

INTERETHNIC DIALOGUE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE POLITICAL EXPERIENCE OF THE AZERBAIJAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC, 1918-1920

The end. Beginning in Irs-Heritage - 1 (20) - 2015

Article 2

1919 was a period of the creation and consolidation of the new state. On 12 January, Azerbaijan newspaper reported: "Official Section, 2 January 1919, № 1. The secretary of the District Court of Baku, Aleksey Andreyevich Suzdaltsev, is appointed acting bailiff of the third Baku city area in area 2 from 1 January 1919. Original signed by the acting chairman of the court, L. Perchikhin." (1, l.16) On 16 January 1919, we read in the Local News section: "Dr. E. Ya. Gindes has been appointed comrade of the minister of charity and will take up his duties today. The new comrade of the minister, in connection with the relocation of the post of minister of charity, has been given broad powers to conduct measures necessary to protect public health." (2, l.23)

In light of these facts of the high activity of Jewish community representatives who were involved in all spheres of the political, economic and spiritual life of Azerbaijan, the number of this segment of the Azerbaijani people is of special interest to us. The section "The Population of Baku" reports the following figures. "According to the statistical department of the city council, the total population of the city of Baku on 1 January 1919 is 235,996 persons of both sexes. The average number of inhabitants of the city of Baku in 1916 was 225,490, in 1917 - 229,638 and in 1918 – 233,864 persons. According to the census of 22 October



*Jews from the town of Guba.
Photo from the early 20th century*

1917, 12,427 Jews were registered.” (3, l.26) The same edition of the newspaper reported: “At the Jewish National Council. On Saturday, 18 January at 0630 pm, the main room of the synagogue will host a general meeting of Jewish citizens of Baku and its districts convened by the Baku Jewish national council on the issue of taxation planned to be carried out by the principle of a progressive income tax. Taxation will give the Council an opportunity to calculate the Jewish population of Baku. According to approximate information available to the Council, the total number of Jewish citizens is 20,000 souls.” (3, l.26) At one time, the tsarist government suppressed any political activity, especially of Jewish parties and associations. But at the time of the ADR, not only was it not persecuted, it evolved very actively! On 18 (5) January 1919, Azerbaijan newspaper reported in the Local Chronicle section: “After a ten-month break caused by political conditions, the publication of V. S. Veynshal’s Caucasian Jewish Bulletin, the organ of the District Committee of the Caucasian Zionist Organization published in Baku, resumed. The first edition published on 18 January, apart from vast literary material, contains a rich Palestinian, general and local Jewish chronicle.

The bureau of the Baku Zionist organization is located on Surakhani and Vorontsovskaya streets № 53-153, Klionsky apartment. It is open daily from 0500 to 0800 pm. Shekels for the year 5679 are also on sale. Persons intending to go to Palestine are requested to inform the bureau.” (4, l. 28) Against the background of the activity of the Zionist organization which aimed to rebuild the Jewish state on the historic land of their ancestors, members of the Jewish community continued to make their contribution to the prosperity of sovereign Azerbaijan. On 19 (6) January 1919, Azerbaijan newspaper reported under the heading “The Ministry of Health”: “The manager of the Ministry of Public Health, Dr. E. Ya. Gindes, organizes flying medical and nutritional units to supply aid to the population in the province, for which doctors, paramedics and nurses for recruited. The wages of doctors are 3,000 rubles per month and traveling allowance – 3,000 rubles provided that they serve for at least 4 months. Paramedics will be paid 2,000 rubles per month with a traveling allowance of 1,500 rubles and nurses – 1,300 rubles per month with a traveling allowance of 1,000 rubles under the same conditions.

The manager of the Ministry of Public Health, Dr. E. Ya. Gindes, appealed to the Ministry of Food to make a known amount of nutritious foods available to medical and nutritional units to supply them to the population in places where these units will be assigned.” (5, l.30) The



Members of the Jewish vocational school in Baku. Vignette of the early 20th century

establishment of such units and emergency assistance to the population were due to the epidemic of typhus and the threat of famine. In the Local Chronicle section in the same issue of the newspaper, we read: “Engineer Bogod has been appointed from the Exchange Committee to the commission for consideration of draft pictures of new 100-ruble checks that are to be released.” (5)

Given the complexity of the international situation and the epidemiological situation, many members of the local establishment opposed the strikes that undermined the already difficult situation in the country. For example, in the article “Combating the epidemic”, Dr. Kopeliovich encourages pharmacists to end the strike, which seems “terrible, especially at such a difficult time, when only the efforts of the whole society and trust in each other can eliminate the raging fire of infection. Knowingly and willfully distancing oneself from participation in the fight against the epidemic is a crime.” Here, the section “The fight against typhus”, bulletin No 1, says that “the preparation of equipment for hospitals has been started. Through Centrodom, the opening

