

SOVIETIZATION OF AZERBAIJAN AND INCLUSION OF KARABAKH INTO THE DIPLOMATIC AGENDA

(continued from the previous issue)

PRIOR TO THE APRIL INVASION, MUSLIM COMMUNISTS MOCKED THE FOREIGN POLICY OF THE AZERBAIJANI NATIONAL GOVERNMENT AND WROTE TO MOSCOW THAT THE DE JURE RECOGNITION OF AZERBAIJAN BY THE PARIS PEACE CONFERENCE WOULD ENSURE THE TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY OF THE REPUBLIC AND ITS SECURITY. HOWEVER, THE BENEFIT OF THIS DIPLOMATIC CAMPAIGN IS STILL ZERO.* NOW THEY WERE EXTREMELY DISTRESSED BY THE SITUATION AND LINKED ALL THE TROUBLES OF AZERBAIJAN TO THE MACHINATIONS OF THE ARMENIANS WHO HAD SETTLED IN THE CENTRE. IT IS CLEAR FROM THE CONTENT OF THE VARIOUS LETTERS SENT TO MOSCOW.



* Доклад об экономическом и политическом положении Азербайджана. 1920 // РГАСПИ, ф.17, оп.86, д.119, л.2



Appointed extraordinary and plenipotentiary ambassador of Azerbaijan in Moscow on 15 July, B. Shahtahinski was one of the first to protest against the Russian-Armenian agreement, but to no avail. From a letter to Lenin on 13 August, it is clear that he himself found out about the agreement from the newspapers and certainly had no specific information about the articles of the agreement. He wrote: "The handover of the Shahtakhti-Erivan /about 100 miles/ and Shahtakhti-Julfa /also about 100 miles/ railway lines to Armenia with all the rolling stock placed the whole of Persian Azerbaijan in the hands of the Dashnaks, connects them with the British forces in Persia and deprives us of any connection with the Turkish revolutionary movement." Shahtakhtinski then writes: "For several years, the population of the Nakhchivan region fought for its independence ... There was a need for intervention by Britain, who took this land with their troops and forcibly handed over the region to Dashnaks despite the population's open protest. But as soon as the British forces left, an uprising immediately began. The regular Dashnak forces with numerous artillery guns, machine guns and an armored train were routed. The handover to the Dashnaks of this region whose working people liberated themselves from them after a three-year bloody fight with arms in their hands and attained unification with Azerbaijan, a region where there is not a single Armenian at present, openly violates

the generally accepted principle of self-determination of peoples and the rights of Soviet Azerbaijan."¹ The People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan M. D. Huseynov admitted in the report "On the situation in Azerbaijan" to N. Krestinskiy that among the population there are rumors that "the Russian units have come to conquer Azerbaijan and that the independence of our Republic is lost, and that the Red Army is a tsarist army."²



Commanders a Red Guard unit. Karabakh. 1922. National Museum of History Azerbaijan. Published for the first time

Despite the serious attempts of Azerbaijan, ahead of the signing of the agreement with Armenia, Ordzhonikidze, who hitherto resisted its signing, sent a message to G. Chicherin after open and covert pressure from the Center on 26 August,

promising to comply scrupulously with the terms of the 10 August agreement.³ On the same day, Chicherin received a second telegram from Ordzhonikidze, which was very indicative: "I repeat once again, the 10 August 1920 agreement with Armenia must be complied with accurately."⁴ The reckless protection of Armenians by G. Chicherin, even contrary to the opinion of the Russian plenipotentiary representative in Armenia B. Legran, and the patronage of Armenia expressed in Chicherin's statements of 11 and 21 August angered Legran who still remained in Tiflis. On 29 August, he wrote to Chicherin: "Armenians are speculating inevitably in some local issues. Your statements of 11 and 21 August do not produce the impression they counted on, they do not take into account the provocative nature of Ohanjanyan's speech."⁵

Such arbitrariness with regard to Azerbaijan by Soviet Russia was resented by N. Narimanov. He was well aware that the main organizers of these provocative games were the Commissar of Foreign Affairs Chicherin, who had become an outspoken critic of the Eastern policy advocated by Narimanov since the summer of 1919, and Assistant Commissar L. Karakhan. Their positions in the Soviet establishment allowed them to identify and implement the foreign and especially Eastern policy of the Soviets in practice. They had a negative attitude towards Azerbaijan and built the South Caucasus policy of Soviet Russia on the Armenian and Georgian factors although these two

