relations began to deteriorate after a while. The main reason for this was the arrest of foreign representatives in Azerbaijan. The total number of foreign diplomats, military, economic and trade representatives arrested in Baku during the April coup was about 400. At that time, 32 British officers, including the first Lord of the British Navy Admiral B. Fraser, who was sent from Istanbul to Anzali via Tbilisi-Baku, were among those arrested. The detainees were kept in very poor conditions. 400 people, about 110 square meters. Women and men had to wait in line for hours at a water tap located in an area of 1,500 square meters. They were given one pound of black bread per person per day, and although food was allowed to be imported, it was often appropriated by security guards (Hasanov, 1996, p. 68). The Bolshevik control of the British military mission and the British military envoy to Baku, Major Daly, caused great concern in London. In addition, the British ambassador to Paris was instructed to issue visas to Azerbaijani representatives in Paris to stay in France until the issue of the British military mission in Baku is resolved by the French Foreign Ministry. However, the French side protested, saying that it was impossible to comply with the request of the British government. Because the Azerbaijani representatives in Paris were representatives of the government recognized by the allies, they have nothing to do with the Bolsheviks. The British military mission was urgently sent to Anzali due to the threat to the British navy and Denikin's ships pushed south of the Caspian Sea. In an extensive report to the British Ministry of War on January 7, 1921, General George Mlyn, the Allied Commander-in-Chief of the Black Sea Army, wrote: " During a meeting with P. Duroy, an agent of the French

Consulate in Baku, the head of the Political Service Department of the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs of the Azerbaijani SSR secretly told him that the Russians were arresting French and other diplomats in order to discredit Azerbaijan from allies ”(Makarov, 1884, p. 24). The first strong reaction to the arrest of British officers in Baku was voiced in the British Parliament on June 9, 1920 by the First Lord of the Kingdom, Long.

After receiving international guarantees for the occupation of Azerbaijan, Soviet Russia took practical steps and neutralized almost all foreign forces that could defend the Republic of Azerbaijan during the occupation. This was one of the primary reasons why the occupation of Azerbaijan by Soviet Russia was not so strongly protested in the international arena. It was as a result of Krasin's talks in London that even after the Soviet Union, Lord Curzon attached great importance to the transportation of oil from Baku through the port of Batumi. The British Oil Department believed that despite the Bolshevik occupation of Baku, trade would continue and even increase its turnover (Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, 2011, p.75). All this indicates that the United Kingdom continued its dual policy during the Soviet era in Azerbaijan, as well as during the Popular Front. Thus, in British foreign policy, it was known that secret talks were held with Soviet Russia, and the British had a good attitude to the restoration of Russia in 1914. Former Prime Minister of the Republic of Georgia Noah Jordan later wrote in a book published in Paris: "It is no secret to the world that Soviet Russia was incited by British Prime Minister Lloyd George to occupy the lands of the South Caucasus republics. This secret came from Chicherin's tongue and the whole world felt it” (Huseynov, 1989). On the other hand, Lloyd George, the Soviet foreign trade commissioner who came to London, promised Krasina on behalf of the Royal Government that they would not interfere in the affairs of the Caucasus. Thus, "Russia's interest in the destruction of Russia's borders in 1914, especially Britain, has increased. Therefore, the occupation of Azerbaijan by the Bolsheviks was met with great silence in the world ” (Hasanov, 1996, p. 74). Samedaga Agamalioglu rightly noted that, “Azerbaijan's forehead was determined not by the surface of the earth, but by bottom. As long as this oil stands here, we will rule over us, not him. Our share of the oil is enough to fill a control lamp. Life in Russia is regulated by this oil. What a pity that the fate of the two countries is glued together by this black mud. Therefore, there is no land issue for us, there is an oil issue ” (Johnston, 1930, p. 74). On September 6, the British representative in Tbilissi (Georgia) appealed to the Azerbaijani People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs to improve the situation of detained British citizens. On September 12, Azerbaijani People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs Mirza Davud Huseynov had a wide-ranging conversation with the British representative in Tbilisi H. Luke. During the conversation, H. Luke told Huseynova that the arrest in Baku of

British citizens who were not at war with Azerbaijan caused deep regret in the British government and the population. Interestingly, during this conversation, the Azerbaijani side offered the British representative to exchange the British citizens arrested in Azerbaijan with the exiled Kemalists in Malta. Surprised by this proposal, Luke said that there was only one Azerbaijani among those people. Huseynov even received extensive information from a British employee about the situation in Maltese exile. In return, Luke said that the conditions of detention of British citizens were very difficult, and Huseynov ironically replied, "Unfortunately, we do not have an island like Malta" (Hasanov, 1996, p.73). The issue was caused not only by Azerbaijan, but also by disputes between Britain and Soviet Russia. At that time, Nariman Narimanov said in a telegram to Chicherin that "in the current situation, it is impossible to exchange British captives with Kamalists. It would be good to replace them with prisoners from all parts of the former Russian Empire in British hands". Meanwhile, the letter of support sent to Kerzon by AM Topchubashov was highly appreciated by England. In that letter, Topchubashov said that what happened in Baku was a "traditional Bolshevik fabrication"

