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# FORMATION OF ARMENIA ON THE POLITICAL MAP OF THE CAUCASUS AND KARABAKH ISSUE (1918-1921)

(ERMENİSTAN'IN KAFKASYA'NIN SİYASİ HARİTASINDA OLUŞUMU  
VE KARABAĞ MESELESİ (1918-1921))

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***Abstract:** A new revolutionary era in Russia started in February 1917 for all the peoples of the former Russian empire ruled by the Romanov dynasty. Along with the overthrow of the tsarist monarchy in Russia, the revolution of February 1917 was a blow to the Russian empire, spawning national liberation movements in that "prison of nations." The overthrow of the monarchy sped up the political processes taking place in the South Caucasus.*

*One of the first steps of the Provisional Government that was formed after the revolution was the creation of a special institution to govern the South Caucasus. On March 9, the Special Transcaucasian Committee (OZAKOM) was created to govern the region. When the revolution of October 1917 occurred, it raised the hopes of the nations that had been subjects of the Russian empire. These hopes for independence were for the most part nourished by the declarations made by the Bolsheviks in the early days of their coming to power. A peace decree and a Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia were to provide a guarantee that the nations of the former empire would be free to secede and create independent republics. However, quite soon it became clear that these documents were merely propaganda.*

*When the Russian Soviet of People's Commissars appointed Stepan Georgevich Shaumian as the Envoy Extraordinary for the Caucasus to fight against the autonomy of Azerbaijan, he was commissioned to carry out the decree of 29 December 1917, on the autonomy of "Turkish Armenia," which*

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*had been prepared by Joseph Stalin. The decree recognized the full independence and sovereignty of the Armenian nation in "Turkish Armenia," which had been occupied by the Russian army. Other items were the creation of militias to protect the population of "Turkish Armenia" and their property once the Russian army withdrew from the territory; the unimpeded repatriation of Armenians who had emigrated from "Turkish Armenia"; and the creation of a provisional administration of a democratically elected Armenian national deputies' council.*

**Keywords:** Nagorno-Karabakh, South Caucasus, Nakhichevan, Sharur-Daralayaz, Zangezur, Baku, Moscow, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Allied Powers, Soviet Russia, Turkey, Musavat government, Caucasian Bureau

**Öz:** Şubat 1917 yılında Romanov Hanedanlığı tarafından yönetilen eski Rus İmparatorluğunun tüm halkları için yeni bir devrimci dönem başlamıştır. Rusya'da Çarlık yönetiminin devrilmesiyle beraber Şubat 1917 devrimi ulusal bağımsızlık hareketleri doğurmuş ve böylece "halkların hapisanesi" olan Rus İmparatorluğu darbe almıştır. Çarlık yönetiminin devrilmesi Güney Kafkasya'daki siyasi süreçlerin hızlanmasına sebep olmuştur.

Devrim sonrasında Geçici Hükümetin ilk adımlarından bir tanesi Güney Kafkasya'nın yönetilmesi için özel bir kurum kurması olmuştur. 9 Mart'ta Özel Transkafkasya Komitesi (OZAKOM) bölgeyi yönetmek için kurulmuştur. Ekim 1917 devriminin gerçekleşmesi ise Rus İmparatorluğunun tebaası olan ulusların umutlarını arttırmıştır. Bu umutlar çoğunlukla Bolşeviklerin iktidara gelmelerinin ilk günlerinde yaptıkları beyanatlardan beslenmiştir. Bir barış fermanı ve Rusya'nın Halklarının Hakları Beyannamesi'nin yayınlanmasıyla uluslara eski imparatorluktan ayrılıp bağımsız cumhuriyetler kurmaları için garanti verilmesi öngörülmüştü. Ancak kısa bir süre sonra bu belgelerin propagandadan ibaret olduğu anlaşılmıştır.

Rus Halk Komiserleri Sovyeti, Stepan Georgevich Shaumian'ı Azerbaycan'ın özerkliğine karşı mücadele etmesi amacıyla Kafkasya için Olağanüstü Elçi olarak atadığında, kendisine ayrıca Josef Stalin tarafından hazırlanmış, "Türk Ermenistan'ın" özerkliği üzerine olan 29 Aralık 1917 fermanını yürürlüğe koyma görevi de verilmiştir. Bu ferman, Rus ordusunun işgali altında olan "Türk Ermenistan'daki" Ermeni ulusunun tam bağımsızlığını ve egemenliğini tanımaktaydı. Fermana yer alan diğer hususlar şu şekildedir: Rus ordusunun bölgeden çekilmesinden sonra milislerin kurulmasıyla "Türk Ermenistan" nüfusunun ve mal ve mülklerinin korunması; "Türk Ermenistan'ından" göç eden Ermenilerin engellenmeden geri dönmeleri ve demokratik yollarla seçilmiş bir Ermeni ulusal milletvekilleri konseyinden oluşan geçişi bir yönetimin kurulması.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Dağlık Karabağ, Güney Kafkasya, Nahcivan, Şerur Dereleyez, Zangezur, Bakü, Moskova, Ermenistan, Azerbaycan, Gürcistan, Müttefik Güçleri (İtilaf Devletleri), Sovyet Rusya, Türkiye, Musavat hükümeti, Kafkasya Bürosu

The peoples of the Transcaucasia gained the chance to decide their own fate, but they did it disastrously. In Autumn 1917, armed Armenian forces entered Karabagh from the side of Armenia and destroyed twelve Moslem villages. The defenselessness of Azerbaijani Karabagh residents clearly manifested itself in terms of the disturbing atrocities committed by the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF/Dashnaksutyun, Dashnaks) in the eastern part of Azerbaijan and Baku environs. Under the pretext of establishing Soviet power, the detachments of Amazasp killed 8,000 in Shemakha and 4,000 peaceful civilians in Quba.<sup>1</sup> It was the declaration of independence of Azerbaijan on 28 May 1918 that saved the Turkic-Moslem population in the greater portion of the South Caucasus from these attempts at annihilation. On 26 May, Georgia declared its independence, and two days later Azerbaijan and Armenia followed suit.

The Batum talks launched by the previous governments of the South Caucasus were restarted by the new national republics. So, there arose necessity of border delimitation between the newly established states, and the Armenian Republic found itself in the most complex situation. Prior to the conclusion of the agreement, Armenian representatives appealed to the Azerbaijani government and found understanding in the matter of their future capital. On 29 May, chair of the Council of Ministers, Fatali Khan Khoyski, told those at a meeting of the Azerbaijani National Council that the issue had been discussed with members of the Armenian National Council. He said that a political center was needed for Armenians to create the Armenian Federation. The town of Alexandropol was captured by the Turks, and now Erivan might act as the capital, so Erivan should be conceded to the Armenians.<sup>2</sup> In the meanwhile, talks were held in Batum between delegations of Azerbaijan and Armenia regarding delimitation of borders. It was agreed that Azerbaijan had no objection against the formation of the Armenian state within the bounds of “Alexandropol province”; in turn, Armenians gave up their claims on a part of the Elizavetpol province (mountainous part of Karabagh).<sup>3</sup> As a result of the Batumi conference, Turkey signed an agreement on “peace and friendship” with Georgia and Armenia on 4 June and thus recognized their independence. According to the agreement signed with Georgia, the transfer of Kars, Batumi, and Ardahan as well as Akhaltsich and Akhalkalak to Turkey was confirmed. However, Turkey softened the requests on June 11 and agreed to give Abastuman and Askur back to Georgia.<sup>4</sup> Armenia accepted the terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk by signing the June Agreement; Echmiadzin and

1 Decision of the Extraordinary Investigation Commission. July 28, 1919, State Archive of the Azerbaijan Republic (SAAR), rec.gr. 1061, inv. 1, f. 108, sheet 7.

2 Minutes № 3 of the meeting of Azerbaijani National Council. May 29, 1918, SAAR, rec.gr. 970, inv. 1, f. 1, sheet 51.

3 Zurab Avalov. *Независимость Грузии в международной политике* (The Independence of Georgia in International Politics), 1918-1921. Paris, 1924, p. 57.

4 *Документы и материалы по внешней политике Закавказья и Грузии* (Documents and Materials on Foreign Policy of the Caucasus and Georgia) (Tiflis, 1919), pp. 343–349.

