

By Dr. Eldar ABBASOV

HEYDAR ALIYEV: target of Armenian nationalists

Konstantin Chernenko, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), died on March 10, 1985 at the age of 74. On the following day, 54-year-old Mikhail Gorbachev was elected the new general secretary at an extraordinary plenary session on the proposal of USSR Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, who was a member of Politburo (Political Bureau), the supreme decision-making body of the Communist Party. This laid groundwork for drastic changes in all areas of political and social life not only in the Soviet Union but also throughout the world, which, in turn, set the stage for a break-up of the USSR and the global Socialist system.

Armenian “supporters” of Lenin’s national policy principles and fighters for “miatsum” (“reunification of primordial Armenian land with the Armenian SSR”) were among those who immediately sensed imminent change in the country. They decisively urged the country’s political leadership to reconsider the borders between Azerbaijan and Armenia, charging that it was necessary to mend the distortions and errors in pursuing the Lenin policy of the ruling party omitted after Soviet rule was established in Transcaucasia. They also sought to annex a part of the Azerbaijan SSR’s territory, namely, Nagorno-Karabakh and Nakhchivan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR), to Armenia. These



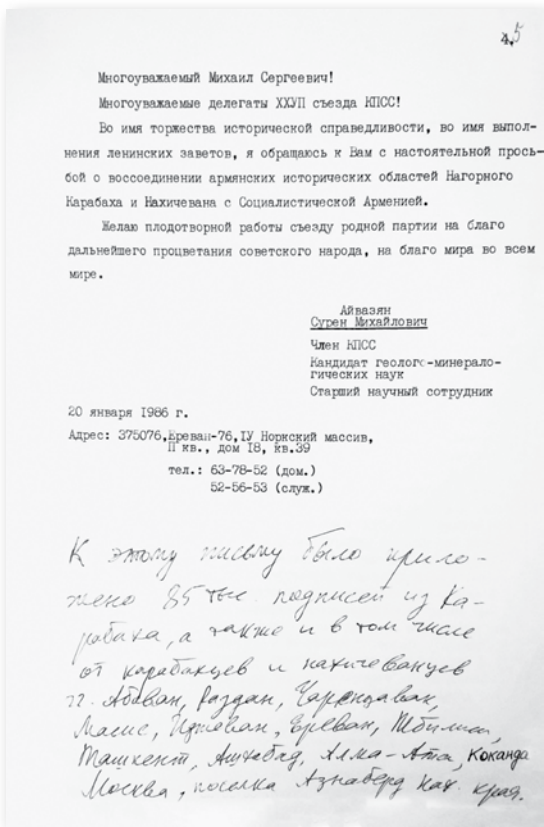


territories were traditionally considered among the Armenian public as “indigenous Armenian land”.

Nevertheless, the fact that Heydar Aliyev, an ethnic Azerbaijani who was a member of the CPSU Central Committee’s Politburo and served as First Deputy Chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers, held a senior position in the Soviet government, was deemed by Armenian fighters for “reunification of indigenous Armenian land” as the main hurdle impeding a successful revision of the existing borders between the Armenian SSR and the Azerbaijan SSR. There is also a widespread opinion amidst the Azerbaijani public that while Heydar Aliyev was a member of the Politburo, Armenian nationalists could not efficiently promote their ideas and that he was restraining their tough pressure on the Kremlin with regard to the issue of territorial claims against Azerbaijan. However, the study of archival documents clearly demonstrates that the pressure of Armenian irredentists on Moscow concerning the issue of alleged “reunification of the indigenous Armenian land” of Nakhchivan and Nagorno-Karabakh to the Armenian SSR began in 1965 and these efforts were stepped up after the death of Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev.

Letters and appeals with similar demands were also sent to the CPSU Central Committee during the tenure of both Yuri Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko. During that time period, Heydar Aliyev was First Deputy Chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers and a member of the Politburo. Furthermore, the demand to hand over Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) to the Armenian SSR escalated into a nationwide movement during Mikhail Gorbachev’s rule. This development was fueled not by Heydar Aliyev’s withdrawal from the Politburo, but the implementation of Mikhail Gorbachev’s policy of glasnost (translated from Russian as “openness” and implying a Soviet policy of open discussion of political and social issues) and perestroika (“restructuring”).

Heydar Aliyev, a nominee and associate of the former General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee Leonid Brezhnev, was considered a representative of the conservative wing of the Politburo and active supporters of perestroika were urging Mikhail Gorbachev to remove him from power. Armenian nationalists sought to facilitate the process, instigating a campaign to discredit Heydar Aliyev. The campaign was conceived and launched by Igor Muradian, a 30-year-old economist



Last page of a letter from Suren Ayyazyan, one of the leaders of the Miatsum movement, to Mikhail Gorbachev and delegates of the 27th congress. January 20, 1986

The letter referenced the murder of Suren Adamian, a Hero of Socialist Labor who headed the “Communism” collective farm in the NKAO’s Martuni district, as well as the killing of an Armenian woman in the NKAO’s Vanklu village in 1983 and the rape and murder of 14-year-old Svetlana Baghdasarian in Stepanakert that same year. It also mentioned the fate of several dozen vigilantes arrested in 1967 after punishing three Azerbaijanis in Stepanakert, which ultimately led to an outbreak of further violence.

On February 26, 1987, Igor Muradian and Zare Melik-Shahnazarian filed a motion with the USSR Supreme Court against Heydar Alirza oglu Aliyev in accordance with Article 67 of the Azerbaijan SSR’s Criminal Code, which cited alleged violation of the “equality of citizens on the basis of race and nationality”.² The statement was signed in addition to Igor Muradian himself, also by an 84-year-old native of Karabakh, Zare Melik-Shahnazarian, one of the perpetrators of the murder of Ahmed Cemal Paşa on July 21, 1922 in Tiflis. Of course, Igor Muradian’s inclusion in this adventure of one of the assassins of the former Minister of the Navy of the Ottoman Empire had a certain political subtext. The plaintiffs attached a total of 600 pages of text to the document that contained descriptions of crimes that were allegedly committed against Armenians and people of other ethnic groups residing in the Azerbaijan SSR. Heydar Aliyev, a former first secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan, was accused of violating the “ethnic equality of the Armenian population” of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast and other regions of the Azerbaijan SSR that had Armenian population.

Following the plea filed with the Supreme Court, Igor Muradian sent a letter to Alexander Yakovlev, a representative of the Politburo’s liberal-reformist wing. The letter informed the recipient that Muradian and a group of his colleagues had sent a number of letters over the past year to the CPSU Central Committee concerning the future fate of Nagorno-Karabakh, but they had not received an intelligible answer to date.

“We get an impression that there are careless people in the CPSU Central Committee, in particular, its department in charge of letters, and because of them the CPSU leadership is not impartially informed of the state of affairs in Nagorno-Karabakh and Nakhchivan,” Muradian

and graduate of the G. V. Plekhanov Russian University of Economics.

Muradian was born in Odessa, Ukraine, but grew up in Baku. However, the political views of Muradian, an ardent Armenian nationalist, shaped up in Armenia where he moved after completing his studies. Pathological hatred toward Turks and Azerbaijanis was his distinguishing feature.

Letters, appeals, cables and documents sent to the CPSU Central Committee by Muradian and his cohorts on annexing Nagorno-Karabakh and Nakhchivan to the Armenian SSR and the lawsuit filed against Heydar Aliyev have been included in 11 volumes in the Russian State Archive of Contemporary History.¹

In late January 1987, 100 typewritten sheets were sent to the CPSU Central Committee, the USSR’s KGB and Ministry of Internal Affairs. They cited trumped-up charges against H. Aliyev accusing him of causing intolerable and unacceptable living conditions in the Armenian-populated regions of Azerbaijan during his tenure as First Secretary of the Central Committee of Azerbaijan’s Communist Party. The section, titled “In the conditions of the lack of glasnost, cited purported crimes committed in the Azerbaijan SSR against ethnic Armenians.

Igor Muradian's letter to Aleksandr Yakovlev,
Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. March 13, 1987

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Muradian I. M.
Кандидату в члены Политбюро
ЦК КПСС, секретарю ЦК КПСС
тов. Яковлеву А. И.

На протяжении последнего года группой моих товарищей было послано в адрес ЦК КПСС множество писем о судьбе нашей многострадальной родины Нагорного Карабаха. Мы не раз не получили вразумительного ответа на множество поставленных вопросов.

