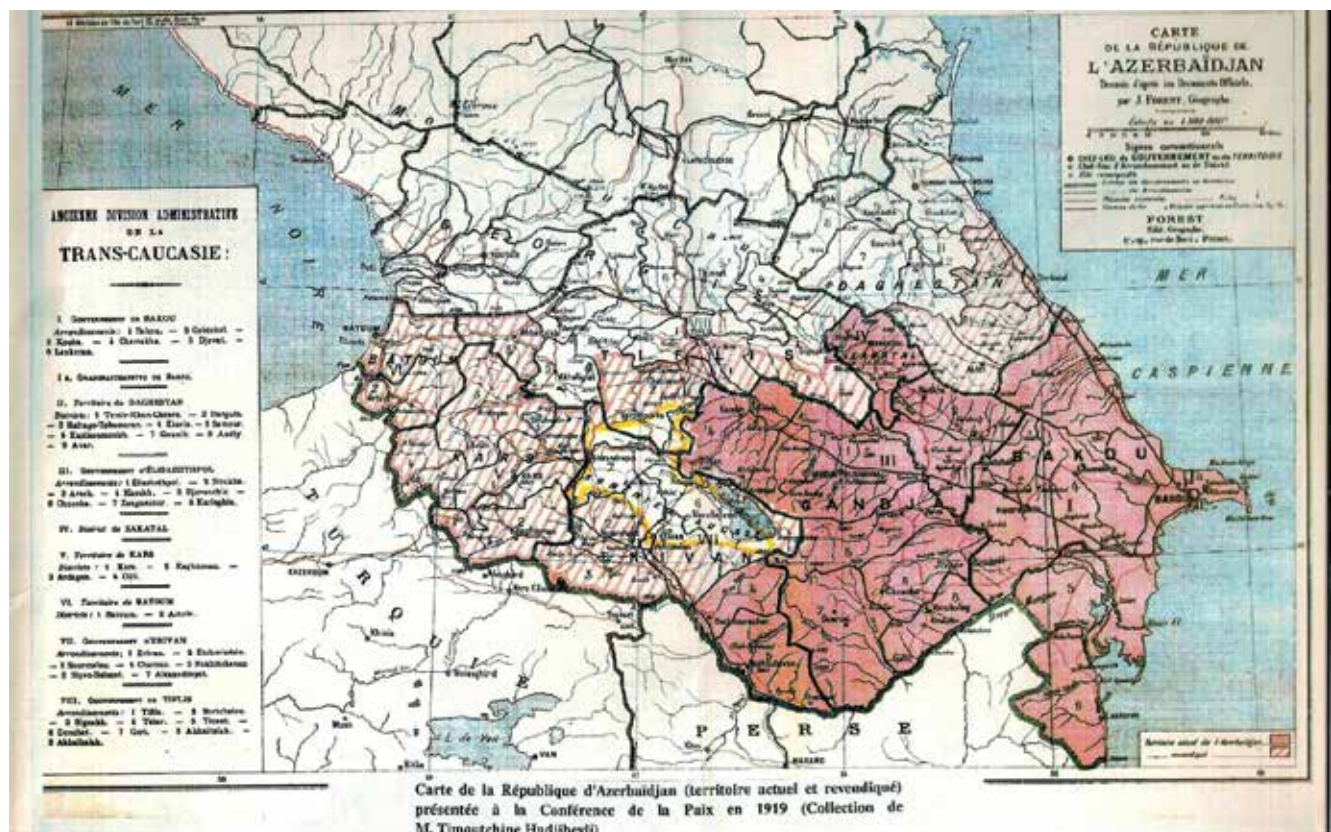


LAST SPRING OF THE FIRST REPUBLIC

Throughout the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century, Azerbaijan played an important role in world politics. Its value was determined by a unique geographical location at a strategic crossroads between North and South, Europe and Asia, the Black and Caspian Seas and the Christian and Muslim civilizations.

Proximity to the borders of Russia's geopolitical rivals - the Ottoman and Persian empires - led to the inclusion of Azerbaijani feudal state formations with their population into the sphere of the foreign (and then domestic) policy of Russia, making them the subject of a "big Transcaucasian game", the prize in which was control of this

Map of the Azerbaijan Republic presented at the Paris Peace Conference



strategically important region. Russia led this struggle first with its traditional rivals - Turkey and Persia, and then with European countries - Britain, Germany and France. In general, over the past two centuries, the strengthening of Russia's position in this region symbolized the growth of its international prestige and influence, and their weakening has always been a factor in the military-political retreat of Russia not only in the Caucasus but also in Europe.

