

MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE AZERBAIJAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC



M. A. Rasulzade's speech in parliament. 1918

With the annexation of the South Caucasus by Russia in the early 19th century, Azerbaijani lands were split into two parts. In the north, the fight of the nation's progressive forces for the liberation of the people and the development of national consciousness was crowned with the proclamation of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic. This event was a logical continuation of the socio-political processes taking place in the region. By that time, the idea of a republic was firmly established in the public consciousness, forming the foundation of the program of political struggle. The founders of the ADR, within **the time interval allotted to them from 28**

May 1918 to 28 April 1920, conducted fundamental changes in all spheres of national life.

In conditions when the South Caucasus became a scene of confrontation between different powers after the collapse of the Russian Empire and when the Azerbaijani people became subjected to genocide and ethnic cleansing by Armenian nationalists, efforts in the field of state building in the absence of sufficient experience and prerequisites for that required extraordinary will, dedication, patriotism and a sense of responsibility before the people.

The ADR was the first parliamentary republic in the Muslim East and among Turkic peoples. 28

*Opening of the diplomatic mission of Azerbaijan in Iran.
Tehran. September, 1919*

May - the date of the proclamation of the ADR – was widely celebrated during the two years. In 1920, this day fell on the period after the collapse of the Azerbaijani state, and the great date was commemorated by participants in an anti-Soviet uprising in Ganja – under a barrage of bullets and artillery shells. They put forward slogans: Let 28 May be not only Independence Day, but also a day commemorating those who fell for their homeland; our resistance to the enemy on 28 May will be a manifestation of spiritual greatness and our moral victory (5) (Note 1). 28 May 1920 was the day when “the honor and dignity of the nation regained general recognition” (1, 1, p. 396).

In difficult circumstances, the founders of the ADR chose the most advanced and democratic form of government of their time. **The Declaration of Independence - the policy document of the new republic - expressed commitment to principles of democracy and secular and parliamentary state, and these principles were followed to the very end (2, p. 10).** State power was represented by three branches - the parliament, the government and the judiciary. Virtually all nationalities were represented in parliament, even the smallest ones: Muslim Turks (Note 2) - 80 seats, Armenians - 21, Russians - 10, Germans - 1, Jews - 1, Georgians - 1, Poles - 1. Moreover, Baku trade unions had 3 and Baku Oil Producers Union - 2 seats (4, p. 23-26). Executive authorities represented by the government reported to the legislature - parliament. **The state was governed on the basis of laws and regulations adopted by the parliament.**

Ahead of the emergence of the ADR, the total area populated by Azerbaijanis in the South Caucasus was about 150 thousand square kilometers. **The territory of the ADR was 114 thousand square kilometers with a population of 3.3 million people (1, t.1, p. 11).** Initially, the temporary capital of the country was Ganja as Baku was in the hands of the Bolshevik-Dashnak (Armenian ultra-nationalists) government known as the Baku Council of People's Commissars.

In the spring of 1918, the Bolsheviks entered into an agreement with the Dashnaks and unleashed armed attacks on civilian Muslim population in Baku and surrounding districts of Azerbaijan. In order to consolidate their power and prevent the creation of Azerbaijani national statehood Bolshevik armed units together with Dashnak militant groups massacred tens of thousands Azerbaijanis. They aimed at not only on seizing full control over Baku and other central regions



of Azerbaijan but also on extermination, genocide of considerable part of Azerbaijani Muslim population in order to prevent any future challenge to their power. Nevertheless on 15 September, the ADR government forces with the help of the Caucasus Islamic Army, partly manned with Ottoman Turks, after heavy fighting managed to liberate Baku and **from 17 September, Baku was declared the capital of the republic.**

During the existence of the democratic republic, five government cabinets changed, the first three of which were led by Fatalikhan Khoyski and the last two – by Nasib bay Yusifbayli. Initially, the government reported to the Azerbaijani National Council chaired by Mammad Amin Rasulzadeh and later – to the ADR Parliament headed by Ali Mardan bay Topchubashov. **The parliament officially opened on 7 December 1918 and operated for 17 months, during which it held 145 meetings and discussed more than 270 bills, of which 230 were adopted (4, 1, 1, p. 155).** MPs were united into 11 fractions and groups. Thus, Azerbaijan accumulated valuable experience of parliamentary democracy and ethics. “The National Assembly represents all classes and nationalities of the country, holding the whole destiny of the state in its hands. Without it no orders were followed, no money was spent, no wars began and no peace was signed. Earning the trust of the Assembly, the government kept its post and was deposed after losing it. Here a post was not a means of domination. The parliament was the absolute master.” (M. Rasulzadeh)

From the earliest days of the existence of the republic, fundamental measures were taken in state building - from the adoption of state attributes to addressing complex state problems. **On 21 June 1918, the national flag consisting of a white crescent and a white eight-pointed star on a red background was approved, and on 9 November, the red cloth was replaced by a tricolor (3, p. 188, 250).**



The main challenge facing the newly-formed republic was the full liberation of Baku and unification of Azerbaijani lands under a single authority, and this required the creation of a national army. The government began to organize armed forces, and **a separate Azerbaijani Corps was set up on 26 June (3, p. 196)**. The state paid close attention to the territorial integrity and defense of the country. On 11 January 1919, a new military uniform was adopted. To train military personnel, a military school, a school of engineers, a school of military railroadmen and a school of medical assistants were created (1, 1, p. 49).

