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FOUNDER OF THE STATEHOOD OF THE LAND OF FIRE AND SUPPORTER OF THE POLITICAL UNITY OF THE PEOPLES OF THE CAUCASUS



From left to right: Mashadi Azizbayov, Ajdar Malikov, Asadulla Akhundov and Mammad Amin Rasulzadeh. 1905

31 January marks the 130th anniversary of the birth of Mammad Amin Rasulzadeh, a man whose name is inseparably connected with the emergence of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic and the struggle for the right of the Azerbaijani people to state independence. One of Rasulzadeh's contemporaries said about his life and struggle that **"for the sake of this struggle, he sacrificed everything - his family, peace, health, and finally, life"**. I think it is fair to say that the personality of Mammad Amin should serve for us - his countrymen and descendants - not only as a political, but also moral benchmark, a role model - especially for the younger generation - the future bearer of the idea of the national independence of the Land of Fire.

The study of the life and activities of Rasulzadeh is more than relevant, taking into account the events developing in the Caucasus after the collapse of the Soviet empire. Exploring the rich heritage of Mammad Amin, a professional historian cannot but come to the conclusion that most of the problems examined by Rasulzadeh in

his numerous articles and publications remain relevant today as well. We regret to note that it was the lack of familiarity with the activities and journalistic heritage of Rasulzadeh that was a big minus for the Azerbaijani political elite in the early 1990s. This omission, however, is understandable, taking into account furious attempts throughout the lifetime of the Bolshevik government not only to blacken the name of Rasulzadeh, but also hide and often distort the true thoughts and beliefs of the person who can be rightfully considered the founder of Azerbaijani statehood in the early twentieth century. The timely study of political ideas of Rasulzadeh could prevent a repeat in one form or another of the events that took place in the Caucasus in 1918-1920.

In this regard, it is appropriate to note that it was precisely Rasulzadeh and his party Musavat, both at home and in exile, that were the main standard-bearers of the ideas of political unity of the peoples of the Caucasus, rightly seeing it as the only guarantee of the existence of the independent state of Azerbaijan.

Numerous archival documents, which have now become available to researchers, including those acquired by the author of this article during his many years of diplomatic activity in France, highlight more and more the detailed picture of Rasulzadeh's political life in light of his initiatives to establish a Caucasus state union.

Strictly speaking, **Rasulzadeh developed the concept of forming a union of Caucasian states before**

the formal declaration of the independence of Azerbaijan on 28 May 1918.

In particular, the idea of the independence of the South Caucasus underlay the declaration of the Musavat Party, which was announced at a meeting of the Transcaucasian Seim on 15 February 1918. However, at this stage, even after the coup carried out by the Bolsheviks in St. Petersburg in October 1917, the idea of the state independence of the Transcaucasia was not shared by the vast majority of the deputies of the Seim. It is interesting to note that only the Georgian National Democrat G. Gvazava, the future editor of Prometheus magazine, with whom Rasulzadeh would be connected with close and fruitful cooperation during 1926-1938, supported at the time the "separation of the Transcaucasia from Russia, which was represented by Lenin and his comrades".

Thus, looking ahead, it should be stated that the basis for interaction between Caucasian politicians included in the Promethean movement in exile evolved in 1918-1921 during the existence of the independent states of the Caucasus.

A logical continuation of this line towards Caucasian unity is the resolution adopted at the Second Congress of the Musavat Party on 2-11 December 1919 in Baku. It stressed in part: "To recognize the union of the Caucasian republics in a free alliance of the Caucasian Confederation desirable and encourage all Caucasian democracy, as well as the governments of neighboring republics to facilitate the implementation of this idea."

Once in exile, Rasulzadeh did not stop reflecting on the causes of the fall of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic. Based on a thorough analysis of the political situation that developed in the Caucasus during the existence of the independent Azerbaijani state, he came to the only correct conclusion: The main causes of the fall of the ADR, as well as other republics of the Caucasus, should be sought in the absence of all-Caucasian unity, solidarity of young states, rejection of the idea of the Caucasian Confederation.

Certainly, being aware of the existence of certain problems and even acute contradictions in a region like the Caucasus, Rasulzadeh, however, believed that all this does not mean that such a situation will inevitably exist and should continue in the future. Moreover, this does not mean that, taking into account the grave mistakes and miscalculations committed in the past, the Caucasian peoples and in particular, their political elites should not be trying to find a mutually acceptable solution, shifting the focus from the ethnic component on regional soli-



Mammad Amin Rasulzadeh. 1919

arity. As international experience shows, **it is precisely regional solidarity, capable of smoothing out ethnic conflicts which unfortunately exist in the Caucasus, that will enable its peoples to better understand their real rather than imaginary interests.**

It is for these reasons that Rasulzadeh focused all his strength and energy on the rapprochement with the political institutions of other peoples of the Caucasus, as well as on the creation of common Caucasian entities coordinating and directing their activities.