Alexandropol were given to Turkey; and Turkey was allowed to use the Alexandropol–Julfa railway as well. The Armenian border would now be located near Erivan. Only 6 kilometers of railway were left at the disposal of Armenia. According to the Batum Agreement, the Armenian Republic was a state of the South Caucasus with a territory of 10,000 square kilometers.<sup>5</sup>

This question arose on 8 October 1918 in Tiflis during talks between the diplomatic representative of Azerbaijan Mahammad Yusif Jafarov and Arshak Jamalyan, an Armenian diplomat. The latter reported back to the Armenian Foreign Ministry: “Today, Mr. Jafarov came to see me.... We touched upon the Karabagh issue. He mentioned the well-wishing attitude of Azerbaijanis to Armenians during the Batum conference, saying that they conceded us Erivan in return for Karabagh.”<sup>6</sup> Again, primary developments broke out in Karabagh and around it. In late summer 1918, the Armenian army headed by Andranik Ozanyan invaded neighboring Zangezur. By the end of October, 115 villages were pillaged, 7,700 Moslems were killed, 2,500 were wounded, and 50,000 were ousted from their homes. The same atrocities were committed in the mountainous part of Karabagh.<sup>7</sup> In late September, the Ottoman-Azerbaijani troops assumed the offensive against the Dashnaks and seized Shusha on October 1 without a blow. As a result, Dashnak detachments had to retreat deep into mountainous parts of Karabagh.

In November 1918, the First World War was over. Germany and its allies sustained defeat, and Turkish troops abandoned Transcaucasia. The Dashnaks continued staging provocations in an attempt to expand Armenian territory. The military operations ceased after categorical protests of the British. In early January 1919, a commander of the Allied (Entente) forces in the region, Major-General William M. Thomson, sent a representative of the Azerbaijan government Khosrov-bey Sultanov to Karabagh and Zangezur as a governor-general of the region. A council composed of three Armenians, three Azerbaijanis, and one Englishman, a member of the Allied mission was subordinated to Kh. Sultanov and his Armenian assistant. However, Dashnak leaders of Karabagh rejected this compromise project. Major-General Thomson told Armenian protesters “some Armenians are much disappointed that the British occupation is not an opportunity for revenge. They are reluctant to accept it that (the) peace conference is going to decide and not military forces.”<sup>8</sup>

5 See: Richard Hovannisian, *Armenia on the Road to Independence, 1918* (Berkeley, 1967), pp. 190–194.

6 Letter from Arshak Jamalyan to MFA of Armenia. October 8, 1918, Archive of Political Documents of the Presidential Administration of the Republic of Azerbaijan (APDPARA), rec.gr. 276, inv. 9, f. 65, sheet 18.

7 For more detailed information about destabilizing actions of Armenia in Karabakh in 1918–1920 years see: Jamil Hasanli, *Foreign Policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan, The Difficult Road to Western Integration, 1918–1920* (London & New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016) ; Ismail Musayev, *Azərbaycanın Naxçıvan və Zəngəzur bölgələrində siyasi vəziyyət və kharici dövlətlərin siyasəti (1917–1921-ci illər)* (Baku: Bakı Dövlət Universiteti, 1996).

8 Tadeusz Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan, 1905–1920: The Shaping of National Identity in a Moslem Community* (Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 143.

In early December 1918, Thomson sent a telegram to leaders of Armenians residing in Javanshir uyezd/uezd (administrative unit) of Karabagh demanding a stop to their banditry and pillage. He ordered as follows: “To notify all Armenians: sit still in their homes. Should they disobey, they would be subjected to punishment for bloodshed and atrocities.”<sup>9</sup>

Their allies’ tough stance on the issue forced the Armenians, albeit with insignificant amendments, to admit the power of the Azerbaijani governor-general and look for an acceptable form of collaboration. The VII Congress of the representatives of Armenian peasants from a mountainous part of Karabagh decided on 15 August 1919 to be subordinated to the Azerbaijani government and peacefully coexist with the Azerbaijani population.<sup>10</sup> On the instruction of the Azerbaijani government, on 9 September 1919, Ali Mardan bey Topchibashov, chair of the Azerbaijani delegation to the Paris Peace Conference, submitted a document that said, “representatives of the Armenian population of Karabagh made a decision to obey the Azerbaijani government.”<sup>11</sup> In this way, Armenian attempts at the Paris Peace Conference to take Karabagh away from Azerbaijan were a failure, but only for a short time.

On 28 April 1920, Soviet troops occupied Baku. Russian troops entered Karabakh a month after they had occupied Baku; Azerbaijan lost its independence; some time later this happened to Georgia and Armenia as well. In this way, in two years, Russia, now Soviet Russia, regained its grip on the Transcaucasus. Soviet power detached bits and pieces of Azerbaijan’s territory. In the first years of Soviet power, when the Soviet central government (the Center) transferred primordial Azerbaijani lands to Armenia, Chairman of the Azerbaijan Revolutionary Committee (Az.RC) Nariman Narimanov, unable to reconcile himself to this unjust transfer of Azerbaijani lands, wrote to Vladimir Lenin to complain that the lands which had, beyond a doubt, been part of Azerbaijan under the Musavat government had become disputed areas under Soviet power. He warned that the common people were aware of all this and were discontented.<sup>12</sup>

On 19 June, Nariman Narimanov, Polikarp (Budu) Mdivani, Anastas Mikoyan, and Avis Nurijanyan sent a telegram to People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs

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9 Azerbaijan, 3 December 1918.

10 Interim Agreement with the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh and the Azerbaijani Government. August 15, 1919, APDPARA, f. 1, r. 169, v. 249/II, p. 13-14.

11 Letter from Chairman of the Delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan at the Paris Peace Conference Ali Mardan bey Topchubashov to chairman of the Peace Conference. September 9, 1919, SAAR, rec.gr. 970, inv. 1, f. 142, sheet 77. For more detail, see: Jamil Hasanli, *Leadership and Nationalism in Azerbaijan: Ali Mardan bey Topchibashov, Founder and Creator* - Routledge Studies in the History of Russia and Eastern Europe (London & New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2018).

12 For more detail, see: “Results of Soviet Construction in Azerbaijan,” Report of Narimanov to Lenin. September 15, 1921, Russian State Archives of Social-Political History (RSASPH), rec. gr. 5, inv. 1, f. 1219, sheet 12; Jamil Hasanli, “Nagorno-Karabakh: Old Delusions and New Interpretations,” *Caucasus and Globalization* 3–4 (2011).

Georgii Chicherin in which they informed him of the Dashnak army's onslaught and its success in Kazakh and Kedabek. A copy sent to Grigorii (Sergo) Orjonikidze in Vladikavkaz contained the following telltale passage: "The Armenians are in fact in a state of war with Azerbaijan. As for the allegedly disputable Karabakh and Zangezur, which have become part of Soviet Azerbaijan, we categorically state that these places should, without doubt, in the future too, remain within Azerbaijan."<sup>13</sup> On 22 June 1920, the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, enraged by the fact that the well-known Bolsheviks working in the Caucasus, Baku and, on the whole, Azerbaijan were dead set against the Center's policy, complained to the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik) (CC RCP (B)) about "the lack of discipline among the Baku comrades and the scandalous contradiction between their actions and the line of the CC."<sup>14</sup> People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs Chicherin followed his own, very specific logic. He went on to explain to Lenin that "so far Russia is not transferring these lands to the Armenians so as not to offend the Tatars [he was referring to the Azerbaijanis]. When conditions for the Sovietization of Georgia and Armenia appear, the problems will disappear of their own accord."<sup>15</sup> His numerous explanations and telegrams sent to Lenin, Orjonikidze, and Narimanov make it abundantly clear: Karabakh was nothing but "small change" and bait in the talks with Armenia.

Stronger Armenian claims to the mountainous part of Karabakh forced those Bolsheviks who were well known in the Caucasus (Nariman Narimanov, Polikarp (Budu) Mdivani, Anastas Mikoyan, and Viktor Naneishvili) and even members of the Military Council of the 11th Army, Iakov Vesnik, Mikhail Levandovsky, and Boris Mikhaylov, to send a letter to the CC RCP (B) which said:

"We believe that it is our duty to inform the C.C. of our concerted opinion about Karabakh and Zangezur; the decision which is planned as intermediate in the talks with Armenia will contradict the interests of the revolution in the Caucasus. *Under the Musavat government, the whole of Karabakh was part of Azerbaijan. The inseparable cultural and economic ties between Karabakh and Zangezur and Baku, which employed tens of thousands of workers from these provinces, and the complete isolation of these provinces from Erevan were confirmed in 1919 by the Congress of Armenian Peasants of Karabakh which, even under the Musavat regime (which was insufferable for the Armenians) and despite provocation by Armenian agents, resolutely supported complete unity with Azerbaijan on the condition that a peaceful life be guaranteed for the Armenians.*" [italics added for emphasis -J.H.]