*The building where the Parliament of Azerbaijan convened.
Photo of the early 20th century*



of public baths has begun so that the population can wash, disinfect and remove insects from their dresses and underwear. To combat the epidemic, four flying medical nutrient units have been organized in the region. In total, 15 such units have been proposed. The manager of the Ministry of Public Health, Gindes." (6, l. 44)

Along with social activities, the community did not forget about its most important mission - education and training of the younger generation. In this regard, the Jewish National Council held discussions on the status and funding of public schools. Azerbaijan newspaper reports on 13 February 1919: "The cost of maintaining Baku Jewish public schools has increased from an initial amount of 75,000 rubles to 144,500 rubles. The four Jewish public schools are: 1) men's Talmud-Torah College; 2) women's professional 2-classroom school; 3) the primary school for the spread of literacy among Georgian Jews; and 4) the school of Mountain Jews educating 400 children who may lose the opportunity to receive basic education due to the closure of schools and lack of funds. Although these schools are included in the total school network of public schools, they all enjoy public rights for students and teachers, but during the many years of their existence they have not been subsidized by the state or the city. The chairman of the Jewish National Council, M. A. Gukhman, has filed a petition to the Ministry of Education to subsidize these

schools. The Ministry of Education, in agreement with the request of the National Council, submits for approval a draft law on the allocation to the Jewish National Council of 10,000 rubles per month from the State Treasury throughout 1919 for the maintenance of Jewish schools." (7, l.80) It should be noted that when Gukhman said that Jewish schools had been left to themselves and nobody supported them for many years, he was referring to the tsarist era with its anti-Semitic policies and the short period of the Baku Commune. The ADR government had the most favorable attitude to the Jewish community, which can be seen from the above information. In addition, the Ministry of Charity did not neglect the needs of national minorities either. A report published in the official Address-Calendar for 1920 said: "Subsidies were issued regardless of nationality, assistance was received and continued to be received on the same grounds. During 1919, such subsidies were issued to the following societies ... 6) the Jewish National Council for a cheap dining room, 7) the Jewish charitable society for a shelter for the elderly and the poor." (8, l.66)

On 27 (14) February 1919, Azerbaijan newspaper reported under the heading "Official approval": "The Minister of Trade and Industry has approved M. B. Manevich as a senior broker of the Baku Stock Exchange and A. E. Ratner in the position of broker in the same exchange." (9 l.106) On

8 March (23 February) the same newspaper published the following information under the headline "The opening of a Jewish club": "Thursday saw the opening of the Jewish club Gazomir in the Jewish cooperative dining room Bethlehem. M. M. Abezgauz made a keynote speech on the objectives and duties of the club. Actress Golda Gutman, who expertly sang a number of Jewish folk songs, Kevesh, who successfully read out his humorous poems, and Lev (piano) and B. Ya. Gutman (accompaniment) performed in the literary-musical-vocal part of the evening. The evening ended at one o'clock in the morning. The next evening of the club will be devoted to Heinrich Heine. A. A. Veynberg will make a report." (10, I.127) The next day, 9 March (24 February), the same newspaper reported executions by firing squad in the town of Ruz under the headline "The Execution of Jews and Red Army servicemen in Warsaw", referring to Warsaw Jewish newspapers. (11, I. 128) At the same time, the Jewish community in Azerbaijan lived a quiet peaceful life without suffering any discrimination or infringement of their rights. They learnt about pogroms here from news agency reports, and many representatives of the Azerbaijani intelligentsia sympathized with the Jews and tried to help them as much as possible. On 12 March (27 February) 1919, under the headline "An Evening of Jewish miniatures" Azerbaijan newspaper informed its readers: "The board arranging Jewish parties is holding the third regular evening of Jewish miniatures called "Merry Omentashen" on the Jewish holiday Shushan Purim in the Mikado Theater on Monday, 17 March. Fifty per cent of the net proceeds from it will go to needy Jews at Passover." (12, I.135)

On 14 March, telegraph brings sad news again - "Jewish pogrom in Proskurov", describing the events committed by Haidamaks. (13, I.132) On 11 April 1919, Azerbaijan newspaper reported a very important cultural and historical event that marked the beginning of the forge of national personnel. It says: "The transfer of the university to Baku. As a result of the negotiations held by Professor Levin and Dr. Gindes with the Georgian government, an agreement was reached on the transfer of Tiflis University to Baku in the near future. The university will function with four departments: medical, natural, legal and oriental from September 1919. The university will be accommodated in the building of the Baku Commercial College, which is quite suitable for this purpose; the hostel for students will be accommodated at the Hotel National. For this purpose, the Azerbaijani government allocates 10 million rubles, as it expects the arrival of 1,500 people. The rector of the university will be Profes-