У нас сложилось мнение, что в ЦК КПСС, в частности в отделе писем сего недоразобравшие люди, благодаря которым руководство КПСС неоднократно информировано о происходящих делах в НКарабахе и в Нахичеване. Даже многочисленные просьбы — организовать телевещание из Еревана на Нагорный Карабах восприняли в отделе транскрипта и связи ЦК КПСС как конъюнктуру. При этом издевательски карается дата реализации этого "дорогостоящего" мероприятия — 1992!!!

Это равнодушие, круговорот, обвинение в буржуазности кулаки людей вызывает отчаяние не только молодых людей, но и ветеранов войны и труда, много испытавших на своем веку. Также непрерывно камское отношение к данному вопросу со стороны некоторых работников ЦК вынудило нас обратиться в "последнюю инстанцию" — Верховный суд СССР с заявлением об иске против Алимбева Георгия. Мы уже ознакомились, но нам не удалось добиться

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выявлено в укрупненном разделе Восточной Армении (Арм. ССР, НКАО, Нах. АССР). Писем представили в Верховный суд СССР по данному делу 600 стр. текста, содержащего описание преступлений против армянского и других народов в АЗ. ССР.

Высылаю Вам сопроводительное письмо к последнему письму посланному в ЦК КПСС от 26.01.1987г., на которое не получили там ответа.

Адрес пишу ответ построчно.

С уважением Мурадян Игорь
13.03.1987г.

claimed. "The indifference, chicanery, accusations of brawling of a handful of people cause despair of not only young people, but also the war and labor veterans who have gone through a lot in their lifetime. Such an openly boorish attitude of some Central Committee officials toward this issue prompted us to file a lawsuit with the "final authority", the USSR Supreme Court, against Heydar Alirza oglu Aliyev. In our opinion, he was responsible for expediting the division of Eastern Armenia (the Armenian SSR, NKAO, Nakhchivan ASSR). We have submitted 600 pages of text pertaining to this case to the USSR Supreme Court, which contain descriptions of the crimes committed against the Armenian people and other nations in the Azerbaijan SSR".³

However, the Soviet Supreme Court declined to consider Igor Muradian and Zare Melik-Shahnazarian's plea, sending it back to the plaintiffs with an accompanying letter undersigned by Robert Tikhomirnov, the acting chairman of the judicial panel for criminal cases. The letter said, "In accordance with the law, the USSR Supreme Court considers complaints filed against specific court

rulings in supervisory order. The issues raised in your plea are beyond the competence of the USSR Supreme Court".⁴

Following the Supreme Court decision to dismiss the plea, Muradian and Melik-Shahnazarian sent a letter to General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev and Prosecutor General Alexander Rekunkov on April 10, 1987, accusing Heydar Aliyev of committing genocide against Armenians in the Azerbaijani territory.

"In this statement, we are fully aware of the seriousness of the charge, the legal and moral responsibility that we bear by initiating a lawsuit against Heydar Alirza oglu Aliyev, a member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the CPSU, First Deputy Chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers. We accuse Heydar Alirza oglu Aliyev of complicity in committing malfeasance by "violating ethnic and racial equality" (Article 67 of the Azerbaijan SSR's Criminal Code)"⁵ the letter said.

At the same time, they noted that "if the international community considered complicity in the gravest crimes of a number of persons in this way, i.e. based on the

principle of direct and personal involvement, Enver Paşa and Talaat Paşa, Hitler and Himmler, Beria and Bagirov, and many other leaders of Pan-Turkism and fascism would not have been convicted to date”⁶

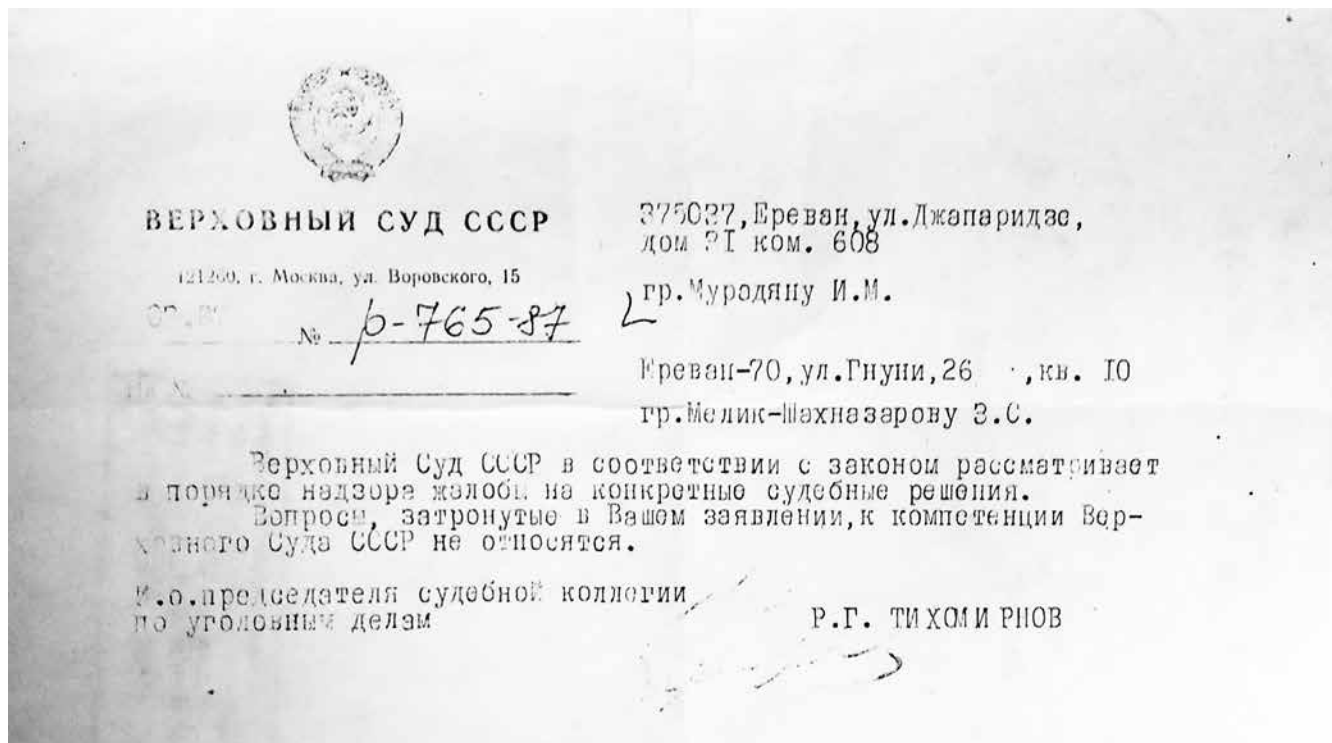
It is beyond doubt that the Soviet KGB exercised strict control over Igor Muradian’s activity by that time. Following the filing of charges against Heydar Aliyev to the USSR Prosecutor General’s Office, the KGB headquarters decided to delegate its officer to the capital of the Armenian SSR to meet with the plaintiffs. On April 25, 1987, Col. V. S. Ilyin arrived in Yerevan from Moscow by plane. On the same day, the KGB officer had a three-hour conversation with I. Muradian. During

As for the facts regarding the rape and murder of 14-year-old Svetlana Baghdasarian in Stepanakert, as well as those arrested after committing violent reprisals there on July 3, 1967 following the declaration of the ruling handed down at a field session of the Azerbaijan SSR’s Supreme Court, those allegations were not confirmed and turned out to be completely fictitious.⁷

According to the outcome of a relevant scrutiny, a conclusion was made that all the allegations concerning grave crimes mentioned in Igor Muradian and Zare Melik-Shahnazarian’s plea were baseless and fictitious.

On April 27, 1987, the USSR Prosecutor General’s Office declined to institute a criminal case against

Refusal of the Supreme Court of the USSR to consider the complaint of Igor Muradian and Zare Melik-Shahnazarian against Heydar Aliyev. March 1987



the conversation, Ilyin addressed in detail the so-called “facts regarding serious crimes” cited in the plea filed by Muradian and Melik-Shahnazarian.

