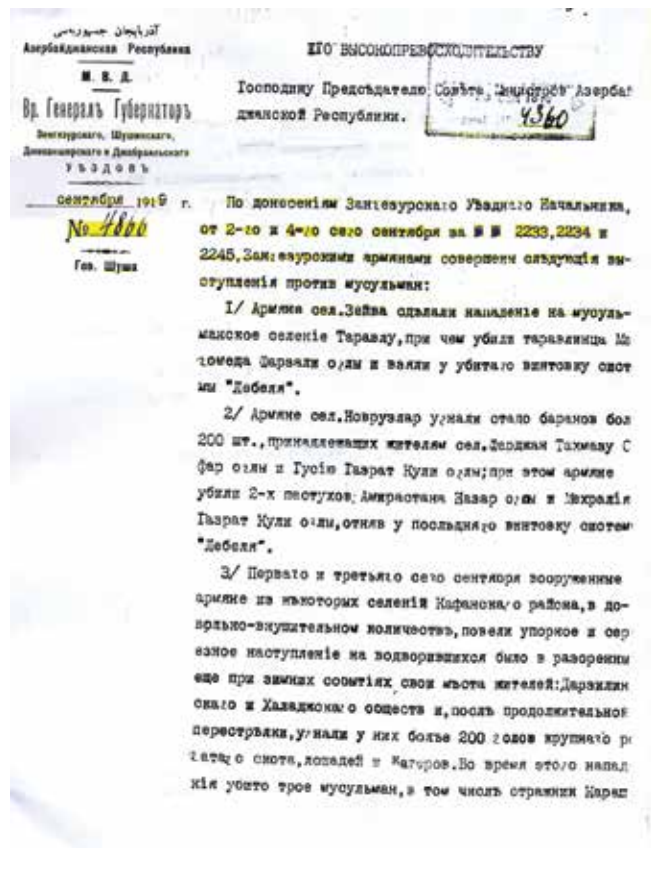


DIPLOMATIC STRUGGLE AROUND KARABAKH AND ZANGEZUR UNDER THE ADR (1918-1920)

Reports of the Zangezur county governor to the ADR government testified to the attacks of Armenian armed formations and regular troops on the Azerbaijani villages of Zangezur

The state-territorial delimitation of the South Caucasus in 1918 violated the socio-economic lifestyle of the population, which had developed over the centuries, thus causing acute border conflicts between the national states that emerged here. A good example is regions such as Karabakh and Zangezur, which became one of the main objects of Armenia's territorial claims to Azerbaijan in 1918. As follows from the statement of the Azerbaijan National Council on June 14, 1918, during a joint meeting with representatives of the Armenian National Council in Tiflis, a verbal agreement was reached on the delimitation of territories (1). The agreement was based on the accord reached by the parties in Batum under which Azerbaijan would not object to the declaration of Erivan as the capital of Armenia, and in response to this gesture of goodwill, Armenia would give up claims to the part of the Yelizavetpol province, that is, to the mountainous part of Karabakh (2). However, the Armenian side refused to conduct negotiations in this format. The chairman of the Armenian delegation, Agaronian, informed Armenian Foreign Minister Oganjanian about this in his telegram of July 8, 1918 from Istanbul, where delegations of the governments of the South Caucasus re-

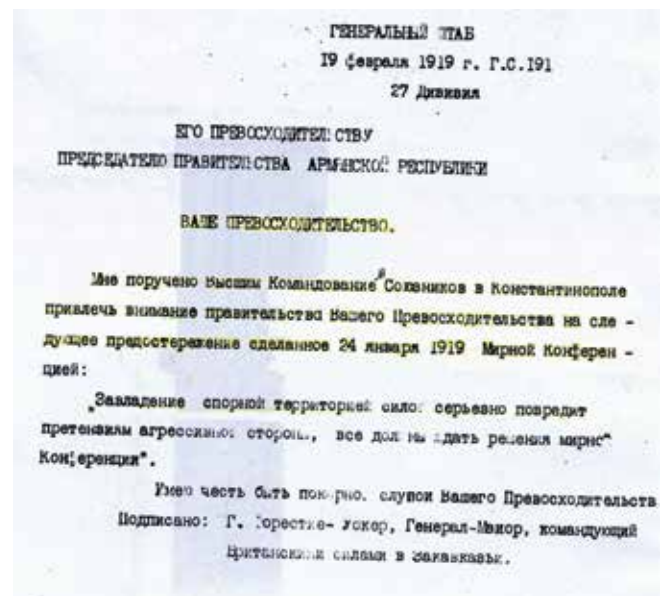


Letter from the commander of British troops in Transcaucasia, George Forestier Walker, to the chairman of the government of Armenia saying that territorial disputes cannot be resolved by force. February 19, 1919

