

# THE ROLE OF THE KARABAKH ISSUE IN RESTORATION OF AZERBAIJANI NATIONALISM

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The articulation of an Azerbaijani national consciousness gained momentum throughout the 1970 and 1980s, but it had not yet matured into a liberation movement until the conflict between Armenian and Azeris suddenly erupted in 1988. Small socio-political groupings initially began to take shape in the late 1960s and early 1970s. However the Soviet structure did not allow Azerbaijani nationalist movement, Azerbaijani National Front was banned and its members were under KGB pressure. As a result popular support for nationalists remained limited. In the demise of the Soviet power in Azerbaijan the most significant factor in shaping Azerbaijan nationalism was the Armenian attacks and military failure in Karabakh. In this context, the article focuses on the Karabakh issue's role in restoration in the early years.*

**Keywords:** *Armenia, Azerbaijan, Azerbaijani Nationalism, Elchibey, Karabakh, Russia, Turkey.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The bloody Karabakh War caused instability in the region and destabilised Armenia, Azerbaijan and whole Southern Caucasia. The problem could not be solved till the present day. The war damaged the national economies and prevented the foreign investors from the region. It did not help to reconciliation the problems between the Turks and Armenians. The war's regional impacts have widely been discussed during the last decade by Azerbaijani and Armenian academicians. However another affect of the war was mostly ignored. The conflicts in Karabakh have deeply affected the Armenian and Azerbaijani nationalism. In Azerbaijan in particular, it can be argued that the war shaped the modern Azerbaijani nationalism and if the war were not erupted the Azerbaijani nationalism would not have been strong as it is now. Even it can be said that the Karabakh War made more possible Azerbaijani independence when the Soviet Union was collapsing.

In this framework this study focuses on the Karabakh War's impact on Azerbaijani nationalism. However it is not a chronological history of the war or Armenian-Azerbaijani relations. The article will not detail all the developments in this period but will rather focus on the

developments most pertinent to its thesis. Another limitation is that of objectivity. Azerbaijani and Armenian sources blame each other, and most of the sources from Turkey support the Azerbaijani arguments. Finding reliable sources is quite difficult regarding the disputes between the Armenian-Azerbaijani problem. However as mentioned earlier we will not focus on the external relations, but the domestic Azerbaijani issues. This is not a judgement of the Armenians or Azerbaijanis, and the article is not interested in who started the riots or conflicts, which side is aggressive or innocent. Actually the author assumes that all sides involved the clashes have responsibilities in any armed conflict, and 'the Armenian-Azerbaijani vendetta' is no exception. Therefore this study made all efforts to keep away this 'vicious circle', and as a matter of fact that this is not a study of Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, but an attempt to understand the conflicts impact on the restoration of Azerbaijani nationalism in the early years of independent Azerbaijan.

### THE EARLY STAGE OF INDEPENDENT POLITICAL ACTIVITY

The main political groups before the Soviet Union in Azerbaijan were socialists, Islamists, pan-Turkists, pan-Azerbaijan nationalists and Azerbaijani nationalists (a more limited nationalism). However, except the leftist groups, these movements were relatively weak and unorganised. The Armenian threat was the first factor that changed the political life. The name of the first national political party was '*Difai*' (Defence) and this was no accidental. It was established as a military-political organisation against the Armenian attacks.<sup>353</sup> The Armenian factor united the Azerbaijanis against a common 'enemy' and many political parties and currents were formed in order to save the Azerbaijani territories and people.

The articulation of an Azerbaijani national consciousness in the Soviet period gained momentum throughout the 1970 and 1980s, but it had not yet matured into a liberation movement until the conflict between the Armenians and Azeris suddenly erupted in 1988. Small socio-political groupings initially began to take shape in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The first political group was clandestinely formed by nationalist minded young people who attended Baku University in the late 1960s. Among the leading cadres of the group were Ebulfez Elchibey, Malik Mahmudov, Alim Hasayev and Rafik Ismailov, who would be prominent figures in the Azerbaijani National Front when it emerged in the late 1980s. The group aimed at increasing Azerbaijani national consciousness and providing a base among youth for national struggle. Nevertheless, it disbanded due to the political inexperience of the leaders as well as intense pressure of the KGB.<sup>354</sup>

However, in the 1970s and early 1980s, small intellectual circles that gathered informally and clandestinely began to appear. In clandestine meetings, such issues as the restoration of national monuments, the economic downfall of the country, and the ecological devastation caused by Soviet policies were discussed. Nationalist minded intellectuals sought a way for national self-determination by gaining concessions from Moscow for personal liberty. Yet, there was no open opposition to the Soviet regime in Azerbaijan during that period.<sup>355</sup> With the advent of Gorbachev, as elsewhere in the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan entered a new era that would open a way to independence. Glasnost and Perestroika policies heavily influenced Azerbaijani political, social and cultural life. In fact, Kamran Bagirov, the leader of AzSSR, initially endeavoured to resist shift in policy directed from Moscow. He had been assuming the old party-politics and taking no initiative on his own. He even tried avoid to addressing perestroika (restructuring, *yenidengurma*)

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<sup>353</sup> Haleddin İbrahimli, *Değişen Avrasya'da Kafkasya* (Caucasia in a Changing Eurasia), (Ankara: Asam, 2001), pp. 5-6

<sup>354</sup> Ebulfez Elchibey, 'Tercume-i Halim', *Kurtulus*, No.2. p.3.

<sup>355</sup> Tamara Dragadze, 'Azerbaijanis', in Graham Smith (Ed.), *The Nationalities Question in the Soviet Union*, (New York: Longman, 1991), pp. 170-171.

or glasnost (openness, *ashkarlyk*) in his speeches as much as possible, and strove to limit the implementation of the partial reforms.<sup>356</sup>

However, encouraged by the application of glasnost in other republics and Moscow, as a first step, a group of intellectuals gradually began to question the seventy-year-old classical Marxist approach to Azerbaijani history. Initially, Azerbaijani intellectuals and authorities who had been charged with being nationalist in the Great Purges of 1936-8 were rehabilitated in the Azerbaijani media. Tentative efforts were made to republish certain long-suppressed works and to re-evaluate the place of Azerbaijani writers in literary history. In this way, the literary and press figures of the past, condemned by the official ideology as nationalist-bourgeoisie, such as Alimardanbay Topchubashi, Ahmad bay Aghayev, Alibay Huseyinzade, and Ahmad Jafaroghlu, were reinterpreted as cultural figures who had made positive contributions to Azerbaijani history.<sup>357</sup> In academic institutions, many researches aimed at reacquainting the Azerbaijanis with their past, their traditions and their culture began to be done. Azerbaijan had been already witnessing a proliferation of historical novels since the early 1980s.<sup>358</sup>

In the early stages of the process of re-evaluating their history, Azerbaijani historians made the distant past the focal point of their research by not touching on the more recent past, as this would mean challenging ideological taboos still in existence. Yet, in time, the official interpretation of recent Azeri history began to be questioned. One of the most significant developments was the change in attitude towards the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic of 1918-1920 and its leaders, who were now treated with a new respect. Professional historians, initially, put on the agenda 'positive aspects of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic of 1918-20', that had hitherto been mentioned as a 'reactionary bourgeoisie nationalist regime' or a 'puppet of Turkey'<sup>359</sup>, and called for prior evaluations to be abandoned.<sup>360</sup> Encouraged by massive support for a new interpretation of the history despite official pressure, they subsequently embarked on a re-evaluation of Azerbaijani-Russian relations. It was acknowledged that much relevant archival material had been suppressed throughout the Soviet period; also, that there had been deliberate distortions, omissions and ideologically biased interpretations. Consequently, they openly stated that a distorted version of the history had been propagated in which Azerbaijani figures were illustrated in a positive light if they supported Russian interests, but they were cruel, despotic and reactionary if they opposed them.<sup>361</sup>

By 1989, the democratisation process, already well under way in the western republics of the Soviet Union, started to penetrate Azerbaijan. It is, however, important to note that compared to Baltic and other Transcaucasus states, the liberation movement started quite late in Azerbaijan. More significantly, its emergence was, to large extent, in reaction to the separatist movement in

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<sup>356</sup> Sharon Kehnemui, *Authoritarianism and Democracy: Policy Management and Regimes in Azerbaijan*, unpublished PhD Thesis, Bilkent University, Ankara, 1993, p.27.

<sup>357</sup> For an assessment of the initial steps made by Azerbaijani historians towards an interrogative approach to the past, see J. Soper Reevaluation of Azerbaijani History Urged, *RFE/RL*, July 7, 1987

<sup>358</sup> Azade Ayse Rorlich, 'Not by History Alone: The Retrieval of the Past Among the Tatars and the Azeris', *Central Asian Survey*, Vol.3, No.2, 1984, p. 95.

<sup>359</sup> For the communist Azerbaijanis, Turkey was one of the main reactionary source and threat for Azerbaijan, because Turkey was in the capitalist block and was a member of the NATO. Turkey Turks speak Turkish language like the Azerbaijanis and both peoples are from the same racial roots.

<sup>360</sup> A. Bohr and Y. Aslan, 'Independent Azerbaijan, 1918-1920: Call to Re-evaluate History of Former Nation-State', *RFE/RL*, August 18, 1988.

<sup>361</sup> For a detail account of debates regarding the issue in Azerbaijani media, see R. Asker, *Perestroika ve Azerbaycan Basini* (Perestroika and the Azerbaijani Press), a paper presented to a symposium organised by *Journal of Yeni Forum* on 'Turkiye Modeli ve Turk Kokenli Cumhuriyetlerle Eski Sovyet Halklari' (The Model of Turkey and the Turkic Republics and the Turkic Former Soviet Peoples), Ankara, 1991

the autonomous region of Nagorno Karabakh, heavily populated by Armenians. Even at a period when demonstrations regarding the events in Nagorno Karabakh became intensive, most Azerbaijani activists did not ask for immediate independence or withdrawal from the Soviet Union. Hunter made the good point that

*“the arrival of Russian troops in Baku would mark a turning point in the development of Azerbaijan’s nationalist movement. The Russian military intervention led to the death of a large number of civilians and greatly antagonized the population. Following the events of what the Azerbaijanis call ‘Black January’, and once the initial shock and apathy had subsided, anti-Russian and pro-independence feeling intensified in the country.”*<sup>362</sup>

At this point, in order to understand the sudden emergence and rapid development of the Azerbaijani nationalist movement in the late 1980s as a reaction to the Armenian separatist movement in Nagorno-Karabakh, and the process of its evolution to a liberation movement, it is essential to account in detail for the recent origins of the Karabakh dilemma and the conditions under which hostility between both groups resurfaced.