13 Telegram of Narimanov, Mdivani, Mikoyan, Nuriyanyan to Chicherin. June 19, 1920, SAAR, rec. gr. 28, inv. 1, f. 211, sheet 115.

14 See: Letter of the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs G. Chicherin to the Politburo of the CC RCP (B), June 22, 1920, APDUDPAR, rec. gr. 1, inv. 1, f. 2a, sheet 9.

15 Chicherin's reply to Lenin's enquiry. June 1920, RSASPH, rec. gr. 2, inv. 1, f. 1451, sheet 1.

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The authors concluded that the Muslim masses would regard Soviet power as perfidious if it proved unable to preserve the old borders of Azerbaijan. They wrote that this would be taken as Armenian-philism or as the weakness of Soviet power and warned against indecision in the question of Karabakh and Zangezur “so as not to turn Azerbaijan into a mongrel supported by the Red Army and handed out to the Armenians and Georgians.”<sup>16</sup>

In an effort to make Soviet recognition of Armenia look official, Chicherin tried to convince Orjonikidze that Soviet Russia needed a compromise with the Dashnak government of Armenia:

“The Azerbaijani government has described as disputable not only Karabakh and Zangezur, but also the Sharur-Daralayaz Uezd. The latter has never been disputed and even the Musavat government always regarded it as Armenian. Without it, Armenia will have practically nothing left. After resisting for a long time, the Armenian delegation at the peace talks agreed to accept Karabakh and Zangezur as disputed territories in the hope of finally acquiring large chunks of them. The delegation is firm about the Sharur-Daralayaz Uezd. On the other hand, we need an agreement with the Azerbaijani government so that our treaty with Armenia does not contradict the demands of Azerbaijan. We ask you to use your exceptional influence in Baku to convince the Azerbaijani government to yield on its demand to describe the Sharur-Daralaghez Uezd as a disputed territory and limit it to Karabakh and Zangezur.”<sup>17</sup>

After receiving Chicherin’s ciphered telegram of 2 July 1920 and discussing the issue with newly appointed Envoy Plenipotentiary of Soviet Russia to Armenia Boris Legran and Saak Ter-Gabrielyan, Orjonikidze informed Moscow directly that;

“Azerbaijan insisted on the immediate and unconditional unification of Karabakh and Zangezur. I think this should be done since economically both uyezds are attached to Baku and have absolutely no ties with Erivan. The Bayazet Turkish Army, which has wedged its way in, has made this especially obvious. According to Comrade Gabrielyan, the Armenian delegation will undoubtedly accept this. In this case, it will be possible to convince Azerbaijan to drop its claims to the other regions. I think that Karabakh and Zangezur should be immediately united with Azerbaijan. I will force Azerbaijan to grant autonomy to these regions; this should be done by Azerbaijan, but in no way should this be mentioned in the treaty.”<sup>18</sup>

16 Letter of Narimanov, Mdivani, Mikoyan, Naneishvili, Vesnik, Levandovsky and Mikhaylov to the C.C. R.C.P. (B.). July 10, 1920, APDUDPAR, rec. gr. 1, inv. 44, f. 118, sheet 25-27.

17 Chicherin’s ciphered telegram to Orjonikidze. July 2, 1920, RSASPH, rec. gr. 85, inv. 3c, f. 2, sheet 3.

18 Orjonikidze’s reply on direct line to Chicherin’s telegram of 2 July about the disputed territories claimed by Azerbaijan and Armenia. July 1920, RSASPH, rec. gr. 85, inv. 3c, f. 2, sheet 6.

By means of another direct communiqué, Orjonikidze informed Lenin, Stalin, and Chicherin that the Armenian government had deliberately misinformed them:

“Today Gabrielyan told me that the Armenian delegation will accept immediate unification of Karabakh and Zangezur with Azerbaijan if it drops its claims to the Sharur-Daralayaz Uezd and the Nakhchivan Region. We have agreed among ourselves that when we are in Baku we will talk to Narimanov about this. You can see for yourself that there is no lack of clarity or understanding. I assure you that we are fully aware of our peaceful policy and are sticking to it. I am convinced, and this is my deepest conviction, that to strengthen Soviet power in Azerbaijan and to keep Baku in our control, we must join Nagorno-Karabakh; its valley part is out of the question: it has always been Azeri and part of Zangezur. Azerbaijan has guaranteed safety of the Armenians living there. We shall grant autonomy and organize the Armenian population without moving Muslim armed units there.”

Orjonikidze deemed it necessary to warn:

“Any other decision will shatter our position in Azerbaijan and will give us nothing in Armenia. I know that we might need Armenia under certain political circumstances. The decision rests with you; we shall follow suit. Let me tell you that this treatment of Azerbaijan undermines our prestige among the broad masses of Azeris and creates fertile soil for the efforts of our adversaries.”<sup>19</sup>

Chicherin and Lev Karakhan, who filled the post of Deputy People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs, pushed the People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs toward cooperation with Armenia at the expense of Azerbaijan. On 16 July, Orjonikidze, unable to withstand the pressure, telegraphed Lenin, Stalin, and Chicherin with a request not to enter a peace treaty with Armenia before the Azeri delegation arrived. He wrote: “The local comrades are very concerned about the possibility of peace with Armenia without involving Azerbaijan.”<sup>20</sup> Anastas Mikoyan, member of the CC Communist Party of Azerbaijan (Bolsheviks), was of the same opinion. On 29 June, he wrote to Orjonikidze: “We are all enraged by the Center’s policy toward Karabakh and Zangezur. You should also defend our opinion in the Center. We have nothing against peace with Armenia but not at the expense of Karabakh and Zangezur.”<sup>21</sup>

19 Direct reminder to Lenin, Stalin and Chicherin. July 1920, RSASPH, rec. gr. 85, inv. 3c, f. 2, sheets 8-9.

20 Telegram from Orjonikidze to Lenin, Stalin and Chicherin. July 16, 1920, RSASPH, rec. gr. 85, inv. 3c, f. 2, sheet 12.

21 Telegram of Mikoyan to Orjonikidze. June 29, 1920, RSASPH, rec. gr. 64, inv. 1, f. 17, sheet 134. For more detail, see: Jamil Hasanli, “Karabakh: Looking into the Past in Search of the Truth,” *Caucasus and Globalization* 3-4 (2011).



This shows that, strange as it may seem, Soviet Russia and Dashnakian Armenia were engaged in secret negotiations about Azerbaijan, to which it was not invited and to which it had not agreed. The developments in Armenia copied what had happened with Georgia a month before: a lot of interesting information had traveled in the ciphered parts of the telegram Orjonikidze and Sergey Kirov had sent to Lenin and Stalin. They believed that a treaty with Georgia without clarifying the position of Azerbaijan was fraught with failure: “We want to know why we are signing a treaty with Georgia and refusing to sign a treaty with friendly Azerbaijan. If you have different plans for Azerbaijan, why are we being kept in the dark?” In the ciphered part they warned: “You should not put forward the name of Karakhan as the author of the Eastern policy. Here the Zakatala scandal [the reference is to the promise to transfer the Zakatala District to Georgia under the Moscow Treaty of 7 May 1920. -J.H.] is interpreted as Armenian perfidy.”<sup>22</sup> Karakhan did play an important role in shaping and realizing the anti-Azeri policy of the People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs of Soviet Russia. The ciphered and open documents of the time directly point to him as the main plotter. Orjonikidze wrote in an open letter: “Karabakh is another Zakatala of our Commissariat for Foreign Affairs. An enormous provocation is underway here: it is rumored that this is stirred up by the Armenians in Moscow.”<sup>23</sup>

Despite the Center’s unprecedented pressure on Azerbaijan, the gap between the Azeri and Armenian positions remained as wide as ever. The talks between Kirov and People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs Mirza Davud Huseynov and the Armenian representatives in Tiflis ended with no results. On August 6, he wrote to Chicherin that he had only convinced the Azeris to cede the Sharur-Daralayaz Uezd to Armenia; the Azeris regarded the rest, that is, the Nakhchivan Uezd, Ordubad, Julfa, Zangezur, and Karabakh, as decidedly their own. The Armenian representatives were no less determined to claim the regions. The Azeris argued that under the Musavat government these regions had belonged to Azerbaijan and that, therefore, if it ceded them, Soviet power would lose its prestige in the eyes of the Azeris, Iranians, and Turks.<sup>24</sup>

On 10 August 1920, the talks in Moscow and Erivan ended in a treaty of six articles, four of which dealt with a deliberately fanned territorial dispute with Azerbaijan. Under Article 2, the troops of the Soviet Russia occupied the disputed regions of Karabakh, Zangezur, and Nakhchivan; the Armenian troops remained in a specified strip. Article 3 stated that the occupation by Soviet troops of the disputed territories did not predetermine the answer to the question about the rights of the Republic of Armenia and the Azerbaijan Socialist Soviet Republic to these territories. The same article further stated that the temporary occupation by the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist

22 Ciphered telegram of Orjonikidze and Kirov to Lenin and Stalin. June 12, 1920, RSASPH, rec. gr. 85, inv. 2c, f. 2, sheets 9-11.

