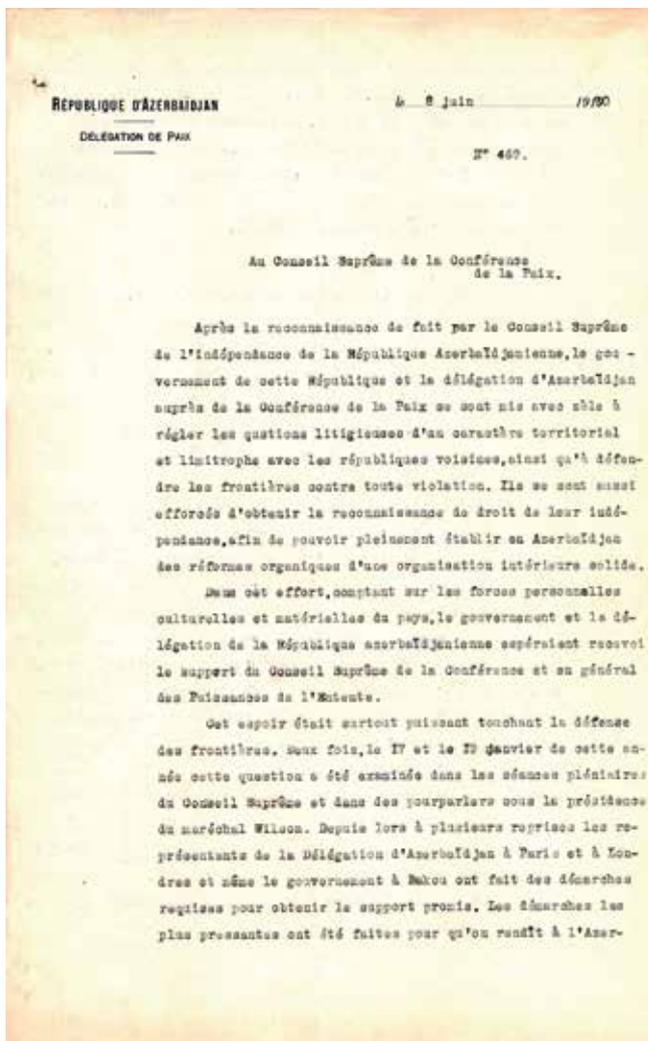


Elman MURADOV

SWISS-AZERBAIJANI RELATIONS IN THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY



On 28 May 1918, the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, the first democratic republic in the Muslim East, was established. The newly-created state could not easily establish international relations. The republic was eager to join the system of international relations against the backdrop of difficult and deepening geopolitical issues. And the best way out was to bring independence to the attention of European countries.

The choice of Swiss-Azerbaijani relations in the early 20th century as a subject of research in 2019, when Azerbaijani diplomacy marks its 100th anniversary, is due to several reasons. Both political and economic relations between Switzerland and Azerbaijan formed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Switzerland was one of the few countries that had a representative office in Baku at the time of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic. The population of Switzerland, which is currently one of the leading countries in the world in terms of material welfare, had to migrate to different countries in the early 20th century because of poverty and employment problems. Some Swiss people migrated to the Caucasus region in search of employment in a more favorable environment. In 1858, the first cheese

Documents on the history of relations between the ADR and Switzerland, as well as documents of the Azerbaijani delegation at the Paris Peace Conference, are stored in the archives of Switzerland

