



Solmaz RUSTAMOVA-TOHIDI
Doctor of History, Professor

TRAGIC EVENTS OF 1918 .. IMPOSSIBLE TO FORGET!

Continued. For the beginning, see IRS- Heritage 1 (29) 2017

The genocide of Azerbaijanis in March 1918 was organized not only in Baku, but also in other cities of Azerbaijan. On the same days, Shamakhi and its surrounding villages were ablaze. The city of Shamakhi was subjected to pogroms twice - in March-April, and 110 villages of Shamakhi county were subjected to pogroms several times.

The first assault on Shamakhi by the united Armenian-Molokan forces began on 29 March 1918, at dawn, with artillery strikes on the sleeping city. The Muslim population could hold out only for a few hours, after which the city was taken by storm and arson, killings of the civilian Azerbaijani population and looting began. In four days, the fire destroyed the most prestigious

*The destroyed Ismailiyya building in Baku.
Photos by the ECI*

part of the city - Piran-Shirvan, rich residential quarters owned by Muslims. Riots and violence continued until Azerbaijani troops led by Ismayil Khan Ziyadkhanov, who came to the rescue of Shamakhi Muslims, entered the city from Ganja.

At 3 o'clock in the afternoon in mid-April 1918, the second assault on Shamakhi began. Armenian troops led by Stepan Lalayev and Tatevos Amirov and armed groups of Shamakhi Molokans surrounded Shamakhi and then flashed through the city like a tornado. All houses, commercial and civil objects belonging to Muslims were looted, destroyed and burned to the ground. The city was enveloped in a fire and totally devastated by the next morning, turning into ashes. All the cult buildings of Shamakhi, including the 800-year-old main Friday "Juma Mosque" and 12 parish churches in Muslim neighborhoods were set on fire and destroyed. On Lalayev's orders, Armenian soldiers drove residents, mostly women, children and the elderly, into already crowded mosques of Shamakhi, locked them up and set them on fire. Having surrounded mosques, Lalayev's soldiers shot all those who tried to get out and escape. Akhund Jafar-Guli, who sheltered up to 400 women and children in his home and in the Yukhari-Gala mosque, hoping to protect them from violence, was assassinated with unprecedented cruelty. All women and children were also burnt alive.

During the two Azerbaijani pogroms, about 8,000 Muslim residents of the 21,127-strong Muslim population living in Shamakhi were killed in the city. The surviving Shamakhi residents, having become refugees, dispersed to different cities and districts of Azerbaijan.

In addition to residential neighborhoods and mosques, all public buildings, schools, hospitals, bazaars, hundreds of shops, warehouses, mills, silk mills and dyeing factories, tobacco and match factories and other civilian objects were looted and destroyed in the city. The amount of material losses caused to the Muslim population of the city of Shamakhi, according to the average calculation, amounted to more than one billion rubles.

The Azerbaijani pogroms also spread to the villages of Shamakhi county and continued until the middle of July 1918. In total, more than 106 settlements of Shamakhi county were burned down and destroyed, and the inhabitants of 110 villages suffered from attacks by Armenian-Molokan gangs.



The total number of dead rural residents - only those killed during the attacks and in captivity - was 10,341 people, of whom 4,359 were women and children. The number of people who died from cold, hunger and disease during many months of wandering in the mountains, forests, steppe, and among the refugees who filled the cities and villages of other counties, reached several tens of thousands. The total amount of property damage caused to the peasants of the Muslim villages of Shamakhi county was 607,167,420 rubles for reported losses alone (1).

Then came the towns and villages of Goycay, Javad, Guba, Nukha and other counties and the environs of Ganja. The population centers of Zangezur and Karabakh counties were attacked by armed Armenian units under the command of General Andronik until mid-1919. In total, in March-July 1918, about 50,000 Azerbaijani civilians were killed by the Bolshevik-Dashnak detachments, while tens of thousands more Azerbaijanis were forced to leave their homes and become refugees in their own country as a result of these punitive operations. Hundreds of villages, tens of thousands of houses and entire Muslim neighborhoods in different cities, dozens of monuments of national architecture



representing the socio-cultural and spiritual centers of Azerbaijanis, mosques, schools, hospitals, other industrial, civil and commercial facilities belonging to Muslims were destroyed.

The desire of the Bolshevik-Dashnak alliance to reduce the size of the Azerbaijani population in all regions with the further dismemberment of Azerbaijani lands between Russia and the future Armenian state, and partly Georgia, was clearly seen behind all these events, (2). Thus, in fact, it was an attempt to erase Azerbaijan from the political map of the world and only thanks to the selflessness of the Azerbaijani national forces, was it possible to prevent the implementation of this criminal plan. Following the formation of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic in May 1918, a new page began in the history of the Azerbaijani people. And the Turkish-Azerbaijani troops managed to liberate the Azerbaijani lands and the city of Baku in July-September 1918 and return the Azerbaijani population to their homes.