With the fall of the autocratic regime in February and March 1917, prerequisites gradually began to take shape for the independent development of Azerbaijan. Originally, its leading political forces adhered to ensuring Azerbaijan's territorial autonomy within a federal democratic republic of Russia, which they announced at the beginning of the 20th century. The maximum objective of the Azerbaijani national-democratic movement was the independence of Azerbaijan in internal affairs (administrative, legislative, cultural, financial, economic and judicial) leaving powers in the field of defense and foreign, financial and customs policy to the central Russian government.

However, Russian history gave the Transcaucasian nations, including Azerbaijan, the chance to implement more ambitious political projects and, as emphasized by one of the ADR leaders, "a political and cultural ideal of the future system that was gained through suffering and complied with their aspirations, religious and historical traditions" (1, pp. 16-17). As a result, acquisition of sovereignty in the Transcaucasia, which was detached from the Russian political centers (Moscow and Petrograd) and left to itself, successively passed through several stages in its development and ended with the proclamation of the independence of the Transcaucasian Federal Republic in April 1918, and a month later, in May 1918, with the formation of the three de facto independent state formations - Georgia (26 May), Armenia, and Azerbaijan (28 May).

The period of 1918-1920, during which Azerbaijan was developing as an independent parliamentary republic, completed its century of evolution from an object of regional rivalry between Russia, Turkey and Persia into an independent, albeit unequal subject of international relations, dependent on external political and military support. This period was not marked by the establishment of equal relations between the ADR and Soviet Russia, which only emphasized the central position of Azerbaijan in the Russian Transcaucasian strategy. Recognizing the possibility of a temporary compromise on independent



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M. Mehdiyev, M. Maharramov, A. Topchubashov*

Georgia and Armenia, which eventually led to the conclusion of peace agreements with these republics, the Bolshevik leaders of Soviet Russia excluded the diplomatic recognition of the ADR even theoretically. Rich in natural resources, which were particularly valuable for the Russian economy weakened by world and civil wars, and holding a unique geo-strategic position, Azerbaijan was an immeasurably more important "target" for Soviet Russia than Georgia and Armenia.

As a result, the 23-month period of the life of the ADR was marked by two opposing trends. The Azerbaijani side consistently implemented a policy of establishing equal relations with Soviet Russia. This course reflected the objective interest of the national government in addressing three major problems in the "northern" direction: securing diplomatic recognition on the part of the largest and most powerful neighbor; establishing equal interstate relations with it, guaranteeing the security of the ADR; restoring economic and trade exchanges with Russia and traditional Russian markets for Baku oil and other export products.

The Russian side conducted a policy of diplomatic non-recognition of the ADR and military and political pressure on it, weakening its positions in the international arena and deliberately undermining the foundations of Azerbaijani statehood from inside and through the



efforts of regional Caucasus and Baku Bolshevik organizations, whose representatives legally operated in Baku and were even represented in the national parliament. This policy was part of the grand-scale process that involved the former Russian Empire in 1917-1921. In the chaos of foreign intervention, civil war and "Red Terror", which dealt a blow, first of all, to the Russian people, a new kind of Soviet imperial state was born. It was built on a different social, political and ideological basis, but the geopolitical aim of its leaders remained unchanged - collecting the territories of the former "suburbs" and creating forms of interaction between the "center" and "periphery", which was traditional for any empire. As a result, from the very start Bolshevik Moscow's policy in relation to the ADR began to form approaches that put it at the same successive level as the autocratic course of the St. Petersburg cabinet.

Soviet Russia's strategy in relation to the ADR was predetermined not only by the desire of the Bolshevik authorities to ensure the economic survival of the "first communist republic", although it was a priority. The occupation of Azerbaijan, which occupied a comfortable position on the approaches to Turkey and Iran (important

in terms of effective implementation of the geopolitical goals of Bolshevik Russia in respect of these countries) and had a sea port providing the shortest path to the Central Asia region made it possible to solve a number of other strategic objectives of the new Soviet-Russian leadership.

Firstly, it provides a convenient base in the region for further Sovietization of Menshevik Georgia and Dashnaktsakan Armenia and, ultimately, for the return of the whole of the Caucasus into the sphere of Russian influence.

