



By Nizami JAFAROV,
Academician

Mission of the First Turkological Congress



The First Turkological Congress held in Baku from February 26 to March 6, 1926, demonstrated that the Turkic peoples had embarked on a new path of social, political and cultural development. In addition, it also showed that Turkology as a science should be at the forefront of this development. Although general theoretical considerations were put forward in the reports and speeches of the great scientists, academicians and professors participating in this magnificent international forum of the Turkic world, it was completely clear to all the Congress representatives that the goal was not

to start a scientific discussion. The elder of the Congress, Samadagha Aghamalioglu, also emphasized the situation in his opening speech:

"It seems to me that no scientific congress has ever attracted so much attention from the broad working masses. Of course, all congresses were accompanied by the attention of the scientific world and, to some extent, the world of intellectuals. But this is the first time in history that we have come across such a congress with such magnificent attention from the masses of the people, and this shows how vital the issues considered and resolved at the congress are in practical terms for the Turkic-Tatar peoples" (5, p. 8).

The main reason for organizing the congress in Soviet Azerbaijan was that Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, had a developed Turkological scientific environment that was incomparable to other Turkic republics. Bekir Chobanzadeh of the Crimean Tatars, Aziz Gubaydullin of the Kazan Tatars, Khalid Said Khojayevev of the Uzbeks, Nikolay Ivanovich Ashmarin of the Chuvash, and Artur Zifeld-Simumyagi of the Estonians worked in Baku, bringing a general Turkological scale to that environment. Another reason was that Azerbaijan was the "gateway to the East", so every event that took place here was visible at least in Iran and Turkey, and attracted the attention of the peoples of the East as a whole (3, pp. 201-203).

The materials of the Congress reflected in the special Russian-language "Stenographic Report" (Baku, 1926) give reason to say that representatives of the Turkic peoples did not hesitate to act quite proudly, even to a certain extent arrogantly in their speeches at the meetings, and taking advantage of the freedom granted by the October Revolution, sharply criticized the colonial policy of Russian tsarism, creating the impression that the Turkic peoples no longer intended to fall under the influence of any colonial power.

The role of the First Turkological Congress in the struggle for cultural equality of the peoples that were part of the Soviet Union was of utmost importance because it provided the broad masses of the Turkic people with the opportunity to seek ways to acquire a perfect alphabet, orthography, terminology, and literary language. Regardless of whether the Congress (and the Turkic intellectuals who participated in it) took on any ideological commitment in word (or deed) or not, the recognition of this opportunity itself was a historic event of paramount importance.

There have been attempts to reduce the historic significance of the First Turkological Congress or even to completely eliminate it, and the main motive behind

them was the holding of such a magnificent scientific and practical forum precisely under the ideological leadership of the Soviet Union. Indeed, the Congress was designed directly in Moscow, the capital of the Soviet Union, and was carried out with the control (and participation) of Soviet state and government bodies. This would not have been possible otherwise... However, one thing must not be forgotten: the holding of a Turkological Congress was a necessity arising from the public and political demands of the time. The national liberation struggle of the Turkic peoples, which began at the end of the 19th century and reached a point of no return at the beginning of the 20th century, could not remain unanswered. Therefore, the Soviet Union, which guaranteed the rights of peoples to determine their own destinies, had to fulfill this obligation to a greater or lesser extent. Therefore, the holding of the First Turkological Congress, first of all, arose from the desires of those peoples represented by the intellectuals of the Turkic peoples (4, p. 360). Secondly, the new state that had entered the historical scene was compelled not only to prevent these legitimate aspirations, but, on the contrary, at least to defend them for the sake of its own interests. Of course, it was also quite natural that the relationship between Turkic peoples

and, in general, Moscow (the Soviet government) was of a somewhat "diplomatic" nature as both sides were guided by certain interests: Moscow's main goal was to rule the Turkic peoples according to the principles of the Soviet socialist (communist) regime, and the objective of Turkic peoples was to achieve cultural development. These interests were almost mutually exclusive, especially in the early years. However, as the communist movement conceived as a universal project declined, serious distrust began to emerge between Moscow and the Turkic peoples: the Turkic peoples accused Moscow of restricting their independence, and Moscow accused the peoples under its rule of nationalism. The roots of such accusations went beyond the boundaries of the new system (socialism) and went back to the era of tsarism, reviving the notions of a "prison of peoples".

