



William Orpen. Signing the Peace in the Hall of Mirrors of Versailles Palace, 28 June 1919. Imperial War Museum, London.



Jamil HASANLI
Doctor of History, Professor

THE RECOGNITION OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN AT THE VERSAILLES PEACE CONFERENCE –

*AN IMPORTANT VICTORY FOR
AZERBAIJANI DIPLOMACY*

PHOTO - Leaders of the allied powers at the opening of the Paris Peace Conference (January 1919).

The declaration of independence of Azerbaijan on 28 May 1918 was a momentous event in the history of the Azerbaijani people. The formation of the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan (DRA), its two-year history and the struggle of the Republic for integration into the world community – all this left its mark in the historical memory of this nation. After the declaration of independence, the DRA

became a participant in international relations and subject to international law. Bilateral agreements with some states were soon signed, after which trade missions were opened in these countries. On 28 December 1918 the parliament of the country and a council of elders approved the composition of the delegation to the Paris Peace Conference, headed by the Chairman of Parliament A. M. Topchubashev with the



The Azerbaijani delegation. The Versailles Peace Conference, Paris, 1919

Government member M. G. Hajinsky as his deputy. When they arrived in Paris on 7 May 1919 the Azerbaijani delegation immediately began work. The first important steps were to finalise the Memorandum of Caucasian Azerbaijan for the Paris Peace Conference, to translate it into the two languages of the Conference – French and English and to publish it as a brochure. (1) On 28 May the Azerbaijani delegation was received by the President of the USA, Woodrow Wilson. A. M. Topchubashev addressed the leader of the USA as the ‘author of the high principles of peaceful coexistence of peoples and the rights of nations, including smaller peoples, of self-determination’ and presented a paper which described the requirements for the recognition of the independence of Azerbaijan, for allowing the delegation to participate in the work of the Peace Conference and for the reception of Azerbaijan into the League of Nations. A. M. Topchubashev re-

ported to his Government that ‘The meeting created a very favourable impression.’ (2) After the meeting with Wilson it was expected that leaders of other allied powers would follow his example.

The strengthening of the Bolshevik threat in the Caucasus led the Entente Powers to take more drastic steps. All understood that the appearance of the Red Army in Transcaucasia meant the penetration of Bolshevism into the Near and Middle East. The majority of European politicians were of the opinion that the defence potential of Azerbaijan and Georgia should be strengthened and that they should be helped to withstand Soviet invasion. However, assistance to not yet recognised countries could create conflict situations in the shaping of the system of post-war international relations. Thus, the recognition of Azerbaijan and Georgia became a historically unavoidable step. With this aim, following a proposal by Great Britain,

a session of the Supreme Council of the Paris Peace Conference, with participation from heads of governments, ministers of foreign affairs of Great Britain, France and Italy, representatives of the USA and Japan to this Conference and ambassadors to France, was held on 10 January. The Supreme Council entrusted to military experts to put forward proposals for strengthening the defence of Transcaucasia and to evaluate the importance of military assistance to the Caucasus for the struggle against the Bolsheviks. (3)

On 11 January, on the proposal of Lord Curzon, the Supreme Council of Allies adopted the decision ‘allied and joined states all together de-facto recognise the governments of Azerbaijan and Georgia.’ (4) The main aim set out by the delegates of the two Caucasian Republics – to achieve recognition from the states defining world politics was reached.

On 5 January the representatives of Azerbaijan and Georgia were invited to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of France. A. M. Topchubashev and M. Maharamov as well as E. Tsereteli and Z. Avalov met with the General Secretary of Foreign Affairs of France Jules Cambon and with the British representative Philip Kerr and the Italian representative Marquis Della Toretta. J. Cambon formally presented the text of the resolution about the de-facto recognition of Azerbaijan to A. M. Topchubashev. He thanked the great powers for their assistance and added that the Republic of Azerbaijan is now awaiting the de jure recognition. On this day the Azerbaijani delegation received many congratulatory telegrams.

In the second half of 15 January Great Britain’s Secretary of State for

War Winston Churchill, Chief of the Imperial General Staff H. Wilson, First Lord of the Admiralty Walter Long and Admiral Lord Beatty and others arrived urgently to Paris for military expert level discussions about military assistance to Azerbaijan and Georgia. The next day, while speaking on information about the conditions in Transcaucasia, Jules Cambon noted that the delegations of Azerbaijan and Georgia asked to receive political, military and financial assistance in order to be able to definitively tear themselves away from Russia. After cross-questioning of both delegations it was clarified that Georgia may supply 50 thousand guns and Azerbaijan approximately 100 thousand people. Jules Cambon added that the armies of both Republics had been formed on the basis of officers of the former Tsarist Army and National Guard. Both Republics had enough soldiers but in order to hold the frontline they urgently needed guns, ammunition and equipment.

On 7 January, in the Claridges Hotel, a meeting aimed at defining the scale of military assistance to Azerbaijan and Georgia was held.