Secondly, it was important in terms of addressing the purely defensive task of blocking competitor powers' access to the Caucasus, the Caspian Sea and Central Asia.

Thirdly, it created favorable conditions for supporting the national liberation movement in Turkey, which, by virtue of its anti-imperialist character, became the only regional ally of Soviet Russia at that stage. In this regard, it was symbolic that the letter Mustafa Kemal - the leader of the movement and head of the Ankara government - wrote to Lenin in Moscow on 26 April 1920, proposing to establish diplomatic relations and asking him to help Turkey in the fight against foreign intervention, coincided with the occupation of the ADR.

Fourthly, the establishment of the Soviet regime in Azerbaijan in April-May 1920 had the most important ideological and political importance for orthodox Bolsheviks, who stood for the promotion of communism outside Soviet Russia. It gave an impetus for supporting the process of “world revolution”, which had gone on the decline and whose prospects had undergone a major re-evaluation due to the apparent failure of the attempts to create “Soviet republics” in Europe - in Bavaria, Berlin, Hungary, Slovakia and the Baltic States. The military coup in Baku allowed the Bolshevik Politburo to proceed to the “export of the revolution” to Persia. It was in Persia where, through the territory of Azerbaijan, the campaign for organizing an anti-government coup supported by leftwing forces began in the middle of May 1920 (and ended ingloriously in autumn 1921).

And finally, the change of power in Azerbaijan provided a unique opportunity to transform proletarian Baku into a regional center for promoting communist ideas and consolidating all the national liberation movements of the East as allies of Soviet Russia in its “revolutionary struggle against capitalists and imperialists”.

The independent ideology and foreign policy orientation of the “First Republic” had no points of intersection with the abovementioned geopolitical interests of Soviet Russia. Despite this, the latter, even at the time of chaos, the ongoing civil war, foreign invasion and economic blockade by the Entente countries, remained the leading factor influencing the Transcaucasian situation and the process of nation building in the ADR. It is natural, therefore, that, having emerged on the ruins of the Russian Empire and in the atmosphere of polyarchy that reigned in it, the “First Republic” completed its historical path as this anarchy came to an end and the Bolshevik “center” consolidated its one-man rule in the country.

Another important factor in the fall of the ADR and the occupation of Azerbaijan was the proximity of the strategic aspirations of Kemalist Turkey and Soviet Russia in the region, based on the interest of both regimes in mutual support for each other.