On 27 June, Turkic, i.e. Azerbaijani was declared the state language (3, p. 201). Old schools were nationalized, new schools and teacher training courses were opened, measures were taken to restore ancestral topographical names changed during the Empire (the historical name of the second largest city of Azerbaijan – Ganja, which was called Yelizavetpol under the Russian Empire, was restored). Military mobilization was conducted, and on 11 August a resolution on conscription was adopted. Earlier, on 15 July, a decree was issued on the establishment of an Extraordinary Commission of Inquiry, which was tasked with investigating the mass killings and robberies carried out in the South Caucasus during World War I against the Turkic- Muslim population and bringing

the perpetrators to justice (3, p. 213). The Commission worked until November 1919, preparing 36 volumes and 3,500 pages of preliminary investigative material and 95 photographs submitted by the Azerbaijani delegation at the Paris Peace Conference. The Commission also prepared 128 draft reports and resolutions, raising the question of prosecuting 194 participants of mass pogroms and murders (1, 1, p. 379-380). Nevertheless on 9 February 1920, on the occasion of the de facto recognition of Azerbaijan's independence by the Paris Peace Conference, the parliament passed an amnesty decree, and all criminal cases involving cases motivated by ethnic hatred were dropped (1, 1, p. 381). Materials of the ADR Extraordinary Commission of Inquiry retain enormous value as the primary source of testimony about the genocide of the Azerbaijani people at the beginning of the last century.

During the existence of the republic, significant economic success was achieved: the Baku- Batum oil pipeline was restored, the construction of the Baku-Julfa railway was continued, the Azerbaijan State Bank was created, currency banknotes were issued and measures were taken to develop the Caspian Shipping Company (3, 1, v.1, p. 57).

It is necessary to note the work in the cultural field. Among the ADR print media, a special place belongs to "Iqbal" newspaper – it was this organ that was the first to

start promoting the socio-political goals and objectives of the republic in conceptual form. The main authors of "Iqbal" newspaper, and also "Dirilik" newspaper, were the leaders and staff of "Achig Soz" newspaper – the organ of the Musavat party, which led the national liberation movement in Azerbaijan. In addition, during the ADR, newspapers such as "Istiglal", "Azerbaijan", "Ovragi-Nafisa", "Musalmanlig", "Gurtulush", "Madaniyyat", "Ganjlar Yurdu", "Sheypur" and "Zanbur" did a lot to promote the national ideology. At the same time, the socio-political, economic and cultural life of the country was reflected on the pages of the official newspaper "Azerbaijan", the first four editions of which were published in Ganja. Then it began to be published in the Azerbaijani and Russian languages in Baku (1, v. 1, pp. 70-72).

Among the first measures of the government of Azerbaijan, we should mention the relocation of the Azerbaijani department of the Transcaucasian teachers' seminary from Tiflis to Gazakh. The Gazakh teachers' seminary became the first educational institution that trained pedagogical personnel for elementary schools in Azerbaijan. In 1919, the government carried out consistent work to open higher education institutions - the objective was to open an Azerbaijani university, an institute of agriculture and a state conservatory (1, 1, p. 74). However, at that time it was possible to

accomplish this task only partially – **on 1 September 1919, the Azerbaijani parliament adopted a law on the opening of Baku State University** (3, pp.101-103).

It was also planned to send young people to study in foreign universities, and in the 1919-1920 academic year, a resolution was adopted to send 100 young people abroad for higher education at public expense. Seven million rubles were allocated for that. Each student was assigned a scholarship of 400 francs and another 1,000 francs for travel expenses. After graduation, each of these students had to work in the place where he was sent for 4 years. 45 people were sent to study in France, 23 – in Italy, 10 - in the UK and 9 - Turkey (1, 1, p. 75-76).

In 1919, a Society for the Study of the Muslim East was established at the Baku University, which did a lot for the study and promotion of the history, culture and literature of Azerbaijan. In early 1920, the Ministry of Education established a department of archeology. There was also the literary association Yashil Galam, the Society for the Preservation of Muslim Culture and Art "Turk Ojagi", etc. In December 1919, the Museum of Independence was opened, which was a notable event in the cultural life of the country (1, 1, p. 77). The opening of the museum was dedicated to the first anniversary of the parliament. In addition, a commission was established to reform the Azerbaijani alphabet

First Azerbaijani State Theatre. 1919





Commemorative medal in honor of the opening of the ADR parliament. 7 December 1918

which was based on Arabic script. **Censorship in the press was abolished and a number of decisions on the celebration of historical dates were adopted.**

An important achievement of the ADR is the creation of the Azerbaijani telegraph agency - an independent news agency of an independent state established by the government on 3 March 1919 (3, p. 285). On 2 February 1920, a new resolution was adopted to establish AzTag, which began to act as an independent structure under the Council of Ministers from 1 March and was part of the Soviet Telegraph Agency in the Soviet period.

