

## **REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN (1918-1920)**

### ***Declaration of Independence***

After Azerbaijan was divided between the Russian and Persian Empires in 1813 and 1828, the subsequent period saw the development of enlightenment and national consciousness, the national movement, begun by intellectuals, and the path to state independence. None of this was straightforward. The path was strewn with the sacrifice of thousands of people, with imprisonment and exile from which no-one returned, and other sufferings. The opportunity to achieve independence arose after the overthrow of Tsarism during the February Revolution and the formation of the Provisional Government in 1917. The seizure of power by the Bolsheviks, the overthrow of the Provisional Government, the withdrawal from the war and the peace agreements changed the situation in the South Caucasus totally.

As the deputies elected to the All-Russian Constituent Assembly could not begin their work in the capital, the assembly was dissolved and on 23 February 1918 the Caucasian deputies formed the Seim (Parliament) of the Trans-Caucasus in Tbilisi. The Azerbaijani faction consisted of 44 persons. On 22 April in the same year the Seim declared the independence of the South Caucasus and formed the Trans-Caucasus Democratic Federative Republic. But as the result of internal disagreements, the Georgians left the Seim and declared their independence. On 27 May the Azerbaijani faction held a separate meeting and decided to declare independence. The faction declared itself the National Council of Azerbaijan. Mammad Amin Rasulzadeh, who was participating in negotiations between the Ottomans and the Trans-Caucasus in Batumi at this time, was elected in absentia chairman of the National Council. The National Council meeting on 28 May adopted the Declaration of Independence of Azerbaijan:

- From now on Azerbaijan is a fully sovereign state; it consists of the south and east Trans-Caucasus under the authority of the Azerbaijani people.
- The type of government of the independent state of Azerbaijan is a democratic republic. The Azerbaijan Democratic Republic intends to establish friendly relations with all nations, especially with the neighboring nations and states.

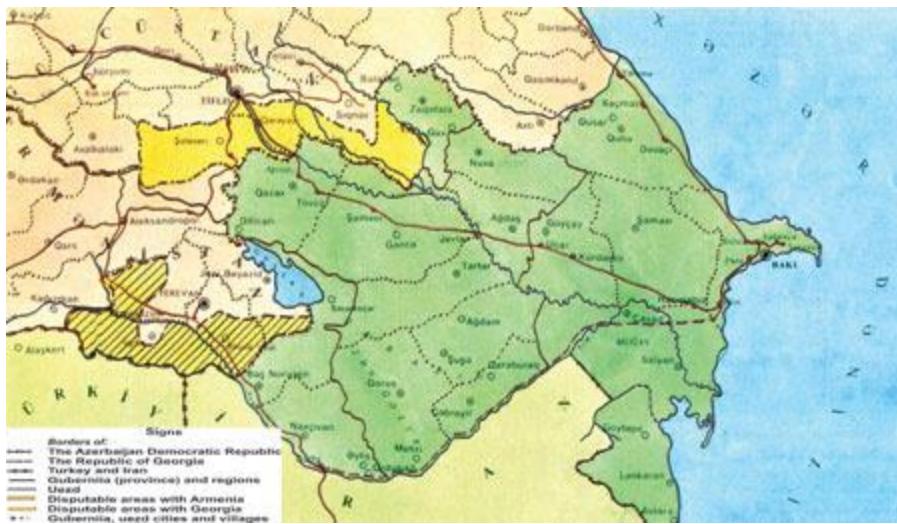
- The Azerbaijan Democratic Republic ensures all citizens living within its borders full civil and political rights, regardless of ethnic origin, religion, class, profession or gender.
- The Azerbaijan Democratic Republic creates broad opportunities for the independent development of all nationalities living in its territory.
- Until the Constituent Assembly is convened, the supreme authority in Azerbaijan is vested in the National Council, elected by the Azerbaijani nation, and the provisional government, which is responsible to the National Council.