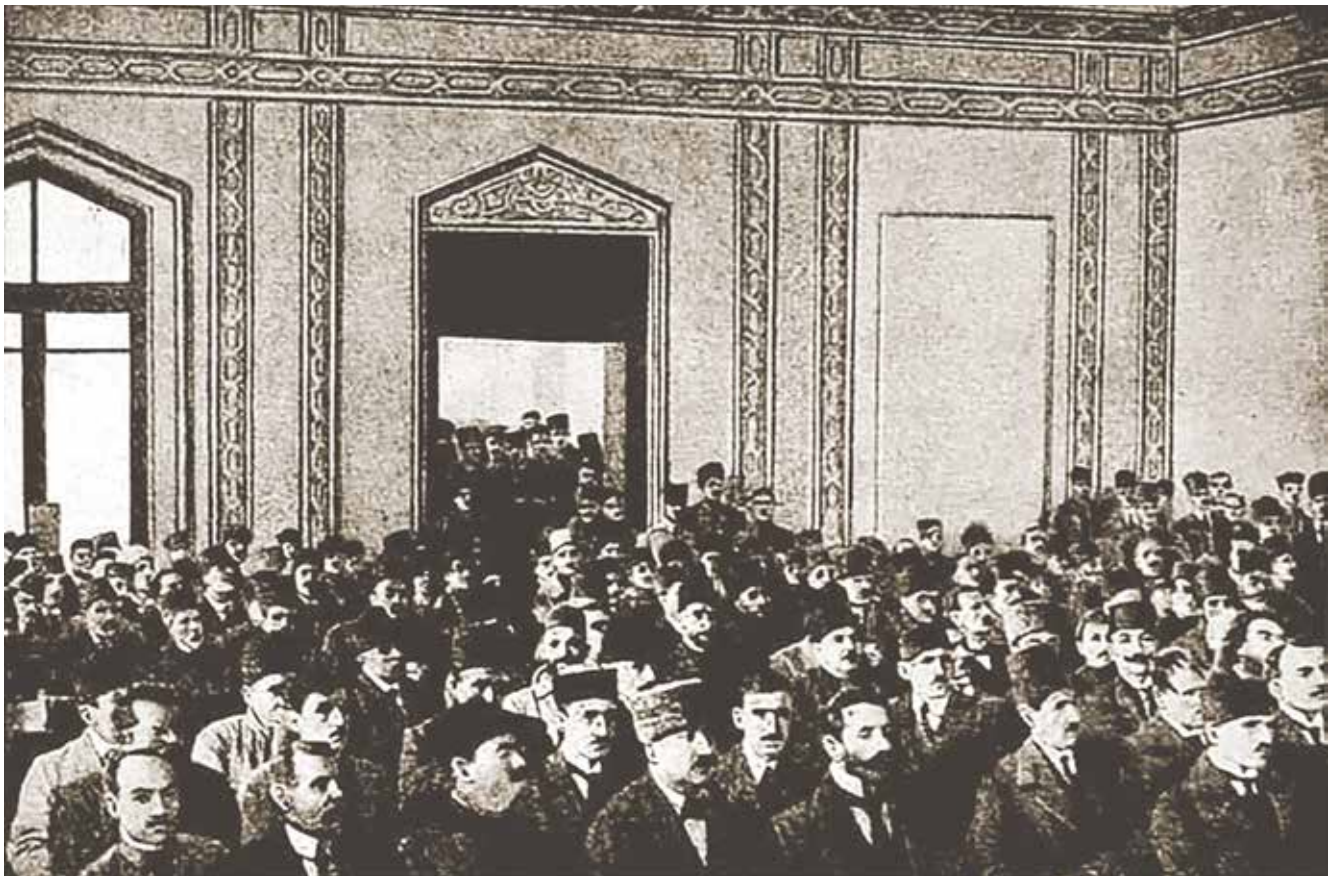
From the moment power in Turkey was taken over by the Grand National Assembly (TBMM), which began its work on 23 April 1920, and the national government headed by Mustafa Kemal, its leadership launched a consistent policy of cooperation with Soviet Russia. It was Russia that was the only source of military-technical, financial, material and political support for the Kemalists. Russia, which, as noted above, failed to “export” the world revolution to the West, was also interested in support-



*Fatali Khan Khoyski - in 1920,
Minister of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan*

ing the Great National Assembly. For that reason, Russia staked on the spread of its influence in the East, especially Turkey and Iran.

Common goals in consolidating their regional positions and the mutual interest in supporting each other in the military and political confrontation with the victorious powers did not leave any chance for the future of independent Azerbaijan. Convincing arguments about the true role of the Turkish factor in the organization of the Bolshevik coup in Azerbaijan in March-April 1920 are cited by the authoritative American scholar Tadeusz Swietochowski. “In those frantic days of spring, Turkish Kemalists who were in Baku, seeking to turn the events in favor of the Ankara government, intervened in what was happening,” he noted. In early April, they met to coordinate the actions of their groups. Some of the participants in the meeting worked in conjunction with the Azerbaijani communists before that and were among



the organizers of the Turkish Communist Party in Baku in March. The Coordinating Center, which included Halil Pasha and Fuat Sabit, adopted a resolution that determined Turkey's policy toward the Azerbaijan crisis. Its three main points were:

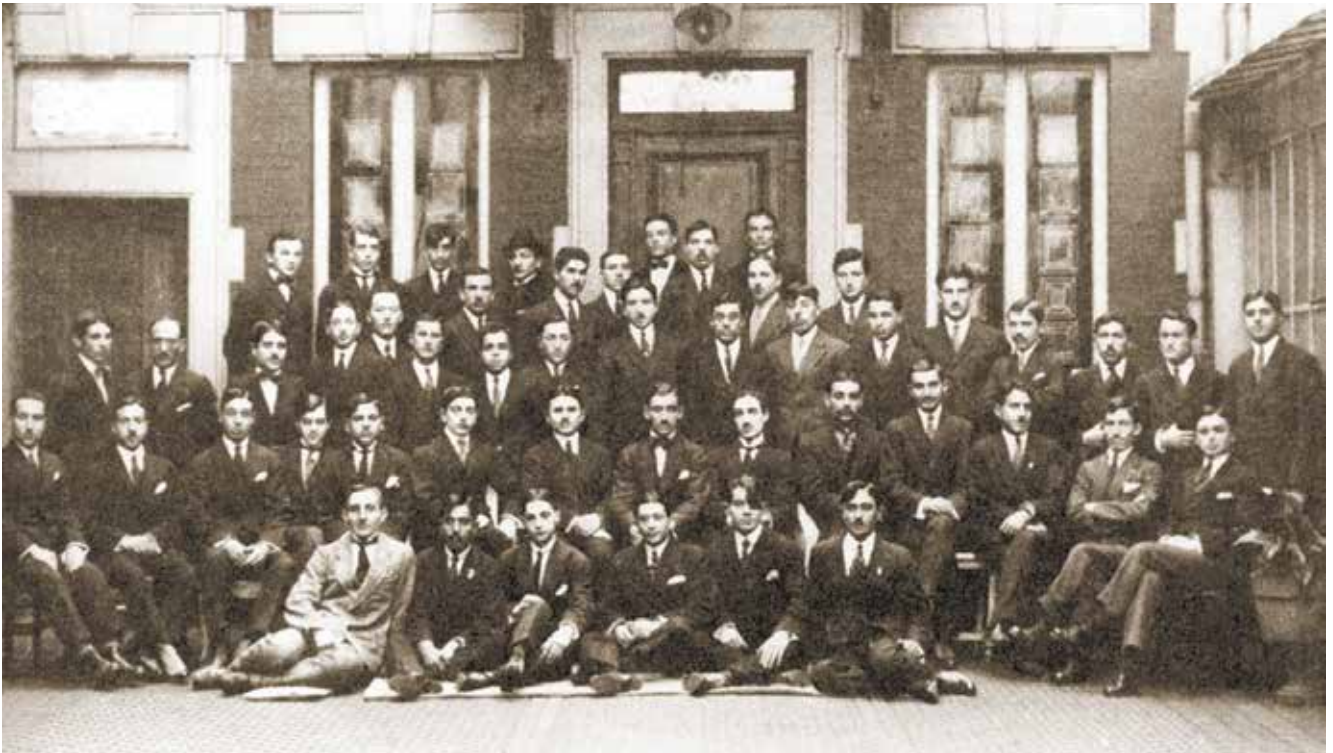
- 1) Rapid overthrow of the present, pro-British government of Azerbaijan and its replacement by a government that is able to cooperate with the Bolsheviks;
- 2) Establishment of a committee for the implementation of changes in the government, which will include Bolsheviks with units in charge of propaganda,

- 3) Occupation of Baku by the Red Army only at the request of the Turkish Communist Party - in the opinion of the committee, which is shared by the Turkish and Azerbaijani Communist Parties, the conquest of Azerbaijan must be avoided" (3, 54).

The resolution was presented to the commander of the Turkish forces on the Eastern Anatolian front Kazim Karabekir, whose recommendations, in turn, formed the basis of Mustafa Kemal's famous letter to Lenin on 26 April. Thus, the establishment of absolute control over the South Caucasus was necessary for both regional powers to provide a channel of military-technical support from the Russian Bolsheviks to the government of Mustafa Kemal. In this context, the role of Azerbaijan not only as a corridor that would connect Turkey and Russia, but also as a source of raw materials for supporting the future Bolshevisation of Turkey was growing. In Turkey, Bolshevik propaganda intensified by that time, and the Communist Party was legalized (Mustafa Kemal was forced to take these, as it turned out later, temporary measures that



Speech of M. E. Rasulzadeh at a meeting of the ADR parliament



Azerbaijani students in Paris. The government of the republic sent 100 students to European universities to receive education. The fate of most of them was tragic

contradicted the ideology and practice of the Kemalists in order to win the sympathy of the Russian Bolsheviks).

The significance of the Azerbaijani factor in Russian-Turkish relations is already proved by the fact that the first foreign policy act of the Great National Assembly was an appeal to Azerbaijan. On the opening day of the Great National Assembly and five days before the capture of Baku – on 23 April 1920 - Mustafa Kemal demanded that Azerbaijan allow “Soviet troops to move to the borders of Turkey to defend them from British attacks” (2, p.368). At the same time, one of the prominent Kemalists and emissary of Mustafa Kemal in Baku, Halil Pasha, tried to convince the ADR leadership that they had no reason to fear the arrival of the Red Army forces, which, he claimed, “would only pass through the territory of Azerbaijan on their way to Anatolia, where they would join the Turkish war of liberation” (3, 54). Halil Pasha, Swietochowski notes, “even presented evidence of the good intentions of the Russians, saying that he would soon take over the command of the Eleventh Army” (ibid).