23 Telegram from Orjonikidze to Chicherin. 1920, RSASPH, rec. gr. 64, inv. 1, f. 17, sheet 304.

24 See: Letter of Kirov to Chicherin. August 6, 1920, RSASPH, rec. gr. 80, inv. 4, f. 102k, sheets 1-2.

Republic (RSFSR) of these territories was intended to create conditions conducive to a peaceful resolution of the territorial disputes between Armenia and Azerbaijan; in the future, the issue, said the Treaty, would be settled by means of a comprehensive agreement between the Republic of Armenia and the RSFSR.”<sup>25</sup> Russia hastened to sign the treaty with Armenia because, the same day, Turkey and the Allied Powers signed the Sevres Treaty, under which Armenia could have gained a lot. The Russian Soviet diplomats feared, with good reason, that Armenia might be tempted and would fall under the influence of the Allies. Under pressure from Moscow, the half-baked diplomatic document was signed; Armenia was promised the Azeri lands previously transformed by Soviet Russia into disputed territories.

From the very first days of Soviet power in Azerbaijan, much was done to transform the primordial Azeri lands into disputed territories. This is best illustrated by the Russian-Armenian treaty. On 19 June 1920, Orjonikidze, who had been dispatched to Azerbaijan, telegraphed Lenin and Chicherin that Soviet power had been proclaimed in Karabakh and Zangezur and that both areas believed themselves to be part of Azerbaijan. He deemed it necessary to warn: “In any case, Azerbaijan cannot survive without Karabakh and Zangezur. I think that we should invite an Azeri representative to Moscow to discuss all the issues related to Azerbaijan and Armenia before the treaty with Armenia is signed; repetition of the Zakataly scandal stirred up by Armenians will undermine our position here.”

The Treaty of 10 August between Soviet Russia and Armenia, of which Azerbaijan was not informed, can be described as a logical result of the political course of the Central Bolshevik government and of the People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs in particular, designed to infringe on the interests of Azerbaijan. Some people placed the stakes on Armenia in the territorial disputes between the two republics; some of the top officials in Moscow never hesitated to tell lies, nor did they shun provocations. Long before the treaty was signed, People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs Chicherin wrote in his report to Lenin: “The Azeri government has claimed Karabakh, Zangezur, and the Sharur-Daralayaz Uezd along with Nakhchivan, Ordubad, and Julfa... This combination should not be accomplished by Russian hands—this is unacceptable. We should remain objective and unbiased. It would be a fatal mistake for our Eastern policy to rely on one national element against another national element. If we take any lands from Armenia and transfer them to Azerbaijan, our policy in the East will be distorted.”<sup>26</sup> Chicherin managed to present at least some of his ideas as official and transform them into instructions for the Revolutionary Military Council of the Caucasian Front sent in the name of the CC RCP (B) to not let either Azeri or Armenian officials into the disputed territories.

25 See: Treaty between the RSFSR and the Republic of Armenia. August 10, 1920, APDUDPAR, rec. gr. 1, inv. 169, f. 249/II, sheets 11-12.

26 Copy of a memo to Lenin. June 29, 1920, APDUDPAR, rec. gr. 1, inv. 1, f. 2a, sheets 13-14.

## Formation of Armenia on the Political Map of the Caucasus and Karabakh Issue (1918-1921)

The new leaders of Azerbaijan found themselves in a quandary: on the one hand, enticed by revolutionary zeal, Azeri Soviet power imagined that it was close to Soviet Russia; on the other, Soviet Russia, believed to be the workers' and peasants' ally, detached the lands which had undoubtedly belonged to Azerbaijan under the previous government. This looked ugly, even to the Soviet officials dispatched from Moscow to Azerbaijan. The injustice was glaring. In a long report to Lenin, Nikolai Soloviev, who filled the post of Chairman of the Council of National Economy of Azerbaijan SSR, wrote:

“People pinned their hopes on Moscow, but the peace treaties with Georgia and Armenia, under which chunks of Azeri territory with Muslim population were transferred to these republics, shattered, if not killed, these hopes. The Muslim masses concluded that Moscow had not only captured Azerbaijan, but also increased Georgian and Armenian territories at its expense... The treaty with Armenia under which it acquired part of Azeri territory with Muslim population and a railway of immense strategic and economic importance which blocked the only corridor uniting Azerbaijan with Turkey was the heaviest blow. The ordinary Muslims were puzzled, while certain members of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan explained that the treaty had been compiled on the instructions of influential Armenians who filled high posts in the Center and called themselves Communists while being conscious or unconscious nationalists.”<sup>27</sup>

Nariman Narimanov was enraged by Soviet Russia's arbitrariness toward Azerbaijan; he knew that these provocations had been devised and realized by People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs Georgii Chicherin (who since the summer of 1919 had been dead set against Narimanov's Eastern policy) and his deputy Lev Karakhan. Their posts as heads of the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs allowed them to shape and realize the foreign, especially Eastern, policy of the Soviets. In his opposition to Chicherin, Narimanov tried to rely on Lenin, who had pronounced many high-sounding words and had been lavish with his promises. Still expecting Lenin to be fair and unbiased, he wrote to him in mid-July:

“Comrade Chicherin's telegram shows that you are receiving biased information or that the Center has succumbed to those who are still cooperating with what remains of Denikin's crowd against Soviet power in Azerbaijan. If the Center wants to sacrifice Azerbaijan and keep Baku and its oil and renounce its Eastern policy, it is free to do this. I deem it my duty, however, to warn you: you will not be able to keep Baku separated from the rest of Azerbaijan with the perfidious Dashnaks and Georgian Mensheviks as your neighbors. On the other hand, I would like to find out what the Center thinks about us, the Muslims, and how

27 See: Information of Soloviev to Lenin “Our Policy in Azerbaijan in Two Months (May-June) after the Coup. 1920, RSASPH, rec. gr. 17, inv. 84, f. 58, sheet 15.

it dealt with these important issues without us. The Center was free to mistrust us, but such senior officials as Orjonikidze and Mdivani, likewise, disagree with its decision. Let me plainly say that with its decision about Karabakh the Center deprived us of our weapon, etc. It added plausibility to the provocative statements of the Musavat Party, which is holding forth that the Muslim Communists allegedly sold Azerbaijan to Russia, a country which recognizes the independence of Armenia and Georgia and, at the same time, insists for some reason that the areas which belonged beyond a doubt to Azerbaijan before Soviet power, become disputable. Comrade Chicherin says that we should obey the Center's policy, but is the Center aware that it is using us as a screen? We are told in plain terms: 'You cannot secure the absolutely undisputed territories, but you are holding forth about liberating the East.'"<sup>28</sup>

Soviet Russia preferred to ignore Narimanov's resolute and sometimes even oppositional stand; it followed the policy of humiliation of Azerbaijan devised by the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs. On 20 July, Chicherin telegraphed Narimanov with a great deal of sarcasm: "So far neither you, nor Orjonikidze have clarified in your telegrams why you and the local Communists are dissatisfied with the occupation of Karabakh and Zangezur by Russian troops and why you want, without fail, their formal annexation to Azerbaijan... We should establish good relations with Armenia because if Turkey turns against us, Armenia, even Armenia of the Dashnaks, will serve as an outpost of our struggle against the advancing Turks."<sup>29</sup> In another letter, Chicherin deemed it necessary to warn the Politburo of the CC RCP (B) that relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia should be treated as part of Russia's Turkish policy: "When discussing the Azeri-Armenian disagreements, I have always pointed out that if the Turks acquired aggressive trends in the Caucasus, Armenia will serve as a barrier and will defend us."<sup>30</sup>

As Soviet Russia was consolidating its position in Azerbaijan, the republic was gradually being turned into a toehold for the Bolsheviks' regional policy; its natural resources and territories were used to lull the Georgian and Armenian bourgeois republics and to create conditions conducive to Sovietization of Armenia. On 23 September 1920, Boris Legran sent a ciphered telegram to Lenin in which he described Soviet Russia's intentions regarding the Azeri territories: there was no danger in transferring Zangezur and Nakhchivan to Armenia. The very idea that Russia needed these territories for its liberating military operations in the Turkish and Tabriz sectors was utopian. One could not disagree with the territorial claims of Azerbaijan. Moscow's objective and subjective considerations would undoubtedly satisfy Azerbaijan; as for

28 Letter of Narimanov to Lenin, July 1920, APDUDPAR, rec. gr. 609, inv. 1, f. 71, sheets 41-42.

29 Urgent telegram of Chicherin to Narimanov. July 20, 1920, RSASPH, rec. gr. 5, inv. 1, f. 2097, sheet 1.

30 Letter of Chicherin to the Politburo of the C.C. R.C.P. (B.). October 5, 1920, Foreign Policy Archives of the Russian Federation (AVP RF), rec. gr. 04, inv. 39, Folder 232, f. 52987, sheet 40.