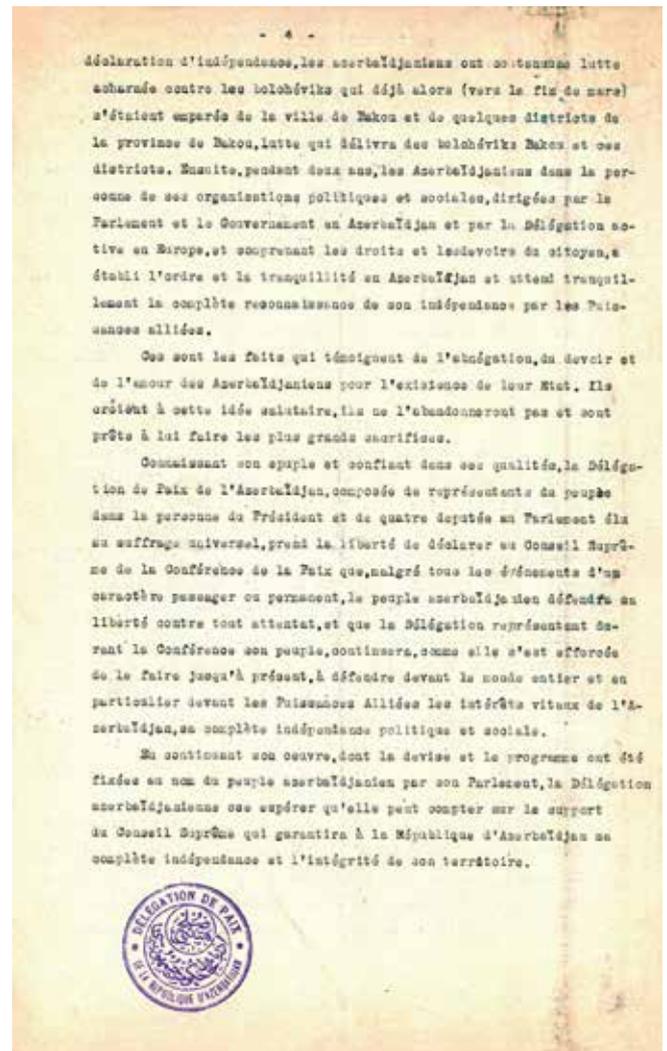
production company was established by the Swiss in the Caucasus. In 1900, the number of these enterprises increased to 15, and in 1914 - to 45. The largest cheese producing enterprises were located in Borchali and in the village of Kamarli (presently in Gazakh District).

The emigration of our compatriots to Switzerland, which has up to 2,000 Azerbaijanis, began in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In those years, wealthy Azerbaijanis went to Switzerland for treatment and recreation. There are still accounts in Swiss banks, where Azerbaijani millionaires invested large amounts of money. Our compatriots also came to study in this country. In January 1920, 50 of the Azerbaijanis who went to Russia and European countries to study various specialties were sent to Switzerland. They did not return after completing their education (1).

At the same time, the beauty of nature and conditions existing for political immigrants turned Switzerland into the homeland of revolutionaries from tsarist Russia, including the Caucasus (2). For this reason, Ahmad bey Agaoglu, a member of the parliament of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, and A. Huseynzadeh, one of the founders of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, discussed the liberation of the Caucasus from Russian occupation with the European states ahead of World War II, and Switzerland is known to be a very important country in this issue (3).

As you can see, relations between Azerbaijan and Switzerland have a rich history. While some studies have been conducted to study these relations, there is a need for a more thorough study of the existing relations between the two countries. The 1920s, which are an important period in mutual relations, are of great importance in this respect.

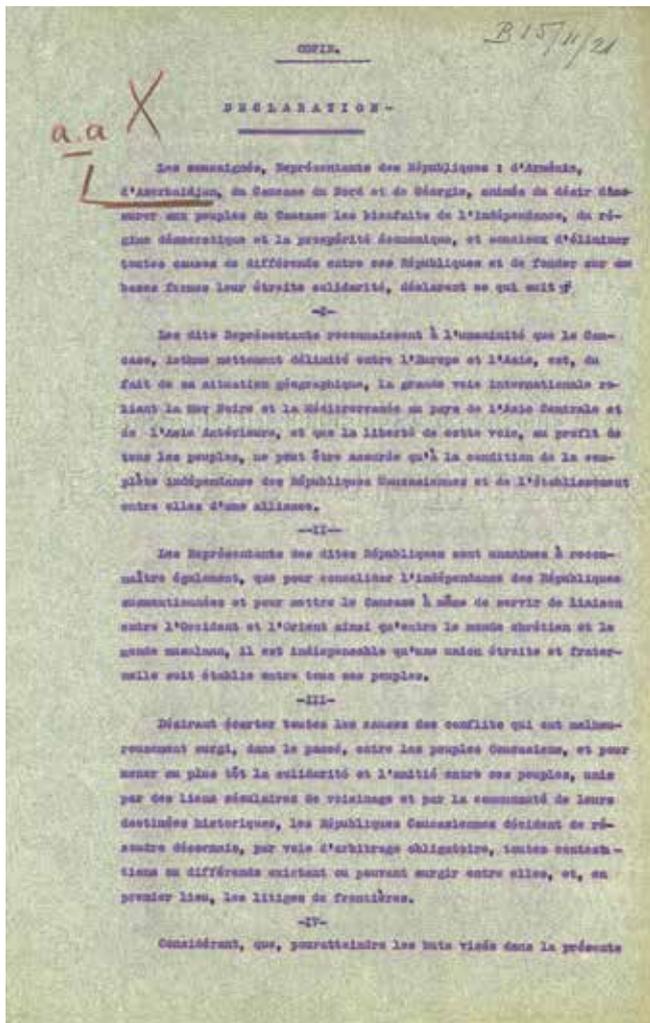
As the colonial regime created by the Russians after 1828 caused serious economic and social deprivations, most immigrants flowed to Turkey. Apart from those who were forced to leave the country for such political and economic reasons, intellectuals and clerics, who could not resign themselves to being slaves of a Christian power, emigrated on religious and personal-psychological grounds. Specifically, the persecution of intellectuals in Azerbaijan in the early 20th century, maximum restrictions on political activity and the closure of a number of newspapers forced intellectuals like Ali bey Huseynzadeh, Ahmad bey Agaoglu, Mammad Amin Rasulzadeh and others to leave the country. Turks emigrating from Russia set up a number of organizations in Istanbul, and Switzerland had an important