On the other hand, Curzon began to determine the number of Russians captured by the British and suggested that they be taken from Egypt to Istanbul and from there to Odessa, and that the Azerbaijani side hand over the imprisoned British to the British mission in Tbilissi (Georgia). Thus, British diplomats, soldiers and other detainees were released in October 1920 (Hasanov, 1996, p. 75). Soviet Azerbaijan and Great Britain later met during a conference in Genoa. Nariman Narimanov was among the Soviet delegation that left for Genoa on March 31, 1922. The Soviet representatives, who arrived in Genoa on April 6, faced the Caucasus issue as the first problem (Ioffe, 1922, p. 56). As the propaganda campaign of the Caucasian immigrant governments against the Soviet government's policy in Italy and other European countries became widespread, the Soviet representatives considered it necessary to take various steps against them. For this purpose, a member of the Soviet delegation N.Narimanov addressed an open letter to Ali Mardan bey Topchubashov, Alexander Khatsov and Irakli Sereteli, who considered themselves the legal representatives of the South Caucasus republics in Europe during the conference. Narimanov's appeal was full of harsh criticism and ironic remarks. For example, Narimanov wrote in his letter: "Dear Sirs, On the eve of the opening of the Genoa Conference, you knock on the door of Poincaré and Lloyd George and declare that the only legal representatives of the South Caucasus republics are the parties you and you are members of. I must disappoint your past and present guardians who want to see you and the people of the South Caucasus directly for their own interests ... " (Hasanov, 1996, p. 34).

The Genoa Conference of European States, chaired by Italian Prime Minister Luici Facto, opened on April 10, 1922, at 3:00 p.m. The conference was attended by delegations from 29 countries, including 34 countries, including the British dominions. As the conference was dedicated to European issues, the United States did not officially participate in the conference. This conference was the first major and international conference to cover the current situation in Europe after the First World War. The Soviet side had high hopes for this conference and wanted to achieve a diplomatic success in its own name. Mehdiyev, a participant in the Paris conference and a political figure of the Popular Front Party, writes about the conference and its Azerbaijani representatives: "The most important political figures of European countries came to Genoa. Here, as Lloyd George, a sharp-eyed old man, is seen, the abus-faced Frenchman Bartu, who wears spectacles, and the Italian men, Facto, Ratenau, one of the most elegantly dressed men at the conference, and Virta, one of Germany's most important figures, are usually more than a friend, Chicherin in the guise of a lord and a fat member of the Ankara Grand National Assembly, Jalaeddin Arif Bey, The Georgian representative was Shengeli and others. As for Azerbaijan, it is also represented by the Azerbaijani delegation, on the other hand, they wanted to be represented in the person of the leader of the Azerbaijani Bolsheviks, Nariman Bey. And he wore a hat to show that he was Azerbaijani ” (Huseynov, 1989). In an attempt to resolve the crisis at the conference, British Prime Minister Lloyd George spoke on terms that were somewhat appropriate for the Russian Bolsheviks. However, the importance of the conference for Azerbaijan was a matter of representatives. On the opening day of the conference, a memorandum was submitted to the conference on April 10 on behalf of the national governments of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia with the assistance of the French delegation. Ali Mardan bey Topchubashov and Mir Yagub Mehdiyev also arrived in Genoa for the conference on behalf of the Azerbaijani national government. Issues related to Baku oil were also on the agenda at the conference. It was noteworthy that France was more advanced than Britain in this matter. Thus, the Prime Minister of France Poincaré expressed the rights of the occupied national governments in the words “We intend to continue our successful oil policy in Baku”. Nariman Narimanov received information from the Azerbaijani ambassador to Ankara Ibrahim Abilov that the Azerbaijani delegation received 3.5 million francs from the French government to attend the conference.

Baku oil, which has plagued the world since the 1890s, fell to its lowest level in 1920 and the following year. Thus, 2.915 million tons of oil was extracted in Baku in 1920, and 2.457 million tons in 1921. Baku oil was the subject of serious discussion at the conference, as this issue was on the agenda not only of the states, but also of the oil magnates and companies that

lost all their rights with the occupation of the Bolsheviks. Moreover, they had extensive information (Sultanov, 2010, p. 53). In the first days of the Genoa conference, a large fire in the Baku oil fields began to be widely propagandized by Azerbaijani political immigrants in the British media. The London-based "Azerbaijan Information Bureau" reported on the fact that protests against the Soviet government had intensified in Azerbaijan and that oil fields around Baku had been set on fire. In talks with British financial and industrial circles, representatives of the Azerbaijani national government stated that "the Azerbaijani nation will never agree to the concession of Baku oil by the Bolsheviks." The British newspaper *The Times* rightly wrote about Baku oil, which marked the Genoa conference: "These days the press is full of oil" (Ismail, 2010, p. 43). At a time when disputes over Baku oil were heating up, Narimanov's expression "concession" without the consent of the Soviet delegation drew attention. Thus, Narimanov said, "We have oil, we can produce it, we can give it to the concession," because he felt like the legal owner of Azerbaijan. However, Chicherin objected to this statement, saying that the delegation visiting Genoa was not authorized to express an opinion on the "concession".

