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# ON THE LEVEL OF HISTORICAL TRUTHS: THE “ARMENIAN QUESTION” AFTER THE POTSDAM CONFERENCE

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POTSDAM KONFERANSI SONRASINDA “ERMENİ MESELESİ”)

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**Abstract:** *The object of this research is to emphasize the fact that the Russian Empire and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) leadership, which purposefully continued the imperial policy of the Russian Empire in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, used the “Armenian card” from time to time to make groundless territorial claims against Turkey. After the victory over Hitler’s Germany, USSR used the “Armenian Question” as a priority issue in its foreign policy. The article notes that, on the eve of the Potsdam Conference of 1945, the legend of “Great Armenia” coincided with the contours of the foreign policy of the USSR, and Moscow created fertile conditions for the development of the concept of “Urartu” created by the Armenian historian Kerope Patkanov at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Joseph Stalin government of USSR’s emphasis on the concept of “Urartu” was related to the initiative to scientifically substantiate the baseless territorial claims on Eastern Anatolia. Moscow, acting in tandem with Armenia, brought up other aspects of the “Armenian Question” when it failed to achieve its goals. One of the new foreign policy directions was the issue of Karabakh. As a result of the decisive and principled position of Mirjafar Bagirov, the First Secretary of the Central Committee of Azerbaijan K(b), Armenians could not realize their claims to Karabakh. However,*

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*because of the pro-Armenian position of Stalin's government and the special activity of G. Arutyunov, the First secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia, ethnic cleansing was carried out in the Armenian SSR in 1948-1953, and Azerbaijani Turks were deported from their historical lands. At this time, despite the serious efforts of the Armenian lobby, the expected large migration of Armenians from abroad did not take place. The article notes that, although ethnic cleansing was carried out in the Armenian SSR during the investigated period, USSR was forced to give up its groundless territorial claims against Türkiye, and the Armenian claims to Karabakh were wasted.*

**Keywords:** *Potsdam Conference, Turkey, USSR, Germany, Armenian Narrative, Eastern Anatolia, Karabakh, İsmet İnönü*

**Öz:** *Bu araştırmanın amacı, 20'nci yüzyılda Rus İmparatorluğunun ve onun emperyal politikasını bilinçli olarak sürdüren Sovyet Sosyalist Cumhuriyetler Birliği (SSCB) liderliğinin zaman zaman "Ermeni kartını" Türkiye'ye karşı asılsız toprak iddialarında bulunmak için kullandığını vurgulamaktır. Hitler'in Almanyasına karşı kazanılan zaferin ardından SSCB dış politikasında "Ermeni Sorununu" öncelikli bir konu olarak kullanmıştır. Makale, 1945 Potsdam Konferansı arifesinde "Büyük Ermenistan" efsanesinin SSCB'nin dış politikasının ana hatlarıyla örtüştüğünü ve Moskova'nın 19'uncu yüzyılın sonlarında Ermeni tarihçi Kerop Patkanov tarafından yaratılan "Urartu" kavramının gelişimi için verimli koşullar yarattığını belirtmektedir. SSCB'nin Joseph Stalin hükümetinin "Urartu" kavramına vurgu yapması, Doğu Anadolu'ya ilişkin asılsız toprak iddialarını bilimsel olarak kanıtlama girişimiyle ilgiliydi. Moskova, Ermenistan ile birlikte hareket ederek hedeflerine ulaşamayınca "Ermeni Sorununun" başka boyutlarını gündeme getirmiştir. Yeni dış politika istikametlerinden biri de Karabağ meselesi olmuştur. Azerbaycan K(b) Merkez Komitesi Birinci Sekreteri Mirjafar Bagirov'un kararlı ve ilkeli tutumu sonucunda Ermeniler Karabağ üzerindeki iddialarında başarısız olmuşlardır. Ancak Stalin hükümetinin Ermeni yanlısı tutumu ve Ermenistan Komünist Partisi Merkez Komitesi Birinci Sekreteri G. Arutyunov'un özel faaliyetleri nedeniyle 1948-1953 yıllarında Ermeni SSC'de etnik temizlik yapılmış ve Azerbaycan Türkleri tarihi topraklarından sürülmüştür. Bu dönemde Ermeni lobisinin ciddi çabalarına rağmen yurt dışından beklenen Ermenilerin büyük göçü gerçekleşmemiştir. Makalede, incelenen dönemde Ermenistan SSR'sinde etnik temizlik yapılmasına rağmen, SSCB'nin Türkiye'ye yönelik asılsız toprak iddialarından vazgeçmek zorunda kaldığı ve Ermenilerin Karabağ üzerindeki iddialarının boşa çıktığı belirtilmektedir.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Potsdam Konferansı, Türkiye, SSCB, Almanya, Ermeni Anlatısı, Doğu Anadolu, Karabağ, İsmet İnönü*

## **Introduction**

For many years, the “Armenian Question” has become the object of research of scholars of various countries. Several scholars have tried to study this problem according to the concept of their historiography. The peculiarity of the problem is that both Soviet and Western historiography did not delve into the essence of the “Armenian Question” invented by the Armenian Gregorian Church<sup>1</sup> in the Middle Ages when investigating the issue. They supported the legend of “Great Armenia”, the myth that the monophysite Armenian church later invented in cooperation with the Armenian lobby groups in Europe, Russia, and India (and which is the cornerstone of the “Armenian Question”) and attributed the essence of Armenianness and past misdeeds to the classification of “closed” topics.