### **THE ORIGINS OF THE KARABAKH CONFLICT**<sup>363</sup>

Before examining the historical roots of the conflict and accounting for events up to the independence of Azerbaijan, it is worth taking a look at the arguments put forward by both sides to legitimate their demands. Debates regarding the ‘Karabakh Questions’ include demographic, geographic, economic, cultural and historical aspects of the issue. As to the historical aspect of the question, Azerbaijani historians argue that before the annexation of Karabakh by Russia in the course of the Russo-Persian wars of 1804-13 and 1826-28, Azerbaijanis made up the great majority of the population of the local khanates. Following the annexation, Russian Tsars encouraged Armenians from Iran and Turkey to settle on the territory of the present Armenia and Azerbaijan, with the intention of providing ethnic consolidation of Christian Orthodoxy on Transcaucasus. Azerbaijani scholars prove their arguments with statistics of the fast growth of the Armenian presence in Karabakh and of their conversion from a minority into an overwhelming majority of the area’s population.<sup>364</sup>

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<sup>362</sup> Shireen T. Hunter, *The Transcaucasus in Transition, Nation-Building and Conflict*, (The Center For Strategic & International Studies, 1994), p.58.

<sup>363</sup> For more details also see Sedat Laciner, ‘Ermenistan Dis Politikası ve Belirleyici Temel Faktorler, 1991-2002’ (Armenian Foreign Policy and the Determining Factors, 1991-2002), *Ermeni Arastirmalari / Armenian Studies*, Spring 1995, Vol. 2, No. 5, pp. 168-221; Kamer Kasim, ‘The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict, Caspian Oil and Regional Powers’, in B. Gokay (ed.), *The Politics of Caspian Oil*, (New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 185-198; Kamer Kasim, ‘The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict from Its Inception to the Peace Process’, *Armenian Studies*, June-August 2001, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 170-185; M.P. Croissant, *The Armenian-Azerbaijan Conflict and Implications*, (London: Preager, 1998); Gerard J. Libaridian (ed.), *The Karabakh File: Documents and Facts on the Question of Mountainous Karabakh, 1918-1988*, (Cambridge: The Zoryan Institute, 1988), pp. 42-46; Charles van der Leeuw, *Storm Over the Caucasus in the Wake of Independence*, (Surrey: Curzon, 1999); Nikolay Hovhannisyan, *The Karabakh Problem*, (Yerevan: Zangak, 1997); Mustafa Budak, ‘Azerbaycan-Ermenistan Iliskilerinde Daglik Karabag Meselesi ve Turkiye’nin Politikasi’, *Kafkas Arastirmalari*, No: II, 1996, pp. 109-143.

<sup>364</sup> S. Alijarli, ‘The Republic of Azerbaijan: Notes on the State Borders in the Past and Present’ in J.F.R. Wright, S. Goldenberg and R. Schofield, *Transcaucasian Boundaries*, (London: UCL Press, 1996), pp.125-128. Also, many Western scholars of Azerbaijan accept the correctness of the historical argument made by Azerbaijani scholars. For instance, see an interview with Tadeusz Swietochowski, E. Dailey and R. Chafibekov, ‘Eminent Scholar Interprets Nagorno-Karabakh Dispute’, *RFE/RL*, August 25, 1989; A.L. Altstadt, ‘O Patria Mia: National Conflict in Mountainous Karabakh’, in R.W. Duncan and G.P. Holman

On the other hand, in sharp contrast to the Azerbaijani thesis, Armenian historians reject the existence of Azerbaijani statehood and regard the Azerbaijani Turks as a migrant population in the territory. They also argue that the territory was historically Armenian even though the Armenian people had fallen at some point under the ‘yoke of either the Ottoman or Persian Empire’. In order to prove their arguments, they refer to the surviving documents and historical landmarks of the Christian period.<sup>365</sup> Having clarified both sides’ positions on Nagorno-Karabakh, let us examine how ‘Karabakh Question’ developed in the historical process, and under what conditions it resurfaced in the late 1980s.

Karabakh (Karabağ) means ‘Black Orchard’ in Turkish. In the course of the Safavid Empire, Nagorno-Karabakh belonged to three Azeri ‘*beglarbeyates*’ (administrative units). Following the formation of an independent Karabakh Khanate in the late eighteenth century, it became a part of this Khanate. A demographic survey conducted by the Tsarist administrator Yermolov in 1823 demonstrated that the population of the territory was overwhelmingly Azerbaijani Turks (91 per cent Azeri - 8.4 per cent Armenian). Even in the Erevan Khanate, which was later known as the Armenian region, Armenians made up only 24 per cent of the local population.<sup>366</sup>

As mentioned earlier, after the Persian Empire ceded the territory to Russia under the treaties of Gulistan and Turkhmanchai in the early nineteenth century, a rapid demographic change occurred in Nagorno-Karabakh, by which Tsarist authorities encouraged Armenians to settle in the territory to counter the influence of Muslims, whom the Russians regarded as an unreliable community. From this time onward, the Armenian population began to flow into the territory from Iran and Turkey. Indeed, a survey made in 1832 revealed that a demographic explosion took less than one decade, with a more than fourfold increase in the percentage of the Armenian population in Karabakh province from its 1823 level of 8.4 per cent to a level of 34.8 per cent in 1832. By the end of the century, Armenians had achieved a majority. They made up 53.3 per cent of the total population and Azerbaijani Turks 45.3 per cent. The demographic balance changed everywhere throughout Transcaucasus in the nineteenth century, not only in Karabakh. The Table 8 illustrates the rapid demographic shift in the percentage of Armenians and Azerbaijanis.

**Table 1:**

Change In The Percentage Of Azerbaijanis And Armenians In The Nineteenth Century (Percent)

	1823 Az.	1823 Arm	1832-5 Az.	1832-5 Arm.	1886 Az.	1886 Arm.	1897 Az.	1897 Arm.
Karabakh Province (later Shusha district)	91	8.4	64.8	34.8	41.9	57.9	45.3	53.3
Nakhichevan province	86.5	13.5	50.6	49.4	56.8	42.2	63.7	34.4

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(ed.), *Ethnic Nationalism and Regional Conflict*, (Westview Press, 1994). In addition for more detailed account of the issue made by Turkish scholars, see N. Sarimehmetoglu, *Azeri-Ermeni Munasebetleri ve Daglik Karabag Olaylari* (Azeri-Armenian Relations and Karabakh Events), unpublished PhD Thesis, Marmara University, Istanbul, 1989; and C. Taskran, *Gecmisten Gunumuze Karabag Meselesi* (The Karabakh Problem, From Past to Present), (Ankara: Genelkurmay Askeri Tarih ve Stratejik Etut Baskanligi Yayinlari, 1995);

<sup>365</sup> For the arguments made by Armenian scholars to legitimate the Armenian thesis on Nagorno-Karabakh, see L. Amiran, ‘Karabakh: History and Legend’, *Armenian Review*, 1982, Vol.1, No.5; P. Donabedian, ‘The History of Karabakh From Antiquity to the Twenty Century’ in L. Chorbajian, P. Donabedian and C. Mutafian (ed.), *The Caucasian Knot, The History and Geo-Politics of Nagorno-Karabakh*, (London: Zed Books, 1994); Gerard Libaridian (ed.), *The Karabkh File*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1988); Gerard J. Libaridian (ed.), *The Karabakh File: Documents and Facts on the Question of Mountainous Karabakh, 1918-1988*, (Cambridge: The Zoryan Institute, 1988), pp. 42-46; Christopher J. Walker (ed.), *Armenia and Karabakh: The Struggle for Unity*, (London: Minority Rights, 1991).

<sup>366</sup> Alijarly, (note 10), p. 128,

(later Nakhichevan district)									
Armenian region (former Erevan Khanate, later Erevan Guberniate)	76	24	46.2	53.8	37.4	56	37.7	53.2	

**Source:** S. Alijarli, 'The Republic of Azerbaijan: Notes on the State Borders in the Past and Present', p.128

The first serious Armenian-Azerbaijani clash occurred in 1905 in the ethnically mixed city of Baku. The problem mainly stemmed from, alongside cultural-religious differences, the animosity of local Azerbaijanis economically and politically discriminated against by the Tsars in favour of the more affluent and urbanised Armenians. The events started with the murder of an Azeri schoolboy by a Dashnak brigade (Armed Armenian group) and the gunning down of an Azeri shopkeeper by an Armenian soldier.<sup>367</sup> The bloody clashes between both communities quickly spread throughout Transcaucasus, and resulted in the deaths of several thousand Azerbaijanis and Armenians. In Nahcivan for instance the armed Armenian units massacred many Azerbaijanis on 20 February. On 29 August this tie violence erupted in Shusha: The radical Armenian Dashnaks issued a manifesto and called all Armenians to 'purge the holy place of Armenia from all Azeri, Persian and other heathen elements'.<sup>368</sup> Hundreds of Azeris who used to live in the down-town area were killed and dozens of houses set on fire by the Armenian gangs. Though we have no official document Leeuw says that the Tsarist authorities provoked the violence.<sup>369</sup> For the author Russia aimed to distract Armenians and Azeris equally from their rekindled aspirations to sovereignty. In another word the strategy was 'divide-and-rule'.<sup>370</sup> In fact the Russia was provoking all Armenians in the region including the Ottoman Armenians and made efforts to strengthen the Armenians against the Muslim subjects in the Caucasus.<sup>371</sup> As a matter of fact that Russians did not aim to establish an independent Armenia, but a strong Christian Armenian community under the Russian rule. This community was considered as bloc which would separate the Muslims and the 'Turkish world' in favour of Russia.

Nagorno-Karabakh changed hands several times due to the instability of the territory during the turmoil of 1917-1920 in Russia. Following the events of the February Revolution in 1917, a dual administrative structure was formed for the territory in which power and authority were shared between Azerbaijani Musavatists and Armenian Dashnaks. Upper Karabakh became the fourth member of the Transcaucation Federation consisting of Azerbaijani Armenia and Georgia. In May 1918 the Federation was split up. Armenia first claimed the Upper Karabakh as its own territory. After this claim Armenian guerrilla Adranik and his followers entered the territory from the south and massacred many Azeri cattle-farmers. Leeuw says that in Zangebur almost half of the population were massacred and remaining people were forced to immigrate Iran

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<sup>367</sup> Charles van der Leeuw, *Storm Over the Caucasus, in the Wake of Independence*, (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1999), p. 70.