### ***Territory and Boundaries***

The territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan was first mentioned in the Declaration of Independence. The document identifies its territory in the geography of “the south and east Trans-Caucasus”. The memorandum submitted by the Azerbaijani delegation to the Paris Peace Conference in November 1918 sets out the territory of the Republic as follows: Baku Province (Baku district, Javad district, Goychay district, Shamakhi district, Quba district, Lankaran district together with the Baku Circle); Yelizavetpol (Ganja) Province (Ganja district, Javanshir district, Nukha district, Arash district, Shusha district, Karyagi [Jabrayil] district, Zangezur district, Qazakh district [one-third of these territories which consisted of mountainous areas, were disputed between Azerbaijan and Armenia]); Irevan Province (Nakhchivan district, Sharur-Daralayaz district, Surmeli district, New Bayazid district, a part of Echmiadzin and Alexandropol districts); Tbilisi Province (Borchali district, a part of Tbilisi and Signakh districts); Zagatala region, Dagestan Province (a part of the Kur and Samur areas, also Derbent city and its suburbs together with part of Gaytar-Tabasaran Province). The borders in the north were determined by the River Samur and the Greater Caucasus range. The border with Georgia in the west was the same as the present borders of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The only discrepancy was the boundary between Borchali and Qazakh regions; this passed through Poylu. The border with Armenia went down to Goycha Lake in the south and, passing through the middle of the lake, went as far as the Turkish border, west of Bash Norashen, including Bazarkecher and Zangezur.

Only 8,700 km<sup>2</sup> of the land where Azerbaijanis were living was disputed (Borchali, Garayazi and Signakh districts). The corresponding areas (7,900 km<sup>2</sup>) of Irevan, Echmiadzin, Surmeli and New Bayazid districts, which were subordinate to Armenia, were disputed by the government of Azerbaijan. The territory of the

republic was 113,900 km<sup>2</sup> of which 97,300 thousand km<sup>2</sup> were undisputed and 16,600 km<sup>2</sup> disputed. The present territory of Azerbaijan is 86,600 km<sup>2</sup>.



The map of the Republic of Azerbaijan issued in Russian in 1920 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the RA. During the Soviet period, this map was hidden in secret archives, so Azerbaijani historians were not able to learn about the territorial boundaries of the RA (1918-1920). After independence in 1991, Azerbaijan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs published this map.

### ***Population***

The document submitted to the Paris Peace Conference by the government of Azerbaijan showed that the population of the South Caucasus was 8,081,668 of which 4,617,671 lived in Azerbaijan. A total of 75.4 per cent, or 3,481,889 of the Azerbaijani population, were Azerbaijanis. The other ethnic groups had appeared as the result of the resettlement policies of Tsarism in different periods of history. Overall, 43.1 per cent of the population in the South Caucasus were Muslims.

### ***Azerbaijan Parliament***

The Republic of Azerbaijan was the first parliamentary republic in the East. The law on the formation of the Azerbaijan Parliament was adopted on 19 November 1918. The National Council, which consisted of 44 Azerbaijanis, stopped its work in Ganja on 17 June 1918 and resumed work under the chairmanship of Mammad Amin Rasulzadeh. The National Council decided to form a Parliament of 120 people. The Parliament was to consist of 80 Azerbaijanis and representatives of other nations according to their proportion in the population. The last assembly of the Parliament was held on 27 April 1920. The Parliament held 155 meetings, ten of them while the

National Council was still operating from 27 May to 19 November 1918, and the other 145 from 7 December 1918 till 27 April 1920. The Parliament discussed more than 270 draft laws, 230 of which were adopted. There were 11 factions in Parliament. The chairman of Parliament was Alimardan bey Topchubashov, and his deputies were Hasan bey Agayev and Mammadyusif Jafarov.

### ***Azerbaijan Government***

Executive power was held by the government. The first prime minister was Fatali khan Khoyski. The government was based in Tbilisi from 28 May to 16 June 1918, in Ganja from 16 June to 17 September 1918 and in Baku from 17 September 1918 to 28 April 1920. The head of the first, second and third cabinets was Fatali khan Khoyski, and of the fourth and fifth cabinets was Nasib bey Yusifbeyli.

### ***Internal Policy***

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The National Army was built in a short time. Azerbaijani Turkic was declared the state language. Baku State University was founded, schools, libraries and clubs were opened and a number of newspapers were published.

Armenia sensing that Russian Bolshevik power was not to recognize Azerbaijan's independence and would secure its support from Russia started military campaign in Karabakh fighting Azerbaijani army that had to leave the strategic positions around Baku to struggle for the territorial integrity of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The fighting increased in intensity by February 1920 and martial law was introduced in Karabakh, which was enforced by the newly formed National Army, led by general Samadbey Mehmandarov...