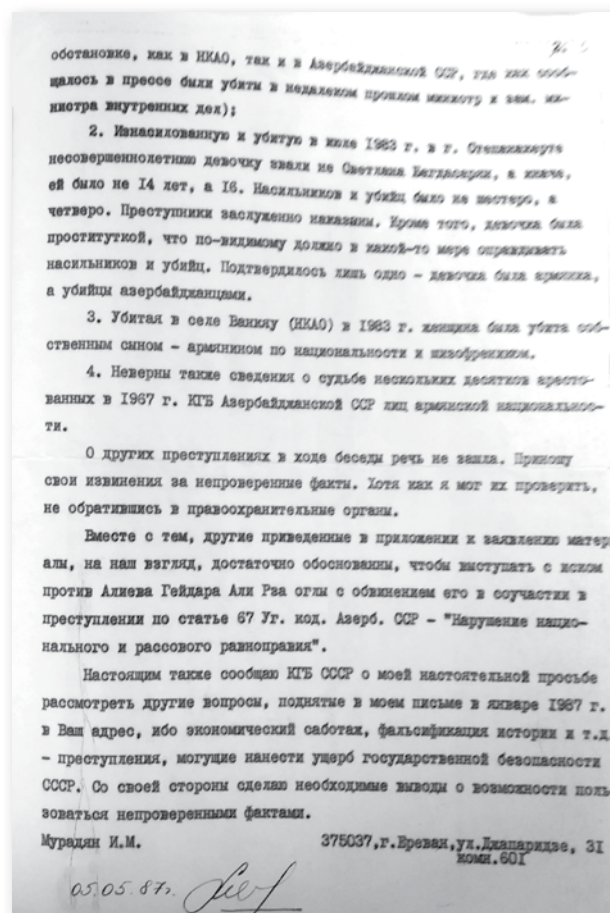
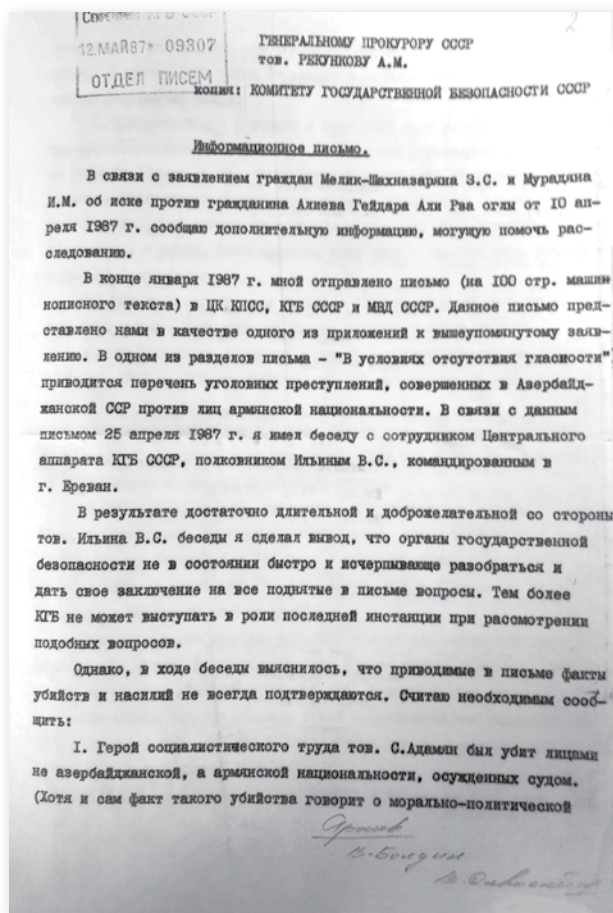
It turned out that the chairman of the “Communism” collective farm based in NKAO, Suren Adamian, was murdered not by Azerbaijanis, but ethnic Armenians, and those individuals were prosecuted and convicted in accordance with the law. Muradian was also told that the above-mentioned Armenian woman in the NKAO’s Vanklu village had been killed not by Azerbaijanis, but her own son, an ethnic Armenian who was mentally disturbed.

Heydar Aliyev and make available a pertinent mailed box of documents.

In another appeal to Alexander Yakovlev, Muradian explained the decision of the Prosecutor General’s Office by the Soviet KGB’s involvement in this process.

“Considering the date of the conversation that took place with Comrade V. S. Ilyin and the refusal to hand over the parcel, as well as the fact that the issue of contacting the Prosecutor’s Office was brought up during the conversation, we have some reasons to believe that such a disparaging attitude of the Prosecutor’s Office employees was due to their awareness of those ex-

Igor Muradian's letter to Aleksandr Rekunkov, Prosecutor General of the USSR, copied to Victor Chebrikov, Chairman of the USSR State Security Committee. May 5, 1987



changes," Muradian wrote. "Perhaps, someone had erroneously concluded that we might retract our statement. In my opinion, no one had ample grounds to suspect us of such a lack of principles"⁸

However, the restless Muradian had no intention to relinquish his claims. Following the dismissal of his allegations by the USSR Prosecutor General's Office, Muradian wrote a letter to Prosecutor General Alexander Rekunkov, sending another copy to the country's KGB. He acknowledged that the "facts" cited in the previous plea had not been confirmed. In addition, Muradian concurred with the explanations provided by KGB officer V.S. Ilyin, extended his apology and pledged to draw relevant conclusions from the comments made regarding the inadmissibility of using unverified information. However, Muradian believed that "other materials cited in the addendum to the plea were quite substantiated" and sufficient for filing a lawsuit against Heydar Aliyev on charges of complicity in an alleged crime under the mentioned Article 67 of the Azerbaijan SSR's Criminal Code, which refers to infringement upon "the equality

of citizens on the basis of race and nationality"⁹ [8]. At the same time, Muradian urged officials of the USSR's KGB "to consider other issues" raised in his letter in January 1987, given that "economic obstruction and falsification of history are crimes that could harm the USSR's national security"¹⁰

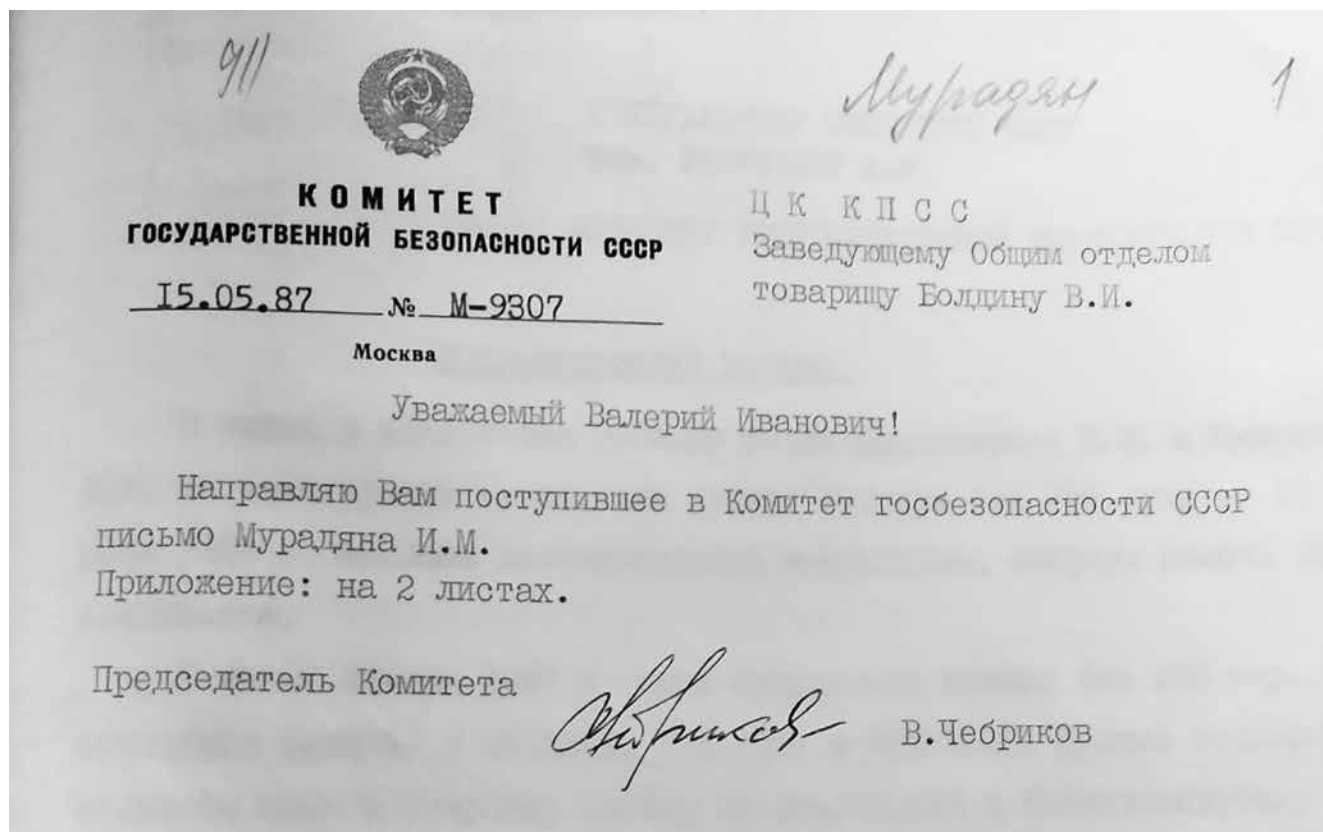
On May 15, 1987, Muradian's message with an accompanying letter undersigned by Chairman of the USSR's KGB Viktor Chebrikov was sent to the CPSU Central Committee. The letter was addressed to the head of the general affairs department, Valery Boldin. However, neither the Prosecutor General's Office nor the CPSU Central Committee responded any further to his ridiculous appeals.