Karabakh, it was possible to insist on its unification with Azerbaijan.<sup>31</sup> In another of his telegrams dated 24 October 1920, this time addressed to Chicherin, Legran described his agreements with the Armenians regarding the Azeri territories: “The Armenians categorically insist that Nakhchivan and Zangezur immediately be recognized as theirs. I pointed out that without Azerbaijan this issue cannot be resolved and that it can be raised only if the Armenians drop their claims to Karabakh. After long discussions they agreed, with minor stipulations, to renounce their claims to Karabakh.”<sup>32</sup> After a short while, however, late in November 1920 when Soviet power had been established in Armenia, the struggle for the mountainous part of Karabakh entered a new stage.

As soon as Soviet power was established in Armenia on 29 November 1920, the Communists returned the Karabakh issue to the political agenda. On 30 November 1920, Nariman Narimanov and People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs Huseynov congratulated the Armenian Revolutionary Committee in a telegram. The telegram, however, did not entirely correspond to the decision adopted by the joint meeting of the Politburo and Orgburo of the CC of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan held on November 30. Narimanov’s speech at the grand meeting of the Baku Soviet on the occasion of establishing Soviet power in Armenia and the Declaration he read on 1 December 1920 also contained certain contradictions. The Declaration said:

“Soviet Azerbaijan, which intends to appease the fraternal Armenian working people fighting the Dashnaks who have spilled and are spilling the innocent blood of our best Communist comrades in Armenia and Zangezur, declares that from this time on territorial issues will never cause bloodshed between two peoples who have been neighbors for centuries; the territories of the Zangezur and Nakhchivan uyezds are an inalienable part of Soviet Armenia. The toiling peasants of Nagorno-Karabakh are granted the right to complete self-determination; all military actions in Zangezur are being suspended, while the troops of Soviet Azerbaijan are being pulled out.”<sup>33</sup>

The Declaration Narimanov read on 1 December mentioned Nakhchivan in addition to Zangezur as the territories transferred to Armenia. Jörg Baberowski of Humboldt University asserts that in the Summer of 1920, Narimanov, under the pressure of Orjonikidze, agreed to transfer Zangezur, Karabakh, and Nakhchivan to Armenia.<sup>34</sup>

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31 See: Legran’s telegram to Lenin. September 23, 1920, RSASPH, rec. gr. 5, inv. 1, f. 21, sheet 144.

32 Secret telegram of Legran to Chicherin. October 24, 1920, RSASPH, rec. gr. 5, inv. 1, f. 2178, sheet 20.

33 *Kommunist*, December 2, 1920.

34 See: Jörg Baberowski, *Vrag est vezde. Stalinism na Kavkaze* (Moscow, 2010), p. 237. German version: Jörg Baberowski, *Der Feind ist überall: Stalinismus im Kaukasus* (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2003), p. 882.

The text which appeared in the Baku newspapers had been falsified by Grigorii Orjonikidze. On 1 December, he informed Legran and People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs of the RSFSR Chicherin of the following in a ciphered telegram: "Azerbaijan has already responded and transferred Nakhchivan, Zangezur, and Nagorno-Karabakh to Soviet Armenia."<sup>35</sup> On 2 December, in another telegram, he informed Lenin and Stalin of the following: "Yesterday Azerbaijan announced that Nakhichevan, Zangezur, and Nagorno-Karabakh were transferred to Soviet Armenia."<sup>36</sup> On Stalin's initiative, two days later "good news" appeared in *Pravda*. Stalin's article, based on a distorted telegram written when Soviet power was established in Armenia, appeared on the same day in *Izvestia*. The question arises: Was Orjonikidze misinformed, or was it a lie? When Soviet power was established in Dilijan, Orjonikidze discussed the issues mentioned in the Declaration of the government of Azerbaijan with Amayak Nazaretyan by direct telephone line and said in particular that "today, the Soviet gathered for its gala meeting in Baku where Narimanov read the Declaration of the government of Azerbaijan, which pointed out that there were no longer borders between Soviet Armenia and Azerbaijan. From this day on, the territory of the Zangezur and Nakhchivan uezds became an inalienable part of Soviet Armenia. It was exclaimed: "*The Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh have been granted the right to self-determination*. The riches of Azerbaijan - oil and kerosene- have become the riches of both republics." Overjoyed, Nazaretyan exclaimed: "We shall start shouting in the press: Bravo, Azeris!"<sup>37</sup>

Did anyone in Armenia see the real text of the Declaration? We know that the text signed by Narimanov and Huseynov was telegraphed to the Armenian Revolutionary Committee. After reading the document, Askanaz Mravyan (a member of the Armenian Revolutionary Committee) informed Armenian representative in Moscow Saak Ter-Gabrielyan that Azerbaijan had announced that Zangezur and Nakhchivan had been united (with Armenia) and that a referendum would take place in Nagorno-Karabakh.<sup>38</sup>

Why did Narimanov suggest in his Declaration that Zangezur be transferred to Armenia? The idea belonged to the Politburo of the CC RCP (B). Orjonikidze was behind this Declaration; this means that the man convinced that Zangezur belonged to Azerbaijan suddenly changed his mind. Why? He wanted to drive a wedge between Azerbaijan and Turkey to reduce to naught Turkey's potential threat to Azerbaijan. On 23 November 1920, Stalin, while

35 Orjonikidze's ciphered telegram to Legran and Chicherin. December 1, 1920, RSASPH, rec. gr. 85, inv. 14, f. 33, sheet 12.

36 Orjonikidze's letter to Lenin and Stalin, December 2, 1920. RSASPH, rec. gr. 85, inv. 14, f. 33, sheet 20.

37 Conversation between Nazaretyan and Orjonikidze by direct telephone line. December 1, 1920, RSASPH, rec. gr. 85, inv. 14, f. 37, sheet 1. For more detail, see: Jamil Hasanli, "How the Caucasus Bureau of the C.C. R.C.P. (B) Discussed the Karabakh Issue in 1920-1923," *Caucasus and Globalization* 1-2 (2011).

38 See: From a member of the Armenian Revolutionary Committee (Mravyan) to representative of Soviet Armenia Ter-Gabrielyan. January 4, 1921, AVP RF, rec. gr. 04, inv. 39, folder 232, f. 53001, sheet 14.

travelling from Baku to Moscow, used a direct line from Rostov-on-Don to inform Lenin that, according to Orjonikidze, the Turks' desire to establish a common border between Turkey and Azerbaijan looked threatening and that the Turkish plans could be upturned by transferring Zangezur to Armenia.<sup>39</sup> This explains why the Turks regarded the treaty between Soviet Russia and Dashnak Armenia and friendly relations between these countries when Armenia became Soviet to be an obstacle on Turkey's road to the Muslim peoples of the Caucasus.<sup>40</sup>

Back on 4 November 1920, during his "famous" trip to the Caucasus, Stalin attended a joint meeting of the Central Committee of the Azerbaijan Communist Party (Bolshevik) (CC Az.CP (B)) and the Caucasian Bureau of the C.C. R.C.P. (B.), which listened to Legran's report on the situation in Armenia and passed a decision. Point "b" of the document, which related to the discussed treaty between Russia and Armenia, said the following: "To inform, at the same time, that the Politburo insists that the point on the transfer of Nakhichevan and Zangezur [suggested by Moscow. -J.H.] is not advantageous either politically or strategically and can only be carried out in an emergency." Point "d" instructed Nariman Narimanov to substantiate the Politburo's opinion about Nakhchivan and Zangezur.<sup>41</sup>

This meant that there was no Karabakh problem at all initially, which was why it was not discussed. On 20 November 1920, a diplomatic mission of Soviet Russia arrived in Erivan to monitor the talks between Turkey and Armenia underway in Gumri and to sort out Armenia's territorial claims against Azerbaijan and Georgia.<sup>42</sup> People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs Georgii Chicherin was informed that "today, the continued existence of the Armenian people depends not so much on military force as on diplomacy. We should abandon party romanticism and arm ourselves with grim realism." The diplomatic mission deemed it necessary to remind the people's commissar that "when talking to the Turks in Batumi [at the peace conference held in Batumi in May-June 1918. -J.H.], Kachaznuni and Khatisyan agreed to transfer Karabakh to Azerbaijan."<sup>43</sup> Despite the fact that on 1 December 1920, Nariman Narimanov made public the Declaration of the Revolutionary Committee of Azerbaijan, Nakhchivan and Karabakh (both its valley and mountain parts) still belonged to Azerbaijan. Under the Moscow Treaty of 16 March 1921 between Soviet Russia and Kemalist Turkey, the Nakhchivan Region became

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39 See: Conversation between Stalin and Lenin by direct line. November 23, 1920, AVP RF, rec. gr. 04, inv. 39, folder 232, f. 52987, sheet 47.