On 19 January the Supreme Council, with participation from Heads of Government, again discussed the issue of the Transcaucasian Republics in detail. On this day the full Azerbaijani delegation participated in the Conference. Eminent political figures of that time – Lloyd George, Clemenceau, Nitti, Cambon, Mazzi, Curzon, Churchill, Foch, Beatty and Wilson arrived at the Conference. A memorandum prepared by the British delegation on the instruction by the Supreme Council from 10 January was read out. It stipulated

the following measures:

1. Recognition of Azerbaijan and Georgia (already accomplished)
2. Transfer of guns and ammunition to Azerbaijan and Georgia
3. Provision of additional food and financial and military (guns and clothing) assistance to Azerbaijan and Georgia
4. Additional measures for strengthening the defence of Baku
5. Provision of Caspian coastal defence and barring Bolshevik access to the Caspian Sea and Caspian flotilla. (5)

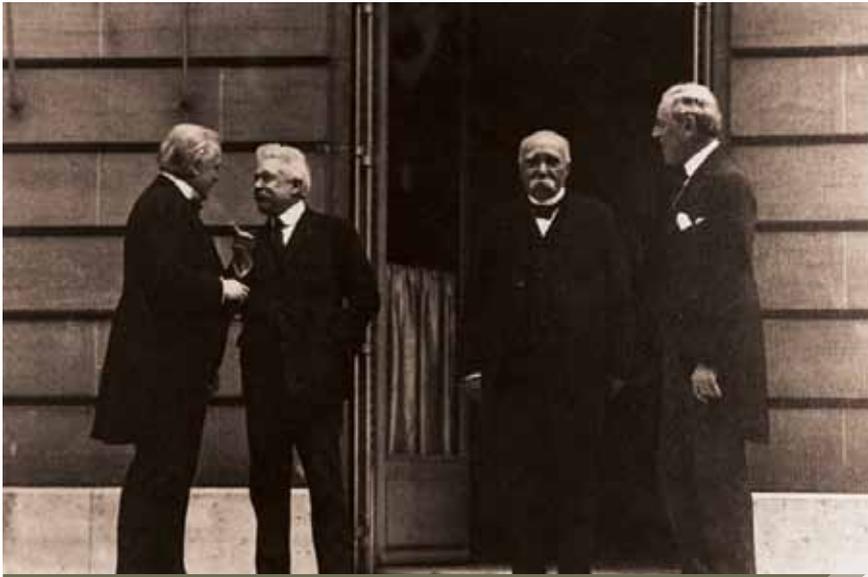
The report by the military experts was presented by Marshal Ferdinand Foch. In the course of the debate Clemenceau and Churchill supported shipping troops to the Caucasus and Lloyd George and Nitti argued for limiting help to delivery of weapons and ammunition. At the same time, Lloyd George strived to clear up the capability for efficient use of the guns which would be sent. (6)

The representatives of Azerbaijan and Georgia were invited into the meeting hall for

questions from Lloyd George. A councillor from the Azerbaijani delegation, M. Maharramov, answered that a law about the army had already gone through discussion in Parliament and that regarding the availability of necessary guns and ammunition in Azerbaijan it is possible to quickly equip 100 thousand soldiers and at present there are 50 thousand well-trained soldiers but only 10-12 thousand of them have weapons. He also said that Baku has a powerful garrison with 7000 servicemen. During the following debates, which were carried out without participation from the delegates of the Caucasian Republics, Marshal F. Foch said that he considered the defence of the Caucasus as a part of the struggle against Bolshevism and in the name of this basic aim it was necessary to support such countries as Azerbaijan, Georgia, Bessarabia, Poland, Estonia and Latvia. He stated that he supported the creation of an alliance of Eastern European and Southern Caucasian Republics against Bolshevism. After this speech the



In the meeting hall



Signing the Versailles Peace Treaty. From left to right: D. Lloyd George, V. Orlando, G. Clemenceau and W. Wilson, Paris, 1919

meeting continued without military experts. (7) Lloyd George said that the Congress of the USA may render assistance to the Caucasian states. The parties declared that they could not send troops to the Caucasus. Summing up the meeting, **Lloyd George thought that it was necessary to urgently assist the Republics of Transcaucasia with weapons, ammunition and uniforms. He acknowledged the impossibility of sending armies to Azerbaijan and Georgia** and noted that the Caucasian Republics should strengthen their defence capability through their own military forces.