publics began to gather from the end of June 1918 for the upcoming conference with the participation of the countries of the Quadruple Union. Agaronian's telegram noted that the Batumi negotiations made absolutely no sense as they concerned the borders of the Transcaucasian districts, not the three independent states. Now the Armenian side believed that Armenia's borders should include at least Shusha, Karyagino, Javanshir, Zangezur, Daralagoz, Surmali, Nakhchivan and Sharur (3). Thus, Armenia tried to expand its borders at the expense of the territories of the Yelizavetpol and Erivan provinces, where the Muslim population outnumbered the Armenian population. Therefore, in his dispatch dated July 31, 1918 to the head of the Azerbaijani delegation to the Istanbul conference, Mammad Amin Rasulzadeh, the chairman of the Council of Ministers of Azerbaijan, Fatali Khan Khoyski, proposed to refuse giving up Erivan and part of Gazakh district in favour of Armenia if the Armenians claimed Karabakh (4).

Attempts by the Azerbaijani government from the summer of 1918 to disarm the Armenian population of Karabakh and Zangezur in order to establish order in the region met with stubborn resistance. The situation was further aggravated with the appearance in the summer of 1918 of Armenian units in Karabakh and Zangezur led by Andranik, who committed looting, violence and murder of Muslims. It is interesting that the Armenian government refused to admit its involvement in the actions of Andranik's detachments, which allegedly did not obey the Armenian authorities and therefore were expelled from the Armenian army and acted independently (5). As a result, by the end of 1918, about 150 Muslim villages were ravaged and plundered, while masses of refugees poured into the lowland part of Karabakh (6).

After the departure of Turkish troops from the South Caucasus in early November 1918, control over the region passed into the hands of British troops who arrived here in the second half of the same month. On the basis of a written appeal from the head of the Azerbaijani government, Khoyski, to the commander of the British contingent, General Thomson, about the atrocities committed by Andranik in Karabakh, in early December

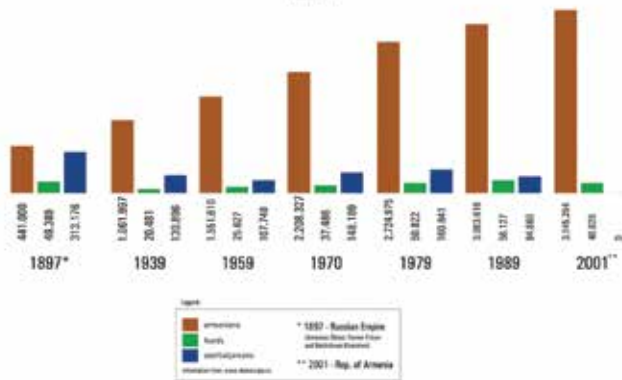


1918, he demanded that the Armenian commander cease hostilities against the Azerbaijani population. In addition, in a telegram to Armenian leaders in Ganja, Gazakh and Javanshir districts, Thomson urged them to stop atrocities and looting against the Azerbaijani population, warning: "Inform all Armenians to quietly sit in their homes. In case of disobedience, you will be directly responsible for the spilled blood" (7).

Undoubtedly, the Armenians were not ready for such a turn of events, as well as for the fact that in January 1919, a governorate general was created in Karabakh and Zangezur on orders from the Azerbaijani government. The proposal to turn Karabakh and Zangezur into a separate governorate general with special powers was put forward by Khalil bey Khasmammadov, Minister of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, in early 1919 in a report to the government on the situation in the region. The main reasons were the separatist aspirations of local Armenians fomented by emissaries from Armenia, bloody incidents against the Muslim part of the population, the weakness of the local authorities due to the absence of a serious military force behind them, as well as the incomplete communication of the central government with the region (8). By the decision of the government of Azerbaijan on January 15, 1919, Khosrov bey Sultanov, who was a doctor by profession, was appointed general-governor (9).