It is noteworthy that all this time the world press spoke loudly about “a massacre of Armenians” by the Muslims of the Transcaucasia, for which we should credit the Armenians themselves, who, unlike Azerbaijanis,

skillfully created a myth about the “long-suffering” Armenian people. It is not by chance that British journalist Scotland-Liddell, who was a direct witness of the events of 1918-1919 in the Transcaucasia, called the Armenians “the best propagandists in the world” (3). Azerbaijan’s Minister of Justice Khalil bay Khasmammadov, who had all information about the tragic events of 1918, bitterly noted that the Azerbaijanis “failed to make noise in the whole of Europe and haunt the doorways of the powers that be, they even failed, as is customary, to get a good press in Europe...”, explaining the reason for this situation by the inexperience in politics of Azerbaijanis who “do not know how to use the methods used by others, especially their ill-wishers” (4).

However, the Azerbaijani authorities turned out to be not entirely “inexperienced” in the matter of bringing the truth to the international, especially Western public.

In mid-July 1918, a month and a half after the beginning of its activity and relocation from Tiflis to Ganja, the Council of Ministers of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic found it necessary to express its attitude to the ongoing events in the republic, in particular, violence against the civilian Azerbaijani population. Having heard

*Ruins on Imamlinskaya Street in Shamakhi.
The house of Karbalayi Mammad Ali Aliyev
in the foreground. Photos by the ECI*



the report of Foreign Minister Mammad Hasan Hajinski, the Azerbaijani government adopted a resolution on the establishment of the Extraordinary Commission of Inquiry (ECI) "to investigate the violence that was carried out over the Muslims and their property throughout the entire Transcaucasus since the outbreak of the European War". The report emphasized that the organization of this Commission should begin immediately, "for most of what can easily be established now in hot pursuit in terms of interviewing persons and photographing and retaining other material evidence will later become difficult and perhaps completely impossible". It was also noted that the proceedings of this commission should be announced in the main European languages (Russian, French and German, and, of course, Turkish) and widely disseminated. The well-known Azerbaijani lawyer Alakbar bay Khasmammadov was appointed chairman of the ECI. Consisting of seven members, the work of the commission involved other representatives of the investigative-prosecutorial and judicial bodies of Baku and Ganja in the future. The composition of the ECI was multinational and consisted mainly of Poles, Russians, Germans and a Lithuanian Tatar, as well as Azerbaijanis who graduated from Russian universities, and professional lawyers. For almost a year and a half from August 1918 to November 1919, the commission managed to collect a whole complex of materials containing colossal information about the total extermination of the Muslim population and the infliction of huge material damage by Armenian nationalists in 1918. The investigation materials collected by the ECI consisted of 36 volumes and 3,500 pages and testified to the brutal crimes committed by Armenians in the cities of Baku, Shamakhi, Guba, Nukha, the surrounding villages of Baku and Ganja, as well as Shamakhi, Guba, Javad, Nukha, Goychay, Aresh counties, in all of Karabakh, Zangezur and other regions of Azerbaijan (5). Based on the results of its work, the ECI prepared 128 reports and draft decisions on the initiation of criminal cases against 194 persons accused of various crimes against civilians. By mid-August 1919, 24 people were arrested in Baku and about 100 in Shamakhi, mostly of Armenian nationality, in the Baku and Shamakhi investigative cases. Some persons accused of massacring Azerbaijanis had managed to leave Azerbaijan by that time (6).

However, the political event, which took place in early 1920 and became particularly significant for the Azerbaijan Republic, made its corrections to the case initiated by the ECI. On 11 January, the Supreme Council of the Allied Powers unanimously adopted a decision on recognizing the de facto independence of Azerbaijan. In connection with this historic event, the Azerbaijani parliament passed an amnesty law on 9 February 1920, according to which all persons who committed a crime because of national enmity were exempted from prosecution and punishment and all criminal cases that "arose in the proceedings of the Extraordinary Commission of Inquiry" were closed forever (7).

Despite the release of the small number of criminals brought to justice with the incredible efforts and scrupulous work of the members of the Commission, it should be noted that the significance of the activities of the ECI was, of course, not limited only to the legal framework. The work of the ECI had huge social and moral-psychological significance, first of all, among the population of the republic who experienced Armenian atrocities. The very existence of such a commission and the more than close cooperation of its members with certain sections of society and ordinary Azerbaijanis restored the people's faith in justice and instilled and strengthened confidence in the government of Azerbaijan as the only legitimate authority. Although due to circumstances, the Azerbaijani government was unable to publish the results of the work of the Extraordinary Commission of Inquiry in various European and Turkish languages and widely disseminate them as was planned when it was created, the Azerbaijani delegation going to the Paris Peace Conference was provided with the materials of the ECI, which investigated cases of violence committed by Armenians against the Muslim population in Baku, as well as in Shamakhi, Guba,

Goychay and Javad counties. These materials consisted of 6 volumes and 95 photographs, copies of which were given both to the heads of great powers and to different international organizations (8).