At the same time, both the Western countries and Russia skillfully used the “Armenian Question” for their own geopolitical goals and used it in their foreign policy plans. In particular, the Tsarist Russian Empire and the leadership of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR, Soviet Union), which purposefully continued its imperial policy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, used the “Armenian card” from time to time to realize groundless territorial claims against Turkey, and after the victory over Adolf Hitler’s Germany, it took the “Armenian Question” as the priority direction of its foreign policy.

Based on the above, in order to reveal the historical truths and investigate the problem from an objective position, the current research aims to show the historical reality based on the principle of historicity and evidence.

At the end of the Second World War, the leadership of the USSR, which switched to a policy of confrontation with Turkey, denounced the Soviet-Turkish agreement of December 17, 1925 “On Friendship and Neutrality” on March 19, 1945. By doing this, Joseph Stalin’s government demonstrated its radical steps in relation to Turkey and showed that adopted a position questioning the nature of Soviet-Turkish relations. Moscow clearly demonstrated that it was proceeding from the level of territorial claims against Turkey.

In this situation, Soviet-Turkish negotiations began in Moscow in June 1945. During the negotiations, the representatives of the USSR took the position that

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1 The Armenian Church was founded in the first quarter of the 4th century, no earlier than 318, by the Parthian Gregory (252-336), the first Catholicos of the Armenians, and not by the apostles, because Gregory the Parthian had no relation to the apostles. This reality was confirmed by the Soviet Historical Encyclopedia, published in 1961. On the 750th page of the Soviet Historical Encyclopedia it is indicated: “The spread of the new religion in Armenia was connected with the name of Grigoriy Parfyanin. In his name, the Armenian Church received the name Gregorian”. Armenian religious officials and scholars, ignoring these historical facts about the church, claim that the correct name for the church is the “Armenian Apostolic Church”.

the Soviet-Turkish agreement of December 17, 1925 did not meet the requirements of the conditions that had arisen and needed serious changes<sup>2</sup>. During the negotiations, the Soviet leadership, which expressed its desire to change the relations between the USSR and Turkey, did not hide its dissatisfaction with Turkey's foreign policy in recent years. Thus, on the eve of the Second World War and during the war years, in the complex and contradictory situation created in the system of international relations, Turkish diplomacy carried out a policy of balancing both the Western countries and the USSR. At that time, the İsmet İnönü government, acting from the level of actual alliance with France and the United Kingdom (the UK), tried to maintain friendly relations with the USSR at the same time.

### **Turkey in the System of International Relations during the Second World War**

After the start of the Second World War, in September 1939, Turkish Foreign Minister Şükrü Saracoglu proposed the conclusion of the Turkey-USSR pact on mutual assistance during his visit to Moscow. Dissatisfied with the terms of the Montreux Convention, during the negotiations, the USSR proposed to Turkey the conclusion of a pact on mutual bilateral security limited to the Black Sea, the Bosphorus, and the Dardanelles<sup>3</sup>. At that time, Moscow wanted a guarantee that the warships of non-Black Sea states would not pass through the Turkish Straits if there was a threat of war. Of course, conducting negotiations in this thread made it impossible to conclude a pact.

The leadership of the USSR, which did not achieve its goal, did not hide its territorial claims against Turkey. After the conclusion of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact with Nazi Germany, Stalin's government, which was not satisfied with seizing the Baltic countries, Western Ukraine, Western Belarus and Bessarabia, wanted to achieve territorial changes on the southern borders as well. At that time, the Dashnaks, who had high hopes for the start of the Berlin negotiations between the USSR and Germany in 1940, strengthened their territorial claims against Turkey. However, in the Berlin negotiations, Hitler's Germany did not accept the claim of the USSR to control the territories from Batumi to the Black Sea Straits, from Baku to the Persian Gulf, and the conflict in Soviet-German relations began to grow rapidly.

In that situation, Turkey adopted a policy of rapprochement with the Western countries. Turkey's negotiations with the UK and France resulted in a positive

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2 *Советский Союз на международных конференциях периода Великой Отечественной войны 1941-1945 гг.*, т. VI. Сборник документов (Москва: Publishing House of Political Literature, 1980), 514.