1 Письмо В.И.Ленину чрезвычайного и полномочного представителя Азербайджана Б.Шахтаhtинского. 13.08.1920 // РГАСПИ, ф.5, оп.1, д.2796, л.1 об.
 2 Доклад М.Д.Гусейнова Н.Крестинскому «О положении в Азербайджане». 16.09.1920 // РГАСПИ, ф.17, оп.86, д.125, л.10
 3 Телеграмма Г.Орджоникидзе Г.Чичерину. 26.08.1920 // РГАСПИ, ф.85, оп.14, д.6, л.3
 4 Ibid, л.4 об.—5
 5 Телеграмма Б.Леграна Г.Чичерину. 29.08.1920 // РГАСПИ, ф.5, оп.1, д.2178, л.8





Shusha. A postcard of the early 20th century

republics had not been sovietized yet. Of course, L. Karakhan's hand was clearly felt in Chicherin's anti-Azerbaijani and Armenophile policy, but it is not only that. Chicherin, as a former tsarist diplomat, formed in the tradition of the pro-Armenian directives with which the Russian Empire was guided in its eastern policy, and particularly in relation to the peoples of the Caucasus. Therefore, in this diplomatic mutant that incorporated the features of a tsarist official and a Soviet commissar, Armenophilia was a natural feature. It was the conflict of worldviews that was at the root of the disagreements between Chicherin and Narimanov. A short while later, N. Narimanov wrote to the authorized representative of Soviet Azerbaijan in Turkey, I. Abilov, that "the ideas Chicherin is using in his Eastern policy are totally wrong... We wrote and sent a big report on the Eastern policy of Chicherin. We criticized it completely."⁶ In turn, Chicherin wrote to Stalin: "In our bet

on Islam, we must always consider the fact that one day the anti-Bolshevik trend ... may be stronger than the anti-British trend. I always cautioned and caution against a one-sided bet on Islam, which was represented by Narimanov."⁷

In the struggle with Chicherin, N. Narimanov saw the only way out in intervention by Lenin, who gave many beautiful promises before Sovietization. Still believing in the fairness of Lenin's position on Azerbaijan, N. Narimanov said in mid-July: "It can be seen from Comrade Chicherin's telegram that your information is one-sided or the Center succumbed to the influence of those who still act together with Denikin against Soviet power in Azerbaijan. If the Center wants to sacrifice Azerbaijan and keep only Baku – oil, and refuse the Eastern policy completely, let it do so, but I warn you: Baku cannot be kept without the whole of Azerbaijan near treacherous Dashnaks and Georgian Mensheviks. On the other

hand, I would like to know how the Center sees us - Muslims and how it could solve such issues without us. The Center could treat us with distrust, but such senior officials as Ordzhonikidze and Mdivani also disagree with the decision of the Center. I should just say openly, the Center took the weapon away from us with its decisions about Karabakh, etc. It reinforced and justified the provocation of Musavat who always say that Muslim Communist allegedly sold Azerbaijan to Russia - the Russia that recognizes the independence of both Armenia and Georgia and for some reason, considers the areas that were undisputed prior to the establishment of Soviet power in Azerbaijan to be disputed. Comrade Chicherin speaks about obedience to the policies of the Center but at the same time, does the Center take into account that the same Center causes us to be a smokescreen ... They openly tell us: "You cannot secure the absolutely indisputable territories of Azerbaijan, but are holding forth on the liberation of the East." At the end of this sad message, N. Narimanov wrote: "Our representative is on his way, and therefore I beg and plead with you to suspend the decision of the Center on Azerbaijan."⁸

In another letter to Lenin, N. Narimanov warned of a serious threat to Azerbaijan: "The situation is terrible. The Center has recognized the independence of Georgia and Armenia, it has recognized the independence of Azerbaijan, but at the same time, the Center is giving completely undisputed Azerbaijani territory to Armenia. If these territories were ceded to Georgia, it would be somewhat

6 Письмо Н.Нариманова И.Абилову // АГД УДП АР, ф.276, оп.5, д.1, л.107–108

7 See: Мустафа-заде Р. Две республики. Азербайджано-российские отношения в 1918–1922 гг., С.267

8 Письмо Н.Нариманова В.И.Ленину. Июль, 1920 // АГД УДП АР, ф.609, оп.1, д.71, л.41–42



possible to resist public opinion, but giving them to Armenia and Dashnaks is an irreparable, fatal mistake.⁹ Such letters from N. Narimanov reduced the Center's trust in him day by day. The special commissioner of Cheka, Lander, who kept a close watch over him, said in a secret telegram to Krestinskiy, Menzhinskiy, Dzerzhinskiy and Lenin on 19 July 1920: "The general policy of Azerbaijan inspires serious concern. There is a large tendency to independence. The right national wing is headed by Narimanov."¹⁰