As a result of the negotiations the Supreme Council adopted the following resolution:

1. Allied Governments do not have the possibility to send armies to the Caucasian Republics
2. The Allies will give help to the Caucasian Republics through delivery of weapons, military equipment and provisions
3. To ask Marshal Foch and Field

Marshal Wilson to consider more precisely the concrete components of the military materials and the means of their delivery to the Republics of the Caucasus. (8)

The political recognition of Azerbaijan during the Paris Peace Conference in January 1919 should be considered a result of the efforts by the Azerbaijani delegates headed by A. M. Topchubashev. In a letter to the Head of Government,

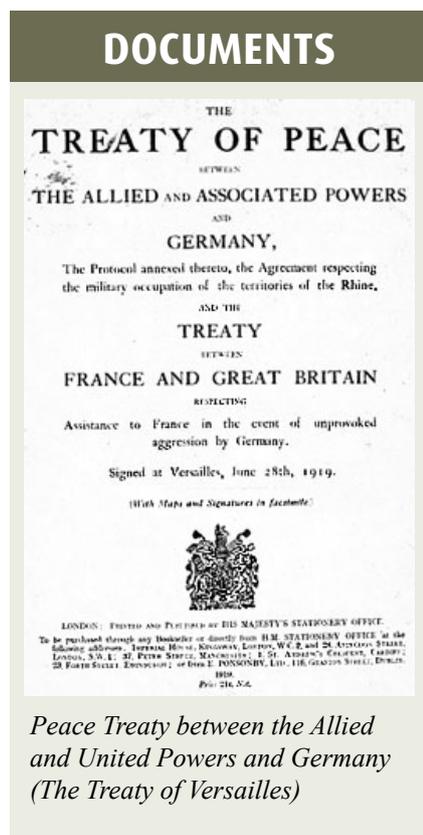
N. Usubbeyov, A. M. Topchubashev noted '... such a period begins when our hopes for a free and independent existence are strengthening and striving to gain real shape. We have never lost our hope even during the most unfavourable times for all the peoples of the former Russia and even when we were told of the futility of our labour. We acted this way because we believed that our people can live independently... Along with this we do not forget about the influential fighters of other smaller peoples. In the name of gaining freedom these peoples struggled, not for half a year or a year but for dozens or more, and at the cost of vast human and material sacrifices they reached their desires. Such a high cost of happiness never made us and will never make us retreat because we know nothing equal to this happiness.' (9)

The first news of the recognition of Azerbaijan was reported by Oliver Wardrop. On 12 January he wired from Tbilisi: 'Lord Curzon has authorised me to inform the Azerbaijani Government that he spoke out yesterday in Paris for the immediate de facto recognition of Azerbaijan



and Georgia. The Supreme Council of the Allies unanimously accepted this proposal.' (10) Immediately after receiving the telegram from O. Wardrop an extraordinary meeting of the Government of the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan took place. It was decided to announce 14 January as a public holiday. On this day proposals to organise celebrations in the whole territory of the DRA were made and

in their powers and in a happy future. M. A. Rasul-zade wrote: 'One of the peoples of the East, having suffered under the yoke of foreigners, deprived of civilian and political rights and even not allowed to participate in state management, displayed, at the first good opportunity and despite all the difficulties, such a model of creation of cultured society that it attracted the attention of the Allies and the whole world... **Among all the republics created from the fragments of the Russian Empire Azerbaijan became the only Muslim country which gained the trust of Europe. The first and only republic in the whole Muslim world was created...**' (11)



Peace Treaty between the Allied and United Powers and Germany (The Treaty of Versailles)

a military parade, rallies and demonstrations as well as a ceremonial meeting of Parliament were held in the capital. An address by the Prime Minister, N. Usubbeyov, to the citizens of the Republic was published on the same day.

The recognition of the independence of Azerbaijan by the Great Powers significantly strengthened the belief of the Azerbaijani people

1. Claims of the Peace Delegation of the Republic of Caucasian Azerbaijan Presented to the Peace Conference in Paris, Paris, 1919, p. 1-49.
2. Ali Mardan bey Topchubashev Письма из Парижа (Letter from Paris), Вак, 1998, p. 38.
3. Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States. The Paris Peace Conference. 1919, vol. IX, US Government Printing Office. Washington, 1946, p. 837-838.
4. Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States. The Paris Peace Conference. 1919, vol. IX, p. 959.
5. Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States. The Paris Peace Conference. 1919, vol. IX, 903-904.
6. Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States. The Paris Peace Conference. 1919, vol. IX, 891.
7. Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States. The Paris Peace Conference. 1919, vol. IX, 897-898.
8. Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States. The Paris Peace Conference. 1919, vol. IX, 899-902.
9. Письма председателя делегации Азербайджанской Республики на Парижской мирной конференции А.М.Топчубашева председателю Совета Министров Азербайджанской Республики (Letter from the Head of the Delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the Paris World Conference A. M. Topchubashev to the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan) 06-10.11.1919, in the State Archive of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 970, 1, 146, 27-8.
10. Верховный комиссар Великобритании в Тифлисе Уордроп–Дипломатическому представителю Азербайджанской Республики в Грузии М.Векилову (The Supreme Commissioner of Great Britain in Tbilisi Wardrop – Diplomatic Submissions of the Azerbaijani Republic in Georgia to M.Vekilov) 12.01.1920 in the State Archive of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 897, 1, 69, 13.
11. М.А.Расул-заде, Азербайджанская Республика (The Azerbaijani Republic), Вак, 1990, p. 57.