3 Б. Данциг, *Турция* (Москва: Military Publishing House of Ministry of the Armed Forces of the USSR, 1949), 277, 278.

outcome, and on October 19, 1939, a pact on mutual assistance was signed between all three countries. There was also a note in the signed pact that Turkey was not obliged to join the actions that could lead to a military conflict with the USSR. After the conclusion of this agreement, the coldness in the USSR-Turkey relations began to manifest itself, and during the Soviet-Finnish war, this coldness became even more acute<sup>4</sup>. After the fall of France, Turkey did not abandon its pro-Western policy. In his speech on November 17, 1940, President Inonu stated that “the bonds of alliance between Turkey and England [the UK] are strong and unbreakable”<sup>5</sup>. At the same time, Turkish diplomacy was successfully carried out in the Balkans, and during this period, a declaration of friendship and neutrality with Bulgaria was signed.

During this period, the process of Turkey’s rapprochement with Germany was on the rise since the spring of 1941, and the development of German-Turkish relations on a fertile ground resulted in the “Friendship and Non-aggression” agreement signed on June 18, 1941. Following the ongoing processes, the USSR approached this agreement with concern and the Soviet leadership formed the opinion that Turkey had taken an anti-Soviet direction in its foreign policy. At that time, there was no tension in the relations between the UK and Turkey, and a meeting was held in Adana with Winston Churchill and the Turkish leadership in early 1943. It showed that Turkey-the UK relations were moving in a positive direction, and it was pointed out that Turkey did not give up the direction of the West in its foreign policy.

Parallely, in the course of the Second World War, Turkey made changes in its foreign policy and broke off diplomatic relations with Germany on August 2, 1944, and then on February 23, 1945, Turkey declared war on Germany and Japan. However, in the spring of 1945, the USSR, which was very close to victory over Hitler’s Germany and expanded its sphere of influence in several countries of Eastern Europe, prioritized the restoration of the borders of the First World War and made territorial claims against Turkey, bringing up the “Armenian Question”.

After the success of the battles for Stalingrad, starting from the beginning of 1943, the Soviet leadership began to show its imperialist ambition and the “Armenian Question” was brought to the level of the foreign policy of the USSR. At that time, Stalin, who took into account the intricacies of the “Armenian Question” and the Armenian-Grigorian Church, received Archbishop Gevorg Chorekchyan of the Armenian-Gregorian Church in Moscow on April 19, 1945. Stalin in this meeting expressed his hope that the

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4 Данциг, *Турция*, 279.

5 Данциг, *Турция*, 282.

Armenian Church would help them settle Armenians scattered around the world in the lands that the USSR wanted to take from Turkey. In this meeting, Stalin accepted several requests of Chorekchyan: opening the Theological Seminary, returning the Matenadaran Library to the Church, restoring the Mathenadaran press, expanding the relations of the Uchkilesa (Echmiadzin) church with the Armenian Diaspora (*spurk/spürk*), opening a currency account of the Armenian-Gregorian Church in the Soviet bank, restoring the activities of the closed churches and monasteries<sup>6</sup>.

After the USSR's victory over Hitler's Germany, Turkey took the initiative and offered to conclude an alliance agreement with the USSR, and in May 1945, the Turkish Ambassador Selim Sarper brought this proposal to the attention of Moscow. At the beginning of June 1945, the Turkish ambassador and the People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs of the USSR Vyacheslav Molotov had two meetings and USSR side gave the answer to this proposal of the Turkish government that the Soviet government considered it possible to conclude such an agreement on the condition that mutual claims between the two states were regulated. Molotov pointed out that there were 2 issues at the source of this condition. The first was the territorial-border issue. At the insistence of the Soviets, both states should jointly protect the borders, and in 1921, some parts of the USSR-Turkey border that were unfairly drawn, namely Kars, Artvin, and Ardahan, should be given to the USSR. The second issue was the issue of the usage of the seas. Thus, the leadership of the USSR did not want to accept the terms of the Montreux Convention and stated that this convention was an agreement directed against the USSR. Molotov, showing Moscow's position, informed the Ambassador Sarper during the negotiations that if Turkey was ready to resolve the disputed issues, it was possible to conclude this agreement<sup>7</sup>.

### The “Armenian Question” during the Second World War

It should be noted, during the Second World War, in order to realize the territorial ambitions of the Armenians, the Armenian Bolshevik leaders continued the Mkhitar<sup>8</sup> traditions, based on fabricated legends, did not give up groundless territorial claims and continuously propagated the aspirations for “Greater Armenia”, and tried to raise the authority of the Armenian-Gregorian

6 «В борьбе за существование», *Armenian Vestnik*, No. 9(56), September 1993.

7 *Советский Союз на международных конференциях периода Великой Отечественной войны 1941-1945 гг.*, т. VI, 144.

