

**Giorgi MAMULIA**  
*Doctor of History (France)*

**Ramiz ABUTALIBOV**

## HISTORY OF RECOGNITION OF AZERBAIJAN'S DE FACTO STATE INDEPENDENCE AT THE PARIS PEACE CONFERENCE



*Alimardan bey Topchubashov - head of the Azerbaijani delegation at the Paris Peace Conference*

The de facto recognition of the state independence of Azerbaijan by the Supreme Council of the Entente was the main aim of the Azerbaijani diplomatic delegation to the Paris Peace Conference, which arrived in the capital of France on 9 May 1919 headed by A. M. Topchubashi.

From mid-June 1919, the main focus of the activities of the Azerbaijani as well as Georgian and North Caucasus delegations was to combat the claims of the White government of Admiral Kolchak formed in Omsk and to win recognition as the official government of the territories that were formerly part of the defunct empire of the Romanovs. Winston Churchill, the War Minister of

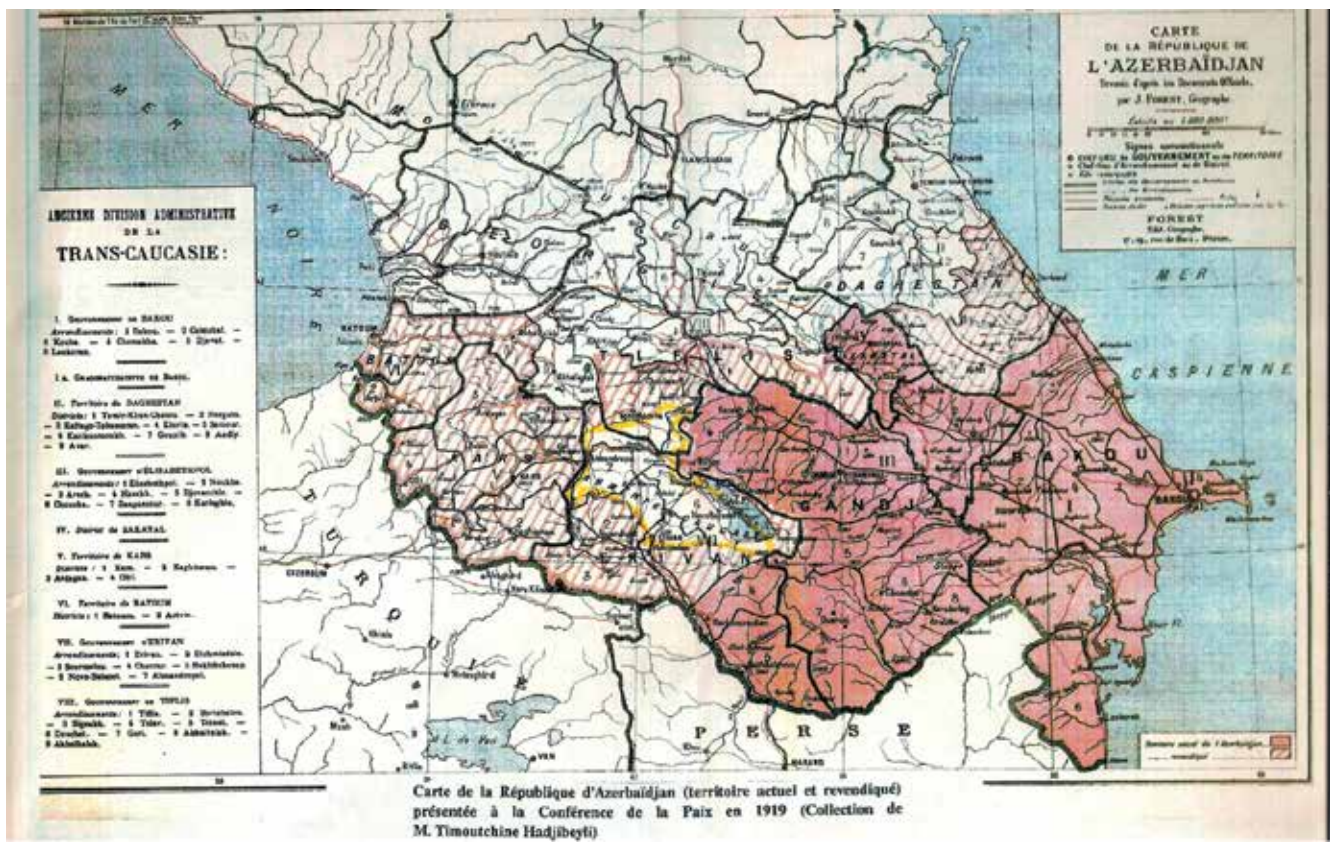
the British Empire, was a strong supporter of Kolchak, Denikin and other White generals, having an indifferent and often hostile attitude to the national aspirations of the non-Russian peoples. Assuming that the Caucasus must return to Russia after the overthrow of Bolshevism, he believed that British troops should remain there only in order to support Denikin, not allowing the local governments to take any action against him.