Another issue at the Genoa conference was between Chicherin and Lloyd George. Chicherin's portrayal of the representatives of the occupied national governments as "allies" of Soviet Russia provoked a strong reaction from Lloyd George. The British Prime Minister's "acceptance of these countries as" Soviet republics "occupied by the Bolsheviks, not as allies of Soviet Russia" was welcomed by the representatives of the Genoa Peace Conference (Documents of USSR Foreign Policy, 1959, p. 261). The relations between the representative of Soviet Azerbaijan N.Narimanov and the British Prime Minister Lloyd George at the Genoa Conference also attracted attention. Thus, Narimanov often made claims to Lloyd George in Eastern politics. Narimanov called the British Prime Minister the greatest politician in Europe and the world: "Lloyd George is undoubtedly a smart man. But it is a question of what purpose he uses his mind and how. He has seriously influenced all the events in European life and wants to somehow overcome the aggravated issues in order to avert the threat of a new war. He understands that a new war will bring complete ruin to Europe, and who knows what else will happen there. After all, Lloyd George is also a representative of the bourgeoisie, and therefore can not but defend its interests " (Hasanli, 2012, p. 519). According to Narimanov at the Genoa conference, the result was explained in the form of 1) interference in the internal affairs of Soviet Russia, 2) to take what is possible, but not to give anything. The meeting, scheduled for April 14, was postponed at the request of the British delegation, which knew in advance of the negative reaction of Soviet Russia to the memorandum to be issued at the conference. At that time, Lloyd George, as well as his French and Italian counterparts, held extensive talks with the

Soviet delegation. During the negotiations, they “wanted to return the property of former entrepreneurs and creditors in Russia, to persuade the Bolsheviks to pay off Russia's past debts. According to them, the debt owed by the Bolsheviks was 18 billion gold coins ” (Materials of the Genoese Conference, 1922, p. 167). However, the Soviet delegation categorically rejected all these proposals.

The Genoa Conference did not produce an effective result for Soviet Azerbaijan, especially in its relations with Britain, but it did shape the view that European states should reconcile with the Soviet reality in Azerbaijan. In this regard, the Genoa Conference drew attention in international politics, in terms of highlighting the identity of Soviet Azerbaijan. Narimanov writes in this regard: “The second plenary session of the Genoa Conference is being held today (May 3). As before, there is another ceremony. We enter the hall at the end. Now the attitude of the representatives to us is completely different. There is no sign of previous malice. The sarcastic remarks at the first meeting are no longer felt. When our speakers speak, the previous roar is no longer heard in the hall. Everyone smiles sincerely and compliments us. They listen to our voice openly and with the necessary seriousness ” (Hasanli, 2012, p. 527).

### **Conclusion**

In particular, the fact that Baku was the world's largest oil-producing region in the last years of the 19th century and the first year of the 20th century increased the world's interest and attention to Azerbaijan. Under such conditions, it would be unthinkable for Azerbaijan to avoid British interests. It was from those years that England's tendencies to take possession of Azerbaijan, especially Baku, began to strengthen. Unfortunately, Great Britain's interests in Azerbaijan did not go beyond its own economic-political and even colonial interests. In these years, England was only able to reach the level of a political partner compared to previous years during the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic. Thus, as a result, after the Soviet occupation, relations between Soviet Azerbaijan and the United Kingdom continued, and these relations continue at a high level with the independent Republic of Azerbaijan.

### **References**

Baykara, H. (1975). *History of the Struggle for Independence of Azerbaijan*, Istanbul.

Hasanov, J. (1996). Intensification of the struggle over Baku oil on the eve of the end of the First World War. *Proceedings of the First International Conference on the History of the Azerbaijani Oil Industry*, Houston.

Makarov, A. (1884). *Transcaucasia in trade terms*. Moscow.

Azerbaijan Democratic Republic. Archival documents of Great Britain. Compiled by N.A. Maxwell (2011). Baku.

Huseynov, A. N. Narimanov's visit to Genoa. (1989, 8 July). *Communist*.

Johnston, S. H. (1930). *A History of the Colonization of Africa by Alien Races*. Cambridge.

Ioffe, A. (1922). *Genoese Conference*. Moscow.

Sultanov, Ch. (2010). *Political and economic studies in the South Caucasus* (chronicle from 1850 to 2010), Baku.

Ismail, M. (2010). *Foreign Policy of Azerbaijan*. (Part 2). Baku.

*Documents of USSR Foreign Policy* (1959). State Political Publishing House (Vol. I). Moscow.

Hasanli J. (2012). *Foreign Policy of Azerbaijan in the Soviet Period (1920-1939)*. Adiloglu.

Materials of the Genoese Conference (1922). (Preparation. Reports of meetings, work of the commission, diplomatic registry, etc.). Moscow