<sup>368</sup> Leeuw, *Storm....*, p. 70.

<sup>369</sup> Leeuw, *Storm....*, p. 70.

<sup>370</sup> Leeuw, *Storm....*, p. 70.

<sup>371</sup> For the Russian policy regarding the Ottoman Armenians see: Ronald Grigor Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat, Armenia in Modern History*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993); Turkkaya Ataov (ed.), *The Armenians in the Late Ottoman Period*, (Ankara: TTK, 2001); Salahi Sonyel, *Minorities and Destruction of the Ottoman Empire*, (Ankara: TTK, 1993); Salahi Sonyel, *The Ottoman Armenians: Victims of Great Power Diplomacy*, (London: 1987); Bilal N. Simsir, *The Genesis of the Armenian Question*, (Ankara: 1984); Azmi Suslu and others, *Türk Tarihinde Ermeniler* (Armenians in Turkish History), (Kars: 1995); Halil Metin, *Türkiye'nin Siyasi Tarihinde Ermeniler ve Ermeni Olayları* (The Armenians and Armenian Events in Turkish Political History), (Ankara: MEB., 2001).

and other parts of the region.<sup>372</sup> Upon the outbreak of ethnic violence once more in October 1918, Ottoman forces under the command of Nuri Pasha entered Karabakh from the north with the aim of aiding the Azerbaijani Turks.<sup>373</sup> However when the war was ended and the Ottoman State was forced to sign an armistice Nuri Pasha forces were withdrawn. Following the withdrawal of Ottoman troops, ethnic clashes re-exploded and continued until the British forces fully attained their supremacy in the territory. The British appointed an Azerbaijani governor at Shusha by confirming Azerbaijani demands on Karabakh. However, the ethnic stability of the region did not last long, and as soon as the British troops withdrew from the territory, in March 1920, the Armenian Dashnak army occupied Karabakh and turned against the Azerbaijani residents. Soon afterwards, Azeri forces recaptured the region with the support of Ottoman troops. One month later, the Red Army entered Nagorno-Karabakh, and regional instability came to an end.<sup>374</sup> Following the establishment of Soviet rule in Transcaucasus in 1920, the new revolutionary authorities decided initially to place Nagorno-Karabakh under Armenian administration. They subsequently reversed this decision, and placed the territory under Azerbaijan's administrative control. In 1924, Karabakh was declared the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) of the Azerbaijan SSR, centred on Stepanakert. Alongside historical, geographical and economic reasons, presumably, Stalin's desire to develop Soviet-Turkish relations played a certain role in this reversal, considering that Turkey would be a partner in anticolonialist, revolutionary struggle in Asia.<sup>375</sup>

The territorial jurisdiction of the early 1920s on Nagorno-Karabakh has been a constant source of dissatisfaction among Armenians. Armenians regarded this decision as injustice, but on the other hand, Azerbaijanis also expressed dissatisfaction with territorial jurisdiction, arguing that 'about 90,000 Armenians in Karabakh had autonomy while the 300,000 Azeri population living compactly in Zangezur (which was given to Armenia by Stalin) enjoyed no autonomy at all.'<sup>376</sup> Upon the deportation of 100,000 Azerbaijanis from Zangezur by the Armenian government in 1923,<sup>377</sup> the Azerbaijani government, fearing the loss of Karabakh, attempted to counteract, and encouraged Azerbaijani settlement in the territory. Meanwhile, the percentage of the Azerbaijani population in Nagorno-Karabakh had fallen significantly from its 1897 level of 45.3 per cent to a level of 5.6 per cent in 1921 due to forced migration from the territory and the death of thousands in the course of ethnic clashes. From 1923 onward, thousands Azerbaijanis were settled in

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<sup>372</sup> Leeuw, *Storm...*, p. 71.

<sup>373</sup> Before the Ottoman occupation an Azerbaijani committee visited Enver Pasha in Istanbul and called for help Azerbaijan against the Russians and to preserve the independence. Istanbul accepted the request and Enver Pasha gave work to his brother Nuri Pasha. For the see Naki Keykuran's memoirs who was one of the members of the committee: Naki Keykuran, *Azerbaycan İstiklal Mücadelesinden Hatıralar, 1905-1920* (The Memoirs from the Azerbaijani Liberation Struggle, 1905-1920), (Ankara: İlke Kitabevi yayınları, 1998), ss. 86-137.

<sup>374</sup> David Nissman, *Nagorno-Karabakh and the Treaty of X*, The Jamestown Foundation - Prism, 17 November 1995.

<sup>375</sup> For a detailed examination of the events of the time, and an evaluation of the views and speculations on the change in jurisdiction, see Sedat Laçiner, *Ideological Evolution of Turkish Foreign Policy*, unpublished PhD thesis, King's College, University of London, 2001, London; A. Suat Bilge, *Guc Komsuluk, Turkiye-Sovyetler Birligi Iliskileri, 1920-1964* (Difficult Neighbourhood, Turkey-Soviet Union Relations), (Ankara: Turkiye Is Bankasi Kultur Yayinlari, 1992).

<sup>376</sup> G. R. Sabri-Tabrizi, 'Azerbaijan and Armenian Conflict and Coexistence', p. 159, cited from D. Mollazade, *The Conflict Between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh: The Ways of Peaceful and Constructive Solution*, p. 35.

<sup>377</sup> Sabri-Tabrizi, 'Azerbaijan...', p. 160.

Nagorno-Karabakh in an attempt to attain ethnic balance. Thus, the proportion of Armenians in the total population steadily decreased from 94.4 per cent in 1921 to 75.9 per cent of 1979.<sup>378</sup>

Throughout the Soviet period, Armenians in Karabakh consistently complained of cultural and economic discrimination against them. In the cultural field, they felt themselves to have been deprived of cultural freedoms owing to restrictions on their contact with Armenia SSR and, to some extent, the discriminatory treatment under Azerbaijani rule against the Armenian language and culture. They also accused the Azerbaijani government of not allocating sufficient resources for education in the native language.<sup>379</sup>

As to economic issues, local Armenians believed that Karabakh was being kept backward by the Azerbaijani rule wishing to encourage them to emigrate, and that it favoured economic investment in regions where its own nationality was a majority, at the expense of Karabakh.<sup>380</sup> However, Karabakh's situation with regard to social and economic development had been, in reality, better than that of other regions of Azerbaijan, though it lagged behind Armenia.<sup>381</sup> Armenian attempts to change the status of Nagorno-Karabakh can be traced back to the mid-1920s. Soon after the decision on territorial jurisdiction, a political underground organisation called 'Karabakh to Armenia' was established, with branches as far as Ganja. It carried out intensive political activity among local Armenians, by agitating them to revolt against Azerbaijani rule, organised secret meetings seeking a political base and distributed thousands of leaflets calling for the unity of Karabakh with Armenia. The organisation was liquidated in 1927 when most members were arrested, including many communists.<sup>382</sup> Armenian leaders also made several attempts for annexation of Karabakh to Armenia. On the occasion of the disbanding of the Transcaucasian Federation in 1936, Aghassi Khanjian, First Party Secretary, brought the issue on to the political agenda, and demanded 'restoration of the territorial jurisdiction of the early 1920s'. Likewise, his successor Harutiunian sent a petition to Stalin in 1945 requesting him to sanction the unity of Karabakh with Armenia. Stalin, in turn, had sent a memorandum to Bagirov, First Party Secretary of AzCP. In reply to Stalin's memorandum, Bagirov expressed his view that Shusha, which was entirely populated by Azerbaijanis, should remain in Azerbaijan under any circumstances, and reminded him that Azerbaijanis also had a significant territorial claim against Armenia on Zangezour. Considering that possible territorial change would be likely to lead to new disputes over the area, Stalin decided to preserve the existing situation.<sup>383</sup>

In the 1960s, Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh began to articulate their discontent, with the advent of a more tolerant regime under Khrushchev. In May 1963, a petition was sent to Khrushchev with 2500 signature of Armenians from Karabakh and four neighbouring districts,

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<sup>378</sup> Mutafian, *The Caucasian...*, p. 142.

<sup>379</sup> For the views regarding the application of Azerbaijani pressure policy on Armenians in Karabakh, see Mutafian, 'Karabakh in the Twentieth Century', in L. Chorbajian, P. Donabedian and C. Mutafian (ed.), *The Caucasian Knot, The History and Geo-Politics of Nagorno-Karabakh*, (London: Zed Books, 1994); Gerard Libaridian (ed.), *The Karabkh File*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1988), p. 143; Walker, 'Armenian Presence...', p. 103. For the opposite view arguing that the former views are exaggeration, see C.J. Asenius and D. Furman, 'The Case of Nagorno-Karabakh' in C. Archer (ed.) *Peacekeeping and the Role of Russia in Eurasia*, (London: Westview Press, 1996), p. 131; Cemalettin Taskiran, *Gecmisten Gunumuze Karabag Meselesi* (Karabakh Issue, From Past to Today), (Ankara: 1995), pp. 141-143.

<sup>380</sup> Ronald Grigor Sunny, 'Nationalism and Democracy in Gorbachev's Soviet Union: The Case of Karabakh' in R. Denber (ed.), *The Soviet Nationality Reader*, (London: Westview Press, 1992), p. 487.

<sup>381</sup> For a comparative analysis in the light of socio-economic statistics, see A. Yamskov, 'Nagorno-Karabakh: Causes of the Conflict and Ways to Solve It' in V. Tishkov (ed.), *National Process in the USSR*, (Moscow: Nagua Publishers, n.d.); Altstadt, 'O Patria...', pp. 115-116.

<sup>382</sup> Christopher Walker, *Armenia and Karabakh*, (London: 1991), p.117.