The lack of a response from the CPSU Central Committee and other government agencies to Muradian's provocative claims further infuriated him. Therefore, he decided to garner support of Central Committee Secretary Alexander Yakovlev, in the pursuit of his campaign aimed at prosecuting Heydar Aliyev. In a three-page statement dated June 15, 1987, Muradian

briefly outlined all the stages of this campaign, airing his grievances over the actions taken by the USSR Supreme Court and Prosecutor General's Office.

A close look at Muradian's statement is mind-boggling. He went as far as accusing the former head of Azerbaijan's political party organization not only of pursuing an alleged policy of "genocide" against the republic's Armenian population, but also Pan-Turkism. Referring to the ideology of Pan-Turkism as a crime, Muradian asked Alexander Yakovlev, one of the ideologists of perestroika, to scrutinize this "ideological misjudgment".

Accompanying note of Igor Muradian's letter signed by Victor Chebrikov, Chairman of the USSR State Security Committee to Valery Boldin, Head of the Main Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. May 15, 1987



"We assure you that we do not and cannot have any bloodthirsty aims regarding certain personalities, even if their activity is linked to crimes against the state as a whole and against the Armenian people," Muradian asserted cynically. "Our only goal is to draw the attention of the leaders of the [ruling] party and government, as well as the Soviet public, to that unprecedented offense referred to in Soviet reality as Pan-Turkism. Committing genocide [or something close to genocide] of the Armenian population in Nakhchivan and Nagorno-Karabakh was a part of it. And yet, I earnestly ask you...

to look into this ideological blunder in terms of considering the plea of our citizens and exercise control over what happens further to our plea."¹¹

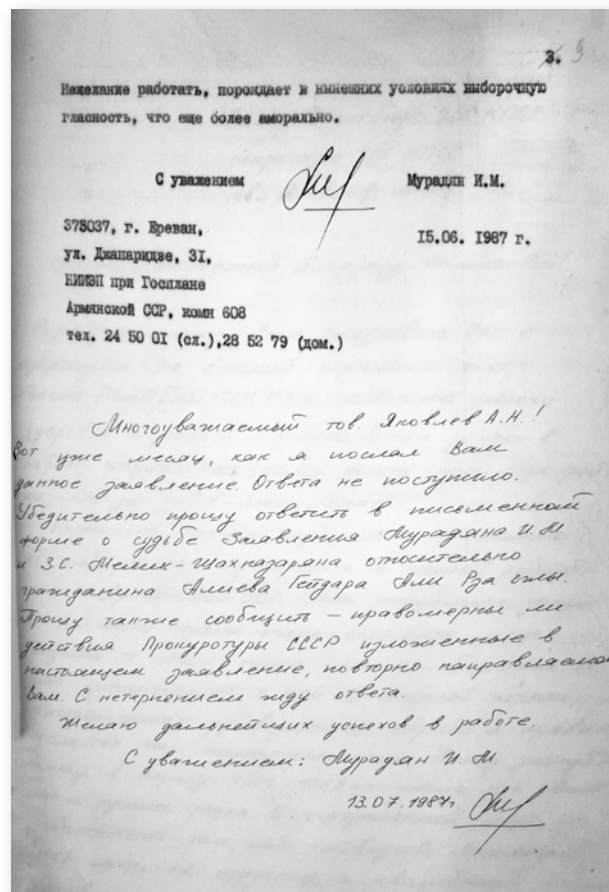
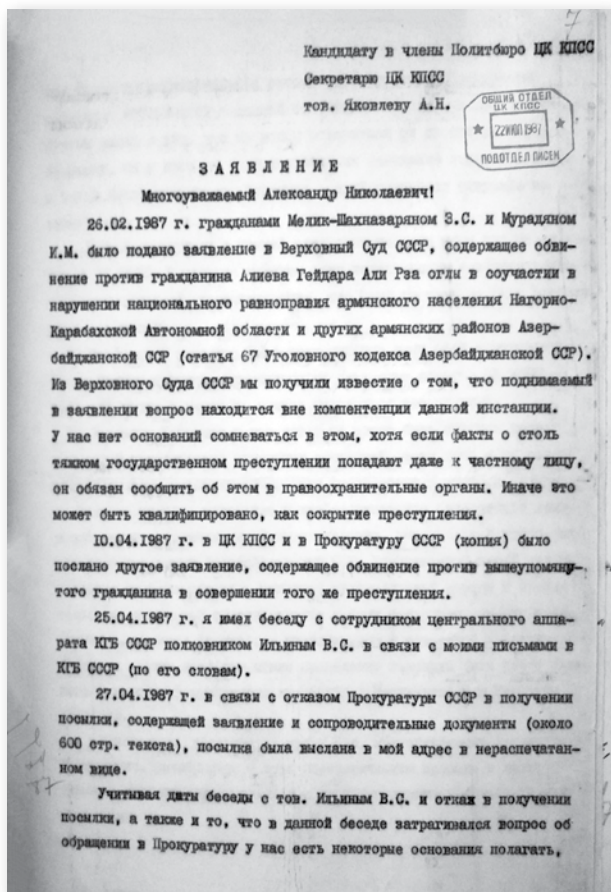
As expected, the disgruntled Muradian's appeal remained unanswered. He further decided to send another appeal to CPSU Central Committee Secretary Alexander Yakovlev. This time, he left a hand-written note on the last page of a copy of his previous letter dated June 15, 1987.

"Honorable comrade A. N. Yakovlev! It has been a month since I sent you this statement. There is no an-

swer. I ask you in earnest to respond in writing as to what ever happened to I. M. Muradian and Z. S. Melik-Shahnazarian's statement regarding citizen Heydar Alirza oglu Aliyev. I also request that you notify me whether the actions of the USSR Prosecutor's Office referenced in the present statement being re-sent to you are legitimate. I'm looking forward to your reply," Muradian wrote.¹²

It came as no surprise that Muradian's repeated appeal was shunned on the Old Square, the headquarters of the Soviet government.

Igor Muradian's letter to Aleksandr Yakovlev, Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, dated June 15, 1987 and an addendum to it dated July 13, 1987



Following the persistent appeals, the USSR Prosecutor General's Office finally sent a brief letter of response to I. Muradian on September 22, 1987, which was undersigned by Y. E. Ovcharov, a senior prosecutor at the department in charge of investigations in national security bodies.

"Your statement dated 27.07.1987 has been reviewed. The issues articulated in the statement are outside the competence of the prosecution bodies," the letter said.

Having received the reply, Muradian, who felt desperate over his failing smear campaign, immediately sent a letter consisting of four typewritten pages to Heydar Aliyev himself. The letter contained incriminatory remarks and threats.