Completely the opposite view was held by Lord George Curzon, who worked as acting Minister of Foreign Affairs from the summer of 1919 and officially took this position in October of the same year. The former Viceroy of India Curzon, who was well aware that the aim of any Russian imperial government will inevitably be expansion into the South and the Middle East, which threatened British interests in these regions, argued for the creation of independent states not only in the Caucasus but also in Central Asia. This was to serve as a reliable barrier to the further expansion of Russian imperialism.

Prime Minister David Lloyd George, not particularly trusting and sympathizing with the Russian White movement, served as a kind of regulator of relations between Churchill and Curzon, in principle, having a good attitude to the small nations of the former empire of the Romanovs. Nonetheless, the main priority for him was to get rid of the crushing financial burden that gravitated over London after the First World War (1).

In March 1919, the presence of British troops in the

*Map of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic presented at the Paris Peace Conference*



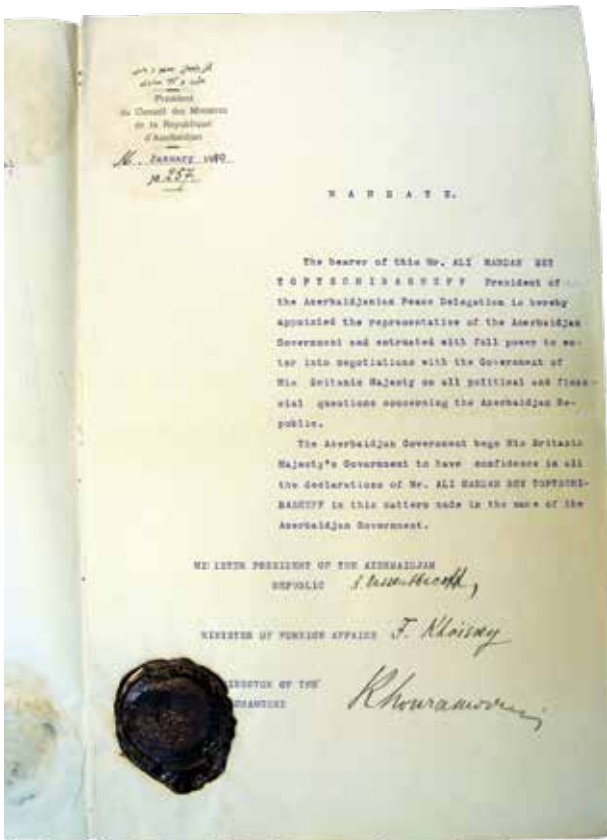
Caucasus was a big subject of discussion in the cabinet, where Lloyd George, Churchill and Curzon expressed their views on this issue. On 6 March, the inter-ministerial committee, which met under the chairmanship of Lord Curzon, decided to recommend the following tripartite policy to the government: 1. Start preparations for the evacuation of the Caucasus. 2. To compensate for this, to supply General Denikin with arms and military equipment, as well as to send a British military mission to Yekaterinodar. 3. To make such support conditional on the fact that General Denikin should not interfere in the affairs of the independent states in the Caucasus (2). Thus, Curzon considered the supply of arms to General Denikin as a means of giving him the opportunity to fight against Bolshevism on the one hand and on the other, to prevent the possible aggression of the Volunteer Army against the Transcaucasian states (3).