8 Mkhitar of Sevestia (1676–1749) - a Catholic priest, who in 1717 requested the Lazarus Island from the Venetian Senate for the establishment of a monastery. Having formed a consistory -a brotherhood of Armenian Catholics, he persistently propagated the “Armenian Question” in the countries of the West and the East. Mkhitar's successors were called the Mkhitarists.

Church (the creator of the “Armenian Question”) before the leadership of the USSR.

In this direction, the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia G. Arutyunov was important due to his special activities. During his meeting with Stalin in October 1943, Arutyunov informed about the struggle of the Armenian-Gregorian Church against fascism and its assistance to the Armenian SSR, and Stalin requested the establishment of the Council for the Affairs of the Armenian-Gregorian Church, and the Council began its work in November 1943<sup>9</sup>. At the same time, Arutyunov, who had dedicated himself to the aspects of the “Armenian Question”, invited the well-known Soviet historian and academician Yevgeny Tarlen to Yerevan in June 1944 and discussed the issue of the unification of Eastern Anatolia with Soviet Armenia. However, this discussion did not give the result expected by the Armenians, and Moscow did not make any decisions<sup>10</sup>.

Armenian nationalist historiography of the modern era (pursued jointly by the Armenian-Gregorian church and Armenian lobby groups and political organizations) has frequently resorted to distorting historical facts and relies on the concept of K. Patkanov, a Russian orientalist and Armenian scholar of the 19th century. According to this concept, the ancestors of the Armenians, the Musks, whom the ancient Greek sources show as Armens, came from the Balkans to the East, as written by ancient authors, not in the 8th-7th centuries B.C., but in the 12th century B.C., before the creation of the state of Urartu. In the 11th-10th centuries B.C., Armenians mingled with Hurrians -Alaroids in the Nairi region, who settled in the territory of Asia Minor and were the main population of Urartu<sup>11</sup>.

Historical falsifiers based on Patkanov’s concept that the area of Asia Minor is the “motherland” of Armenians also stated that Urartu, one of the powerful states of the ancient world, was an Armenian state. The main purpose of this concept was to “scientifically” justify the territorial claims of the Armenians to Eastern Anatolia. It should be noted that the famous Soviet historians B.B. Piotrovsky and G. Kapansyan stand out among the defenders of the “Urartu” concept. They claimed that Armenians were the heirs of Urartu culture, linking the ancestors of Armenians to the Hayk tribes from the Hurri tribes<sup>12</sup>. During the Second World War, the concept of “Urartu” was very important for Armenians who wanted to exact revenge from Turkey. Since the concept of

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9 *Ноев Ковчег*, No. 3 (138), March 2009.

10 *Ноев Ковчег*, No. 3 (138), March 2009.

11 К. Патканов, *Ванские надписи и значение их для истории Передней Азии* (СПб: В.С Balasheva, 1881), 148,149.

12 Б.Б. Пиотровский, *О происхождении армянского народа* (Ереван, 1946), 25 ; Г.А. Капанян, *Хаяса – колыбель армян* (Ереван: Publishing House of the Academy of Sciences Armenian SSR, 1947), 236.

“Urartu” was fully in line with the interests of the leadership of the USSR, which wanted territory from Turkey, this concept found a fertile ground in Soviet historiography and began to develop. Thus, the USSR government, which was very close to victory in the war with Hitler’s Germany, set the goal of restoring the southern borders of Tsarist Russia on the eve of the First World War, claimed the Kars and Ardahan provinces from Turkey, and this policy coincided with the main line of the “Armenian Question” -its claim to Eastern Anatolia, and it was an urgent issue to collect Armenians scattered around the world into the Armenian SSR.

Although the discussion of the transfer of Armenians living abroad to the Armenian SSR began in 1944, practical steps were taken in April 1945. In their turn, the Armenian organizations representing the Armenian Diaspora appealed to the United Nations (the UN) conference convened on April 25-26, 1945, forgetting the services rendered by the Armenian extremists Garegin Njdeh, Drastamat “Dro” Kanayan, and other Dashnaks to Hitler’s Germany, and stated in their appeal that “Armenians acted together with the Allies, and therefore the Armenian lands on the territory of Turkey should be united to Soviet Armenia<sup>13</sup>.

### **Historical Background: The Activities of the Armenian Lobby on the Eve of the Second World War**

It should be noted that the “Armenian Question” was raised in the USSR long before the Second World War, and the Communist Party of Armenia showed special zeal in this regard. During this period, the “Armenian Aid Committee”, which was established at the initiative of the leadership of the Communist Party of Armenia, opened representations in the territory of the USSR, Central Asian republics, and various regions of Russia, which had no territorial connection with the Armenian SSR, and tried to keep the “Armenian Question” on the agenda. At the same time, representatives of Armenian organizations operating in foreign countries made trips to the Armenian SSR in the name of visiting orphanages, relying on Mkhitarist tactics while “inciting feelings of hostility towards neighboring nations, propagating territorial claims, sowing seeds of hatred in the minds of the youth” of Armenia<sup>14</sup>.