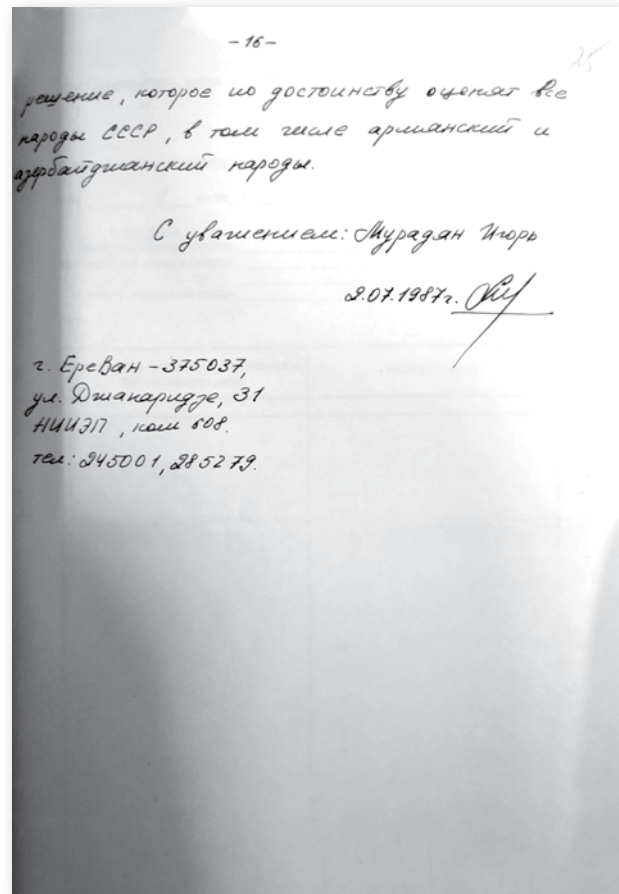
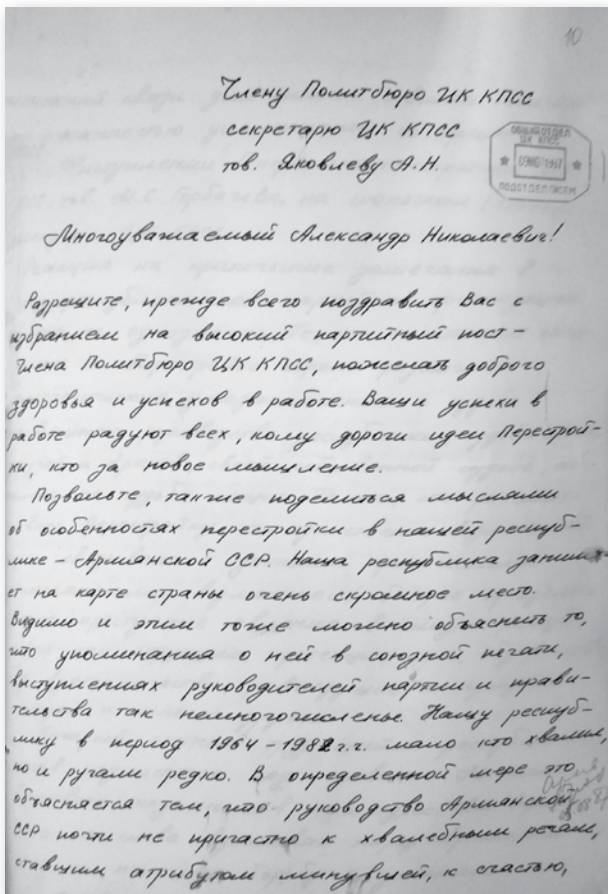
The message started with several bold, impudent phrases. "Aliyev, I accuse you of complicity in the perpetration of genocide of the Armenian population in Nakhchivan, Nagorno-Karabakh and the Azerbaijan SSR. During your tenure as the first secretary of the Central Committee of the republic's Communist Party the policy of genocide against the Armenian population pursued

by the Musavatist government and further party and government officials of the Azerbaijan SSR (with varying degrees of success) from 1920 to 1987 intensified to an unprecedented extent," Muradian claimed.

"Tens of thousands of Armenians left the republic while you were in office and in the following years (1967–1987), along with Russians, Georgians, Ukrainians and Jews, escaping the Pan-Turkist workforce policies. Nakhichevan, an ancient Armenian province, has been deprived of indigenous Armenian population almost entirely, while its growth has essentially ceased in Nagorno-Karabakh (Artsakh). Socio-economic development of the Armenian [populated] provinces is being restrained by all means, while Armenian cultural and architectural monuments are being blatantly destroyed," Muradian wrote.

"Moreover, history is being crudely falsified and anti-Armenian and pro-Turkish propaganda is being pursued at the state level, while the Armenian regions are separated from the Soviet Armenia by an insurmountable wall," the letter said.¹³

First and last pages of Igor Muradian's 16-page letter to Aleksandr Yakovlev, member of the Political Bureau, Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. July 2, 1987



In May 1987, Heydar Aliyev was hospitalized and spent four months in the Central Clinical Hospital. This prompted I. Muradian to believe in an imminent end of his political career. However, Heydar Aliyev's return to the USSR Council of Ministers in September and his attending the Politburo meetings deeply frustrated the Armenian irredentist.

"Your long-term presence in the Politburo is a phenomenon of perestroika and glasnost," Muradian wrote. "Your four-month-long absence (May-September 1987) had inspired hope for an essential, speedy onset of your political demise. Immediately after the April (1985) plenary session, it became clear to any sensible person that you do not belong among those the Soviet people pin all their hopes upon in terms of recovery in our society. You are not aligned with the concepts of Perestroika and Glasnost".¹⁴

The letter concluded with a section entitled "Thought-starter" whereby Muradian recalled numerous assassinations of statesmen of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR) and the Ottoman Empire

committed by Armenian terrorists as part of the "Nemesis" operation. Muradian referred to the murders of former ADR Prime Minister Fatahi Khan Khoyski and ADR Interior Minister Behbud Khan Javanshir. He also mentioned Ottoman Grand Viziers Mehmed Said Halim Paşa and Talaat Paşa, as well as Bahaeddin Şakir, the founder and chief of Teskilat-ı Mahsusa, the Ittihad secret service in Turkey, Ahmed Cemal Paşa and Enver Paşa, who served as Minister of the Navy and Minister of War of the Ottoman Empire, respectively.¹⁵

It is worth mentioning the signature at the end of the letter that said "I. Muradian, a son and grandson of communists widely known in close Armenian circles, who is always committed to fighting Pan-Turkism and Pan-Islamism and has no party membership".

Recalling this letter and the overall campaign launched against him by Armenian nationalists as part of their goal to annex the Nakhchivan ASSR and Nagorno-Karabakh to the Armenian SSR, Heydar Aliyev commented, "In May 1987, I fell ill. After my recovery I worked for one to two months. I received a letter from

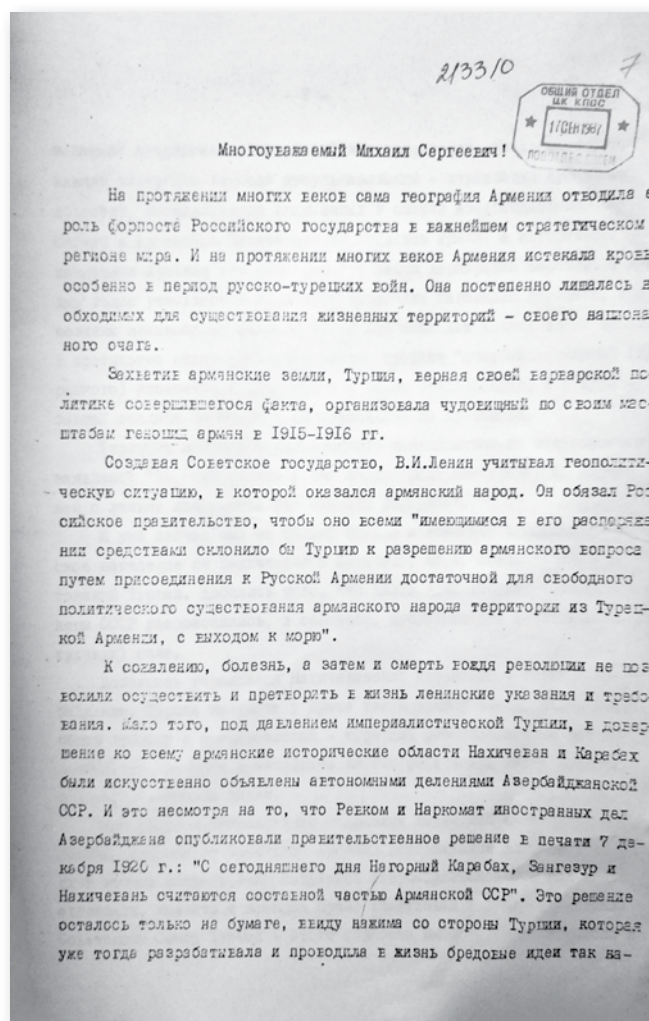
First page of Igor Muradian's letter to Mikhail Gorbachev, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. September 17, 1987

Armenia at that time. It was written by Igor Muradian, one of the leaders of the "Karabakh" society. It was a very impudent person. I was insulted and threatened. The author of that message stated that they would wage struggle against me, since I stand in the way of Karabakh's handover to Armenia...Igor Muradian was calling for my arraignment".¹⁶

Armenian historians and commentators, as well as a number of foreign pundits, argue that the campaign aimed at discrediting Heydar Aliyev masterminded and launched by I. Muradian ultimately led to his dismissal from the position of First Deputy Chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers and the Politburo. In particular, British journalist Thomas de Waal wrote that one of the far-reaching ideas of Muradian, who was acting jointly with his fellow activist of the Armenian nationalist movement, was to start a criminal case against Heydar Aliyev under Article 67 of Azerbaijan's Criminal Code. It was believed that although they failed to achieve their goal, most likely, this campaign slightly contributed to his dismissal from the Politburo.¹⁷

Nevertheless, research and analysis of relevant archival documents provides ample factual basis to conclude confidently that Muradian's discrediting campaign had no bearing on Heydar Aliyev's withdrawal from the senior Soviet leadership. The documents attached to the lawsuit filed by the Armenian nationalists against H. Aliyev did not cite any significant facts and merely contained slander and absurd allegations. In addition, those efforts had a nationalist, Turko-phobic slant and hence the ruling party and Soviet government agencies did not take those appeals seriously.