Although Churchill did not feel sympathy for Azerbaijan and Georgia, he was also against drawing Denikin into a conflict with these republics, rightly considering that it would lead to the scattering of the White forces, whose main aim was to fight the Russian Bolsheviks. As a result, the aforesaid scheme of relations with Denikin was adopted, which allowed London to gain the necessary leverage over the Volunteer Army, despite the fact

that by September 1919, British troops were withdrawn from Azerbaijan (4). Although in the second half of July 1919 the Volunteer Army managed to temporarily occupy the North Caucasus, creating a direct threat to Azerbaijan from Daghestan and the Caspian Sea, Denikin, who depended on military assistance from the Entente, did not dare to invade the Transcaucasia.

In the same month, Curzon managed to get Oliver Wardrop, one of the founders of Georgian studies in Britain, a renowned expert on the Caucasus, and in general, a staunch supporter of the independence of the Caucasian peoples, appointed as British high commissioner in the Caucasus. On 5 August, before his departure to Tbilisi, Wardrop turned to Curzon with his recommendations, and one of the main recommendations was the issue of recognition of the independence of the South Caucasus states by London. According to Wardrop, Britain should recognize the republics, as was already done in 1918 by Germany and Turkey, which recognized Georgia and Azerbaijan (5).

On 12 August, the day of his departure to the Caucasus, Wardrop himself visited the Azerbaijani delegation and made a "good impression" on Topchubashi. Fully understanding the importance of regional cooperation for the state independence of the peoples of the



## *Mandate of the ADR government issued to the Azerbaijani delegation at the Paris Peace Conference*

these reports did not find support in the UK government, as in September and October 1919 the Volunteer Army was on the crest of a military success and its units were near Orel and in the Moscow direction.

Then, however, under the influence of the rapidly developing military failures of the Volunteer Army, which quickly fell back under the pressure of the Bolsheviks in late October, the opinion of the Allied Supreme Council in relation to the concept of “one and indivisible Russia” became more and more critical and began to change for the better in relation to the South Caucasus states.

Although in the first week of November, the said changes only began to emerge in the foreign policy of the Entente states, Topchubashi immediately noticed these tendencies, stressing in his report on 6/10 November 1919 that “in the last three days the press, especially the British press, has been full of information related to apparent changes in the radical attitude of the Entente to the Soviet government of Russia. First, the British Parliament and then the London and Paris press (despite the electoral campaign) began to discuss the conditions of peace (or truce) proposed by the Bolsheviks.” “I feel that a period is beginning when our hopes for free and independent existence get stronger and aspire to spill into an actual form,” Topchubashi summed up his observations (10).

On 11 December, during a meeting held in London between French Prime Minister Jean Clemenceau, Lloyd George and Curzon, the latter, among other issues, raised the question of the Caucasus (11). On 22 December, Curzon and Philippe Berthelot, Secretary General of the French Foreign Ministry, had a meeting in London where, in addition to the settlement of the Turkish issue, the sides also discussed the recognition of Azerbaijan, Georgia and the North Caucasus. In order to prepare his companion for this possibility, Curzon said that Britain is interested in a great power obtaining a mandate over the Caucasus. Britain defends the Caucasus countries from Denikin, but still does not recognize them de facto or de jure, because it entails specific responsibilities. Personally, Curzon would like to see these Caucasian states with autonomous status, cooperating with each other, and possibly after the victory over Bolshevism, with a federal link to restored Russia if it exists. If this winter sees a catastrophe with Denikin, next spring, the Allies could consider the recognition of Georgia and Azerbaijan (12).