*Elementary school in Baku.
Photo from the early 20th century*

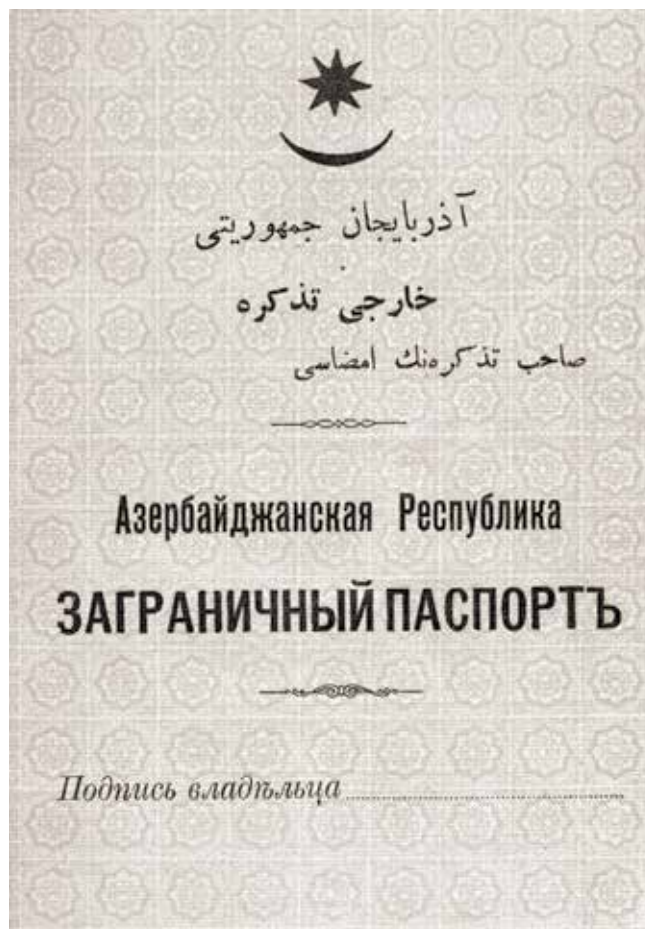
sor Razumovskiy. To all appearances, Professor Levin will be provided with a department." (14, I.60) On 24 April 1919, Azerbaijan newspaper published a brief statement under the heading "The Jewish National Council": "The Jewish National Council has received over 5000 rubles through B. S. Borschak from the children of Aga Iskandar in memory of the late Musa Nagiyev. (15, I.76) Thus, the Jewish community in Azerbaijan was provided with all possible assistance and support. Industrialists, intellectuals, workers of oil fields, officials, as well as petty and middle bourgeoisie considered it their duty to express sympathy to their Jewish fellow citizens. On 21 May 1919, Azerbaijan newspaper published the following information under the heading "Protest against pogroms (at the Jewish National Council)": "On Monday, 19 May, a regular meeting of the Jewish National Council was held. At the beginning of the meeting, an extraordinary statement by a member of the council, I. Yu. Glakhengauz, was read out about Jewish pogroms taking place in Poland and Ukraine. In the recent period, witnesses of these pogroms began to arrive in Baku, describing the nightmarish picture of horrors the likes of which even the bloody pages of Jewish history have not seen. Meanwhile, the Baku (meaning Jewish – M. B.) society met this tremendous disaster with complete indifference. So far only the poor Jewish population of the city has responded, as they have always reacted sensitively to national grief, while the wealthy part of the population has not responded to this stream of Jewish blood and tears. Finding it impossible to organize fundraising for the victims of the pogroms today and in view of the fact that the National Council is currently engaged in the collection of the community tax,

the rapporteur proposes that the National Council appeal to the Jewish population of the city of Baku to respond with a donation within their powers to the suffering of tens of thousands of widows and orphans affected by the pogroms in Poland and Ukraine.” (16, l.26)

The tragedy of the Jews in Poland and Ukraine found a lively response among the majority of the inhabitants of Azerbaijan. For example, “in 1919, a delegation of Jews arrived in Baku from Yelizavetgrad with a request for assistance to victims of Petlyura pogroms. On this occasion, the Jewish National Council organized a special edition with an appeal to help their brothers. The delegation returned to Ukraine with donations and lists of donors. To the surprise of the Jews who lived there, the list was full of people with unheard-of surnames ending in “li”, “zadeh” and “oglu”. The delegates explained that it is local residents, not Georgians or Armenians, but the Caucasian Turks - Azeris. No one expected this. So in Ukraine they learned that somewhere in Baku there are people who not only do not kill Jews, but also help them.” (17, p.38)