place in the activities of these organizations due to its geopolitical position.

In emigration, Azerbaijanis established cooperation with Caucasian nations. In 1915, North Caucasian, Azerbaijani and Georgian immigrants created an organization called the Caucasus Committee in Turkey. The Caucasus Committee, chaired by Marshal Fuat Pasha, worked for the independence of the Caucasus and prepared theoretical grounds for a confederative political entity after cessation from Russia. The documents we have obtained from the Swiss diplomatic archives confirm this. A document, referred to in a letter from Charles Edouard Lardy, an employee of the Swiss Embassy in Paris in 1918, states that "the delegation from the Caucasus expresses its desire to the Swiss side to build a confederation" (4). The country which was considered as a model was Switzerland.

It should be noted that Armenian "propagandists" falsified facts about ethnic relations and the



socio-economic and political situation in Azerbaijan, and thus tried to prove that it was very backward in the political, cultural and economic spheres, and opposed the recognition of Azerbaijan as an independent state. Therefore, the Foreign Ministry of Azerbaijan thought it important to carry out two missions in Western Europe - to deny fake materials about Azerbaijan and to create a propaganda center to popularize Azerbaijan. To this end, it was planned to release at least one newspaper in one of the European centers, specifically in Switzerland, with an illustrative appendix, publish booklets about the history, literature, art, social and political situation of Azerbaijan, to use the press organs of various political parties in Western Europe for propaganda purposes and to make open lectures and speeches at rallies. In order to fulfill these responsibilities, the Foreign Ministry of the Azerbaijan Republic discussed "issuing newspapers in Europe to protect Azerbaijan's interests and sending an extraordinary mission to Switzerland" and

submitted it to the parliament for approval. The choice of Switzerland from neutral countries to fulfill the tasks set by the Foreign Ministry of Azerbaijan was not accidental. A report prepared for the parliament noted that Switzerland is currently playing a key role in world politics for its geographical location and political importance within neutral countries. Now it is possible to conduct a more independent and successful policy on the Caucasian states only from Switzerland. The report stated that it was impossible to conduct an independent campaign that did not match the policy of a state from the UK, France, Italy, Germany or Austria and said that this work was unfavorable in other neutral centers such as Copenhagen, Brussels or Madrid. As Switzerland was able to maintain its neutrality in relations with various groups of states, all the lines of world politics converged here. Taking all this into consideration, the Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry considered it necessary to send an extraordinary mission to Switzerland, to publish an Azerbaijani press organ in Geneva, and to use the Swiss press for the benefit of Azerbaijan (5).

Particularly, plenipotentiary representative A. M. Topchubashov attached great importance to the sending of a special representative mission to European capitals. Since the government of Azerbaijan, which was involved in the liberation of Baku for over four months, could not take significant steps in this field, Topchubashov created a small mission in Istanbul headed by Ali bey Huseynzadeh to be sent to Switzerland. Here they had to meet with diplomatic representatives from foreign countries and travel to the Netherlands, Italy and France. However, Entente countries did not grant the mission visas to travel to European countries (6).