A few days later days – on 26 April, Mustafa Kemal sent the Russian government a message explaining the strategic line of the Young Turks government in relation to Soviet Russia and the three South Caucasian republics. Pledging to “connect all his work and

all military operations with the Russian Bolsheviks that aimed to combat imperialist governments”, he clearly and unequivocally outlined in this letter the basic line of Ankara’s regional strategy – refuse to expand its influence in the South Caucasus region and recognize it as a Russian dominance area in exchange for political, military, technical and material support from Moscow. “If the Soviet forces plan to open military operations against Georgia or force Georgia through diplomatic channels and through their influence to enter into an alliance and expel the British from the territory of the Caucasus, the Turkish government undertakes military operations against imperialist Armenia and pledges to force the Azerbaijan Republic to enter the circle of Soviet states,” the Turkish leader promised.

Later in his address he also identified the “price” of the proposed “services”: “In order, firstly, to expel the imperialist forces who occupy our territory inhabited by our people, and, secondly, to strengthen our inner strength to continue our common struggle against imperialism, we ask Soviet Russia to give us in the form of first aid five million Turkish liras in gold, weapons and ammunition in an amount which should be clarified during the negotiations and, in addition, some military facilities and sanitary material, as well as food for our troops, who - according



to the demand of the Soviet government - will have to operate in the East" (4, inventory 51, 321a file 54868, l.1).

As a result, it was Turkey that rendered the most active support to Soviet Russia in the occupation of Baku in the shortest possible time, which was later confirmed by Turkish leaders themselves. "With our influential help and assistance, these armies (meaning the 10th and 11th Armies - ed.) easily passed through the North Caucasus and entered Azerbaijan. Azerbaijanis met the troops who arrived with complete peace of mind. The Soviet armies took the necessary military and strategic measures on the borders of Armenia and Georgia and began to establish direct communication with us," Mustafa Kemal said at a TBMM meeting on 14 August 1920 (2, p.368).

The pro-Russian position of Turkey in this period was also confirmed later by representatives of Soviet Azerbaijan. A letter from the first representative of Soviet Azerbaijan in the RSFSR, Behbud Shakhtakhtinski, (20 September 1920) to Deputy Foreign Minister Lev Karakhan contained recognition of the fact that "before the coup in Azerbaijan, the Turks strongly insisted on its alliance with Russia, and contributed a lot to the coup there" (4, op.51, p.321a, d.54859, l.7ob).

In general, with respect to the independence of Azerbaijan, the Turkish factor played an ambiguous role. Neither



the Young Turks led by Nuri Pasha nor Kemalists represented by emissaries of Kemal in Azerbaijan, not to mention the Turkish communists who felt more comfortable in Baku than in their native Turkey, were interested in the development of Azerbaijan as a truly independent state. The independent stance and pro-Western orientation of the ADR were perceived by all political forces in Turkey as a potential threat to its interests. Moreover, for Kemalists the independent ADR was a "barrier" on the vital path of communication and rapprochement with Moscow, and for the Young Turks - an obstacle to the spread of Turkish influence in the Caucasus and Central Asian regions in the future.

As a result, from the very beginning of the "First Republic", the Turks, carrying out an objectively progressive mission of military and political support for the young Azerbaijani state and ensuring the security of its borders, pursued their own strategic goals in Azerbaijan. It was particularly evident in the support of the Turkish emissaries in Baku for pan-Turkic and even pan-Islamist forces in the ADR leadership, which they regarded as a counterweight to the Azerbaijani national-democratic forces, supporters of independent (as much as possible in those conditions) domestic and foreign policy orientation in the government of the "First Republic".

In the first months of 1920, they openly supported Bolshevik elements in the ADR government, with which Ankara linked its plans to turn Azerbaijan into a "corridor country". The logical final in the development of this trend came in the spring of 1920, when Turkish nationalists and communists joined forces and began to provide open support for the implementation of the plans of Moscow and Baku Bolsheviks to seize power in Baku and other regions of the ADR. The pendulum of the pragmatic foreign policy of Turkey, which saved the people of Azerbaijan from genocide by the Dashnak-Bolshevik alliance in mid-1918 and supported the efforts of the Azerbaijani patriotic forces to establish an independent ADR, swung in the opposite direction in the spring of 1920.

As a result, the Turkish factor - in cooperation with Russia - played an important supporting role in the process of occupation and subsequent Sovietization of Azerbaijan. ❁

To be continued

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