When Azerbaijan was part of the Russian Empire, Jews faced special obstacles (percentage limit) for admission to gymnasiums and universities. After independence, the ADR removed any national or religious restrictions. From now on, education became available to all citizens of the country. On 18 June 1919, Azerbaijan newspaper published a “List of students who graduated from the Baku School of Commerce in 1919. Among them were: ...8. Bruk losif, 9. Vigdorov Aleksandr, 10. Gratsman Yakov, 11. Grubman Isak, 20. Livshits losif, 21. Levikov Simon, 22. Mezhebovskiy Veniamin, 31. Shakov Grigoriy, 32. Shapiro Georgiy, 33. Yukhnovetsky Moisey (the total number of graduates was 33 persons – M. B.). (18, l.80) The next day, 19 June, the newspaper reported on graduation from the third men’s gymnasium. That year saw the 8th graduation of the following students from the third men’s gymnasium: ...Barshtak Viktor (silver medal), Bokhenek Maks, Brodskiy losif, Belostotskiy Saul, Burman David, Kaplan Moisey (gold medal). In total, 26 people graduated from the gymnasium. (19, l.83)

How authorities responded to any cases of infringement of the rights of national minorities is indicated by the following fact. Under the heading “The Oath of the Jews”, Azerbaijan newspaper reports the following: “In view of the protests by the Jewish National Council concerning the humiliating form of the Jewish oath, the Minister of Justice has ordered all judicial institutions of Azerbaijan to remove words degrading people from the oath.” (20 l. 87) In the UK, Baron Lionel Rothschild, who was elected by the City of London, had to wait for changes in the formula of



Foreign passport of the citizen of the Azerbaijan Republic

the oath from 1847 to 1858 to get into Westminster! Only after finding a compromise, was he able to take his seat in the House of Lords.

In order to strengthen national unity and civil society, “a draft law on citizenship” was developed. On this occasion, Azerbaijan newspaper reported: “The Ministry of Justice has drafted a bill on Azerbaijani citizenship. Here are the main provisions of this law. All the subjects of the former Russian state, who were born on the territory of the Azerbaijan Republic, are considered Azerbaijani citizens regardless of nationality, religion and status.” (21, l.95) Thus, the new law equalized the rights of all citizens of Azerbaijan irrespective of their origin and place of origin. Moreover, any infringement of the rights and freedoms of representatives of national or religious minorities was tantamount to a crime against the state. Here’s what MP Pepinov said about this at the 83rd plenary session of the parliament: “Those who openly campaign against the Government or the Republic or distribute publications harming the basics of the republic, or offend the feelings of one of the nationalities or

religions are liable to hard labor for no more than 6 years." (22, l.22) A joyous and in many ways, inspiring event in the political life of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic was the recognition of its independence by leading European powers. In connection with this event, a solemn meeting of the parliament of the republic was held on 14 January 1920. A stream of congratulatory telegrams arrived from many states and non-governmental organizations, wishing wellbeing and prosperity to the Azerbaijani people. This event left nobody indifferent. Almost all deputies expressed their views on this issue. From the Jewish national minority, the floor was given to MP M. A. Gukhman. Here is what he said: "Dear Members of Parliament! The cherished dream of the best sons of Azerbaijan has come true. What entire generations in Azerbaijan dreamed of in the recesses of their souls for centuries and what the wildest optimists could only dream of a year ago as an achievable ideal has now become a fait accompli, and this independence was achieved not because of generosity from the side, but is a result of systematic, continuous and consistent work by the governing circles of Azerbaijan and members of the Azerbaijani delegation in Paris. On this great historic day for Azerbaijan, I, on behalf of the Jewish population in the Azerbaijan Republic, offer my sincere and warm congratulations, especially as, due to their historical destinies, the Jews are the most principled followers of the idea of independence of nations and the most ardent champions of the rights of people to their own public life as they deem best for themselves. I wish the Turks of Azerbaijan and the entire Muslim world to take a relevant honorable place in the League of Nations (chants of "bravo" and applause.) Long live the liberated and forever free children of Azerbaijan (applause). May independent Azerbaijan thrive! (Applause). (23, l.29)

Unfortunately, at that time history gave the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic a very short time for independent existence. After putting an end to the civil war and strengthening their position, the Bolsheviks, who hid behind the idea of a global republic of Soviets, began to restore the former empire, but under other slogans and banners. The goal remained the same - resources, oil and strategic positions.

As for the Jews, who were granted equal rights and opportunities for the first time in history, as well as protection from the state, as a result of these events, they, like all other nations, ended up in the grip of the Marxist-Leninist ideology, which actively eradicated any dissent. The struggle against religion, multiparty system, Zionism and Hebrew as the language of the Jewish "bourgeoisie" lied ahead. ✨

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