<sup>383</sup> Y. Aslan, *Turning Point in the History of Armenia*, (Ankara: Turkish Democracy Foundation, 1996), p.11.



complaining of cultural oppression and economic discrimination, and calling for a reconsideration of Karabakh's status. In their petition, they demanded incorporation into either Armenia or Soviet Russia. However, Khrushchev refused to deal with the issue.<sup>384</sup> In 1965, the issue was once again raised by Armenians taking a place in the massive demonstrations in Yerevan on the day commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the 1915 massacres. The crowds called for the 'return of our lands' in Azerbaijan as well as Turkey.<sup>385</sup> In 1967 the Karabakh Armenians, this time, sent a petition to the authorities in Yerevan, stating the increasing cultural and political pressures of Azerbaijani rule and appealing for unification. Armenian separatist demands resulted nothing but only the growth of Azerbaijani mistrust, and hostility between both groups. Communal tensions between Azerbaijanis and Armenians had become progressively worse since the early 1960s. In 1968, clashes between both communities erupted in Stepanakert and resulted in the deaths of number of people.<sup>386</sup> After the event, though Brezhnev rule managed to keep the issue under tight wraps for nearly two decades, Armenian separatist activism continued to develop as an underground movement in the 1970s and early 1980s. In 1977 Sero Khanzatian, a leading Armenian novelist and a prominent member of the Armenian Communist Party, wrote a strong letter of protest and demonstrations once again took place in the region.<sup>387</sup> Brezhnev viewed the protest and demonstrations as illegal and not clearly supported the Armenian thesis. Actually the Moscow administration did not want any source of instability between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. It was only until Gorbachev came to power in 1985, his perestroika policy merely let the underground activities come out into the open.

Under new conditions, a committee made up mostly by former dissidents began campaigning and succeeded in mobilizing the Armenian population to demand that Moscow grant Nagorno-Karabakh its independence from Azerbaijan. Masses of individual and collective letters from Armenians were sent to the Kremlin, accusing Heidar Aliyev - First Secretary of AzCP Central Committee - of conducting anti-Armenian policy, and demanding the unification of Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia. In the late 1987 and early 1988, several delegations from Nagorno-Karabakh met with party officials in Moscow to discuss the status of the NKAO and other Armenian problems. Nonetheless, no concrete progress was made, and subsequently the CPSU Central Committee issued a resolution stating that separating the NKAO from Azerbaijan was not in the interest of the Armenian and Azerbaijani peoples. However, the resolution only led to the growth of Armenian anger, and was followed by daily demonstrations and strikes calling for unification both in Yerevan and Stepanakert in which hundreds of thousands of people joined.

On February 20, 1988, the Soviet of Nagorno-Karabakh voted 110 to 17 to request the transfer of Karabakh to Armenia. This was a clear sign that separatist demands had spread even among the highest levels of the Armenian community. During the following week, massive demonstrations in both Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh significantly increased and the demonstrators in Yerevan reached as many as 1,000,000. Alarmed by the size of demonstrations, Moscow dispatched the first peacekeeping forces to Stepanakert to prevent possible violence between Armenians and Azerbaijanis on February 25 1988.<sup>388</sup> Meanwhile, Azerbaijanis living in Zangezur were being systematically deported from Armenia during the winter of 1987-88.

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<sup>384</sup> Ronald Grigory Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat, Armenia in Modern History*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 195.

<sup>385</sup> Mutafian, *The Caucasian...*, p. 145.

<sup>386</sup> Dilip Hiro, *Between Marx and Muhammed: The Changing Face of Central Asia*, (Harper, 1995), p.

<sup>79</sup>  
<sup>387</sup> Sunny, *Looking...*, p. 195.

<sup>388</sup> Suzanne, *Pride of Small Nations: The Caucasus and Post-Soviet Disorder*, (London: Zed Books, 1994), p. 162.

Azerbaijani refugees settled in Sumgait where, later, the initial bloody clashes would burst.<sup>389</sup> The plight of homeless and poor Azerbaijani refugees nourished growing Azerbaijani resentment. Above all, in the course of deportations, the open support of the Armenian community in Baku concerning the unification of Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia increased further Azerbaijani anger.<sup>390</sup> Finally, the killing of two Azerbaijanis in a demonstration in Karabakh led to the outbreak of intercommunal violence that was to continue until 1992. Azerbaijanis responded with retaliatory violence in Sumgait, an Azerbaijani industrial town on the Caspian Sea, in which attackers were mostly Azerbaijani refugees who had settled in the city following the deportation from Armenia.<sup>391</sup>

With the spreading of ethnic violence, the already sizable flow of Azerbaijani refugees accelerated, and the official number of refugees reached 165,000 by the end of 1988. In the same period, approximately an equal number of Armenians were deported from Azerbaijan.<sup>392</sup>

By the mid-1990, all Azerbaijanis had been driven out of Armenia<sup>393</sup>, and most of the Armenians out of Azerbaijan.<sup>394</sup> Meanwhile, various Armenian paramilitary units advanced into Nagorno-Karabakh and drove a new wave of Azerbaijanis into the urban centres of Azerbaijan.<sup>395</sup> On the other hand, in the face of all these incidents, the Azerbaijani government did nothing, and preferred to wait for Moscow to settle the conflict with Armenia. As a matter of fact that the Azerbaijani government did not aim independence from the Soviet Union, and was not happy with Gorbachev policies and the change in Moscow. The Azerbaijani communists' anti-nationalist position weaken the Azerbaijan's struggle against Armenians in Karabakh. This resulted in Armenian occupation of Karabakh by the Armenian forces and collapse of the Azerbaijani communist regime.

## TOWARD A POPULAR FRONT

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<sup>389</sup> Alstadt, 'O Patria Mia...', p. 116; Aslan, *Turning...*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>390</sup> H. Huttenbech, 'In Support of Nagorno-Karabakh: Social Components of the Armenian Nationalist Movement', *Nationalities Papers*, Fall 1990, Vol. 18, No. 2, p. 10.

<sup>391</sup> For a detail information on the events and subsequent developments, see E. Fuller, 'Nagorno-Karabakh: The Death and Casualty Toll to Date', *RFE/RL*, 2 December 1988, pp.1-4.

<sup>392</sup> For the plight of Azerbaijani and Armenian refugees and the problems they faced, see W Reese, 'Refugee Problem in Transcaucasia Assumes Alarming Proportions', *RFE/RL*, 7 December 1988

<sup>393</sup> The Karabakh War and the problems caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union increased scepticism about the minorities in Armenia and not only the Azerbaijanis but also the other ethnic and religious groups were seen as potential threat. For the Jewish case see Sedat Laciner, 'Armenia's Jewish Scepticism and Its Impact on Armenia-Israel Relations', *Armenian Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 4, December 2001-January-February 2002, pp. 296-335 (For its most current version see Sedat Laciner, 'Armenia's Jewish Scepticism and Its Impact on Armenia-Israel Relations' in Sedat Laciner and İbrahim Kaya (eds.), *The Armenian Issue and the Jews*, (London and Ankara: TEIMK, 2003), pp. 1-39); Aydan İyigüngör, 'A New Perspective: Armenian Allegations in the Light of Israel and the Jews', *Armenian Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 4, December 2001-January-February 2002, pp. 336-350; 'Anti-Semitism in Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia', *UCSJ Special Report*, 25 August 1999.

<sup>394</sup> Except those in Karabakh region, about 20.000 Armenians live in Azerbaijan. For the Armenian minority in Azerbaijan and for the other minorities see Rasim Musabeyov, 'Azerbaycan'daki Etnik Azınlıklar' (The Ethnic Minorities in Azerbaijan), *Avrasya Dosyası*, Vol. 7, No. 1, Spring 2001, pp. 177-196.

<sup>395</sup> For a detail examination of Armenian paramilitary groups, see E. Fuller, 'Paramilitary Formations in Armenia', *RFE/RL*, Vol. 2, No.31, 3 August 1990

The Karabakh movement and subsequent development of a political crisis served as a catalyst for growing Azerbaijani consciousness not merely on the events in the region, but also on broader issues AzSSR faced.<sup>396</sup> It can be, thus, said that Armenian separatist movement in Karabakh played a cardinal role in the emergence of political consciousness within the broader context of nationalism in Azerbaijan. An Azerbaijani intellectual expressed this phenomenon as follows:

‘We had a weak sense of solidarity in the past and minded our own business. The developments (In the NKAO, Armenia and Azerbaijan) have helped to unite us. A national feeling and state of awareness have emerged in the community for the first time. We had not observed this in the past. I can say that Azerbaijan has changed. It is as if the Armenian attitude has awakened the people and moved them to safeguard their rights’.<sup>397</sup>

The Sumgait incidents led to a chain of events, which would radically change the political landscape of the Transcaucasus over the next few years. On 12 July 1988, the NKAO unilaterally seceded from Azerbaijan in defiance of the Soviet Constitution. By the constitution’s decree, the NKAO needed the consent of AzSSR for this move. AzSSR Supreme Soviet, thus, considered this move as illegal and annulled it the same day. This, however, meant nothing for Karabakh Armenians. By that time, the NKAO had already broken off all economic and political links with Baku.<sup>398</sup> Azerbaijanis, who felt they had lost their territory, put pressures on Azerbaijani political authorities for a more active stance in the face of the events. Yet, Azerbaijani government still waited for the Kremlin to settle the dispute and paid little attention to the developments in the country. Actually, the relatively indifference position of the Baku government increased unrest among the Azerbaijani population and made possible of creation of a popular nationalist movement.<sup>399</sup> Meanwhile, Azerbaijan’s society became increasingly polarized and politicised since the long suppressed political movements and ideas came into the open. After 1986 in particular the number of the associations, clubs and organisations dramatically increased.<sup>400</sup> According to one survey, the number of Azerbaijan’s informal organisations reached forty by the end of 1988, though this number had been only a few before the outbreak of the ethnic conflict. Among those were *Dirchalish* (Regeneration), the Committee of People’s Aid for Karabakh, *Kizilbashi*, *Yurd* (Homeland), *Birlik* (Unity), *Yeni Musavat* (New Musavat), *Inkisaf* (Progress).<sup>401</sup> The media stimulated this polarization and politicisation of the masses as independent newspapers and magazines were created alongside the state mouthpieces. In fact, most of these organisations were not related with the Karabakh issue and many of them cultural or social organisations. However the events in Karabakh and the communist administration’s ‘indifferent’ attitude made them politicised and almost all of them saw Karabakh issue as a priority.

On 16 March 1988, Ebulfez Elchibey declared in the Science Academy that there was a need for a defence organisation to protect the Azerbaijani people from the Armenian attacks. Later Elchibey declared in a demonstration in Azadlik Meydani on 16 May 1998 that ‘Azerbaijan

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<sup>396</sup> M. Saroyan, ‘The Karabakh Syndrome and Azerbaijani Politics’, *Problems of Communism*, September / October 1990, p. 18.