### ***Foreign Policy***

The main aim of the foreign policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan was the promoting of the newly established state. The new government, therefore, conducted an active foreign policy from its inception. Information was sent to a number of European countries about the establishment of the new state. The government signed a friendship treaty with the Ottoman Empire in Batumi. The first step in foreign policy

was to send a delegation, consisting of Mammad Emin Rasulzadeh and Aslan Saikurdschi, to the Istanbul Conference, which was intended to be held between the Allied Powers (or the Entente Powers. The main allies were the French Third Republic, Imperial Russia, the British Empire, Italy and the United States.) and the South Caucasus republics. Alimardan bey Topchubashov was sent to Istanbul to create diplomatic relations with European countries.

After Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire, and Bulgaria) were defeated in World War I, the Allies' army came to Baku, led by Gen W.M. Thomson, on 17 November 1918. Despite the activity of the Armenian and Russian national councils against Azerbaijan, once Gen Thomson had familiarized himself with the situation, he declared that he respected highly the government of Azerbaijan Army. Around 1919 and its prime minister and that its government would be the only legal power in the country until the formation of the new coalition government.

One of the first steps of Azerbaijan was to determine the makeup of the delegation to the Paris Peace Conference.

### ***Recognition by Allies***

A delegation from Azerbaijan attended the Paris Peace Conference, 1919. Upon its arrival, the Azerbaijani delegation addressed a note to US President Woodrow Wilson, making the following requests:

1. That the independence of Azerbaijan be recognized;
  2. That Wilsonian principles be applied to Azerbaijan;
  3. That the Azerbaijani delegation be admitted to the Paris Peace Conference;
  4. That Azerbaijan be admitted to the League of Nations, 5. That the United States War Department extend military help to Azerbaijan;
- and 6. That diplomatic relations be established between the United States of America and the Republic of Azerbaijan.

President Wilson granted the delegation an audience. As the Azerbaijani delegation reported to its Government, Wilson had stated that the Conference did not want to partition the world into small pieces. Wilson advised Azerbaijan that it would be better for them to develop a spirit of confederation, and that such a confederation of all the peoples of Transcaucasia could receive the protection of some Power on the

basis of a mandate granted by the League of Nations. The Azerbaijani question, Wilson concluded, could not be solved prior to the general settlement of the Russian question. Nevertheless, on behalf of his government he stated that cooperation with Azerbaijan would be effective.

The delegation, led by Alimardan bey Topchubashov, left for Paris after holding a number of meetings with the representatives of different countries in Istanbul. The Azerbaijan issue was discussed at the Council of Allied Powers on 2 May 1919 for the first time. The delegation of Azerbaijan held several meetings. On 23 May a member of the British delegation, L. Mallet, met Topchubashov and they discussed political, military and economic issues. On 28 May Topchubashov met a member of the US delegation, Henry Morgenthau, during the first half of the day and President Woodrow Wilson during the second half. The memorandum of Azerbaijan was presented to the president of the USA.

In late June the British government adopted a decision on the withdrawal of troops from Azerbaijan. It was not possible to implement the Italian mandate in Azerbaijan in place of the British one. At the suggestion of the British foreign secretary, Lord Curzon, the independence of Azerbaijan was known de-facto in the assembly of the Supreme Council of the Paris Peace Conference on 11 January 1920. Following this, some countries opened their representative offices in Baku and some established diplomatic relations with Azerbaijan.

### *Fall of the Republic of Azerbaijan*

The very fact of the independent Azerbaijan was a sensitive strike for Soviet Russia, and it caused heavy consequences during the economic warfare. Moscow's intention to regain control of the vitally necessary region was strong and coherent, and on its way the Soviet government was ready to accept any concession.

In 1918 and 1919 Soviet Russia rejected all attempts made by the RA to establish diplomatic relations between the two. 1920 was marked by a diplomatic dispatch which started with a radiogram sent by Minister of Foreign Affairs Georgy Chicherin, which said: "The government of the Russian Socialist Federative Republic reverts to Azerbaijan with an initiative to immediately launch talks with the Soviet government aiming at acceleration and finishing of the White army bodies in the South of Russia". In his response, Fatali Khan Khoyski, the head of the Azerbaijan government, insisted on non-interference in the internal affairs of the country.

In 1920 the Soviet government established a strong relationship with the new Turkish government headed by Mustafa Kemal. The Soviets were ready to supply Turkey with armaments in exchange for Turkish military support in Azerbaijan. Turkey particularly suggested using military bodies formed in Dagestan to occupy Baku and to avoid exploding its petrol storage reservoirs. Turkish support played an important role and attracted to the Bolsheviks the sympathies of the Muslim population in Azerbaijan.