On the eve of the Second World War, Armenian lobby groups and the Armenian Diaspora did not promote groundless territorial claims against Turkey only in

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13 M. Qasımlı, *Ermənistanın sovetləşdirilməsindən Azərbaycan ərazilərinin işğalınadək erməni iddiaları: tarix-olduğu kimi (1920-1994-cü illər)* (Bakı: Science Development Fund, 2016), 227.

14 Qasımlı, *Ermənistanın sovetləşdirilməsindən Azərbaycan ərazilərinin işğalınadək erməni iddiaları*, 218.

the territory of the USSR. Nationalist Armenians trying to keep the “Armenian Question” on the agenda published anti-Turkish literature in various foreign countries, made territorial claims against Turkey, which prompted the Turkish government to ban such literature. For example, the book *Armenian Issue* published in Beirut by Masheh Seropyan was directed against the territorial integrity of Turkey, according to Article 51 of the Press Law of Turkey and to the letter No. 1975/3 of the Ministry of Internal Affairs dated May 3, 1939, its import and sale to Turkey was banned<sup>15</sup>. In those years as well, articles published by Hayastan Gochank (“Call of Armenia”), a press organ of the Armenian society “Yerpar” (“Approach”) operating in the United States, voiced unfounded territorial claims against Turkey, propagated the claim of “Greater Armenia”. The said group carried out anti-Turkish propaganda within Turkey as well. To prevent such conspiratorial moves, the Turkish government banned the import and sale of this collection in accordance with Article 51 of the Press Law on February 5, 1941<sup>16</sup>.

Even after the start of the Second World War, Armenian lobby groups continued their territorial claims against Turkey. At that time, these organizations were drawing up fake maps and showing fictitious “Armenia” and “Kurdistan” on the territory of Turkey. One such map, “Der Grosse Weltatlas” (“The Great Atlas of the World”), was published in Leipzig, Germany. According to Article 51 of the Law on the Press of Turkey, this map was also prohibited from being imported into the country<sup>17</sup>.

### **The “Armenian Card” at the Potsdam Conference**

The Potsdam Conference, organized in the summer of 1945 in Germany, was a meeting of the Allied Powers during the Second World War for discussions on how to establish peace and Allied control over Europe and the Pacific upon the defeat of the Axis Powers, highlighted the increasing assertiveness of the USSR. The USSR, as the winning side, left its position mentioned in the previous section and put the “Armenian card” on the table while openly asserting its territorial claims against Turkey. Thus, at the evening meeting of July 16, 1945, the People’s Commissar of Foreign Affairs of the USSR V. Molotov told the British Foreign Minister E. Eden that the Turks took advantage of the weakness of the Soviet government in 1921 and captured a part of the territory of the Armenians and the Soviet Union Armenians were

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15 Qasımlı, *Ermənistanın sovetləşdirilməsindən Azərbaycan ərazilərinin işğalınadək erməni iddiaları*, 224. Also see: Republic of Turkey General Office. Resolution T.C.BCA 030.18.01.02.86.40.18.

16 Republic of Turkey General Office. Resolution T.C.BCA 030.18.01.02.93.129.20.

17 Qasımlı, *Ermənistanın sovetləşdirilməsindən Azərbaycan ərazilərinin işğalınadək erməni iddiaları*, 224.

offended because of this. Molotov, who did not agree with British Foreign Minister Eden's opinion that "the Turks will not accept the territorial claims of the USSR", insisted that 400,000-500,000 Armenians should live in Turkey. At that time, their number had reached 1 million in the Armenian SSR, and more than 1 million Armenians were living in foreign countries. So, if the territory of the Armenians expanded, many Armenians would have liked to come to the Armenian SSR, and for the sake of justice, Turkey had to give the land of the Armenians to the Soviet Union<sup>18</sup>.

At the seventh evening meeting of the heads of state on July 23, 1945, Stalin also put this position on the table and told the heads of state that the issue of changing the borders with Turkey was primarily the borders before the First World War, which meant the "restoration of historic borders", and which meant that the Kars region belonged to the Armenians and the Ardahan region belonged to the Georgians<sup>19</sup>. It should be noted here that Stalin falsified history in order to achieve his goal in the Potsdam Conference on the territory-border issue. Because the Kars province, which joined the Russian Empire after the San Stefano Peace Treaty, was not part of Armenia, which did not exist at that time, and Ardahan had nothing to do with the Georgians.

### **"Armenian Question" after the Potsdam Conference**

Despite its assertiveness at the Potsdam Conference, the USSR failed to acquire territory from Turkey. Yet, using Moscow's Armenophile policy to its advantage, the Armenian nationalist agenda did not give up on its aim of territorial expansion and brought up the "Karabakh Issue" by focusing the contours of the "Armenian Question" to the historical lands of Azerbaijan. In this context, on October 27, 1945, Stalin told G. Arutyunov that the USSR had not given up its territorial claims to Turkey and that the "Armenian Question" remained on the agenda, and that the Armenian factor was important for the USSR. Arutyunov said that more than 300,000 Armenians aspired to the "historic" Armenian homeland and asked Stalin to solve the Karabakh and Nakhchivan issues in favor of the Armenians<sup>20</sup>.