<sup>397</sup> Cited from *Milliyet* (Turkish daily newspaper), 21 November 1988; Saroyan, ‘The Karabakh...’, p.

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<sup>398</sup> Saroyan, ‘The Karabakh...’, p. 17.

<sup>399</sup> Nazim Cafersoy, *Elçibey Dönemi Azerbaycan Dış Politikası, Bir Bağımsızlık Mücadelesinin Diplomatik Öyküsü* (Azerbaijan Foreign Policy in Elchibey Era, Diplomatic Story of an Independence Struggle), (Ankara: Asam, 2001), p. 9.

<sup>400</sup> Fazil Gezenferoğlu, *Ebulfez Elçibey, Tarihten Geleceğe* (Ebulfez Elchibey, From History to Future) (Ankara: Prestij Matbaacılık, 1995), p. 116.

<sup>401</sup> Swietochowski, *Russia and A Divided Azerbaijan*, (Columbia University Press, 1995), p. 196; Cafersoy, *Elçibey...*, p. 11.

Defence Association' was established. The Baku Scientists Club, in 1988 summer, took initiative in order to form Azerbaijan Popular Front, APF (*Azerbaijan Halk Cephesi*). They first organised an Initiative Group (APF-IG) to write the program.<sup>402</sup> The APF-IG made meetings with the other civic societies and prepared reports regarding the social, cultural, economic and political problems of Azerbaijan. The Varliq (Existence) organisation joined the APF-IG's activities and made efforts to popularised the national issues. Later the Varliq and APF-IG would be the main base of the Azerbaijan Popular Front (APF) in future. When the Tophane Forest in Karabakh was destroyed by the Armenian militants in 1988 Autumn, a massive and well-organised demonstration series took place in Baku Azadlig Square between 17 November-5 December 1988. These demonstrations are called 'Meydan Harekatı' (Square Movement). In the early meetings the issues on the agenda were 'the problems of the Karabakh Azerbaijanis', 'the reasons of the Karabakh problem' and the 'possible solutions for the conflicts'. However the demonstrations, which while nominally devoted to protesting Armenian actions against Azerbaijan, turned into a forum for the discussion of the virtues of independence as opposed to the oppressive regime of Soviet rule. This was the open manifestation of various political and social groups, which had been clandestinely developing for a long time.<sup>403</sup> The masses were shouting 'Long Live Independent Azerbaijan', 'Give Azerbaijan Turks' Name Back'.<sup>404</sup> As Zinin and Maleshenko pointed out, 'the slogans in defence of the sovereignty and national interests of the republic united the most diverse forces, including prominent intellectuals, public leaders and scholars. Relying on mass support, these forces started to struggle against the official power structures for greater independence for Azerbaijan in the economic, political and social spheres, and for the acceleration of the reform process'.<sup>405</sup> The speakers and the masses in the demonstrations accused the Russians for the Karabakh and other problems. Elchibey especially said, 'All to be blamed for is the Moscow administration' in his November 22 Speech. In his February 26 Speech Elchibey declared, 'The only dream of the Azerbaijan peoples is to become united'. Similarly Nemet Penahov claimed that these demonstrations were not the ordinary social gatherings but Azerbaijani people's national movement.<sup>406</sup> Naturally all these disturbed the Baku communists and the Moscow. As a result, the armed Soviet special forces oppressed the masses and emptied the square. 16 protesters, including Elchibey and Penahov, were detained. The Soviet Army then declared martial law in 17 *rayons*.

The period between the autumn of 1988 and the autumn of the following year, marked the crucial period of transition, during which small, isolated groups were transformed into larger alliances, and a powerful opposition was formed. According to some accounts, the first news that such a Front was being created appeared in an article published in the local weekly *Adabiyat va Incasanat* in November, 1988.<sup>407</sup> The author of the article stated that the aim of the Front was simply to help AzCP authorities to implement perestroika in the republic, as the initial statements of similar groups that had been created in other republics of the Soviet Union. This article was

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<sup>402</sup> Cafersoy, *Elçibey...*, p. 11.

<sup>403</sup> In the demonstration, some Azerbaijanis were seen to have carried green Islamic flags and the portraits of Khomeini. Many Western analysts, subsequently, exaggerated the situation and speculated on the possibility of the emergence of a new Islamic state in the Caucasus. See, W. Reese, 'The Role of the Religious Revival and Nationalism in Transcaucasia', *RFE/RL*, 5 December 1988.

<sup>404</sup> Cafersoy, *Elçibey...*, p. 13.

<sup>405</sup> Y. Zinin and A. Maleshenko, 'Azerbaijan', in M. Mesbahi (ed.), *Central Asia and the Caucasus After the Soviet Union*, (University Press of Florida, 1994), p. 102.

<sup>406</sup> Cafersoy, *Elçibey...*, p. 13.

<sup>407</sup> M. Michaeli, 'Formation of Popular Front in Azerbaijan', *RFE/RL*, 9 December 1988 and M. Michaeli and W. Reese, 'The Popular Front in Azerbaijan and its Program', *RFE/RL*, 25 August 1989. Though the first news regarding the Front appeared in Azerbaijani media in November 1988, initial steps for the creation of such a Front had been made within several months after the February clashes of 1988 over Karabakh. For a brief summary of the issue, see Swietochowski, *Russia...* p. 199.

followed by a report by Etibar Mammadov, a historian at Baku State University, about which a group of intellectuals including two Russians had prepared a declaration announcing the formation of the Popular Front and the list of its founding members.<sup>408</sup> The most crucial uniting factor for the Front was the Karabakh issue in these years: The Communist government did almost nothing to prevent the clashes in Karabakh and followed the Moscow politics a word for word, while the nationalists saw demonstrations and gatherings could not solve the Karabakh problem. In February 1989 APF-IG and the Varliq group formed a committee and some other societies were added on 13 March 1989. APF on the same day officially applied Supreme Soviet Azerbaijan. Thousands of people gave written petitions to Abdurrahman Vezirov, the First Secretary of Azerbaijan Communist Party, to support the APF. The Azerbaijan Communist Party (AzCP), under the public pressure, officially allowed the Front, but as will be seen Vezirov continued to harshly criticise the Front members.

In brief, as in the power struggle between the reformists and conservatives experienced elsewhere in the Soviet Union, in Azerbaijan, also, official authorities were not pleased with the existence of the APF, despite its limited aims within the framework of glasnost and perestroika. Indeed, on several occasions, Abdurrahman Vezirov, the first secretary of the AzCP, unofficially, attacked the Front, accusing it of trying to become an alternative to the Communist Party, while the official media remained silent on the issue.<sup>409</sup> In spite of the AzCP's opposition, the growing tension between Armenians and Azerbaijanis increased the popular support for the Front. In these days the number of Azerbaijani refugees increased and the Azerbaijani trains between Nahcivan-Azerbaijan were attacked in the Armenian territories. These attacks meant a de facto sanction against the Nahcivan Autonomous Region of Azerbaijan since Nahcivan had no territorial connection with Azerbaijan but the Mehri *rayon* of Armenia. Nevertheless, despite negative reaction of communist authorities to the APF, The Front held its founding congress on 16 July 1989, in which Ebulfez Elchibey was elected as the chairman of the executive board, and struggled for recognition until it became legal in October. The leadership of the APF predominantly consisted of nationalist intellectuals who had the same purposes as the nationally conscious secular elite at the turn of century. It is admitted by all accounts that the Front enjoyed the widest measure of mass support as being the most influential of the Azerbaijani political organisations since the time of the Musavat Party of 1918-20.<sup>410</sup>

It is important to note that the program of the APF was, to a great extent, similar to the programs of the popular fronts in the Baltic republics. The APF demanded more economic, social, and political sovereignty for Azerbaijan, more local decision making, and more local control over the natural resources of the republic. In the programme, political aims of the Front were declared supporting 'perestroika as a general social movement aiming to improve and democratise all spheres of our lives'.<sup>411</sup> The programme supported the purpose that the 'social, economic and political norms and practices correspond in spirit and in letter to the basic law of the Constitution of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Azerbaijan'.<sup>412</sup> The Front 'absolutely condemns the use of force in political struggle', and its fundamental bases were 'Humanism, democracy, pluralism,

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<sup>408</sup> Swietochowski, *Russia...* p. 199. The founding members were Dajanbakhish Umudov, Leyla Yunusova, Sanubar Bagirova, Djavad Salamov, Mirbaba Babayev, Tofik Kasimov, Panah Huseyinov, Sabit Bagirov, Hikmet Hadjizade, Agamaly Sadiq, Isa Gambarov, Neriman Zulfikarov, Altay Efendiyev, Arzu Abdullayeva, Zamine Djabbarova, Vagif Sadkhanov, Najaf Najafov, Muslim Eldarov, Emin Ahmedov, Zardusht Alizade, Fakhreddin Agayev, Anatolii Grachov, and Georgii Tkachenko.

<sup>409</sup> Hunter, *The Transcaucasus...*, p. 69.

<sup>410</sup> Swietochowski, 'Azerbaijan: Between...', p. 44.

<sup>411</sup> 'Programme of the Azerbaijan Popular Front', *Central Asia and Caucasus Chronicle*, Vol. 8, No. 4, August 1989.

<sup>412</sup> 'Programme of...'

internationalism and human rights'.<sup>413</sup> It was open to all people regardless of social group, party membership, nationality or religion. Nevertheless, an article clearly disclosed its absolute target that greatly annoyed official authorities in Baku and Moscow: 'The main task of the APF is to achieve political, economic, and cultural sovereignty for the republic of Azerbaijan'<sup>414</sup>, which includes independent representation in international organisations such as the UN and Unesco.