From the very first days of the existence of the Karabakh governorate general, the Armenian government and representatives of the so-called "Armenian National Council of Karabakh and Zangezur" inundated the

Comparison table of armenian, azerbaijani and kurdish population of Armenia



British command with letters, telegrams and appeals protesting against the creation of a special administration in Karabakh and Zangezur subordinate to the government of Azerbaijan. At the same time, the Armenian government called Karabakh and Zangezur “integral parts” of its territory, sending even a state commissioner to Goris. The Armenian National Council even proposed turning the Armenian part of Zangezur and Karabakh into a separate governorate general headed by a British officer who was not subordinate to the Azerbaijani government (10).

The steps of the British command, which were inconsistent at first and were expressed in the statements of its representatives on the status of the Governor-General of Karabakh, also gave an excuse for the Armenian side to put pressure. During meetings with representatives of the Karabakh Armenians and the Armenian government, the commander of the British troops in the Caucasus, General Thomson, as well as representatives of the British mission in Shusha stated that the presence of the Azerbaijani administration and troops in Karabakh and Zangezur did not mean that in the future these territories should belong to Azerbaijan, since their final fate will be decided at the peace conference (11). These statements of the British command led to an intensification of intrigues of the Armenian separatists. For example, letters from the representatives of the Armenian National Council sent in March 1919 to the government of Armenia and its commissioner in Karabakh and Zangezur set the task of getting the Azerbaijani governorate general eliminated, introducing Armenian representatives of Karabakh and Zangezur into the Armenian delegation at the Paris Peace Conference, creating a single command in the region, providing it with experienced commanders, weapons, money, etc. (12)

But after the command of the British troops in Karabakh through the mouth of Colonel D. Shuttleworth confirmed the recognition of Governor-General Kh. Sultanov as the sole supreme authority on April 3, 1919 and called upon the population to follow all his orders unquestioningly, the actions of the British became more consistent (13). On May 8, 1919, the Armenian diplomatic representative in Georgia said in a report that General Thomson, on the basis of reports by Shuttleworth and Major Monk-Masson on the situation in Karabakh and Zangezur, came to the conclusion that the rule of law in the region was being violated through the fault of representatives of the Armenian government, which incited the Armenian population to disobey the authorities of Azerbaijan (14). At the end of May 1919, these representatives were expelled by the British from the region (15).

The decisive actions of the British had a certain influence on the political moods of the Armenian population of Karabakh and Zangezur and their leaders. This was reflected in the decisions of the Seventh Congress of Armenians of Karabakh and Zangezur held in Shusha on August 15, 1919. The congress adopted the “Interim Agreement of the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh with the Azerbaijani Government”, which consisted on 26 clauses: “The mountainous part of Karabakh -Shusha, Javanshir and Jabrayil counties (Dizak, Varanda, Khachen and Jarabert) inhabited by Armenians, considers itself to be within the borders of the Republic of Azerbaijan temporarily, until the settlement of this issue at the Peace Conference” (16).

After the withdrawal of British troops from Azerbaijan in late August 1919, the region was visited by Colonel William Haskell, Chief of Staff of the US Army, who was appointed High Commissioner of the Allied Powers in the South Caucasus at the Paris Peace Conference by the decision of the Council of Five (USA, Britain, France, Italy and Japan) in July 1919. On August 20, Haskell headed first to Erivan, on August 23 - to Tiflis and finally, on August 28, he arrived in Baku (17). Haskell’s tour in the region was primarily due to the beginning of the peace conference in Paris and the active negotiations of the Allies with representatives of national states formed on the ruins of the Russian Empire about the procedure for recognizing their independence. The South Caucasian republics were at the epicenter of this process. One of the important tasks facing the Haskell mission was to make sure on the spot how the young republics corresponded to the contents of the provisions of

their memoranda their delegations had submitted to the peace conference and to prepare a report on this. The most acute was the issue of borders, and Haskell was certainly aware of the territorial conflicts that were taking place in the South Caucasus. Haskell also knew the position of the former British command concerning the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict around Karabakh and Zangezur. Therefore, it is not by chance that solidarity with the position of his Entente ally could be felt in Haskell's position on this issue from his very first statements. During a meeting with Azerbaijani Prime Minister Nasib bey Usubbayov on August 28, 1919, Haskell proceeded from the point of view that Karabakh and Zangezur were an integral part of Azerbaijan. At the same time, Haskell refuted the sensationalized parts of his speech in the Armenian parliament with threats against Azerbaijan as not corresponding to reality.