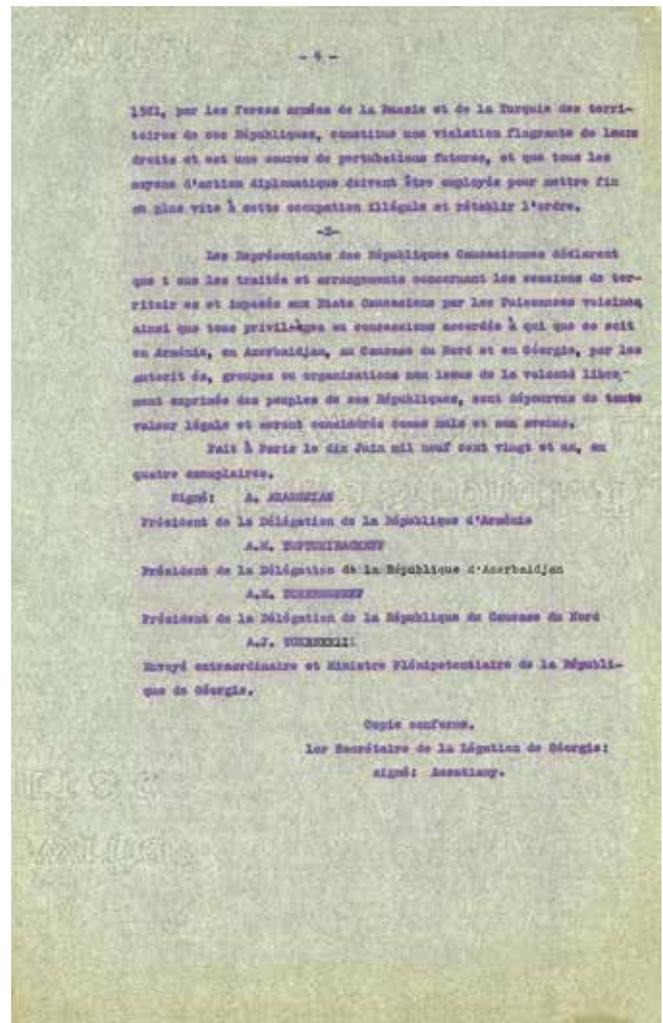
Enver Pasha, the military minister of the Ottoman Empire, attached great importance to the sending of Azerbaijani representatives to European capitals. He pointed out that it is necessary to go not only to Berlin and Vienna, but also to neutral countries such as Switzerland and the Netherlands in order to contact the embassies of the conflicting countries. As a result of such visits, it is possible to propagate through newspapers and other means that Azerbaijan is an independent state. Enver Pasha said, "For a long time, at least until the general peace is concluded, it is necessary to stay in Switzerland and go to Berlin and other centers. If you cannot stay there for a long time, you can send someone from your current office. It would be better to have a whole Azerbaijani representative office in Geneva and Lausanne" (7).

The Committee to Protect the Rights of Turkic Tatar Muslims of Russia. In 1915, the Committee to Protect the Rights of Turkic Tatar Muslims of Russia was established in Istanbul. The chairman of the committee was Yusuf Akcura, a history teacher at the Heybeliada Deniz Lyceum in Istanbul. The committee was joined by Abdurrashid Ibrahim from Tatars, Mehmet Esat Chelebizadeh from Crimean Tatars and Mugimeddin Beyjan from Bukhara. Azerbaijani intellectuals such as Ahmad bey Agaoglu and Ali bey Huseynzadeh also joined the committee. (8). This organization, of which Huseynzadeh was an active member, was often called the Akcura-Huseynzadeh committee (9).

The main purpose of this committee was to promote the goals of the Committee in European countries such as Germany, Austria, Hungary and Bulgaria. In order to form a public opinion in Europe, members of the committee engaged in active propaganda in this direction: they published works and articles in various media outlets, signed official appeals to states and made lectures. Agaoglu and Huseynzadeh, who were not official members of the committee, also presented a memorandum to European states on the liberation of the Caucasus from Russian occupation and tried to describe the true state of the Caucasian Turks.

The Committee also decided to take part in the Congress of Nations to be convened in Switzerland in June 1916. In the summer of 1915, two texts were prepared. The first text was entitled "The current status and activities of Muslim Turkic Tatars in Russia" and was prepared by Yusuf Akcura. The text covered the population, population growth, economic activity, education system and reform, literature, Russian pressure, censorship and the wishes of the Turkic Tatars. It is likely that this document was published in Budapest.