The programme placed a special emphasis on the issue of relations between the two Azerbaijanis. The APF advocated 'the abolition of all political barriers to the development of cultural and economic links with Southern Azerbaijan'. The same theme reappears in the section dealing with Ethnic Relations: 'While recognizing the indisputable nature of the borders between the USSR and Iran, the People's Front supports the restoration of the ethnic unity of Azerbaijanis living on both sides of the border. The Azerbaijani people should be recognized as a united whole. Economic, cultural and social ties between our divided nation should be restored. All obstacles to the creation of direct human contacts (visits to relatives and friends) should be abolished'.<sup>415</sup> Regarding the heritage of Islam and national identity, the Front demanded that 'all religious buildings should be restored and handed back to the believers'. It also supported spreading a new attitude towards Islamic religion and culture, and advocated that 'religious beliefs and traditions that are respected by billions of people throughout the world no longer be subjected to the ignorant attacks of philistines'. Another article of the programme declared that the APF 'is fighting for the reinstatement of the national symbols of Azerbaijan, the nation's own name (Azeri Turks), surnames and geographical names'.<sup>416</sup>

In order to have these demands accepted and provide the official recognition of the APF, during the summer and autumn of 1989, the Front organised a series of general strikes leading to an economic embargo against the NKAO and Armenia. Azerbaijani workers began to block supply trains to the NKAO and Armenia. Alongside having the demands above, the blockade was, also, organised in response to the Armenian blockade of Naheivan since June.<sup>417</sup> In August and September, The APF held a series of mass demonstrations in Baku, in which the number of demonstrators ranged from 200,00 to 600,000.<sup>418</sup> During demonstrations, Azerbaijanis shouted slogans in favour of independence, and, more significantly, waved the national flag of the independent republic of 1918-20 in the streets of Baku. The values symbolised by the national flag clearly reflected the ideas of the Front; green-Islam, blue-Turkishness, and red-freedom. In return for ending the blockade and strikes, the Front demanded the recognition of the APF, a convention of a special session of the Azerbaijan Supreme Soviet to discuss the NKAO, the abolition of the Special Administration in the NKAO, which had been set up by Russians in mid-January 1989 and was responsible to the central Soviet government, and a restoration of Azerbaijan's full jurisdiction there, and the release of political prisoners.<sup>419</sup> The blockade, and the growing tension, forced the Azerbaijani government to recognise the Popular Front and enter into negotiations with its leader, Ebulfez Elchibey in the fall of 1989. Elchibey, subsequently, called off the embargo on the rail transit to Armenia in return for the granting of official recognition for the Popular Front.

The struggle over the Karabakh question had turned into a broader struggle for power. The Popular Front was concerned with a wide range of issues from the NKAO to ecological damage, from lack of democracy and free speech to independence. Throughout 1989, the Front

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413 'Programme of...'

414 'Programme of...'

415 'Programme of...'

416 'Programme of...'

417 Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks...*, p. 206.

418 Michaeli and Reese, 'The Popular...', p. 30.

419 Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks...*, p. 206.

went through a process of both expansion and fragmentation. During this period it also evolved a much more clearly nationalist and pro-Turkish, and even pan-Turkist tendency.<sup>420</sup> By the end of the year, the Azerbaijani Communist Party had lost much of its authority. Meanwhile, a religious revival was being experienced in Azerbaijan, as in other Turkic republics. Azerbaijanis began to rediscover Islam not simply as a part of their general historical and cultural background, but as a living source of moral and spiritual inspg the unifiey began to restore old mosques, build new ones, and establish religious societies and theological schools and courses. Numerous Islamic groups also were formed, and took part under the umbrella of the Popular Front. Though there were some political extremist groups - mostly underground -, most of Islamic groups were non-political societies, the most known *Tovbe* (Repentance), aiming at encouraging the improvement of social and individual morality and the return towards the path of Allah.<sup>421</sup>

As Hunter pointed out, as a political movement 'the Islamic movement was never very large. Moreover, interest in Islam on the part of most Azerbaijanis derived not from political but from cultural causes'.<sup>422</sup> Thus, extremist groups did not get support from the great majority of Azerbaijanis. Indeed, a survey conducted in Baku in early 1990 demonstrated that only 3.8 percent of the population favoured some form of Islamic government. However, 76.7 percent favoured establishing religious institutions and schools, and 97.0 percent welcomed the opportunity to learn more about Islamic culture.<sup>423</sup> As is seen, Islam was perceived as a component of Azerbaijani national identity, not a political ideology. Like overwhelming Azerbaijani Turks, Azerbaijani intellectuals also rejected the idea that Islam should take place as an independent factor in Azerbaijani politics. Instead, they preferred the 'Turkish model' which accommodates religion within the secular character of the state. Azerbaijani nationalists wanted to attain control over the direction of Islamic revival, and endeavoured to orient it to the moderate brand of the Islam of Turkey as opposed to the extremist Islamic form of Iran.

Parallel to the growing national and Islamic sentiments, the idea of 'One Azerbaijan', which had been shelved since the beginning of perestroika under the pressure of Moscow that wished to improve the deteriorating relations with Iran, once more came out into the open. As mentioned earlier, the APF placed a special emphasis on the Southern question by declaring necessity for the development of social, cultural and economic ties between Northern and Southern Azerbaijanis, and for the abolition of political barriers to this development. The issue reappeared in Azeri media throughout 1989, and many articles criticising the manners of Russian, Iranian and Azerbaijani government on the Southern question were published. The early days of 1990 marked a historical event with respect to the Azerbaijani people. Inspired by the fall of the Berlin Wall, Azerbaijani crowds demolished frontier installations along almost the entire length of the 590 kilometres border with Iran. The opening of the frontier was warmly welcomed by radical elements of the APF, considering it as a first step in the direction of Azerbaijani unity.<sup>424</sup> By the same token, a group of academics sent a letter regarding the issue to the Politburo and the Presidium of the USSR. In the letter, they compared the division of Azerbaijan with that of present day Korea and Vietnam in the past, and stated that 'Azerbaijan was artificially split into two parts after Russo-Iranian wars of the early nineteenth century, which resulted in the tragic Turkhmanchai Treaty of 1828'. The letter demanded 'essential relaxation of the frontier regime between the two parts of Azerbaijan'.<sup>425</sup>

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<sup>420</sup> Hunter, *The Transcaucasus...*, p. 69.

<sup>421</sup> Zinin and Maleshenko, 'Azerbaijan...', p. 110.

<sup>422</sup> Hunter, *The Transcaucasus...*, p. 67.

<sup>423</sup> Hunter, 'Search for...', p. 238.

<sup>424</sup> T. Swietochowski, 'Azerbaijan: A Borderland at the Crossroads of History' in S.F. Starr (ed.), *The Legacy of History in Russia and the New States of Eurasia*, (London: M. E. Sharpe, 1994), p. 289.

<sup>425</sup> Swietochowski, 'Azerbaijan:...'.

## ‘THE BAKU MASSACRE’

Within less than two weeks of the border events, the Nagorno-Karabakh issue again caused heavy tensions between Azerbaijan and Armenia. On 10 January 1990, the Supreme Soviet of Armenia made a decision on the inclusion of the NKAO in the republic’s budget and the endowment of local residents’ right to vote in Armenia’s election.<sup>426</sup> It is quite clear that this decision meant the annexation of Nagorno-Karabakh by Armenians. Two days later, the APF held a demonstration in Baku to protest Vezirov’s mismanagement of the crisis and Armenia’s declaration of its annexation of Nagorno-Karabakh. Speakers called for the resignation of Vezirov and for a referendum on secession of Azerbaijan from the Soviet Union.<sup>427</sup> However, immediately after the demonstration, the unrelieved frustrations manifested themselves through more violence. Ironically Vezirov on 15 January 1990 called all Azerbaijanis to arm and to join the voluntary forces against the Armenians, and this call increased the tension in the country. In response to the forcible deportation of Azerbaijanis from Armenia since 1988, radical nationalists and Azerbaijani refugees began rioting and attacking the residence of local Armenians. In contrast, it is submitted by all accounts that the activists of the APF risked their own lives to protect the Armenians, and helped them in their evacuation from Baku.<sup>428</sup> The APF subsequently issued a statement strongly condemning the pogroms, and some leaders of the Front accused Moscow of being the force behind the incident. According to Cafersoy, the Baku police and 12.000 interior security forces were ordered not to intervene the clashes.<sup>429</sup> However, whatever the reason was, it is clearly apparent that it showed the ineffectiveness of the Front in the face of events. Eventually the attacks were able to be stooped after three days, on 16 January 1990.

The accompanying circumstances strengthened the suspicions of Moscow’s involvement. On 19 January 1990, Moscow used the pogrom, though it had been ended by Azerbaijani police and activists of the APF five days previously, as a pretext to move the Soviet Army into Baku in order to crackdown on Azerbaijan’s growing independence movement.<sup>430</sup> The troops used excessive violence against the Azerbaijanis. Horrific brutality of the Red Army resulted in more than 160 dead and 700 wounded.<sup>431</sup> 400 Azerbaijanis were arrested.<sup>432</sup> The month came to be known as ‘Black January’. The intervention’s aim was to prove that Moscow was still powerful in Azerbaijan, yet it was the start of the collapse of the Moscow power in the country. The incident intensified anti-Russian and pro-independence feelings. After the ‘Black January’ tragedy, ten of thousands of Azerbaijani communists burned their Communist Party membership card in a demonstration following the funeral procession.<sup>433</sup> About two million Azerbaijanis attended the funeral and national mourning was declared in all of the regions. 40-days national strike was started by the unions. The people in the funeral ceremony blamed Gorbachov and the Communist

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426 Swietochoski, ‘Azerbaijan...’, p. 204.

427 Goldenberg, *Pride...*, p. 117.

428 Swietochowski, ‘Azerbaijan...’, p. 47.

429 Cafersoy, *Elcibey...*, p. 23.

430 Moscow also used another argument to justify its crackdown on Azerbaijanis so as to have support from Western governments. Gorbachev blamed the APF for attempts to create a ‘fundamentalist Islamic republic’ by overthrowing Soviet power. This argument was absolutely incorrect. The APF had entirely pan-Azerbaijani character and Islam never played important role in its policy. For a detailed discussion on Soviet arguments, see R.O. Kurbanov and E.R. Kurbanov, ‘Religion and Politics in the Caucasus’ in M. Bourdeaux (ed.), *The Politics of Religion in Russia and the New States of Eurasia*, (M.E.Sharpe, Armonk, 1995), pp. 234-235.

431 Swietochoski, *Russia...*, p. 205.

432 Eldar Ismayilov, *Azərbaycan Tarihi* (History of Azerbaijan), (Baku: 1995), p. 331.

433 Saroyan, ‘The Karabakh Syndrome...’, p. 29.



Party. Some of the slogans were as follow: ‘Gorbachov is a Murderer’, ‘Soviet Communist Party, Go Home’, ‘The Occupiers Go to the Hell’, ‘Occupiers, Go Home’. Anything called ‘communist’, ‘Lenin’ or any communist leaders’ name in Baku streets, like the Lenin monument and street-name-sign, was attacked and damaged. Moscow’s response to the upheaval was the removal of Vezirov from power and his replacement with Ayaz Muttalibov.