By March 1920, it was obvious that the economic and political situation in the RA had reached a crucial point. In accordance with the analysis made by the Bolsheviks the RA government allegedly received weak support from the people and this should have provided success to the operation.

Vladimir Lenin said that the invasion was justified by the fact that Soviet Russia could not survive without Baku oil.

After a major political crisis, the Fifth Cabinet of Ministers of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic resigned on April 1, 1920. In the beginning of April 1920 the Russian XI Red Army reached the border of Azerbaijan and prepared to attack. The official date of the operation is considered April 25, 1920, when the Azerbaijan Communist Party transformed the party's cells into military bodies, which were to take part in the attack. On April 27, 1920, the Provisional Revolutionary Committee with Nariman Narimanov as chairman was established and issued the ADR Government an ultimatum. The labor military detachments managed to occupy oilfields, state offices, post offices. Police regiments defected to the rebels. To avoid bloodshed, the deputies complied with the demand and the ADR officially ceased to exist on April 28, 1920, giving way to the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic (Azerbaijan SSR) as its successor state.

The Red Army, which entered Baku by April 30, 1920, met very little resistance in Baku from Azerbaijani forces, which were tied up on the Karabakh front. The first Communist government of Azerbaijan consisted almost entirely of native Azerbaijanis from the left factions of the Hummat and Adalat parties.

In May 1920, there was a major uprising against the occupying Russian XI Army in Ganja, intent on restoring Musavatists in power. The uprising was crushed by government troops by May 31. Leaders of the ADR either fled to the Democratic republic of Georgia, Turkey and Iran, or were captured by the Bolsheviks and executed, including Gen. Selimov, Gen. Sulkevich, Gen. Agalarov: a total of over 20 generals were assassinated by Armenian militants like Fatali Khan Khoyski and

Behbudagha Javanshir. Most students and citizens travelling abroad remained in those countries, never to return. Other prominent RA military figures like former Minister of Defense General Samedbey Mehmandarov and deputy defense minister General Ali-Agha Shikhlinski (who was called "the God of Artillery" ) were at first arrested, but then released two months later thanks to efforts of Nariman Narimanov. Gen. Mehmandarov and Gen. Shikhlinsky spent their last years teaching in the Azerbaijan SSR military school.

In the end, the Azerbaijanis did not surrender their brief independence of 1918-20 quickly or easily. As many as 20,000 died resisting what was effectively a Russian reconquest.

Parliament came to a conclusion to pass the authority to the Communist Party under the following conditions:

1. Full independence of Azerbaijan under Soviet power will be maintained.
2. The government formed by the Communist Party of Azerbaijan will have provisional authority.
3. The final system of government in Azerbaijan will be determined without any outside pressure, by the supreme legislative organ of Azerbaijan, the Soviet of Azerbaijani Workers, Peasants, and Soldiers.
4. All functionaries of the governmental agencies will retain their posts and only persons holding positions of responsibility will be replaced.
5. The newly formed provisional Communist government guarantees the life and property of the members of the present government and parliament.
6. It will take measures to prevent the entry of the Red Army under battle conditions.
7. The new government will resist, using strong measures and all the means at its disposal, all outside forces, from whatever quarter, aiming at the suppression of Azerbaijani independence.

Thus, the Republic of Azerbaijan stopped its existence on the 28th of April, 1920. The occupation of Azerbaijan had economic reasons, as well as political. The most prominent reason for the occupation was Azerbaijani oil, that would help the Soviets to realize their plans in expanding their territories.

According to the Russian historian A.B. Shirokorad, the Soviet invasion of Azerbaijan was carried out using a standard Bolshevik template: a local

revolutionary committee starts real or "virtual" worker riots and requests support from the Red Army. This scheme was used also decades later, during the Soviet invasions in Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968). On 28 April 1920, the Baku Revolutionary Committee filed a formal request for help with the Soviet Russian Government. But a day before, the 11th Red Army, including the 26th, 28th and 32nd rifle divisions and 2nd mounted corps (over 30,000 soldiers), already invaded the territory of Azerbaijan.

Despite its two year existence, the multiparty Azerbaijani parliamentary republic and the coalition governments managed to achieve a number of accomplishments on nation- and state-building, education, creation of an army, independent financial and economic systems, international recognition of the Republic of Azerbaijan, established diplomatic relations with a number of states, prepared Constitution of its secular state guaranteeing equal rights for all. This laid an important foundation for the re-establishment of the national independent state of Azerbaijanis in 1991.