Caucasus, in his conversation Wardrop made a major emphasis on the need for a maximum rapprochement between Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia (6).

Arriving on 29 August in Tbilisi, where representatives of the Georgian government gave him an enthusiastic welcome (7), Wardrop immediately made arrangements for the structural organization of his commissariat. In all the important cities of the South Caucasus, officers subordinate to him were appointed, and their purpose was to inform the high commissioner of the developments on the ground in a timely manner and accurately. In Baku, this representative of the high commissioner was the Indian-born Colonel Claude Bayfield Stokes, a career intelligence officer, who was British military attaché in Tehran in 1907-1911 and served in the intelligence department of the General Staff of the Indian Army before the First World War (8). In the words of Stokes himself, he had an extremely good attitude to Azerbaijanis and was a staunch supporter of the independence of Azerbaijan and Georgia (9).

Seeing totally eye-to-eye on this issue, Wardrop and Stokes regularly sent messages to London in an effort to persuade the British government to recognize the independence of the South Caucasus republics. Initially,

*Azerbaijani delegation wrote to the leadership of the Paris Peace Conference to secure recognition of the ADR*

Two days later, on 24 December, Curzon prepared a special memorandum containing specific recommendations on the recognition of the independence of Georgia and Azerbaijan. The Foreign secretary noted that of all the republics of the Caucasus, Georgia was the most capable of independent existence, followed by Azerbaijan. Curzon emphasized that the independence of both countries was linked, because if the Bolsheviks occupied Azerbaijan, Georgia's fate would also be decided. Curzon then moved to suggestions for the British government: 1. To try to create an anti-Bolshevik bloc of nations, recognizing the federal Transcaucasia and placing it under the mandate of either Britain or America. Then, the power invested by this mandate would extend it to other anti-Bolshevik regions of former Russia, which had democratically elected governments, thus connecting the Transcaucasia, the Don, Kuban, Terek and Ukraine into a single federal entity. The latter would later be expanded to the entire territory of the former Russian Empire, forming thus a federal democratic republic, in which there would be no room for Bolshevism. 2. To refuse to recognize Georgia and Azerbaijan until the position of Denikin is finally clarified, continuing to exert pressure on him to refrain from aggression against the two republics. 3. To recognize Georgia and Azerbaijan temporarily, granting the League of Nations the right to make a final decision on the matter. If Bolshevism in Russia is defeated within five years, these countries will have to join a renewed federal Russia. Among other things, this decision may stop Denikin from occupying the Transcaucasia (13).

In the early days of January 1920, steps were taken to recognize Azerbaijan and Georgia's independence. On 2 January, British foreign experts had already prepared a report on the form of recognition of Azerbaijan and Georgia. According to this document, *de facto* recognition "differs from *de jure* recognition only in the fact: 1. That in the case of a state such as Azerbaijan, which has had no previous independent existence, *de facto* recognition is a necessary step to the grant of *de jure* recognition, and 2. *de facto* recognition involves a qualification to the effect that it is only granted on a specified condition such as e.g. the maintenance of stable Government or the decision of a Conference" (14).

*De facto* recognition will dispel suspicions in the re-



publics about the allies supposedly waiting for the restoration of a united Russia. In the case of Azerbaijan, it is useful for dealing with Turkish influence. At the same time, only moral responsibility towards these countries falls on the Allies. For these reasons, the Foreign Office believes "that *de facto* recognition would meet the wishes of the republics for the time being. *De jure* recognition would depend on the decision, taken by the League of Nations or the Allies" (15).