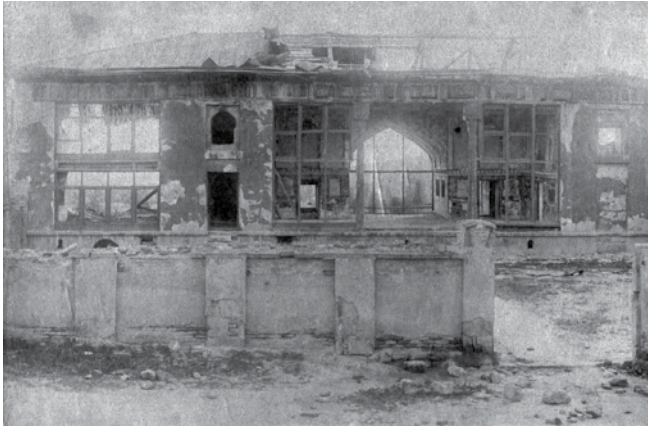
At the same time, the Armenian government protested over the presence of Azerbaijani troops in Zangezur, saying that it was part of Armenia and that it considered any actions of the Azerbaijani government in this area to be contrary to the decisions of the British command and unacceptable as they could entail undesirable consequences and bloody incidents. The Armenian government offered Azerbaijan to resolve the issue at a separate bilateral conference. In response, the Azerbaijani government indicated that it considered Zangezur affairs to be internal affairs of Azerbaijan and did not consider it possible to enter any negotiations with the Armenian government on this matter. At the same time, it was stressed that the British command had long ago carried out a preliminary delimitation of territories, having granted Karabakh and Zangezur to Azerbaijan. At the same time, the Azerbaijani government agreed to hold the Azerbaijani-Armenian conference in Baku, but on the condition that its decisions would be not a temporary but a final solution to territorial disputes between Armenia and Azerbaijan. This reservation by the Azerbaijani side was not accidental. Azerbaijani diplomacy was already well acquainted with the tactics of the Armenian side - first to make loud statements, presenting themselves as ardent peacekeepers, and to make broad promises about their determination to solve the conflict, and then to deny their words at the last moment. Taking this into account, Azerbaijan's Foreign Minister Jafarov directly warned the Armenian side at a meeting with the plenipotentiary representative of Armenia in Azerbaijan, Bekzadyan, on October 13, 1919: "The experience of the Transcaucasian conference, in



Postcard with the image of Shusha, center of Karabakh

which the principles of settling territorial disputes were partly developed, showed that with the irreconcilable position that the Armenians have been taking, nothing will be done decisively, and the projected conference will not yield any results unless both the objects of the dispute and the maximum of mutual concessions are first clarified through a private exchange of views. If such preliminary clarification of questions does not occur and the way of resolving issues is not outlined, I consider it absolutely unnecessary to convene a conference only to once again demonstrate intransigence to society and ask you to communicate with your government on the issues that have been raised by me, unless, of course, the Armenian government sincerely wishes to come to a mutual agreement" (18).

The results of the Armenian-Azerbaijani peace conference that began in Tiflis on November 20, 1919 fully confirmed the fears of the Azerbaijani foreign minister. On the eve of the conference, the Azerbaijani government ordered its army units in Karabakh to cease hostilities. As follows from the government's reports, the sending of troops to the aid of the Karabakh governor-general was due to the presence of undeniable evidence that the Armenian government had sent regular troops, weapons and munitions to Zangezur to distribute them among the Armenian population of the region in order to raise an uprising at the right time in order to show that the Armenians of Zangezur do not want to recognize the Azerbaijani authorities. In such a situation, the government could not remain indifferent, especially since it was necessary to return to their lands the 60,000 Azerbaijani refugees (19) who had left their homes as a result of the atrocities of Andranik's armed gangs in



Sardar Palace in Irevan, once a masterpiece of architecture, was intentionally brought to unsafe condition by Armenian authorities and subsequently knocked down

Zangezur county in the period from the second half of 1918 to early 1919.