A cursory acquaintance with the transcript of the First Turkological Congress clearly shows that the intellectuals of the Turkic peoples, while unhesitatingly and extremely sharply criticizing the colonial policy of Russian tsarism, were confident that they would achieve great successes in terms of both socio-economic and cultural spheres by following the path opened by the October Revolution. In this mission, they relied only on themselves, not on the help of any other people.



Participants of the first Turkological congress

A group of foreign delegates of the congress

Thus, the attempt to describe the Congress a “product” of the Soviet government (and ideology) and overshadow its historic significance for the Turkic peoples from this point of view is fundamentally wrong. If such a thing had happened, the government would have continued the work it had “finished”, and would have held the second, third, etc. congresses in succession. However, not only were the subsequent congresses not held (although the place and time of the Second Congress were also announced at the First Congress - it was to be held in Samarkand two years later), but even the published documents of the First were thrown into the corner of the archives, while its ideas, if I may say so, began to be applied anonymously. Apparently, at the next stage of the “development” of the Soviet ideology (and national policy), it was decided to solve the cultural problems of the Turkic peoples not jointly, but separately - as problems of different peoples.

Those who do not understand the importance of the First Turkological Congress in the history of the Turkic world (and Turkism!) say that the Congress was held specifically by the State Security bodies of the USSR, supposedly with the aim of exposing the pan-Turkists and then gradually eliminating them. Of course, such an idea is an impression derived from the role of the

NKVD in the Soviet system of power. Control over the Congress was generally in the hands of Soviet authorities, so the security bodies could only be entrusted with



(from left to right) M. f. Kopruluzadeh, A. Huseynzadeh and Salman Mumtaz



doing the “black” work of it (for example, monitoring who was doing what). The main task facing the authorities was to hold the Congress at a high scientific and ideological level and demonstrate to the whole world how democratic, humane and fundamental the national question was being implemented in the Soviet Union and in the Soviet society that was building socialism. Therefore, the country’s most prominent Turkologists, linguists, historians and ethnographers were involved in the work of the Congress, and experts from abroad were also invited.

However, the persecution of all surviving representatives of the First Turkological Congress about ten years later shows that the attitude towards the national issue in the USSR in the 1920s was sharply different from that in the early 1930s. Gradually, political and ideological antipathy arose not only towards Turks, but even towards the word “Turkic”, and one of the reasons for this was probably the almost complete breakdown of friendly relations between the only independent Turkic

state – Turkey – and the USSR, starting from the early 1930s (2, p. 212).

Of course, the holding of the First Turkological Congress and a certain part of the decisions made there were due to the internal needs of Soviet authorities. However, the idea that the Soviet authorities in 1926 had planned the repressions that would take place in the 1930s is in no way justified.

The First Turkological Congress was a fairly sincere, democratic and confrontational meeting of different positions held in the early years of the Soviet Union, the study of its transcripts of which began mainly after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The services of Professor Adil Babayev in this work are truly important, extensive, and worthy of all kinds of appreciation (see: 1). At the same time, qualitatively new challenges that have emerged over time (and as integration in the Turkic space has become even stronger!) require a deeper study of the Congress materials. Of course, such a magnificent (and authoritative) forum as the First

Participants of the first Turkological congress

Turkological Congress can be a subject of controversy from one side or another, but it would not be fair to dismiss it as a Soviet conjuncture, a NKVD "game".

The key issue facing the Congress was not to create, develop and establish Turkology or Turkic studies as a science on the correct methodological foundations. The prominent scientists in this field - linguists, literary critics, historians, art critics, etc., did not pursue the goal of providing information about their new research. The goal was to find ways to involve the Turkic peoples in modern cultural development. The reports of such great scientists as V. V. Bartold, B. V. Chobanzadeh, N. N. Poppe, L. V. Scherba, S. Y. Malov, A. N. Samoylovich, M. F. Koprulu, S. F. Oldenburg and others on the history of Turkic languages, literature and culture also attracted the attention of the Congress only as scientific and theoretical foundations of practical proposals.

Although the first fundamental forum of the Turkic peoples had initially been planned, the second, third, etc. were never held. Despite all this, the first forum fulfilled its mission adequately. 🌟

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