On 6 January, a memorandum prepared on the orders of Churchill and dedicated to the settlement of the Turkish problem, also concerning the problem of the Caucasus, proposed precautions in the event of London's recognition of the independence of the Transcaucasian republics: "Should it be decided to establish the independence of Georgia and Azerbaijan, the British Representative with general Denikin should be given timely warning to prepare the field and to make it clear to Denikin that he will lose Allied official support if he resists the policy of the Peace Conference in this respect" (16).

Perhaps, the final push to the recognition of the independence of Azerbaijan and Georgia was a telegram received in London on 9 January from the High Commissioner of Britain in the Transcaucasia Wardrop, in which



*Azerbaijani delegation conducted active correspondence with the leadership of the Paris Peace Conference to secure the recognition of the ADR*

was dictated by the immediate interests of the country and, according to Khoyski, supporting Azerbaijan, the British will also better serve their own interests, protecting the shortest way to Persia. Since the Volunteer Army will soon cease to exist, London should take an immediate decision to support Baku if it wants to save Azerbaijan from Bolshevism.

Commenting on Khoyski's words, Stokes pointed out that, in his opinion, the foreign minister of Azerbaijan was not exaggerating the danger hanging over his country. "Unless we are willing to see Bolsheviks rampant in Azerbaijan a decision to support that country cannot be taken too soon" (19). Taking into account the seriousness of the situation created by the defeat of the Volunteer Army, Stokes recommended "immediate grant of full independence and whole-hearted support to Azerbaijan, dispatch of arms and equipment including uniforms for her army and of breach blocks and ammunition for two six-inch guns at Baku" (20) and in addition, the rapid payment of the entire amount the British owed Azerbaijan for their military presence in the country. "These measures would, I consider place the Government in a position to suppress Bolshevik organizations within its borders and enable it to prevent Bolsheviks obtaining control of country", Stokes said (21).