Amid deepening territorial disputes between Azerbaijan and Armenia and biased patronage of Armenia by Russia, which was clearly reflected in the agreement of 10 August, a meeting of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the ACP (b) was held at the insistence of N. Narimanov on 26 August 1920, where a decision was made to appoint A. Shirvani as extraordinary commissioner of Azerbaijan for Karabakh and Zangezur and A. Karakozov - his deputy.¹¹

Initially, N. Narimanov wanted to appoint a more experienced party worker, S. M. Afandiyev, as extraordinary commissar, but the organizational bureau of the Central Committee of the ACP (b) on 26 August rejected the candidacy of S. M. Afandiyev.¹² N. Narimanov's concern was due to the fact that the Bolshevik army of Soviet Russia, which had occupied Karabakh, had totally disarmed the Muslim population, but was turning a blind eye to the arming of the Armenian population. A repre-



Meeting Kalinin at the railway station in Baku. Left to right - Chairman of the Central Election Commission of the Azerbaijan SSR S. Agamalioglu, chairman of the CPC of the Azerbaijan SSR Musabayov, M. Kalinin, secretary of the Central Committee of the ACP Sergey Kirov, L. Mirzoyan - Secretary of the Baku Committee of the ACP. National Museum of History of Azerbaijan. Published for the first time.

sentative of the Commissariat of Internal Affairs of the Azerbaijan SSR, S. Atayev, reported to People's Commissar H. Sultanov that A. Shirvani's arrival in Shusha "was not marked by any significant improvements in the shaky apparatus of the Revolutionary Committee."¹³ He wrote: "There is not a single Armenian employee who did not call himself a communist, and all these communists have no reliable documentary evidence of their party affiliation. All these are communists of 28 April 1920. While auditing the financial and food departments, not quite an acceptable picture immediately emerges, where all the money and food were sent only to Armenian highland villages in enormous amounts, while the ruined and ravaged Muslim lowlands were not

given anything. The party consists of 900 Armenians (an organization that Russia failed to establish in three years) and enjoys broad sympathy up to readiness to provide local support for the armed guard battalion, which also consists of Armenians. The whole party is armed and obeys no orders related to the storage of weapons. "We are members of the party," members of the organization answer when it comes to weapons. In any case, all the Armenian highland villages, which are controlled by agents of the Ararat government and obey no orders, are armed too. The party sends its agents to Armenian villages, but it is not known what they are doing there."¹⁴

Despite the tough and even occasionally sharp oppositional

9 See: Н.Нариманов. К истории нашей революции в окраинах (Письмо И.В.Сталину). Баку, 1990. С.117

10 Телеграмма Ландера Крестинскому, Менжинскому, Дзержинскому и Ленину. 19.07.1920 // РГАСПИ, ф.17, оп.86, д.125, л.12

11 Протокол заседания Политбюро ЦК АзКП (б). 26.08.1920 // АПД УДП АР, ф.1, оп.1, д.22, л.2 об. For more details, see.: Личное дело Алигейдара Ширвани // АПД УДП АР, ф.12, оп.3, д.7523, л.29

12 Протокол заседания Оргбюро ЦК АКП (б). 26.08.1920 // АПД УДП АР, ф.1, оп.1, д.21, л.9

13 Доклад С.Атаева в ЦК АКП (б). 12.12.1920 // АПД УДП АР, ф.1, оп.1, д.141, л.24 об.

14 Ibid, л.26 об.



*S. M. Kirov attending a parade in Baku.
National Museum of History of Azerbaijan. Published for the first time*

behavior of N. Narimanov, Soviet Russia gave preference to the policy of humiliating Azerbaijan developed by the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs. A diplomatic dispatch sent to N. Narimanov by G. Chicherin on 20 July says with sarcasm: "So far, neither you nor Ordzhonikidze have explained in any of your telegrams why the occupation of Karabakh and Zangezur by Russian units does not satisfy you and other communists that are there and why formal annexation to Azerbaijan is required... We need to improve relations with Armenia, because it may happen that if Turkey turns against us, even Dashnak Armenia will be an outpost in the fight against the advancing Turks."¹⁵ In another letter, Chicherin warned the Politburo of the Central Commit-

tee of the RCP (b) that Armenian-Azerbaijani relations should be approached from the standpoint of Turkish politics. He wrote: "While discussing the Armenian-Azerbaijani disputes, I pointed out all the time that if Turkish policy takes the path of aggressive tendencies in the Caucasus, Armenia will be a barrier against it and will defend us."¹⁶