Soon after Black January, The Third Congress of People’s Deputies convened in Moscow and Lithuania claimed its independence, while at the same time Gorbachev was proclaimed the president and was granted excessive powers to rule the collapsing union. Wrapped in rhetoric and democratisation, Gorbachev kept ultimate powers in his hand as president, including the power to declare a state of emergency, to appoint and dismiss senior armed services officers, to authorize a vote of confidence, to take measures for the defence of the Union’s sovereignty and sovereignty of the union republics, to vote Supreme Soviet decisions and more.<sup>434</sup> These powers effectively gave Gorbachev far-reaching mechanisms to deal with the mounting crises. Nonetheless, Gorbachev continued to lose his legitimacy as the union’s leader.

The intervention of Soviet military in Azerbaijan made it possible for Communist authorities to rebuild the authority of AzCP internally and re-establish itself more firmly in the republic’s political life. As an Azerbaijani opposition leader tragically observed, ‘the Azerbaijani Communist Party was reborn like a phoenix from the ashes of burnt Party membership cards’.<sup>435</sup> However, to calm rising anti-Russian and nationalist feelings, even under these circumstances, Muttalibov and other leaders of AzCP had to adopt a new face, ostensibly as a party of reformers and a force for national interests. In this respect, the post-January period witnessed a deliberation effort to co-opt APF policies. As Fuller put it, Muttalibov tactic in attempting to rebuild the authority of the party was to emphasise Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity by rejecting the ceding of Nagorno-Karabakh, while adopting a cautious line such issues as full economic autonomy and the possibility of secession from the USSR.<sup>436</sup>

Muttalibov’s government took some measures to reinforce the ostensibly nationalist image of AzCP before approaching elections in September 1990. In early May, the Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan took a decision on the changing of the national flag by removing the hammer and sickle and adopting the tricolour-flag of the Azerbaijani Republic of 1918-1920. This decision had also a significant meaning with respect to showing reconciliation with the APF, as the newly accepted flag had hitherto been used by the Front. In the same manner, the official founding date of Azerbaijan was shifted from 28 April 1920 to 28 May 1918.<sup>437</sup> Before the elections Muttalibov increased the tension and criticised the Front. Under these circumstances, in September election, the Azerbaijani Communist Party, not surprisingly, won the overwhelming majority of seats. The APF had only thirty seats of total 350 seats in the parliament. The leaders of the APF explained this failure by which the election was rigged by communist authorities. Indeed, many observers recorded widespread vote fraud on the election day.<sup>438</sup> However, the explanation as to the success of AzCP or the failure of the APF most probably lies in a different direction. Azerbaijani society was in a state of shock, apathy and despair following the brutal ‘Black January’ events.

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<sup>434</sup> S. Kehnemui, *Authoritarianism and Democracy: Policy Management and Regimes in Azerbaijan*, p.30.

<sup>435</sup> Elizabeth Fuller, ‘The Azerbaijani Presidential Election: A One-Horse Race’, *RFE/RL*, Vol. 3, No. 37, September 13, 1991, p. 13.

<sup>436</sup> Elizabeth Fuller, ‘Democratization Threatened by Interethnic Conflict’, *RFE/RL*, Vol. 3, No. 1, January 4, 1991, p. 42.

<sup>437</sup> F. Borovali, ‘Azerbaijan: From Trauma to Transition’ in M. Rezun (ed.), *Nationalism and the Breakup of An Empire: Russian and Its Periphery*, (London: Praeger, 1992), p. 119.

<sup>438</sup> For a detail account of pressure on opposition candidates by Communist authorities during the pre-election campaign and vote fraud on election day, see Fuller, ‘Democratization...’, p.42

Furthermore, in the post-January period, official authorities followed a pressure policy against the APF. Many leaders and activists of the Front were arrested on the grounds of the allegedly role of the Front in January unrest. APF offices were closed and its files were seized. Their newspaper *Azadlik* (Freedom) was shut down on the pretext of 'slander' against the Azerbaijani president and was not allowed to publish until June.<sup>439</sup>

Accompanying by this process, the Muttalibov's government attempted to fill the void left by the APF by applying, somewhat, the programme of the Front to regain the initiative. Alongside the measures mentioned previously, a serious initiative was undertaken for the change of the alphabet from the Russian to Latin and the restoration of the traditional names of towns. Main streets of Baku were renamed for Izmir, which is a port city of Turkey, and Ataturk. In addition, the Central Committee of AzCP prepared a proposal for removing the 'Soviet Socialist' label from the republic's title.<sup>440</sup> In such a climate, it is not surprising that the Azerbaijani voters preferred an established apparatus, which shifted its policy, to some extent, from socialism to nationalism against a scattered organisation which considerably lost its prestige and patronage over masses. In post-election period, though the APF hold only 10 per cent of the seats in the new parliament, it, however, embarked on an active campaign to oppose pro-Moscow policies of Muttalibov's government, threatening to boycott parliamentary proceedings, organising demonstrations and calling for strikes. During this period, the APF regain the initiative parallel to the failure of the AzCP in resolving political, social and economic problems. Alongside growing tension between Muttalibov and the APF within the country, fighting in the Nagorno-Karabakh region mounted as Armenia adopted plans to increase its influence in the territory and remove Azerbaijan's power. Meanwhile, Azerbaijani refugees still suffered from the lack of housing, medicine, clothing and other supplies. Muttalibov's government failed to answer the expectations from various levels of the society.<sup>441</sup> Moreover, Muttalibov's pro-Soviet orientation uncovering in the debates on a new union treaty increased further the APF's power among Azerbaijani society in which the Front severely opposed the treaty and advocated an absolute independence.<sup>442</sup>

The conservative communist in Moscow made a coup between 19-21 August 1991 to overthrow Gorbachev. Muttalibov initially supported and subsequently, after its failure, rejected,<sup>443</sup> while the Front opposed the coup attempt and publicly supported the liberal forces. After the failure of the coup thousands gathered in front of the APF and protested the Muttalibov government. Muttalibov used force in order to suppress the protests and many APF leaders were beaten by the police. The police further damaged the APF headquarter.<sup>444</sup> The people gathered in the Lenin Square and requested abolition of the Communist Party and the Supreme Soviet despite of the armed forces around the square. They further asked the government for establishing a national army. As a result of the protests Muttalibov convened an emergency session of the republic's supreme Soviet on 29 August, at which he announced his resignation both from The First Secretary of Azerbaijani Communist Party and from the Politburo. However, it was insignificant gesture. By this junction, it became quite apparent that he was a supporter of pro-Soviet policies, aligned with the conservative forces in Moscow, even at a time when the Soviet

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<sup>439</sup> A. Altstadt, 'Decolonization in Azerbaijan and the Struggle to Democratize' in D. Schwartz and R. Panossian (ed.), *Nationalism and History: The Politics of Nation-Building in Post-Soviet Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia*, (The University of Toronto, 1994), p. 103; Cafersoy, *Elçibey*..., pp. 27-29.

<sup>440</sup> Borovali, (note 70), p. 120.

<sup>441</sup> Altstadt, *The Azerbaijani Turks*..., p. 224.

<sup>442</sup> Elizabeth Fuller, 'Azerbaijan's Relations with Russia and the CIS', *RFE/RL*, Vol. 1, No. 43, 30 October 1992, p. 52.

<sup>443</sup> Elizabeth Fuller, 'The Transcaucasus: Real Independence Remains Elusive', *RFE/RL*, Vol.1, No.1, January 1992, p. 48

<sup>444</sup> Edalet Tahirzade, *Elcibey*, (Baku: 1999), p. 67.

Union was on the verge of collapse. Muttalibov would briefly politically survive in Azerbaijan after the country gained independence. Two days later, on 30 August, 1991, Azerbaijani Supreme Soviet proclaimed its independence under the 1977 constitution's article granting republics the right to secede, passing a declaration on the reestablishment of the independent Republic of Azerbaijan. It was recognised by Turkey in the coming weeks followed by several other nations, and Azerbaijan became a full member of the United Nations in February 1992.

## AFTER THE COLLAPSE OF THE SOVIET UNION

The demise of the Soviet power in Moscow granted independence to the Soviet republics including Azerbaijan and Armenia in 1991. Apart from Baku and Yerevan the Karabakh National Council also declared 'independent republic of Nagorno Karabakh'. As a result the conflict transformed from interstate conflict to the one between states.<sup>445</sup> No states officially recognised the newly declared republic in Karabakh, including Armenia, however it was clear that the Armenian forces in the region had Armenia's, Russian Federation's and the Armenian diaspora's support. Armenians in the world saw the Karabakh problem as a national problem and started an international campaign to separate the region from Azerbaijan.<sup>446</sup> While the Azerbaijanis were relatively inactive on the subject in the early years, the Armenians organised many meetings and street demonstrations in Armenia and in many other European and American cities.<sup>447</sup> The Armenian activism naturally affected the Azerbaijanis in the independence period and the Karabakh problem became one of the most significant factors, which shaped Azerbaijani nationalism. In this process the Khojally events had a special place. The Armenian attacks in this town created a modern legacy in Azerbaijani history:

## THE KHOJALLY LEGACY AND ITS IMPACT ON AZERBAIJANI NATIONALISM

As mentioned earlier Azerbaijani nationalism was awakened by the Armenian attacks. The Armenian threat became a legacy in early 20<sup>th</sup> century and later the nationalist used the Armenian factor as a uniting instrument in domestic politics. In another word 'terrible Armenians' were like cement, which united all opposing Azerbaijanis. The 1918 Armenian attacks and massacres for instance have deeply affected Azerbaijanis during the whole 20<sup>th</sup> century. 'The Khojally massacres' was another legacy dramatically affected Azerbaijani nationalism. In February 1992 the Armenian forces took control of the north and southwest of Stepanakert (Hankenti). They then surrounded an Azeri inhabited enclave in Karabakh, Khojally, which was the only town in the province with an airport suitable for large-winged aircrafts.<sup>448</sup> The Armenian forces took the town and made it a barrier against a possible Azeri offence on Stepanakert. The fall of the Khojally was a strategic gain for the Armenians and first significant loss for the Azeris.<sup>449</sup> However its impact on Azerbaijan and Azeri nationalism was more important. First of all the Azeri fighters were split into factions and could not be united against the Armenians and the Armenian victory harmed the Azeri national pride. Second, the Armenian militants killed about 450 civilians

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<sup>445</sup> Kamer Kasim, 'The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict From Its Inception To The Peace Process', *Armenian Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 172.