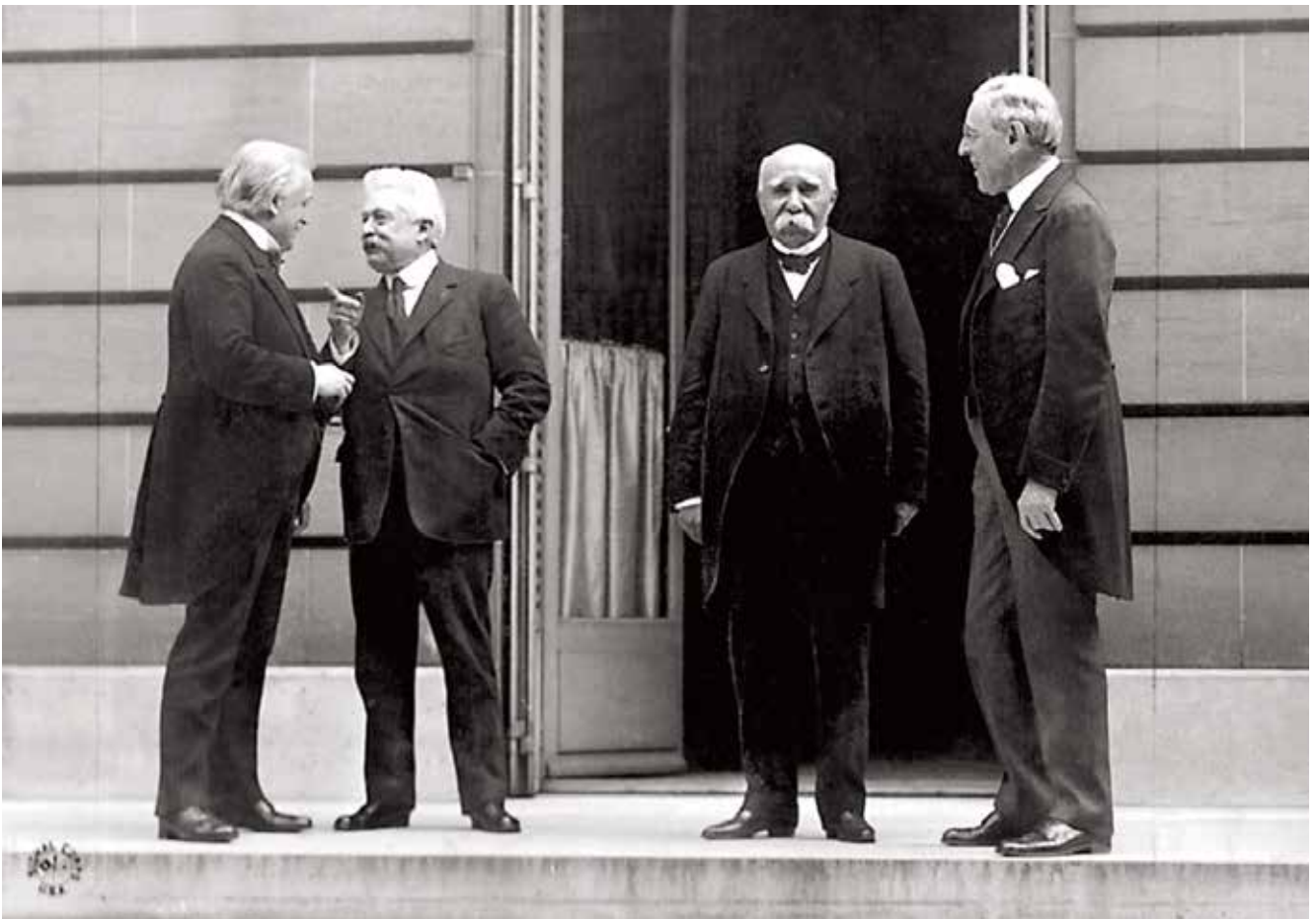
With the explicit aim of neutralizing the pro-Russian military who tried to talk only about autonomy, not independence for the Transcaucasian states at the time, Stokes pointed out that in the eyes of Baku and Tiflis "no promise of autonomy in any shape given by any existing Russian Government even if guaranteed by Allies will carry any weight. Policy advocated above may be regarded as drastic but in my opinion half measures would be of no avail and delay would mean disaster" (23). "I entirely concur", added Wardrop at the bottom of Stokes' message (24).

On 10 January 1920, Paris hosted a meeting of the foreign ministers of the Entente, which decided to recognize Azerbaijan and Georgia *de facto*. Coming up with this initiative, Curzon noted that at the meeting of the Supreme Council on the same day, Lloyd George pointed out the seriousness of the situation in South Russia and the Caucasus, which was facing the danger

the latter reported that Colonel Stokes, the political representative of the High Commissariat in Baku, had sent him a letter. Stokes wrote in it that on 7 January, he met with Fatali Khoyski, the foreign minister of Azerbaijan, at the request of the latter. Showing Stokes a telegram from Chicherin, people's commissar of Bolshevik Russia for foreign affairs, dated 2 January and received in Baku on 6 January, Khoyski said that the Bolsheviks proposed that Azerbaijan and Georgia, together with the Bolsheviks, attack the Volunteer Army. The "successful advance of Bolsheviks on both sides Caspian Sea has brought Bolshevik danger to door of Transcaucasia and Azerbaijan must decide very soon her policy towards Bolsheviks" (17). According to Stokes, it is possible that the Bolsheviks will try to stage a mutiny in Baku in order to force the government to take a decision that is advantageous to them. Although the current government of the country has resolute anti-Bolshevik positions, "if Great Britain will not come to its assistance, it may be compelled to make terms with Bolsheviks", Khoyski said (18).