With this, G. Arutyunov ignored the historical facts that neither Karabakh nor Nakhchivan were originally related to the history of the Armenian people and that Armenians were mostly a non-ethnic population in the Caucasus, including Azerbaijan. Thus, after the Turkmenchay and Edirne Treaties were concluded,

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18 *Советский Союз на международных конференциях в период Великой Отечественной войны 1941-1945 гг.*, т. VI, 39, 40.

19 *Советский Союз на международных конференциях в период Великой Отечественной войны 1941-1945 гг.*, т. VI, 158.

20 *Ноев Ковчег*, No. 3 (138), March 2009.

the Armenian-Gregorian Church was able to convince the Romanov rulers of Tsarist Russia that Armenians had an exceptional place in the establishment of the political power of the Russian Empire in the Caucasus mega region, including the lands of Azerbaijan north of Araz, which Russia occupied. Massively resettled, the migration of Armenians to the country continued in the later stages of history, as a result, the weight of the Orthodox Armenians (adherents to the Gregorian Church), who made up 9.37% of the Azerbaijan's population in the first thirty years of the 19th century, increased to 32.8% at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>21</sup>. After settling in the historical lands of Azerbaijan, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Armenians, who were not satisfied with establishing Armenian statehood only in Yerevan, continued their territorial claims against Azerbaijan and brought the "Nagorno-Karabakh problem" into the history of Azerbaijan.

### **Armenian Territorial Claims Concerning Karabakh after the Second World War**

In the autumn of 1945, G. Arutyunov relied on this outline of the "Armenian Question" and put the "Karabakh card" on the table before the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist (b) Party (AUC(b)P) about the annexation of a part of Azerbaijani lands -the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Province (NAGO) to the Armenian SSR. In his letter dated November 28, 1945, written to Mirjafar Baghirov, the 1st secretary of the Central Committee of the AUC(b)P Secretary K.M. Malenkov expressed the desire of the Armenians regarding this issue and wanted to know his opinion<sup>22</sup>. At that moment Bagirov showed that the claims of the Armenian SSR had no scientific and historical basis and also stated that, with the exception of Shusha, the majority of whose population were Azerbaijanis, the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Province (NKAR) could be given to the Armenian SSR in the event that Azizbeyov (the majority of whose population was Azerbaijani Turkish), the Vedi and Karabakhlar regions should be returned to the Azerbaijan SSR as a whole<sup>23</sup>.

Neither the Soviet central government nor the leadership of the Armenian SSR agreed to this proposal, because in this case, the fictitious "Armenian state" created at the expense of the historical Azerbaijani lands would become meaningless in terms of Armenian aspirations due to the potential territorial

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21 Х.Ю. Вердиева, *Переселенческая политика Российской империи в Северном Азербайджане (XIX-начале XXвв.) Историко-демографическое исследование (II издание, с изменениями, дополнениями)* (Баку: "Ecoprint", 2016), 320.

22 Archive of Social-Political Documents of the Affairs Department of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan (hereinafter - ASPD ADPR), F.1. List. 31. Case no 186a, p. 3.

23 ASPD ADPR, F.1. List. 31. Case no 186a, p. 5.

compromises. However, Bagirov's firm position regarding Azerbaijan's territorial integrity did not stop Armenian territorial claims. In order not to diminish the "Armenian Question", the leadership of the Armenian SSR acted in tandem with Armenian lobby groups, took another direction for the "Armenian Question", and prepared a project related to the repatriation of Armenians living abroad in November 1945 with the aim of gathering Armenians scattered around the world in Yerevan. Based on this project, on November 21, 1945, Chairman of the Soviet of People's Commissars of the USSR Stalin and the head of affairs of the SSR M. Smirtykov adopted the decision No. 2947 consisting of four points "On practical measures for the resettlement of Armenians living abroad to Soviet Armenia" and the Armenian SSR and the Council of People's Commissars were allowed to organize the bringing of Armenians who wanted to come from abroad<sup>24</sup>.

After this decision, the Armenian lobby in the United States (the US) became more active. The said lobby made groundless territorial claims, and the "Committee of the American Struggle for Fair Treatment of Armenians", in its appeal sent to the UN delegation on February 1, 1946, stated that the "Armenian National Council of America" supported the repatriation of Armenians and defended the decision to give the lands of Eastern Anatolia<sup>25</sup>. Later, at the beginning of May 1946, 16 Armenian organizations in the US appealed to the Secretary General of the UN Trygve Lee, drawing attention to the inclusion of the "Armenian Question" on the agenda of the UN Security Council, and stated that the Armenians scattered around the world demanded the transfer of Kars, Ardahan, Erzurum, Trabzon, Bitlis and Van to the Armenian SSR<sup>26</sup>. At that time, the Chairman of the Philadelphia (in the US) branch of the "Armenian National Council of America" Shahinyan, who insisted on the territorial claims, also stated that "the 10,000-strong Armenian colony of Philadelphia unanimously supports the program of joining the lands of Eastern Anatolia to Armenia"<sup>27</sup>.