An important step in the establishment of the state independence of Azerbaijan was the adoption on 11 August 1919 of the Law on Citizenship of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic. Anyone who accepted citizenship had to take an oath in the manner stipulated in Article 6 of the law: "I, (name and surname), joining the ranks of citizens of Azerbaijan, promise and swear to Almighty Allah and my conscience to be sacredly and inviolably faithful to Azerbaijan, no longer recognize any other homeland, steadily perform all the duties of a citizen of Azerbaijan and faithfully serve the happiness of the Azerbaijan Republic, sparing no effort, property, and if necessary life for that. So help me Allah to fulfill this promise." Persons taking no oath made a solemn promise without mentioning the word "I swear" (3, p. 97).

The Azerbaijan Democratic Republic is the first democratic state in the East. The republic granted

women the right to vote much earlier than the United States and some other Western countries.

From the very outset, the ADR conducted an active foreign policy. The first bilateral document it signed was the "Treaty of Friendship between the Governments of the Ottoman Empire and the Azerbaijan Republic". In order to establish diplomatic relations with European countries, on 3 August 1918, Ali Mardan Bay Topchubashov was sent to Istanbul as an extraordinary envoy and a plenipotentiary minister (2, p. 53). He also led a delegation sent to the Paris Peace Conference on 28 December. On 2 May 1919, on the initiative of U.S. President Woodrow Wilson, the question of Azerbaijan was first discussed at a meeting of the "Council of the Four" at the Paris Conference (1, 1, p. 53).

The probability of a turning point in the fate of the republics created on the ruins of the Russian Empire manifested itself in a speech by British Prime Minister Lloyd George in November 1919 at a meeting of the House of Commons of the Parliament. It was clear from his speech that he favored the recognition of Azerbaijan and assistance to it. On the initiative of the British side, a session of the Supreme Council of the Paris Peace Conference was convened on 10 January 1920, and the next day, based on a proposal by British Foreign Secretary Lord Curzon, the Council passed the following resolution: "The Allies and the Entente countries recognize the Azerbaijani government de facto." (2, p. 502-503).

With the recognition of Azerbaijan at the level of an international peace conference, the diplomatic ties of the young republic expanded. **Consulates of**

*Seal of Baku State University. 1919.
National Museum of History of Azerbaijan*





Sample awards and medals of the ADR. 1919

Belgium, Switzerland, Holland, Czechoslovakia, Finland and several other countries opened in Baku. On 20 March 1920, Iran de jure recognized Azerbaijan (1, v.54), and in a short time an embassy was opened in Tehran, a consulate-general in Tabriz, vice-consul's offices in the cities of Rasht, Anzali and Mashad, and consular agencies of Azerbaijan in Khoy and Ahar. **The Azerbaijani parliament adopted a law on the establishment of diplomatic missions in the United Kingdom, France, Italy, the United States, Switzerland, Poland, Germany and Russia (2, pp. 562-565). Representative offices of the UK, Greece, Belgium, Georgia, Armenia, Denmark, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Iran, USA, Ukraine, Finland, Sweden, Italy and Switzerland started operating in Azerbaijan (1, 1, p.55).** Azerbaijan's participation in the system of international relations was interrupted due to the military intervention of Soviet Russia in April 1920.

Despite the fall of the state, the national idea and craving for the nationhood survived. Fundamental steps to restore Azerbaijani statehood, establish Azerbaijan on the political map of the world, create a state based on democratic principles in the Muslim world and fill the

name of Azerbaijan with political content in delineated, albeit compressed boundaries - all this became the foundation on which Azerbaijani statehood, albeit in a much reduced form, continued to live.

At the end of the 20th century, the restored independent Azerbaijani state declared its loyalty to the traditions of the First Republic. 28 May was officially declared the Republic Day and measures were taken to preserve the memory of major national historic events. A period of restoring the names of prominent ADR figures in people's memory began, and numerous articles, books and TV programs were devoted to their lives and activities. The works of writers and poets who were ideologists and spiritual fathers of the First Republic were published and republished. Professional holidays, whose foundation was laid during the ADR, were restored. In short, based on the principle of continuity accepted in Azerbaijani statehood, measures were, and are being, taken to restore the national memory. Commemorative events held at the official level and political assessments repeatedly made at the highest level are a clear indication of the modern Azerbaijani state's attention to the historic heritage and commitment to historical roots in determining the direction of future progress. 🌟

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Note 1. The Ganja uprising of 22 May-3 June 1920 is the biggest uprising against Soviet rule, which demonstrated the desire of the Azerbaijani people to fight for their independence. Despite the fact that the uprising failed and an unprecedented wave of repression began, the Ganja uprising was the first in the litany of uprisings that lasted until 1924 (Editor's note).

Note 2. The Azerbaijani population was the republic was given as "Turks" in documents.