After a comprehensive review of this issue, the Azerbaijani government decided to appeal to the UK to protect the interests and very existence of Azerbaijan. This decision was not made for any sentimental reasons. It

*“Big Four”: David Lloyd George, Vittorio Orlando, Georges Clemenceau, Woodrow Wilson*



of a direct invasion by the Bolsheviks. The matter had not only a military but also a political aspect. Based on this, he wanted to submit his following considerations to the heads of the Entente governments: The fate of Armenia will be resolved by the Peace Conference separately, as part of the settlement of the Turkish problem. As for Georgia and Azerbaijan, countries subjected to a triple threat from Denikin, the Bolsheviks and the Turks, he proposes granting those states *de facto* recognition. “The countries he mentioned had shown a firm desire to become real states. [...] To recognize their “de facto” governments would be equivalent to according them support” (25).

As a result, the minutes of the meeting recorded the decision that “the Principal Allied and Associated Powers should together recognize the Governments of Georgia and Azerbaijan as “de facto” Governments, subject to the reserve that the representative of the United States and the representative of Japan would request instructions from their Governments on the question” (26). On the same day, Lord Curzon sent a telegram to the Foreign Office in London, in which he reported that

on his initiative, the Entente Supreme Council decided to recognize Azerbaijan and Georgia *de facto*; representatives of the British Foreign Office could inform the two governments (27).

At the same time, the telegram emphasized that “recognition of *de facto* independence of Georgian and Azerbaijan Governments does not of course involve any decision as to their present or future boundaries, and must not be held to prejudice that question in smallest degree” (28).

On 12 January, Wardrop informed the governments in Tiflis and Baku of this decision (29). By this time, the representatives of the Azerbaijani delegation in Paris were aware of the decision, although the Azerbaijani delegation received the official text of the resolution on *de facto* recognition only on 30 January (30) after a special request to the General Secretariat of the Conference to send the text (31).

Attributing this decision of the Allies to the evolution of the civil war in Russia, on 14 January A. M. Topchibashi wrote to M. J. Mekhtieff and A. A. Sheikhlislamoff, the members of Azerbaijani delegation, who were in



*Members of the Azerbaijani delegation at the Paris Peace Conference*

London, that “since the arrival of the British ministers here, the center of gravity moved to Paris again. At the same time, serious events in the South of Russia and in particular in the Caucasus coincided with it, as after taking Taganrog, Novocherkassk and Rostov, the Bolsheviks moved on further and, apparently, were already in Tikhoretskaya. All this, combined with some of our as well as Georgian efforts, forced masters of the world to pay attention to our republics. The Council of the Three discussed our question twice and finally decided to recognize Azerbaijan and Georgia *de facto* as both these countries proved their ability for independent living and established order at home. They have already given us and the Georgian government a telegram on recognition through Wardrop. But at the same time, we have not received anything official here: We have the information that we will get it tomorrow or the day after tomorrow. We have some information on recognition and we have just had a meeting with the Georgians, where we exchanged views and stated that Azerbaijan and Georgia are *de facto* recognized” (32).

*De facto* recognition opened up new prospects for the Azerbaijani delegation in Paris. Now that the whole world is convinced of the commitment of the Azerbaijani people to the ideals of independence and their ability to establish a stable government with a posi-

tive agenda, the Western powers were ready to start new specific forms of cooperation with Baku. The fact that at the end of April 1920 the country’s independence was crushed by the Bolshevik boot amounted to a temporary triumph of brute force. In an historical perspective, the commitment of the Azerbaijani people to independence was unswerving, as events have shown 70 years later. ✨

## References:

1. Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet, held at 10, Downing Street, S.W., on Tuesday, August 12, 1919, at 11 30 A.M. // The National Archives (London) (далее – NA). CAB 23/11. Fol. 117.
2. Minutes of a Meeting held at 10, Downing Street, S.W., on Thursday, March 6, 1919, at 12 noon // Ibidem. 23/9. Fol. 103.
3. Ibidem.
4. Ibidem.
5. Wardrop to Curzon. [London], 5. 8. 1919 // NA. FO. 608/881. Fol. 163-164.
6. Али Марданбек Топчибашев. Письма из Парижа. Донесения председателя делегации Азербайджанской Республики на Парижской мирной конференции. Баку. 1998. С. 55.