The reshuffle at the CPSU Central Committee and the Politburo sped up following the plenary session held in January 1987. The October plenary session of the Communist Party was one of the stages in the renewal of its membership. Heydar Aliyev's membership in the Politburo was revoked at the meeting. Afterwards, Heydar Aliyev noted in an interview with Russian journalist Andrei Karaulov that he had sensed an unfriendly attitude of Mikhail Gorbachev during the latest period of his tenure.¹⁸ As a result of this hostility, Mikhail Gorbachev raised the issue of Heydar Aliyev's stepping down as a Politburo member and First Deputy Chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers at his own free will during a Politburo session. The move followed a preliminary



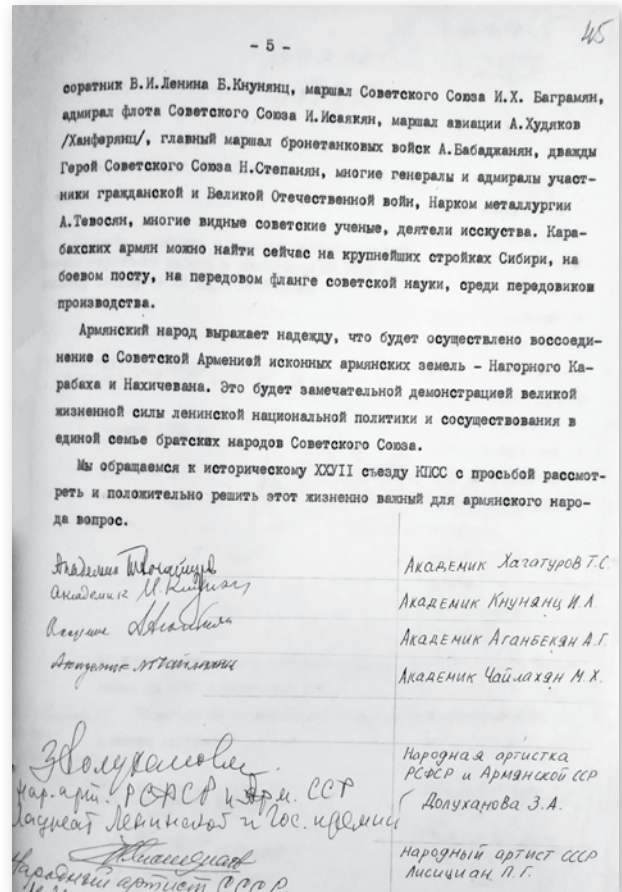
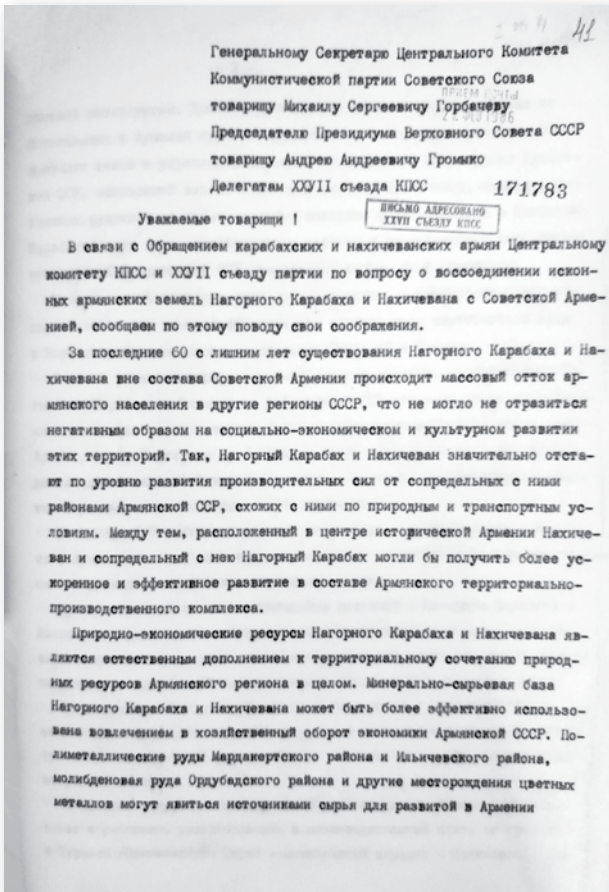
conversation with Heydar Aliyev on October 21, 1987.

Heydar Aliyev's resignation was announced at a plenary session of the CPSU Central Committee on the same day.¹⁹

Undoubtedly, the removal of Heydar Aliyev from the country's political leadership encouraged the irredentist Armenian nationalists and set them loose. This was clearly evidenced with a statement made by academician Abel Aganbegian, a well-known Soviet economist and Gorbachev's associate, who claimed it was appropriate to hand over Nagorno-Karabakh from the Azerbaijan SSR to the Armenian SSR. The remarks were made on November 16, 1987 during Aganbegian's visit to Paris paid on the occasion of the publication of his book titled "Perestroika, le Double Défi Soviétique".

Aganbegian commented on the issue during the book presentation organized by the Armenian Institute of France and the Association of Armenian Veterans in the conference hall of the InterContinental hotel, named after Missak Manouchian, an ethnic Armenian

Letter dated February 24, 1986 and composed by Igor Muradian to Mikhail Gorbachev, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Andrey Gromyko, Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, and delegates of the 27th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The letter is signed by four members of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR – economist Tigran Khachaturov, organic chemist Ivan Knuniants, economist Abel Aganbegyan, physiologist Mikhail Chilakhian, as well as representatives of intelligentsia – opera singer, People's Artist of the RSFSR and People's Artist of the Armenian SSR Zara Dolukhanova (Dolukhanian), opera singer, former soloist of Bolshoi Theater, People's Artist of the USSR Pavel Lisitsian, People's Artist of the USSR and Armenian SSR Nikolay Nikogosian



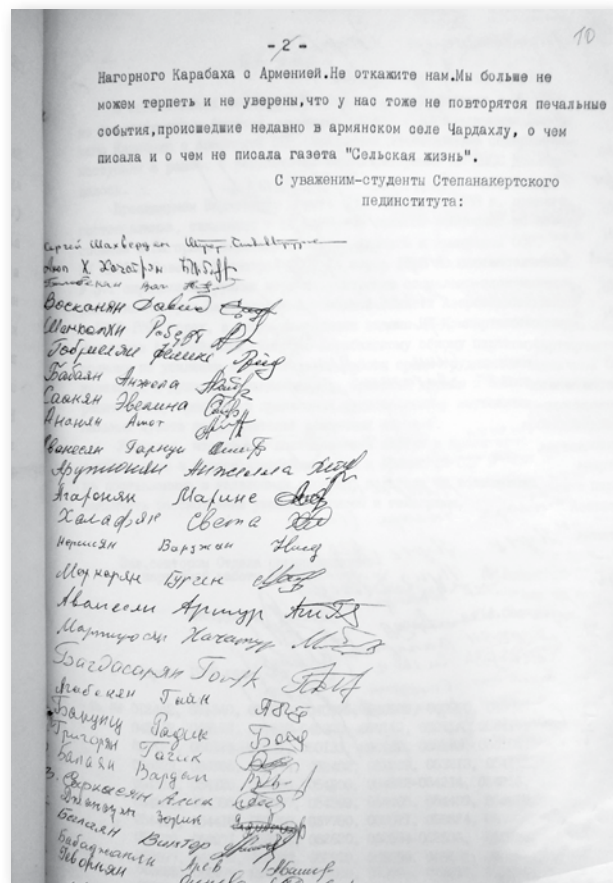
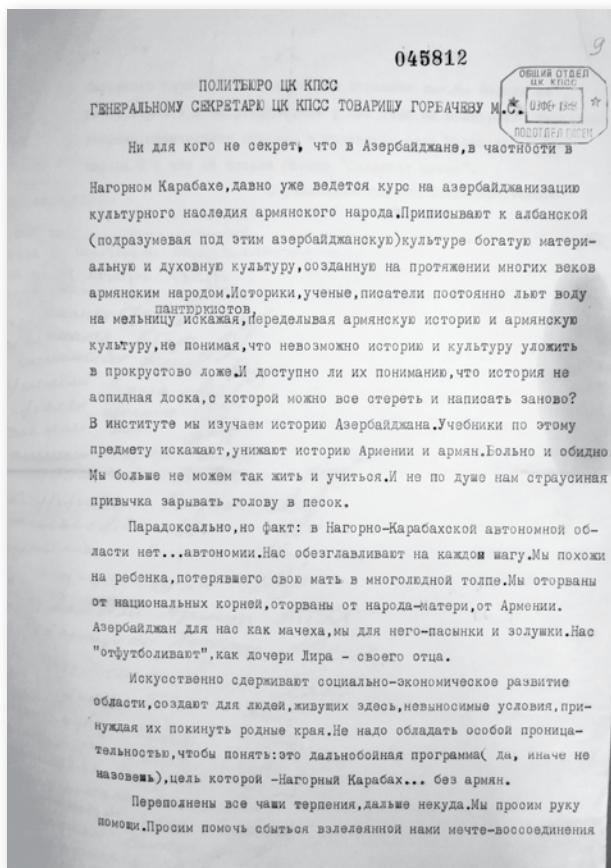
anti-fascist and a French national hero. In reply to a question from an ethnic Armenian regarding the possibility of “annexing Nagorno-Karabakh and Nakhchivan to Armenia,” Aganbegian said, “I would like Nagorno-Karabakh to become part of Armenia. As an economist, I believe that it has much closer ties to Armenia than Azerbaijan. I have already made a relevant proposal and hope that these ideas will be materialized in the spirit of perestroika and democracy.”²⁰