It should be noted that the "American Committee for the Fair Treatment of Armenians" and the "Armenian National Council of America" organizations were not satisfied only with appeals. These organizations organized a rally in New York City on April 28, 1946, in order to attract the attention of the American public to the "Armenian Question" and stated in their adopted resolution that the return of Armenians to the Armenian SSR was possible only

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24 Н.Н. Аблажей, "Репатриация и депортация армян во второй половине 1940-х годов", *Вестник НГУ*. Серия: История, филология, 2011, Том 10, выпуск 1: История: 230.

25 *Коммунист* (published in the Armenian SSR in Russian), February 6, 1946.

26 *Коммунист*, May 9, 1946.

27 *Коммунист*, May 15, 1946.

if the provinces of Eastern Anatolia were given up by Turkey<sup>28</sup>. The “Armenian National Council of Lebanon” made a similar request, sending a telegram to the UN Security Council on May 15, 1946, demanding a positive solution to the “Armenian Question”.<sup>29</sup>

After the Potsdam Conference, several representatives of the political circles of the US also supported the demands of the Armenian Diaspora, and the US State of California was particularly noteworthy in this regard. Thus, the territorial demands of the “Committee for the Fair Treatment of Armenians” and the “Armenian National Council of America” to Turkey were defended by Senator Downey, a member of the Democratic Party from California, and Girhard, a Republican member of the House of Representatives from California, and the latter stated that, “the solution of the “Armenian Question” in this direction should form the main principles of the foreign policy of the United States”<sup>30</sup>.

Armenian lobby groups, which did not give up their territorial claims against Turkey, were bearing their fruits. Armenian caravans heading to the Armenian SSR departed from various parts of the world. On June 27, 1946, 1,806 Armenians from Damascus and Beirut arrived at the port of Batumi on the “Transylvania” ship<sup>31</sup>. On July 28, 1946, 789 Armenians from Bulgaria came to the Armenian SSR<sup>32</sup>. In August 1946, the first Armenian caravan consisting of 1742 people from Romania arrived in the Armenian SSR<sup>33</sup>. Concerning the widespread diaspora in Arab countries, on September 19, 1946, 2427 Armenians from Syria and Lebanon arrived in Batumi on the ship “Vyacheslav Molotov” to go to the Armenian SSR<sup>34</sup>.

It should be noted that Armenian organizations aiming at territorial claims also worked in the 1920s to transfer scattered Armenians from various countries to the South Caucasus mega region, primarily to the lands of Azerbaijan, as a result of the efforts of the Armenian diaspora organization and more than 8000 Armenians were relocated from the Iraqi city of Mosul to different regions of

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28 *Коммунист*, May 1, 1946.

29 *Коммунист*, May 17, 1946.

30 *Коммунист*, June 6, 1946

31 H., Verdiyeva and C. Əlizadə, *İrəvan məkanında azərbaycanlılara qarşı etnik təmizləmə: tarixi və hüquqi aspektlərdə* (Baku: “Science and Education”, 2020), 63. Also see: *Ноев Ковчег*, No. 3 (138), March 2009.

32 Verdiyeva and Əlizadə, *İrəvan məkanında azərbaycanlılara qarşı etnik təmizləmə*, 63. Also see: *Коммунист*, July 30, 1946.

33 Verdiyeva and Əlizadə, *İrəvan məkanında azərbaycanlılara qarşı etnik təmizləmə*, 63-64. Also see: *Коммунист*, August 11, 1946.

34 Verdiyeva and Əlizadə, *İrəvan məkanında azərbaycanlılara qarşı etnik təmizləmə*, 64. Also see: *Коммунист*, September 21, 1946

the Azerbaijan SSR”<sup>35</sup>. During these years, the “Organization of Armenians of Iran”, which was active in Pahlavi Iran, managed to relocate several thousand Armenian families to the territories of Azerbaijan<sup>36</sup>. However, after the Potsdam Conference, the Armenian caravans from abroad did not show the expected result. So, although the immigration of 63,000 Armenians to the Armenian SSR was planned for 1947, in practice only 35,400 Armenians came to the Armenian SSR. According to the indicators of June 1948, 86,346 Armenians had come to the USSR from abroad<sup>37</sup>. These indicators did not coincide with the claim made by G. Arutyunov on October 27, 1945 to Stalin that “more than 300,000 Armenians aspired to join the Armenian SSR”.