*Alimardan Topchubashov continued his struggle  
for independence even after the  
fall of the ADR*

7. Eastern Report. N° CXXXVII. September 5, 1919 // NA. CAB 24/145. Fol. 280.
8. Colonel Chardigny à ministre guerre Paris. 22. 3. 1919 // Archives du ministère des Affaires étrangères (далее – АМАЕ). Correspondance politique et commerciale (далее – CPC). 1914-1940. Série Z. Dossier n° 626 Russie (Caucase). Fol. 212.
9. Prof. J. Y. Simpson. Minute of Conversation with Colonel Stokes, just returned from the Caucasus. [Paris], 7. 6. 1919 // NA. FO. 608/851. Fol. 60.
10. Али Марданбек Топчибашев. Письма из Парижа. С. 96-97.
11. Notes on a Conversation at 10, Downing Street, London, S.W. on Thursday, December 11, 1919, at 3 p.m. // NA. CAB 29/81. Fol. 18.
12. Anglo-French Conference on the Turkish Settlement. Minutes of First Meeting of an Anglo-French Conference in the Secretary of State's Room at 11-45 a.m. on December 22, regarding the Turkish Settlement // Ibidem. 24/95. Fol. 271.
13. Curzon. Transcaucasia. 24. 12. 1919 // The National Archives (NA). London. CAB. 24/95. Fol. 162 A.
14. Mr. Kidston. Explanation on the Points raised by Lord Curzon on the attached Minute. 2. 1. 1920 // NA. FO 371/3666. Fol. 1.
15. Ibidem. Fol. 2.
16. The Military aspect of the Turkish Peace Settlement. Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War. 6. 1. 1920 // NA. CAB 24/96. Fol. 30.
17. Wardrop to Foreign Office. Tiflis, 8. 1. 1920. (Received 9. 1. 1920) // NA. FO. 608/271. Fol. 177.
18. Ibidem.
19. Ibidem. Fol. 178.
20. Ibidem.
21. Ibidem.
22. Ibidem. Fol. 178-179.
23. Ibidem. Fol. 179.
24. Ibidem.
25. Notes of a Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Held at the Quai d'Orsay, Paris, on Saturday, January 10, 1920, at Noon // NA. CAB 29/41. Fol. 6-7.
26. Ibidem. Fol. 7.
27. Lord Curzon to Foreign Office. Paris, 10. 1. 1920 // NA. FO. 608/271. Fol. 163.
28. Ibidem. Fol. 165.
29. Wardrop to Foreign Office. Tiflis, 2. 2. 1919. (Received 8. 2. 1919) // NA. FO. 608/271. Fol. 247.
30. Report of the General Secretariat of the Paris Peace Conference to A. M. Topchibashi concerning the dispatching of the documents, relating to the de facto recognition of the Azerbaijan Republic by the Supreme Council of the Entente. Paris, 30. 1. 1920 // Le Centre d'études des mondes russe, caucasien et centre-européen (CERCEC). Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS). Paris. Archives d'Ali Mardan-bey Toptchibachi. Carton n° 4/3.
31. Letter of A. M. Topchibashi to the president of the Supreme Council of the Paris Peace Conference concerning the dispatch of the documents relating to the de facto recognition of the Azerbaijan Republic by the said Council. 29. 1. 1920 // Ibidem.
32. Letter of A. M. Topchibashi to A. A. Sheikhlislamoff and M. J. Mekhtieff concerning the decision of the Supreme Council of the Entente to recognize de facto independence of the Azerbaijan and Georgia, events in Azerbaijan and the activity of Azerbaijani diplomatic delegation in Paris. Paris, 14. 1. 1920 // Ibidem. Carton n° 7/2.