The abovementioned period of Rasulzadeh's activities is inextricably linked with the activities of the Promethean organization, which brought together almost all the political representatives of non-Russian peoples seeking to restore the independence of their countries that emerged in 1918-1921 on the ruins of the Romanov empire and soon became victims of new red imperialism. Poland, represented by Marshal Jozef Pilsudski, pioneered the creation of the organization, providing it with financial and other support at all times during its existence. Along with this, Warsaw contributed to the creation of entities by émigrés, centralizing their anti-Bolshevik and national liberation activities to the maximum. In order to coordinate the actions of Caucasian political activists,



M. A. Rasulzadeh makes a farewell speech at the funeral of A. M. Topchubashov. Paris, 1934

members of the Promethean movement, a committee for the independence of the Caucasus (CIC) was established in 1926, and in 1935 it was reorganized into the Council of the Confederation of the Caucasus (CCC). One of the main leaders of both organizations throughout their existence was Rasulzadeh. Rasulzadeh's presence in the leadership of the central organs of Caucasians - members of the Promethean front, strengthened his idea that the only chance for the existence of independent Caucasian states is their confederative union.

On 14 June 1934, representatives of the national centers of Azerbaijan, Georgia and the North Caucasus signed the Pact of Caucasian Confederation, containing provisions for the creation of a united Caucasus state after the liberation of the region from Bolshevik occupation. On behalf of the Azerbaijani National Center, the document was signed by Rasulzadeh, which, in fact, made him the most prominent leader not only in Azerbaijani, but also in all Caucasian emigration.

The text said in part:

"1. The Caucasus Confederation, fully guaranteeing the national character and sovereignty of each of the republics internally, will act on behalf of all the

republics in foreign policy as an international association of the highest order.

2. The Confederation will have a common political and customs border. The foreign policy of the confederative republics will be conducted by the competent authorities of the Confederation.
3. The defense of the borders of the Confederation will be assigned to the Confederation's army, which includes the armies of the confederative republics under a unified command subordinate to the governing bodies of the confederation.
4. All differences which may arise between the confederative republics and will not be settled by direct negotiations shall be referred to compulsory arbitration or the High Court of the Confederation. The confederative republics undertake to accept them without limitation and implement all their decisions.
5. A commission of experts will soon start drafting the constitution of the Caucasus Confederation, taking into account the principles set forth above. This draft will serve as a basis for the work of the first constituent assembly of each republic.
6. A place is reserved in this pact for the Republic of Armenia."

At the same time, a careful study of documents on Rasulzadeh's activity in this period shows that one of the main motives that prompted him and other Caucasian leaders of the Promethean movement to sign the text of the Pact and create the CCC was not only the desire to centralize their activities in exile as much as possible. A more important goal was to create a solid foundation, if the peoples of the Caucasus become free from Bolshevik occupation in the future, in order to oppose the practice and possibility of imperial manipulation, which is one of the main and, admittedly, effective methods used by the Bolsheviks against the sovereignty of the Caucasian states in 1918-1921.

A classic example of this was the use by the Bolsheviks of the Armenian separatist movement in Nagorno-Karabakh. As a result, the Red Army invading Azerbaijan in April 1920 was confronted only by one battalion, while the remaining Azerbaijani troops were in Karabakh.

Thus, considering this problem from a retrospective point of view, the main positive result of the activities of émigrés and first of all, Rasulzadeh himself was precisely **awareness of the need for Caucasian unity - the**

M. A. Rasулzadeh. Turkey. 1950s

principal and sole key to the genuine independence of the peoples of the Caucasus. And although it was impossible to restore the independence of the Caucasian states in that era for reasons beyond the control of the émigrés, the latter's fears that their people would once again fall into the trap of imperial manipulations by the principle of Divide et Impera in the future were fully confirmed by the sinister reality of our days.

Therefore, the activities of Rasулzadeh, as well as other Caucasian Solidarists involved in the Promethean movement not only deserve a careful study, but also a positive assessment by their descendants, who, to their trouble, were not able to take advantage of their tragic experience and their subsequent conclusions in a timely fashion.

In his activities, Rasулzadeh did not ignore the problem of compatibility between the concept of the Caucasian Confederation and ideology of pan-Turanism (pan-Turkism), which he interpreted as a purely cultural rather than a political movement. Considering the ideology of communism as a tool of Russian imperialism aimed at Russifying the Azerbaijani people, Rasулzadeh contrasted it with the ideology of Musavatism as a symbol of the Azerbaijani national liberation movement, which is also an integral part of the all-Caucasian national liberation front.

“Musavatism is the banner of the Azerbaijani national movement in action! This banner is moving forward together with banners of our neighbors who united under the banner of the Caucasian Confederation and whose fate is closely linked to the fate of our Motherland – Azerbaijan.” 🌟

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M. A. Rasулzadeh's grave in the Asri Cemetery in Ankara