40 See: Letter of Legran to Chicherin. 22.12.1920, RSASPH, rec. gr. 5, inv. 1, f. 212733, sheet 5.

41 See: Protocol No. 4 of the joint meeting of the CC Az.CP (B) and Caucasian Bureau. November 4, 1920, APD UDP AR, rec. gr. 1, inv. 1, f. 22, sheet 20.

42 For more detail, see: Firuz Kazemzadeh, *The Struggle for Transcaucasia (1917-1921)* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1951), p. 290; Ronald Grigor Suny, *Looking toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 130.

43 The Diplomatic Representatives of Soviet Russia in Erivan to People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs Chicherin. November 1920, SAAR, rec. gr. 28, inv. 1, f. 38, sheet 15.

an autonomous territory as a protectorate of Azerbaijan on the condition that it would never cede protectorate to a third state. This revived the problem of the mountainous part of Karabakh as an urgent issue between Azerbaijan and Armenia.<sup>44</sup>

On 3 June 1921, members of the Caucasian Bureau, Grigorii Orjonikidze, Filip Makharadze, Nariman Narimanov, Alexander Myasnikov (Martuni), Ivan Orakhelashvili, Amayak Nazaretyan, and Yurii Figatner (candidate for bureau member), Secretary of the C.C. of the Azerbaijan CP Grigorii Kaminsky, and member of the CC of the Communist Party of Georgia Shalva Eliava attended a plenary session of the Caucasian Bureau of the CC RCP (B). Its evening sitting was expected to discuss three questions: (1) the Azerbaijani issue; (2) the issue of Zangezur; and (3) the nomads. Protocol No. 6 deals with the decisions on the first and third points; the second was discussed separately in the Addendum to the Protocol, which started all the trouble.<sup>45</sup> First, as distinct from Protocol No. 6, the decision on Zangezur, which consisted of seven points, was marked as “strictly confidential.” Second, of the seven points, only six dealt with Zangezur, while Point 5 said: “The declaration of the Armenian government should mention that Nagorno-Karabakh belongs to Armenia.”<sup>46</sup>

On 12 June, the Council of People’s Commissars (CPC) of Armenia issued a decree on joining the mountainous part of Karabakh to Armenia. The decree said: “Proceeding from the declaration of the Revolutionary Committee of the Socialist Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan and from the agreement between the socialist republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan, it is declared that from this time on Nagorno-Karabakh has become an inalienable part of the Socialist Soviet Republic of Armenia.”<sup>47</sup> The same day, Myasnikov and Karabekyan signed the document; three days later, on June 15, it was discussed by the CC CP of Armenia, which passed the following decision: “The decree on the unification of Nagorno-Karabakh and Soviet Armenia should be published.” The same sitting discussed the fifth point of its agenda on dispatching a representative to Karabakh; it was decided “to send Comrade Mravyan together with Pirumov, Akop Ionisyan, Ter-Simonyan, and a group of other comrades to Karabakh.”<sup>48</sup> The government issued a corresponding decree, which the Armenian Revolutionary Committee published a week later on 19 June. Askanaz Mravyan was appointed Chargé d’Affaires Extraordinaire in Nagorno-Karabakh.

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44 For more detail, see: William Edward David Allen and Paul Muratoff, *Caucasian Battlefields: A History of the Wars on the Turco-Caucasian Border (1828–1921)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953).

45 See: Protocol No. 6 of the evening sitting of the plenary session of the Caucasian Bureau of the CC RCP (B). June 3, 1921, RSASPH, rec. gr. 64, inv. 1, f. 1, sheet 76rev.

46 Addendum to Protocol No. 6 of the evening sitting of the plenary session of the Caucasian Bureau of the CC RCP (B). June 3, 1921, RSASPH, rec. gr. 64, inv. 1, f. 1, sheet 77.

47 *Bakinsky rabochy*, June 22, 1921.

48 Protocol No. 8 of the meeting of the CC of the Communist Party of Armenia. June 15, 1921, RSASPH, rec. gr. 64, inv. 1, f. 105, sheet 11rev.



As distinct from the Decree of the CPC of Armenia of 12 June, the Declaration of the Azerbaijan Revolutionary Committee did not mention the transfer of Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia; this was not discussed by the republics which had never concluded any legally valid agreement either. It seems that the authors of the Decree were inspired by the “strictly confidential” decision on the Zangezur issue which the Caucasian Bureau had passed on 3 June 1921. The sitting was chaired by Orjonikidze with Figatner acting as a secretary. The decree of 12 June did not mention the 3 June decision of the Caucasian Bureau because, first, it was “strictly confidential” and second, the Caucasian Bureau was not empowered to pass decisions of this kind.

What caused the hasty and legally untenable actions designed to transfer Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia? What was behind Armenia’s actions and the decision of the Caucasian Bureau of the CC RCP (B) in May-June 1921? The answer is simple. On 15 June, the commission on border problems among the Transcaucasian republics was to meet in Tiflis. On 2 May 1921, the plenary session of the Caucasian Bureau set up a commission of representatives of the three republics headed by Sergey Kirov to delimitate the administrative borders.<sup>49</sup> On the eve of the Tiflis meeting, the Caucasian Bureau (by its decision of 3 June) and the Armenian government (by a decree of 12 June) wanted to confront Azerbaijan with the accomplished transfer of Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia.

On 26 June, the CPC of Azerbaijan discussed Navy Commissar of Azerbaijan Aliheydar Karaev’s report about his trip to Nagorno-Karabakh and Nakhichevan and decided that the Armenian claims to Nagorno-Karabakh should be studied and summarized in a detailed report to the Council. A group of three (Shakhtakhtinsky, Vezirov, and Aliev) was set up to cope with the task. It was decided to suspend the powers the Armenian government had extended to Mravyan until the group had completed its report and to inform Grigorii Orjonikidze, Chairman of the Armenian Revolutionary Committee Alexander Myasnikov, Navy Commissar of Azerbaijan Karaev, and Askanaz Mravyan of this decision.<sup>50</sup> On 27 June, Nariman Narimanov, in fulfillment of the decision, informed Orjonikidze and Myasnikov by telegraph that the CPC of Azerbaijan had unanimously deemed the unilateral decision on Nagorno-Karabakh passed by the Armenian Revolutionary Committee without discussion at the CPC of Armenia and the arrival of Mravyan in Nagorno-Karabakh as envoy extraordinary of Armenia to be an unprecedented political and tactical mistake. It was also requested that Mravyan be immediately recalled.

On 27 June, a joint sitting of the Politburo and Orgburo of the CC of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan discussed the problem of borders between

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49 See: Protocol No. 2 of the sitting of the Caucasian Bureau of CC RCP (B). May 2, 1921, RSASPH, rec. gr. 64, inv. 1, f. 1, sheet 57.

50 See: Protocol of a sitting of the Council of People’s Commissars of Azerbaijan. June 26, 1921, SAAR, rec. gr. 411, inv. 1, f. 12, sheet 1.