The mentioned event, organized by the Armenian community in France, was covered two days later by Jean George, a correspondent of L’Humanité, a newspaper of French Communists. Copies of the newspaper were circulated not only in Moscow but also all the capitals of the Soviet republics, including Baku. However,

Ramiz Abutalibov, an employee of the UNESCO secretariat, phoned the Azerbaijan SSR’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and informed its senior officials about Abel Aganbegian’s revelations. The phone call came even prior to the distribution of L’Humanité in the Azerbaijani capital.

The mentioned remarks of Gorbachev’s aide on economic issues were the first alarm bell that notified the Azerbaijanis of the ongoing hostile Armenian campaign aimed at breaking Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) away from Azerbaijan. Such a clear-cut statement by a well-known academician, whose political clout was bolstered by his status of an adviser to General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev, was perceived in Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia as an evident call to

Letter from students of Stepanakert Pedagogical Institute to Mikhail Gorbachev, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. February 3, 1988



launch a mass movement for secession of the NKAO from Azerbaijan and convinced those activists of an allegedly imminent transfer of the region to Armenia.

As soon as Abel Aganbegian's remarks became known in Azerbaijan, local intellectuals, university faculty members and scholars at the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR called on the CPSU Central Committee to condemn the statement made by the General Secretary's aide. They cried foul over Aganbegian's irresponsible statement aimed at inciting inter-ethnic rift as well as diverting public attention from core issues pertaining to the country's socio-economic development and undermining the policy of perestroika.

A reference note written for the CPSU Central Committee by Vladimir Kondratyev, a head of unit at the department for organizational activities, said Aganbegian's remarks on annexing Nagorno-Karabakh to the Armenian SSR, published in the French newspaper L'Humanite in November 1987, were lambasted in a total of 54 documents, including letters and cables,

received by the Central Committee from the Azerbaijan SSR. The statement, which contributed to inciting ethnic hatred, was condemned, along with the remarks concerning this issue made by Zori Balaian and Silva Kaputikian and circulated by Soviet media outlets.

Abel Aganbegian was summoned to the CPSU Central Committee over the mentioned statement and had a conversation with Valentin Grigoryev, who headed the Committee's Department for Science and Educational Institutions, as well as Viktor Ryabov, a deputy head of the department.²¹ During their meeting with the General Secretary's aide the CPSU officials stressed the inadmissibility of making unreasonable remarks on the subtle Nagorno-Karabakh issue.

Following the mentioned meeting and a scrutiny regarding all appeals received from Azerbaijan over Aganbegian's statement made in Paris, Sergei Slobodanyuk, the head of a unit at the CPSU Central Committee Department for Organizational and Party Work, issued a relevant note to the Central Committee and informed Vasily Konovalov, the second secretary

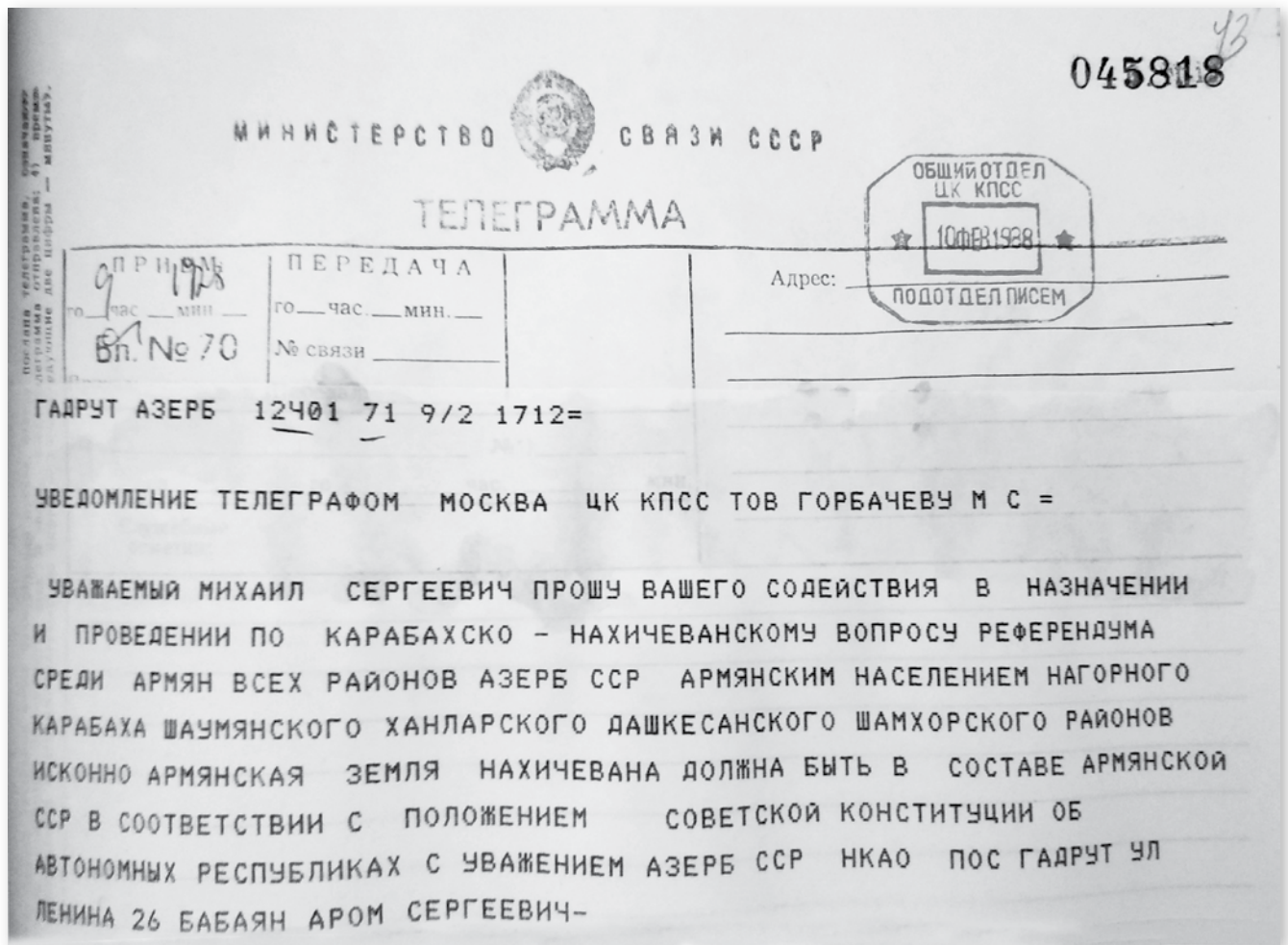
at the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan, about due measures taken in this regard. An important conclusion was made in the summarizing note that "Aganbegian had made ill-conceived utterances indeed".²²

Zori Balaian and Silva Kaputikian also had to communicate with the CPSU Central Committee due to their provocative publications and speeches inciting inter-ethnic strife. They had a conversation with Yuri Sklyarov, the head of the committee's Propaganda Department.²³

amid the ongoing policy of glasnost and their hardline actions were not taken seriously. Thus, the disaster over Karabakh was caused in particular by this formalism-based attitude of the CPSU Central Committee and its Politburo in addressing extremely complicated ethnic issues.