Following the results of the conference, on November 23, 1919 the parties concluded a peace agreement signed by the chairman of the Armenian Government, A. Khatisov, and the chairman of the Government of Azerbaijan, N. Usubbayov. The parties agreed to resolve all controversial issues, including border issues, through negotiations rather than by force of arms. It was envisaged that from the moment the agreement was signed, neither of the two contracting governments would take over by force of arms the areas that had not recognized it until then (20). Observing the terms of the agreement, Azerbaijan withdrew its military units from Zangezur. Armenia immediately sent its regular troops here, grossly violating the agreements reached. The British military journalist Scotland-Liddell, who was in Baku at that time, informed London that following the signing of the agreement of November 23, "Armenians, taking advantage of the withdrawal of Azerbaijani troops, treacherously attacked Muslims in Zangezur, where they destroyed up to forty Muslim villages" (21). Touching upon the recent events in the Zangezur county in a telegram dated December 8, 1919 to the Supreme Commissioner of the Allies, Colonel Haskell, Azerbaijan's Prime Minister Usubbayov expressed his fear that if the Armenian part of the Zangezur population had cannons and machine guns, then there was no guarantee from their further actions and from the continuation of anarchy. Therefore, the head of the Azerbaijani government proposed sending a commission of American officers to the Zangezur county within no later than 5 days to seize weapons and machine guns from Armenian gangs. The Azerbaijani government warned that otherwise it would be forced to take concrete measures that could lead the perpetrators of anarchy to realize the need to observe

the peaceful principles of coexistence in Zangezur (22).

In a telegram dated December 11, 1919, Haskell said that he "received and forwarded the telegram to the Armenian president-minister with the following addition: if these accusations are confirmed after the investigation, this will be the strongest blow to the future of Armenia" (23).

Meanwhile, from December 14 to December 21, 1919, Baku hosted an Armenian-Azerbaijani peace conference, which continued the talks launched in Tiflis in November in order to resolve all the acute problems that had accumulated between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The most acute issue on the agenda of the conference was the solution of territorial problems between the two republics. Here the positions of the parties were diametrically opposite again. The Azerbaijani side put forward the idea of a confederation of all the republics of the South Caucasus, believing that such a political association would be the best and most acceptable for all to resolve territorial and other disputes. The Armenian delegation took a nonconstructive stance again, saying that before the final borders are established, a provisional agreement on the demarcation line must be concluded (24). This position was expected on the whole: Armenia did not want to bind itself by any long-term agreements on the borders with its neighbors, as it was eagerly awaiting the decisions of the Paris conference on the "Armenian question". The resolution of this issue in favor of Armenia would mean the handover of all the territories of the former Erivan province, Karabakh and Zangezur to Armenia. The Armenians dreamed of the adventurous idea of a "greater Armenia", whose boundaries, as the first Prime Minister of the Ararat Republic Kachaznuni wrote, were to stretch "from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea, from the Karabakh mountains to the Arabian deserts" (25). It is clear that with such vast perspectives, Armenia did not want to get such trifles as agreements with Azerbaijan on certain sections of the border. Therefore, at the conference the Armenian delegation evaded the final recognition of bilateral borders with Azerbaijan under various pretexts again. As for the proposal of the Armenian delegation to establish a demarcation line, the real ethno-demographic situation in the border regions of Armenia and Azerbaijan made such a disengage-

This is how the Muslim quarters of the city of Shusha looked after the pogroms arranged by the Armenian armed formations in the early 20th century

ment practically impossible without taking into account the economic and everyday lifestyle of the population. The thing is that Azerbaijani cattle-breeders traditionally drove their flocks high into the mountains of Zangezur in summer and to the plains of low-lying Karabakh in winter. For this reason, Armenia's claims to mountainous Zangezur, attempts to streamline the crossings by introducing identification documents and certificates about nomadic settlements, establishing guard posts and customs posts designed to discourage these migrations provoked constant tensions between the parties. The protests of the Azerbaijani government remained unsuccessful. And the peace conference concluded its work without coming to any results.

In January-April 1920, Azerbaijani villages in Zangezur and Karabakh were subjected to new attacks by Armenian troops supported by local Armenians. Blood was shed again and a new wave of refugees appeared among the Muslim population. This forced the government of Azerbaijan to concentrate significant military forces in Karabakh and Zangezur on the border with Armenia, thus denuding the northern borders where the military threat from Bolshevik Russia was growing. Thus, on the eve of the Sovietization of Azerbaijan, despite all the diplomatic and political efforts of the Azerbaijani government, the conflict with Armenia around Karabakh and Zangezur did not find its peaceful solution. ❖

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