<sup>446</sup> Sedat Laciner, 'Ermenistan Dış Politikası ve Belirleyici Temel Faktörler, 1991-2002 (Armenian Foreign Policy and Main Determining Factors, 1991-2002)', *Ermeni Araştırmaları*, Vol. 2, No. 5, Spring 2002, pp. 168-221.

<sup>447</sup> Nesrin Sariahmetoglu, 'Dağlık Karabağ Olaylarının Perde Arkası', in Mehmet Tütüncü (ed.), *Caucasus: War And Peace*, (Haarlem, Netherlands: SOTA, 1998), p. 211.

<sup>448</sup> Kasim, (note 77), p. 172.

<sup>449</sup> Michael P. Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict, Causes and Implications*, (London: Praeger, 1998), p. 78.

in these conflicts, which caused great reaction among the Azeri and other Turkish communities. Many Western media groups described the events as ‘massacre’ or ‘slaughter’ while Azeri media named it as ‘genocide’. *The Economist* (London) described the picture as follow:

‘Some of the bodies of Azeri refugees slaughtered by Armenian fighters as they tried to escape from the town of Khojally were clearly visible from the helicopter. The town had been captured by the Armenians on February 25<sup>th</sup>. A week later bodies of men, women and children lay scattered where they had fallen in the bleak snow-covered mountains of Nagorno-Karabakh. Several had apparently been shot at point-blank range. One survivor told how he had seen Armenians shooting people lying on the ground. Two of the men had been scalped, and one woman’s fingers had been hacked off.’<sup>450</sup>

The western TV and radio stations reported that thousands of Azerbaijanis were killed as they tried to flee to the Azerbaijanis town of Agdam. TV pictures shot by European, American and Azerbaijani cameramen showed mutilated bodies, some scalped, others with powder burns.<sup>451</sup> These reports deeply affected the public opinion in Azerbaijan and in Turkey. The nationalist groups organised street demonstrations and saw the politically divided Azeri forces and the Russians in the region as responsible for the massacres and military failure. For the ordinary Azerbaijani all Azerbaijanis had to be united against the Armenians and Russians. The Azeris especially accused the Russian regiment of 366<sup>th</sup> of involving Khojally massacre.<sup>452</sup> Russia denied the accusations, yet there was a strong 1,200 Russian troops of the Soviet Fourth Army and it was now under the Russian control. As *the Economist* reported the Russian forces admitted their sympathy for the Armenians<sup>453</sup> and in the Armenian attacks Russian tanks and weapons were used and many Russian soldiers involved the clashes.<sup>454</sup> Russia’s ambassador to Turkey claimed that some of the deserted Russian soldiers might have taken part in some incidents but this could not be considered as official Russian involvement.<sup>455</sup> However the Russians persuaded neither the Azeris nor the international public opinion. The Azeri perception was that the Russians financially and militarily helped the Armenians against the Azeris. While the Armenians were occupying Khojally and continuing to advance in the Azeri territories Azerbaijan had no national army and Muttalibov showed no intention to form an organised military force. Actually Muttalibov, was signing agreements to join the Commonwealth of the Independent States (CIS) when the Khojally was under occupation on 27 February 1992. Muttalibov’s pro-Soviet policy and the tragic news from Khojally provoked the masses and the public pressure force Muttalibov to resign on 6 March 1992. During the Spring 1992 the communists did anything possible to return the power, yet the failure in the Karabakh nourished the nationalist current in Azerbaijan.

The Armenian forces continued their advances after the Khojally and occupied all the Karabakh territories and they established a physical link between Armenia and Karabakh. However the Armenian attacks did not stop with these advances and the Armenians occupied some

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<sup>450</sup> ‘A View To A Slaughter’, *The Economist*, 7 March 1992.

<sup>451</sup> Paul Quinn-Judge, ‘Revenge Tragedy’, *New Republic*, 6 April 1992, Vol. 206, No. 14, p.11. For similar reports and details of the incident see: ‘Massacre by Armenians’, *The New York Times*, 3 March 1992; Thomas Goltz, ‘Armenian Soldiers Massacre Hundreds of Fleeing Families’, *The Sunday Times*, 1 March 1992; ‘Massacre in Khojaly’, 16 March 1992; ‘Armenian Raid Leaves Azeris Dead or Fleeing’, *The Washington Times*, 2 March 1992; Pascal Privat and Steve Le Vine, ‘Faces of Massacre’, *Newsweek*, 16 March 1992; Nazim Cafersoy, ‘10. Yılında Hocalı Soykırımı’ (The Genocide in Khojally in Its 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary), *Azerbaycan Türk Kültür journal*, No. 341, March-April 2002, pp. 27-30; Laçiner, ‘Ermenistan Dış Politikası...’ pp. 200-201.

<sup>452</sup> Kasım, (note 77), p. 173; *Interfax*, 27 February 1992.

<sup>453</sup> ‘The Killing Mountains’, *The Economist*, 18 January 1992, p. 52.

<sup>454</sup> ‘The Russians are Leaving... Not Yet’, *U.S. News & World Report*, 16 March 1992.

<sup>455</sup> *Milliyet*, 13 April 1993.

other Azeri towns apart from the Karabakh territories. Furthermore Armenian militants attacked Nakhichevan region of Azerbaijan near the border of Turkey, although the region's population was predominantly Azeri. The attacks caused great indignation not only in Baku but also in Ankara. The possibility of Turkish military intervention was discussed and Turkish President Turgut Özal suggested sending troops to Nakhichevan.<sup>456</sup> Turkish-Russian relations were deteriorated with the Armenian attacks and the two sides confronted the possibility of a military clash in the Caucasus. The Commander of the CIS Joint Armed Forces Marshal Shaposhnikov's response was harsh: He said 'Turkey's intervention could create a Third World War'.<sup>457</sup> However the Russians got the message, and they forced the Armenians to withdraw their militants. The Nakhichevan crisis ended without causing any military confrontation between Turkey and Russia yet it increase Turkey's influence in Azerbaijan and nourished Turkish nationalism in the country. The crisis further persuaded the Azeri public about the Russian support for the Armenians. All these developments strengthened Turkish nationalist movement in Azerbaijan and undermined the conservative establishment of the Soviet period.

As a result, thanks to the failure in Karabakh and the pro-Soviet communist policies the APF de facto gained the power in Baku in May 1992. Ebulfez Elchibey was elected President of the State on the 7 June 1992 elections, thus Turkist Azerbaijanis first time became to the power. With the Elchibey's election Azerbaijan's defence and foreign policies were dramatically changed. Since details of the Elchibey period's foreign and domestic policies fell behind the limits of this study we will just mention the main changes:

First of all Elchibey suspended Azerbaijan's membership in the CIS, then he took all the necessary steps to build a pipeline from Baku to Ceyhan (Turkey) to transport the Caspian oil to the world markets; the formation of the national army accelerated; many villages were recaptured from the Armenian forces; Azerbaijan rejected to join the CIS and called for the withdrawal of all Russian forces, an agreement was signed with Russia and 80.000-Russian forces were withdrawn step-by-step; many Azerbaijani officers were sent to Turkey for military training; an international diplomatic campaign was started to explain the Azerbaijani perspective. Some advances in the front were maintained yet the Karabakh territories were still under the Armenian occupation. The problem was not be able to be solved till now and it has continued to be a main source of Azerbaijani nationalism. For Turkist Elchibey, Russia and Iran could not be reliable allies for Azerbaijan, but Turkey was the only country, which could help Azerbaijan in its economic development and political struggles. In this period Russia regarded Elchibey's Turkist policies 'dangerous' for the Russian national interests in Caucasus and increased its support for Armenia. Similarly Elchibey's 'unification of Northern and Southern Azerbaijan' policy disturbed Iran. Tehran perceived Elchibey's policies as 'irredentist'. It can be said that growing Azerbaijan Turkish nationalism damaged Azerbaijan's relations with Iran and Russia and Turkey became the most trustful ally for Baku in this period.<sup>458</sup>

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<sup>456</sup> Kasim, *The Nagorno-Karabakh ...* p. 174; 'Özal: Asker Gonderin' (Ozal: Send the Troops), *Hürriyet*, Turkish daily, 9 May 1992. For Ozal policies see: Sedat Laçiner, 'Özal Dönemi Türk Dış Politikası' (Turkish Foreign Policy in the Ozal Period), in Turgut Göksu and others (eds.), *Türkiye'nin Dış, Ekonomik, Sosyal ve İdari Politikaları* (Turkey's Foreign, Economic, Social and Administrative Policies), (Ankara: Siyasal Kitabevi, 2003), pp. 25-48; Laçiner, *Ideological...*

<sup>457</sup> Amberin Zaman, 'Azerbaijan Looks to Ankara', *The Middle East*, No. 213, July 1992, p. 8.

<sup>458</sup> For Elchibey's policies see: Haleddin Ibrahimli, *Degisen Avrasya'da Kafkasya* (Caucasia in Changing Euroasia), (Ankara: Asam, 2001); Nazim Cafersoy, *Elcibey Donemi Azerbaycan Dis Politikasi* (Azerbaijani Foreign Policy in the Elchibey Period), (Ankara: Asam, 2001).

## **CONCLUSION**

In developing a nationalist set of ideas, the Karabakh problem and the war with Armenia played a crucial role. Armenian victories united the Azerbaijani people and the Turkist movements found a suitable ground for their ideas. Thanks to the failures in the military front the Turkist currents could overturn the pro-Soviet and pro-Russian groups from government. The new Azerbaijan nationalism further affected Azerbaijan's foreign policy understanding: While Iran and Russia lost their influence on Azerbaijan Turkey became a significant actor in Azerbaijan policies. To conclude the conflicts in Nagorno Karabakh left permanent marks on Azerbaijani political life: Thanks to the conflicts Azerbaijanis regained their national consciousness. The war caused instability and economic cost, but it speeded the nation-state building process in Azerbaijan.