Overall, a conclusion may be made that the impudent smear campaign of Igor Muradian and Zare Melik-Shahnazarian, his associate, which was aimed at arraigining Heydar Aliyev, had failed. It would have been

One of the numerous appeals from Nagorno-Karabakh to the Central Committee of the CPSU orchestrated by activists of the Miatsum movement, demanding annexation of "ancestral Armenian lands" to Armenia. February 10, 1988



However, a further course of developments concerning Nagorno-Karabakh showed that those explanatory conversations conducted by Soviet officials with the ideologists and organizers of the "miatsum" movement were merely formal and inefficient. The nationalist statements made by representatives of the Armenian intelligentsia were considered by Moscow as quite normal

definitely unwise to expect any significant outcome of their slanderous activities. The campaign had been conceived by Armenian nationalists as a preparatory phase of the Karabakh movement aimed at removing Heydar Aliyev from the senior USSR leadership to clear the main obstacle that stood in the way of Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast's secession from Azerbaijan and its

transfer to the Armenian SSR. Admittedly, the dismissal of Heydar Aliyev from the CPSU Central Committee's Politburo in October 1987 provided suitable conditions for the launching of the "miatsum" mass movement masterminded by the nationalists beforehand.

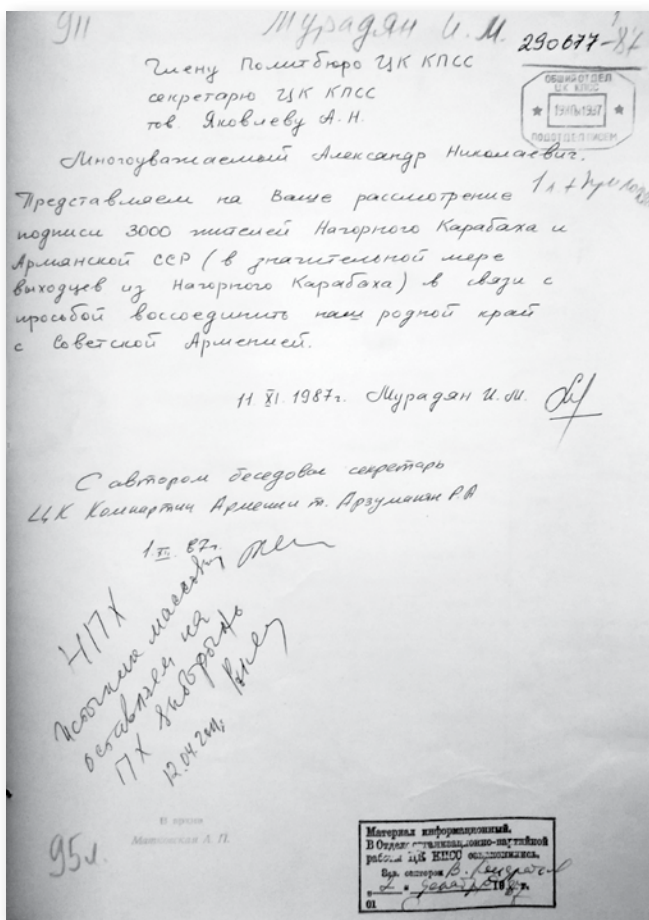
Summing up the results of the dirty campaign of Igor Muradian and his associate Zara Melik-Shahnazarian to bring Heydar Aliyev to court, we can confidently state the failure of their absurd venture. It was naive to expect any serious result from their slanderous activities. This campaign was conceived by Armenian nationalists as a preparatory stage of the "Miatsum" movement. In their opinion, the removal of Heydar Aliyev from the top leadership of the USSR should have cleared the way for the process of annexation of Nagorno-Karabakh to the Armenian SSR. At the same time, it should be stated that the removal of Heydar Aliyev from the Politburo of the CPSU

Central Committee in October 1987, the main initiator of which was undoubtedly the liberal reform wing of the Politburo of the CPSU Central Committee, coincided with the campaign of Igor Muradian. Undoubtedly, it created the necessary conditions for the launch by the Armenian nationalists of the long-prepared adventurist movement "Miatsum", which eventually turned into a tragedy not only for the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh, but also for the Armenians as a whole.

Nevertheless, neither the dirty campaign of Igor Muradian and Zare Melik-Shahnazarian, nor the removal from the highest echelon of power of the Soviet Union did not break Heydar Aliyev. Since he turned out to be much stronger than all his enemies and detractors. ❁

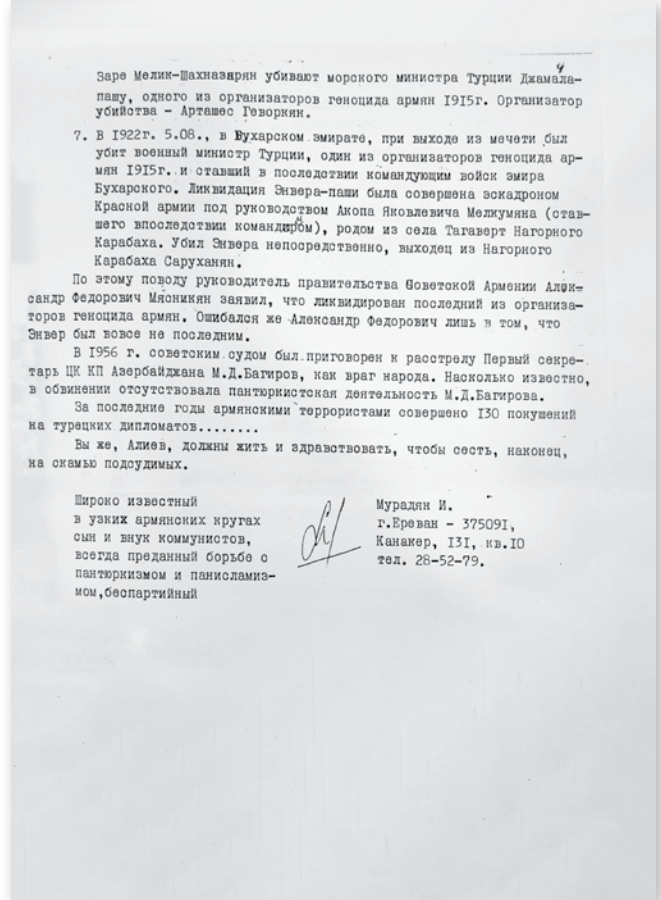
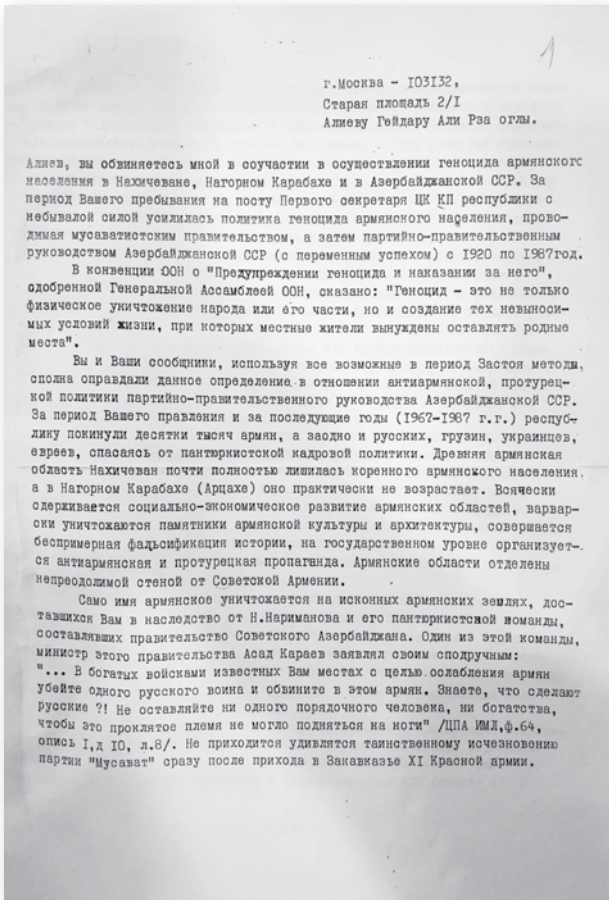
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First and last pages of Igor Muradian's letter to Heydar Aliyev. September, 1987



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