That is why while preparing for the signing of the Armenian-Russian agreement, the document entitled "Description of the borders of undisputed areas between the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic and Armenia", which was prepared by the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs of the Azerbaijan SSR and sent to Moscow on 5 August, was not considered at all. Based on historical and ethnographic, geographic and

administrative data, this document described the border between Soviet Azerbaijan and Armenia. This description, with few exceptions, reflected the position of the borders between the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic and Armenia.

R. Mustafazada, who studied Russian-Azerbaijani relations in the period 1918-1922, comes to the conclusion that as the positions of Soviet Russia in Azerbaijan strengthened, the republic gradually turned into a kind of "donor" in the regional policy of the Bolsheviks and was used to lull the Georgian and Armenian bourgeois republics at the expense of its natural resources and territories and create favorable conditions for the Sovietization of Armenia.¹⁷ On 15 October 1920, the Presidium of the Caucasian Bureau of the Central Committee of the RCP (B) again stressed the importance of a peace-loving policy in relations between Georgia and Armenia.¹⁸ In the words of N. Narimanov, "Armenia, which always supported Denikin, became independent and got territories of Azerbaijan into the bargain. Georgia, which had been conducting a double policy, got independence. Azerbaijan, which was the first of the three republics to rush into the arms of Soviet Russia, lost its territory and independence."¹⁹ In an encrypted telegram to Lenin sent by Legran on 23 September 1920, the intentions of Soviet Russia regarding Azerbaijani territories are defined as follows: do not fear to hand over Zangezur and Nakhchivan to Armenia. First, the

15 Срочная депеша Г.Чичерина Н.Нариманову. 20.07.1920 // РГАСПИ, ф.5, оп.1, д.2097, л.1

16 Письмо Г.Чичерина в Политбюро ЦК РКП (б). 05.10.1920 // АВГ РФ, ф.04, оп.39, папка 232, д.52987, л.40

17 Мустафа-заде Р. Две республики. Азербайджано-российские отношения в 1918–1922 гг., с.145

18 Протокол заседания Президиума Кавказского бюро ЦК РКП (б). 15.10.1920 // РГАСПИ, ф.64, оп.1, д.1, л.30 об.

19 Письмо Нариманова Ленину. См.: Н.Нариманов. К истории нашей революции в окраинах (Письмо И.В.Сталину). – Баку, 1990. с.118



Administrative division of the Azerbaijan SSR from April to November 1920

idea that we need these territories for liberation army operations in Turkish and Tabriz directions is utopian. Second, Zangezur is really an Armenian region, where our government has a hostile and aggressive nature, and it was especially evident during the Geruz events. Third, it is impossible to disagree with the territorial claims of Azerbaijan. The objective and reasonable calculations of Moscow will certainly satisfy Azerbaijan. As for Karabakh, it will be possible to insist on its accession to Azerbaijan.²⁰ In another telegram dated 24 October 1920 and sent to

G. Chicherin, B. Legran described his agreement with Armenians on Azerbaijani territories as follows: "Armenians' categorical condition is the immediate recognition of Nakhchivan and Zangezur as their territories. I pointed out that this question cannot be resolved without Azerbaijan and that we can raise it with Azerbaijan only if Armenians give up their claims to Karabakh. After lengthy discussions and with minor reservations, the Armenians agreed to give up Karabakh."²¹ But this refusal was temporary, and at the end of November 1920, with the

establishment of Soviet power in Armenia, the struggle for the mountainous part of Karabakh entered a new stage. The main purpose of this struggle was to take away the mountainous part of Karabakh from Azerbaijan and hand it over to Armenia with the help of Moscow. However, this was not possible, and this struggle lasted with certain interruptions until 1923 when the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region was established within the Azerbaijan SSR. ✪

20 Телеграмма Б.Леграна В.И.Ленину. 23.09.1920 // РГАСПИ, ф.64, оп.1, д.21, л.144

21 Секретная телеграмма Б.Леграна Г.Чичерину. 24.10.1920 // РГАСПИ, ф.5, оп.1, д.2178, л.20