The second text was prepared by members of the committee, Yusuf Akcura, Ali bey Huseynzadeh, Mehmet Esat Chelebizadeh and Mugimeddin Beyjan. The text was entitled "Memorandum of the Committee to Protect the Rights of Muslim Turkic Tatar Peoples of Russia". The delegation followed the Vienna-Budapest-Berlin-Sofia route. They were received by Austrian Prime Minister Sturgkh and Foreign Minister Forgach and presented these two documents to them. On 12 December 2015, the delegation met with Hungarian Prime Minister Tisza and MP Andrassy and presented these two documents to them. Yusuf Akcura also gave a lecture at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. These activities were also carefully monitored by enemy states (10).



In the summer of 1916, the society joined the League of National Minorities of Russia established in Switzerland with the support of the German Foreign Ministry. The League of National Minorities of Russia took part in the Third Congress of Nations organized by the League of Nations (Union des Nationalités) in Lausanne in June 1916 (11).

The League of National Minorities of Russia (Ligue des Alleghones de Russie). In April 1916, Lithuanian intellectuals Juozas Gabrys and Friedrich Baron von Ropp set up an organization called the League of National Minorities of Russia in order to work for the independence of non-Russian nations within the Russian Empire. Along with the independence of non-Russians, the founding members of the organization aimed to prevent Russia's colonial policy. This organization, which was supported by the German Foreign Ministry, did not fulfill all the desires of Germany unconditionally.

The league was also joined by Zilliacus, Sario and



Documents on the history of relations between the ADR and Switzerland are stored in the archives of Azerbaijan

of a number of prestigious institutions in that country required the opening of a bureau of the League of National Minorities of Russia in Switzerland. It was decided to open a bureau of this league in Bern. Ukrainian emigrant Volodymyr Stepankovsky was nominated for the office. Stepankovsky was an editor of the L'Ukraine newspaper published in Switzerland and a representative of the Ukrainian National Liberation Movement in Switzerland. One of the most important activities of the bureau was the publication of propaganda materials. Dmitry Donkov, one of the Ukrainians living in Switzerland, was appointed to do this job, and he received a monthly salary of 500 Swiss francs. In order to carry out the bureau's activity, there was a need for large financial resources, and it was not possible for the League of National Minorities of Russia to provide this amount in full. The German Foreign Ministry financially supported Volodymyr Stepankovsky. However, Dmitry Donkov was not aware of this support.

There were also reasons why the German Foreign Ministry supported this entity. A report received by the German Foreign Ministry said that the Entente states would organize a conference of Muslims in Switzerland and bring well-known Muslim intellectuals there. The aim was to ensure that Muslims oppose Germany and the Ottomans. For this reason, Germany supported the activities of the league of Russian national minorities.

On the initiative of Ropp and with the efforts of Gabyrys, the 3rd Congress of Nations was scheduled for June 1916. Although the League of National Minorities of Russia chose not to join the League of Nations conference convened in Lausanne and not to act jointly on behalf of the league, almost all Russian opposition peoples included in the league participated in the Congress of Nations. And, as a result, most of the people at the Congress of Nations represented peoples who were oppressed by the Russian government and complained about it. Thus, 14 of the 23 nations participating in the Congress of Nations were representatives of that league (ATASE Arxivi, K: 1836, D: 38, F: 17/1-17/5). ❀

to be continued

Gummerus from Finland, Friedrich Baron von Ropp, Saulius, Smetona and Kairys from Lithuania, Lempicki and Sieroszewski from Poland, Stepankovsky from Ukraine and Jerfeteli from Georgia. Polish representative Lempicki was elected president of the league, Ropp, Saulius, Stepankovsky, Zabłudovsky and Rashid Ibrahimov vice-presidents. The headquarters of that league were in Sweden and Switzerland, but if necessary, offices could be established in other countries too. (12)

The first foreign policy initiative of the League of National Minorities of Russia was an appeal to US President Wilson. The appeal was prepared on behalf of all non-Russian nations and contained complaints from national minorities living in Russia. Ahmad bey Agaoglu and Ali bey Huseynzadeh were also among the signatories. This appeal was also sent to the cities of Stockholm and Bern, and was published in several newspapers in these cities (13).

Baron von Ropp, a prominent representative of the League who represented the Baltic region, also secured the support of Russian-born Jews living in the United States for the league. A Jew living in the United States even sent a huge amount of money to this league.

The neutral position of Switzerland, the large number of political emigres living there, and the presence

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This building housed Switzerland's consulate in Azerbaijan. Baku, Contemporary Photo