The materials of the ECI, being official documents, since they were collected and stored by government agencies, had and still have special value. In conclusion, I would like to briefly tell about the fate of the documents of the ECI and the members of this Commission. After the April coup of 1920, which put an end to the existence of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic and the establishment of Soviet power in Azerbaijan with the help of the Red Army, the new political forces that replaced the national authorities radically changed the attitude towards the tragic events of 1918. For decades these events were presented in Soviet historiography as a civil war allegedly provoked by Musavatists and Dashnaks. Classified ECI documents were unavailable for many years to researchers, who were deprived of the opportunity to give them an objective assessment in any case. Only at the end of the 1980s, when it became possible to use previously closed archive funds following the beginning of perestroika in the former USSR, did the materials of the Extraordinary Commission of Inquiry, as well as documents relating to the history of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic as a whole become available to specialists and scientists. It turned out that although the archives of the republic retained a large part of ECI documents, investigative cases in some counties (excluding the reports of ECI members) had disappeared irrevocably.

In 2009-2013, the author of this article published collections of documents of the Extraordinary Commission of Inquiry covering the materials on Baku and surrounding villages, as well as on Guba and Shamakhi counties with scientific and historical essays and detailed information-reference and geographic maps with special content (9). The collections that were published constitute almost 80% of ECI materials kept in the archives of Azerbaijan.

However, a special case was represented by photographic materials of the ECI, which were repeatedly mentioned by members of the Commission who recorded every shot taken during the inspection of certain facilities destroyed by Armenians starting from the Ismayiliyya building in Baku and ending with the mosques of Shamakhi and the ruins of Muslim houses and shops in Guba and Kurdamir. The ADR Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent 95 photos and 80 film transparen-

cies prepared by the ECI to France and the Azerbaijani delegation to the Paris Peace Conference, as mentioned above. But none of these images were found in the republic.

And it was only after a long search that all the materials of the ECI sent from Baku to Paris in 1919, including the unexamined investigative materials on Goychay and Javad counties and 102 photographs, were found by the author in the personal archives of the head of the Azerbaijani delegation at the Paris Peace Conference, Ali Mardan bay Topchubashov, and returned to their homeland after 90-plus years (10).

The author considers it his duty to pay tribute to the memory of Ali Mardan bay Topchubashov, a great Azerbaijani, an outstanding statesman and public figure, politician, journalist and diplomat, head of the Azerbaijani mission at the Paris Peace Conference, who played an invaluable role in bringing the truth about Azerbaijan to the world community in the hardest and most difficult conditions. In exile, Ali Mardan bay had enormous financial difficulties, as evidenced by the addresses of his apartments in Paris. Living first in the city center, Topchubashov's family subsequently changed apartments and moved away from the city further and further away. Ali Mardan bay spent the last years of his life on the outskirts of Paris, seriously ill, in extreme need, in a one-room semi-basement apartment, but kept his entire archive and ended his bright life among countless boxes containing thousands of documents. The 102 photos - vivid evidence of the atrocities of Armenian nationalists against Azerbaijanis and ECI documents were found in these boxes.

It is also worth mentioning with reverence the names of people thanks to whose foresight and honest and hard work the truth about the events of 1918 was immortalized in documents and reached our days: these are ADR statesmen - Fatali Khan Khoyski, Mammad Hasan Hajinski, Khalil bay Khasmammadov, the chairman and members of the ECI, Alakbar bay Khasmammadov, Andrey Fomich Novatsky, Nikolay Mikhailovich Mikhailov, Alexander Yevgenyevich Kluge, Mammad-Khan Tekinski, Ismayil bay Shahmaliyev, Aley Adamovich Alexandrovich (Litovsky), Cheslav Boleslavovich Klossovski, V. V. Gudvil, Abas Ali bay Haji Irzayev, as well as technical staff. The fate of many of them was tragic: Khoyski was brutally murdered, while H. Khasmammadov was seriously wounded by Armenian terrorists in June 1920 in Tiflis; Hajinski and A. Khasmammadov were tortured and executed by the Soviet authorities;

The ruined village of Chukhanli near Shamakhi. Abdullah Mahmud oglu's house in the foreground. Photos by the ECI



N.M. Mikhailov died from a stray bullet in his apartment during the Ganja uprising in 1920; A. E. Kluge died in 1919 during an epidemic that began soon after the devastating events of 1918; Mammad Khan Tekinski and Ismayil bay Shahmaliyev were victims of Stalinist repression in 1938. The fate of other members of the ECI, who collaborated with the new authorities in the early 1920s, remains unknown. However, the names of these people remained in the documents of the ECI forever.

The multi-volume documents of the ECI, which reveal the essence of the deliberate and purposeful policy of mass extermination and expulsion of the Muslim population from their native lands, mainly Azerbaijanis, conducted by Armenian organizations acting under the flag of different political and national parties with the aim of seizing their territory and wealth, have great scientific, historical-political and diplomatic significance today. These documents became especially topical in connection with the beginning of a new stage in the Armenian aggression against the Azerbaijanis of Nagorno-Karabakh, the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict. ❁

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