Azerbaijan and Armenia and dismissed the Nagorno-Karabakh issue raised by Alexander Bekzadyan as untenable in view of the region's obvious economic bias toward Azerbaijan. Likewise, it was administratively and economically untenable to divide the localities with Armenian and Azeri populations between the two republics. On the basis of Narimanov's declaration, involving Armenian and Muslim villagers in wide-scale Soviet construction was suggested as the only answer. It was also suggested that all discussions be discontinued until relevant information had arrived from Tiflis. Even before the sitting adjourned, Alihedar Shirvani, instructed by Narimanov, informed Huseynov in Tiflis of this decision.<sup>51</sup> His message said in part: "The Council of People's Commissars has agreed with the decision. Comrade Narimanov asked me to inform you that the question must be resolved in this way, otherwise the Council will divest itself of all of its responsibilities, since if this is the way Soviet Armenia wishes to make a good impression on the Dashnaks and the non-party masses, we should bear in mind that by the same token we will be reviving anti-Soviet groups in Azerbaijan similar to the Dashnaks."<sup>52</sup>

On 28 June, the CPC met once more under Narimanov's chairmanship. Myasnikov's Declaration, which proclaimed Nagorno-Karabakh part of the Armenian S.S.R., was declined; the meeting discussed the possibility of recalling Mravyan, extraordinary representative of Armenia in Nagorno-Karabakh. After this, Narimanov departed to Tiflis to attend the plenary meeting of the Caucasian Bureau of the CC RCP (B) scheduled for 4 July 1921. The famous sitting of the Caucasian Bureau of the CC RCP (B) of 27 June 1921 never considered the historical and ethnographic aspects; the decision was based on Karabakh's economic pull toward Azerbaijan. On 4 July, however, at another plenum of the Caucasian Bureau attended by Joseph Stalin, Sergey Kirov, future head of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan (three weeks later he would have to become Secretary of the CC Az.CP (B) of Azerbaijan. -J.H.), and Grigorii Orjonikidze (the Transcaucasus republics' curator) voted for the following resolution: "*To include* [italics added for emphasis -J.H.] Nagorno-Karabakh in the Armenian SSR and limit the plebiscite to the mountainous part."<sup>53</sup>

The plenary session was attended by member of the CC RCP (B) Stalin and members of its Caucasian Bureau Orjonikidze, Makharadze, Narimanov, Myasnikov, Kirov, Nazaretyan, Orakhelashvili, Figatner; Breitman (Secretary of the Caucasian Bureau of the Central Committee of the Russian Young Communist League), and members of the Central Committee of the

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51 See: Protocol No. 20 of the sitting of the Politburo and Orgburo of the CC Az.CP (B). June 27, 1921, APDUDPAR, rec. gr. 1, inv. 74, f. 1231, sheet 64.

52 Conversation of Shirvani and Narimanov by direct phone line with Huseynov. June 27, 1921, RSASPH, rec. gr. 64, inv. 1, f. 215, sheet 14.

53 Protocol No. 11 of the evening sitting of the plenary session of the Caucasian Bureau of the CC RCP (B). July 4, 1921, RSASPH, rec. gr. 64, inv. 1, f. 1, sheet 118.

## Formation of Armenia on the Political Map of the Caucasus and Karabakh Issue (1918-1921)

Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Georgia Tsintsadze, Mdivani, and Svanidze. The discussion revealed two opposite opinions. The participants were invited to vote for the following: (a) Karabakh *should remain* (italics added for emphasis -J.H.) part of Azerbaijan (Narimanov, Makharadze, and Nazaretyan voted “for”; Orjonikidze, Myasnikov, Kirov and Figatner voted “against”); (b) The plebiscite should be carried out throughout the entire territory of Karabakh among the Armenians and Muslims (Narimanov and Makharadze voted “for”); (c) The mountainous part of Karabakh should be joined to Armenia (Orjonikidze, Myasnikov, Figatner, and Kirov voted “for”); (d) The plebiscite should be carried out only in Upper Karabakh (Orjonikidze, Myasnikov, Figatner, Kirov, and Nazaretyan voted “for”).<sup>54</sup>

The protocol contains a note: Comrade Ivan Orakhelashvili was absent when the vote on Karabakh was taken. This was a much more honest position than that of future Secretary of the CC of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan Sergey Kirov and Grigorii Orjonikidze, who repeatedly demanded in his telegrams to Vladimir Lenin and Georgii Chicherin that both the valley and the mountainous part of Karabakh be left in Azerbaijan. They voted “for” on the two last points. The adopted decision violated Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity. This made people wonder why Orjonikidze and Kirov, who several months earlier “could not imagine Azerbaijan without Karabakh,” changed their minds in June 1921 and voted against Azerbaijan at the 4 July sitting of the Caucasian Bureau. Were they guided by the Center’s secret instructions? Here is an explanation: the Moscow Treaty of 16 March 1921 between Soviet Russia and Turkey (with a point which preserved Nakhichevan within Azerbaijan on the condition that Azerbaijan would never cede protectorate to a third state) turned Nagorno-Karabakh into a target of secret and then open discussions at the Caucasian Bureau in June-July 1921 and triggered attempts to transfer Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia by force.

The text and the political sense of the decision of the Caucasian Bureau of 4 July was frequently falsified and misinterpreted. The Armenian authors performed a “minor” operation by replacing the verb “include” with the verb “keep within.” Nariman Narimanov stated resolutely that “because the Karabakh issue is so important to Azerbaijan, I believe it necessary to transfer the final decision on it to the CC RCP.” It was thanks to his protest that the meeting arrived at the following decision: “Since the Karabakh issue has caused serious disagreements, the Caucasian Bureau of the CC RCP (B) believes it advisable to transfer the final decision to the CC RCP (B).”<sup>55</sup> This meant that the same sitting discussed the Karabakh issue as Point 5 of the

54 See: Protocol No. 11 of the evening sitting of the plenary session of the Caucasian Bureau of the CC RCP (B). July 4, 1921, RSASPH, rec. gr. 64, inv. 1, f. 1, sheet 118. For more detailed information, see: Jamil Hasanli, *The Sovietization of Azerbaijan: The South Caucasus in the Triangle of Russia, Turkey, and Iran, 1920-1922* (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2018), pp. 146-148.

55 Protocol No. 11 of the evening sitting of the plenary session of the Caucasian Bureau of the CC RCP (B). July 4, 1921, RSASPH, rec. gr. 64, inv. 1, f. 1, sheet 114.

agenda; the decision passed by a majority vote after Narimanov's statement (Point 6) annulled the previous results.<sup>56</sup>

On 5 July, the plenary session of the Caucasian Bureau adopted the following decisions on Point 2 of the agenda in view of the firm position of Narimanov and Orjonikidze's retreat from his previous stand: (a) proceeding from the need to maintain national peace between the Muslims and the Armenians, the economic ties between Upper and Lower Karabakh, and its constant contacts with Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh *should be left* (italics mine -J.H.) within the Azerbaijan SSR with broad regional autonomy and its administrative center in the town of Shusha, which belongs to the autonomous region (for-4; abstained-3); (b) the CC of Azerbaijan should be instructed to identify the boundaries of the autonomous region and present the results to the Caucasian Bureau of the CC RCP (B.) for approval; (c) the Presidium of the Caucasian Bureau of the CC should be instructed to talk to the CC of Armenia and the CC of Azerbaijan about a candidate for the post of commissar extraordinary of Nagorno-Karabakh; (d) the CC of Azerbaijan should be instructed to identify the volume of rights of the autonomy of Nagorno-Karabakh and present the result to the Caucasian Bureau of the CC for approval.<sup>57</sup>

When commenting on the repeal of the first "fair decision" on the Nagorno-Karabakh, the Armenian side referred to Joseph Stalin's unexpected arrival in Tiflis, who had allegedly pulled the strings for the Azeris in his usual manner. We have established that Stalin had arrived in Tiflis earlier, late in June and could not, therefore, suddenly arrive at the plenary meeting of the Caucasian Bureau of the CC RCP (B) on 5 July. Why do the Armenian historians who falsify the historical documents of the Caucasian Bureau implicate Stalin in "keeping" ("transferring" being their favorite term) Nagorno-Karabakh within Azerbaijan? Because the crimes perpetrated under Stalin give the Armenians a chance to present themselves as victims of the totalitarian regime and create the semblance of "fairness restored."<sup>58</sup>

The results of the discussion of the Zangezur (3 June 1921) and Nagorno-Karabakh (4-5 July) issues were caused by a wave of Communist nationalism in Armenia raised by the fact that the Moscow Treaty (March 1921) between Soviet Russia and Kemalist Turkey had registered the status of the Nakhichevan Region and the attempts of the Center to quench this wave. On 15 April 1921, People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs of Armenia Alexander Bekzadyan (who headed the Armenian delegation at the Moscow talks) sent a long letter of protest to Georgii Chicherin in which he accused Soviet Russia of failing to protect the interests of the Armenians. The letter said: "The

56 See: Protocol No. 12 of the plenary session of the Caucasian Bureau of the CC RCP (B). July 5, 1921, RSASPH, rec. gr. 64, inv. 1, f. 1, sheet 122.