After Turkey became one of the main subjects of the “Marshall Plan” and became a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) on February 18, 1952, the Soviet government informed the Turkish government on May 30 that “for the protection of friendly neighborly relations, strengthening of peace and security, the governments of Armenia and Georgia found it expedient to give up their territorial claims against Turkey”<sup>38</sup>. So, USSR was forced to give up its territorial claims against Turkey. Of course, this was also related to the internal power struggle within the Communist Party at that time. Capitalizing on this, Armenian nationalists brought up the plan to carry out ethnic cleansing in the historical land of Azerbaijan, Yerevan, and the next stage of expulsion of Azerbaijani Turks from their historical lands in the territory of the Armenian SSR began. The implementation of the resettlement was formalized by the decision No. 4083 of the Soviet of Ministers of the USSR “On the resettlement of collective farmers and other Azerbaijani population from the Armenian SSR to the Kur-Araz lowland of the Azerbaijan SSR” on December 23, 1947<sup>39</sup>.

According to this decision, 100,000 Azerbaijanis were to be transferred “on a voluntary basis” to the Azerbaijan SSR in 1948-1950, 10,000 in 1948, 40,000 in 1949, and 50,000 in 1950. To speed up the implementation of this process, the Soviet of Ministers of the USSR prepared a concrete action plan with the decision of March 10, 1948 “On the measures related to the transfer of collective farmers and other Azerbaijani population from the Armenian SSR to the Kur-Araz plain of the Azerbaijan SSR”<sup>40</sup>. In total, 37,387 Azerbaijanis

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35 Qasımlı, *Ermənistanın sovetləşdirilməsindən Azərbaycan ərazilərinin işğalnadək erməni iddiaları*, 218.

36 Qasımlı, *Ermənistanın sovetləşdirilməsindən Azərbaycan ərazilərinin işğalnadək erməni iddiaları*, 219.

37 Аблажей, “Репатриация и депортация армян во второй половине 1940-х годов”, 118.

38 *Советский Союз на международных конференциях в период Великой Отечественной войны 1941-1945 гг.*, т. VI, 514.

39 ASPD ADPR, F.1. List.33. Case no 227, p. 14.

40 ASPD ADPR, F.1. List. 33. Case no 227, p.1.

were transferred from the Armenian SSR to the Azerbaijan SSR in 1948-1951<sup>41</sup>. The deportation continued in the following years and by 1956, the number of people transferred from the Armenian SSR to the Kur-Araz plain of the Azerbaijan SSR and other regions had reached 58,421 people.<sup>42</sup>

Since the conducted statistics face several errors, the final indicator can only be accepted conditionally. However, as a result of the implementation of the decisions dated December 23, 1947, and March 10, 1948, the number of Azerbaijani Turks in the Armenian SSR without a doubt decreased sharply. At the same time, the plan of the Armenian nationalists to collect the Armenians living abroad did not give the expected result. After the Potsdam Conference, the Azerbaijani Turks, who had to experience the bitter truth of the Armenian territorial ambitions, were deported from the Armenian SSR in 1948-1953, and no legal assessments to this criminal act based on the accepted conventions were delivered by the relevant institutes of international law. Decades later, it was Azerbaijan's National Leader Heydar Aliyev who first systematically highlighted the tragedy of Azerbaijanis living in Yerevan. On December 18, 1997, he signed the decree "On the mass deportation of Azerbaijanis from their historical and ethnic lands in the territory of the Armenian SSR in 1948-1953" and the criminal nature of the policy of ethnic cleansing and extermination against the Azerbaijanis in the territory of the Armenian SSR in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was brought to the attention of the international community.<sup>43</sup>

## **Conclusion**

As a result, based on the above, it should be stated that after the Potsdam Conference, the "Armenian Question" was brought up by the leadership of the USSR, and Stalin's government acted in tandem with the Armenian nationalists and pursued Armenian territorial ambitions in three directions: First, an unfounded territorial claim was made against Turkey and the concept of "Urartu" was developed; second, claims to Karabakh were brought up; third, ethnic cleansing was carried out in the Armenian SSR in 1948-1953 when the migration caravans of small Armenians living abroad headed to the territory of the USSR and Azerbaijani Turks were deported. Ultimately, however, the USSR was forced to give up its groundless territorial claims against Turkey, and Armenia's claims for Karabakh were pushed to the sidelines.

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41 ASPD ADPR, F. 1. List 33. Case no 230, p. 10.

42 B. Nəcəfov, *Deportasiya*, Part III (Baku: Çashioğlu, 2006), 208.

43 "1948-1953-cü illərdə Qərbi Azərbaycan torpaqlarından deportasiya", *1905.az*, December 27, 2023, <https://1905.az/1948-1953-cu-ill%C9%99rd%C9%99-q%C9%99rbi-az%C9%99rbaycan-torpaqlarından-deportasiya/>

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