57 See: Protocol No. 12 of the plenary session of the Caucasian Bureau of the CC RCP (B). July 5, 1921, RSASPH, rec. gr. 64, inv. 1, f. 1, sheet 122.

58 Tofiq Köçerli, *Qarabağ: Yalan ve hegiget* (Baku: İrsad, 1998), p. 172.

Armenian delegation finds it very important to point out that the Turkish delegation at the conference acted as a protector and defender of the Muslim population of the Transcaucasus and of the interests of Soviet Azerbaijan in particular.”<sup>59</sup> Bekzadyan was concerned about the fact that Turkey had managed to retain Nakhichevan, a border point of great importance for its safety in the east, within Azerbaijan. He deemed it necessary to stress that “the conference’s decision on the Nakhichevan and Sharuro-Daralaghez issues deprived Armenia of the possibility of administering Zangezur, which belongs to it, in a normal way.”<sup>60</sup>

Chicherin wrote a letter to Saak Ter-Gabrielyan, who represented the Soviet government of Armenia, informing him of the above, by saying that he was amazed by Bekzadyan’s attempt to justify what the Armenian delegation had been doing at the Moscow conference and push the guilt onto the Russian delegation. He wrote that the Armenians, with whom he had been communicating, were well-aware of the conference’s main aim and had never complained of its decisions.<sup>61</sup> Chicherin sent a more or less similar telegram to Boris Legran in Tiflis, which said: “I strongly object to the way Bekzadyan is trying, first, to heap the guilt on the Russian delegation and, second, to purge the Armenian delegation of accusations in front of readers or listeners, of whom I know nothing, by distorting the facts and suppressing information of which the Armenian delegation was well aware.”<sup>62</sup>

The Armenian leaders resorted to blackmail of this sort to be able to take advantage of an opportune moment (in the context of the closed discussions of the Moscow Treaty) to appropriate Karabakh and pull the Center to their side. The Armenian leaders, who had remained silent at the Moscow Conference, suddenly formulated their claims to Soviet Russia; they obviously wanted Karabakh as a compensation of sorts. The Nagorno-Karabakh issue was discussed once more on 5 July at the insistence of Orjonikidze and Nazaretyan.

The decisions of the Caucasian Bureau of 5 July began to be implemented in the first days of August. On 1 August 1921, an extraordinary Congress of the Soviets of the 2nd Part of the Shusha Uezd was held in the village of Kendhurt. L. Mirzoyan, who was invited to represent the Council of People’s Commissars, delivered a report in which he proved that economically, spiritually, politically, and ethnically Karabakh was closely connected with Baku as the center of Azerbaijan. He described the decision of the Caucasian Bureau to set up an administrative unit subordinated directly to Baku in the

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59 A. Bekzadyan’s letter to Chicherin. April 15, 1921, AVP RF, rec. gr. 04, inv. 39, folder 232, f. 53001, sheets 58-59.

60 A. Bekzadyan’s letter to Chicherin. April 15, 1921, AVP RF, rec. gr. 04, inv. 39, folder 232, f. 53001, sheet 62.

61 See: Chicherin’s letter to Ter-Gabrielyan. April 21, 1921, AVP RF, rec. gr. 04, inv. 39, folder 232, f. 53001, sheet 63.

62 Chicherin’s telegram to Legran. April 22, 1921, AVP RF, rec. gr. 04, inv. 39, folder 232, f. 53001, sheet 65.

mountainous part of Karabakh as absolutely correct<sup>63</sup> and promised that with the establishment of an autonomy all the problems would be resolved. On his return, Mirzoyan supplied a detailed report in which he wrote, in particular, that the Karabakh issue had been created (and fanned) by top party and Soviet officials, on the one hand, and by the Armenian nationalist-minded intelligentsia, on the other.<sup>64</sup>

After 5 July, it was rumored that the Armenians had been evicted from Karabakh to Armenia (Mirzoyan mentioned in his report that the rumors were started by nationalist-minded Armenians). Gradually, this “information” reached the Caucasian Bureau of the CC RCP (B). It should be said that all those who were displeased with the decisions of the Caucasian Bureau of 5 July acted through Sergey Kirov (when he was elected First Secretary of the CC of the Community Party of Azerbaijan). In August 1921, Secretary of the Caucasian Bureau Figatner wrote to Kirov that allegedly after the decision of the Caucasian Bureau of 5 July to keep Nagorno-Karabakh within Azerbaijan, “many Armenian villages were moved from Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia.”<sup>65</sup> After receiving this information, Kirov immediately asked Karaev and Mirzoyan (who were in Karabakh) to clarify it. They answered that there was an opposite trend: in the first months of Sovietization of Azerbaijan, Muslims started moving away from Karabakh to other places.

The decision of the Caucasian Bureau on an autonomous status for the mountainous part of Karabakh forced the Center to closely follow the relevant developments. In a letter to Sergey Kirov, First Secretary of the CC Az.CP (B), dated 22 May 1922, Joseph Stalin wrote the following with a great deal of sarcasm: “They say that Fonstein, a ‘native’ of Karabakh, represents it in the Central Executive Committee of Azerbaijan.”<sup>66</sup> In his letter dated 18 June, Kirov explained to Stalin that he had been deluded and listed the members who represented Karabakh at the Central Executive Committee (CEC).<sup>67</sup> At the same time, the Center was playing into the hands of the Armenians; it tried to prevent subordination of the party organization of Karabakh to the Communist Party of Azerbaijan. On 1 August 1922, however, Kirov and Matyushin, who headed the organizational department of CC Az.CP (B), telegraphed to Moscow: “The territory of Karabakh is part of Azerbaijan, while its party organization is part of the Az.CP.”<sup>68</sup>

63 See: Protocol of the extraordinary Congress of the Soviets of the 2nd Part of the Shusha Uezd. 01.08.1921, APDUDPAR, rec. gr. 1, inv. 2, f. 18, sheets 120-120rev.

64 See: Report by Mirzoyan at the C.C. Az.C.P. (Copy to the Caucasian Bureau of the CC RCP (B)) about his trip to the mountainous part of Karabakh. August 3, 1921, RSASPH, rec. gr. 64, inv. 1, f. 95, sheet 3rev.

65 Information supplied by Secretary of the Caucasian Bureau of the CC RCP (B) Figatner to Kirov. August 1921, APD UDP AR, rec. gr. 1, inv. 129, f. 107, sheet 58.

66 Stalin’s letter about the situation in the Communist Party of Azerbaijan and the representative of Karabakh in the CEC of Azerbaijan. May 22, 1922, RSASPH, rec. gr. 558, inv. 11, f. 746, sheet 1.

67 See: Kirov’s confidential letter to Stalin. June 18, 1922, RSASPH, rec. gr. 558, inv. 11, f. 746, sheet 2.

68 Telegram sent by Kirov and Matyushin to the CC RCP (B). August 1, 1922, RSASPH, rec. gr. 80, inv. 25, f. 2, sheet 1.

On 7 July 1923, the Central Executive Committee of Azerbaijan crowned three years of preparatory work with a decree on setting up the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region (NKAR) as part of the Republic of Azerbaijan. This is how the struggle over the territorial affiliation of Nagorno-Karabakh which began in the first years of Soviet power in the Transcaucasus ended. On 27 May 1924, Nariman Narimanov wrote the following to Stalin: “Under Mirzoyan’s strong pressure, Nagorno-Karabakh was made an autonomous region. I was not able to accomplish this, not because I was against the autonomy, but because the Armenian peasants themselves did not want this. Meanwhile, Mirzoyan, assisted by the Dashnak teachers, tilled the soil and pushed the decision through the Transcaucasian Territorial Committee.”<sup>69</sup> He knew that the trouble for Azerbaijan did not stop there; he predicted that the autonomy of Nagorno-Karabakh was the beginning of a future tragedy.

## **Conclusion**

Back in the 19th century, Alexander Griboedov, a Russian diplomat and poet, wrote: “We ... have been holding forth long enough about how to convince the Muslims to accept their current problems as not lasting forever and how to eradicate their fears that Armenians will seize the land on which they were allowed to settle temporarily.”<sup>70</sup> The fears proved justified: the Armenians put down roots in the Azeri lands and eventually became hostile toward the true owners of the land. Throughout the 20th century, the Azeris deeply regretted the hospitality with which they treated the Armenians. In the last two decades, this regret has become even more agonizing.

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69 N. Narimanov, *K istorii nashey revolyutsii v okrainakh (Pismo I.V. Stalinu)* (Baku, 1992), p. 59.

70 A.S. Griboedov, *Sochinenia v dvukh tomakh, Vol. 2* (Moscow, 1971), pp. 340-341.

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