

## MUSLIM MOVEMENTS AND INTERETHNIC PROCESSES IN THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA IN 1918–1920

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### Abstract

The year 1917 was crucial for the peoples of Transcaucasia, who, living within the Russian Empire, seemed to have reconciled themselves to the situation until the proclamation of their own statehood, and each sought a way out of the situation in their own way. Since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, dense masses of Muslim population lived in the Yerevan province and adjacent regions, such as Elizavetpol (Gandzak) and other areas. In this situation, due to the revolutionary conditions in Russia, bloody and uncompromising inter-ethnic conflicts broke out; the relative tranquility of general coexistence was violated, and an atmosphere of distrust and hostility took place between nations and ethnic groups. The collapse of the Russian Empire served as a new impetus for extremely dangerous developments, and the national consultations convened with the participation of Turkish and Armenian national-political figures ended fruitlessly. This was a consequence not only of the region's motley national composition but also of the conflicting and irreconcilable interests of various forces that could not be overcome. The anarchy contributed to the deepening of the chaos, as a result of which the undertaken reforms were not implemented, promises remained unfulfilled, and the Tsarist authorities themselves incited this conflict, often adopting the role of an observer while anticipating the desired scenario. Occupying large territories, the Muslim population obstructed the establishment of normal communication between Armenian regions in every way. In particular, the road between Yerevan and Daralagyaz passed through Muslim villages, which was the reason for frequent attacks and murders of Armenians on the Daralagyaz roads. The situation was the same in the Davalu region, which, being cut off from Gharakhay (or Karabakh), could not transport any goods beyond. Under such conditions, to assist in opening the roads, the Government of the Republic of Armenia (RA) was forced to appeal for help to the Allied British Command. The years 1918-1920 were marked by anti-state actions by Muslims living in the territory of the RA. Refusing to accept the authority of the RA, they constantly kept the

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government in turmoil. Turkey and Azerbaijan stood behind the rebellious regions, supplying weapons and financing the insurgents. The RA had both successes and failures in the fight against the rebellious regions.

**Keywords:** Transcaucasia, inter-ethnic conflicts, Muslims, Republic of Armenia, Russian Civil War

### Introduction

During the Russian revolutions (1905-1907, 1917), this supposed tranquility in the Russian Empire was frequently disrupted by inter-ethnic conflicts, which reached their peak during the 1905-1907 revolution. Under these conditions, criminal acts became frequent, committed by gangs united along ethnic lines, especially the Kurdish-Tatar groups, which became common in various provinces (Ganja, Qazakh, Jivanshir, Shusha, Zangezur, and Karyagino districts of Ganja province, and Akhalkalaki and Borchalu districts of Tiflis province), further exacerbating the food supplies, which was compounded by the increasing attacks of Muslim gangs on Armenians in the autumn of 1917.

It also turned out that there were no undisputed Armenian territories in Transcaucasia, even within the Yerevan province, including even the heavily Armenian-populated Akhalkalaki, Borchalu, and Zangezur, which sharply aggravated inter-ethnic relations. The national problems inherited from Tsarism began to play their destructive role. This was particularly vividly expressed during the so-called *zemstvo* discussions, where the overt and aggressive disagreement of the Georgian-Azerbaijani circles towards Armenians became sharp, resulting in the categorical rejection of Armenian figures' proposals to establish *zemstvos* or autonomies based on national-territorial features. This would have required changing the former administrative borders, for example, removing the Akhalkalaki district from Tiflis province and Lori from Borchalu district, which was a result of Tsarist administrative discriminatory policy. The same applied to the much more problematic Karabakh and Zangezur. Turkish-Tatar-Azerbaijani agents in the Muslim-populated regions of Yerevan province organized the population, created combat groups, engaged in subversive activities, destroyed railways and telegraph lines, and carried out ambushes on separate Russian military units.

S. Vratsian aptly noted regarding this: "An anxious, nervous state prevailed everywhere. The dark hand—that is, Turkey—acted unrestrainedly, and no effort, governmental or public, could curb or prevent the Muslim movements. They gradually expanded, acquired a persistent character, and by the end of 1917 had become the most catastrophic phenomenon of Caucasian life".<sup>1</sup> The Czech historian Miroslav Hroch also observed this well, noting that the existence of serious social conflict along ethnic or national lines was a decisive factor in the dissemination of national ideologies and

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<sup>1</sup> Vratsian 1993: 72.

their transformation into mass movements, which was very pronounced in the Caucasus during 1905-1909 and 1917-1921, including the bloody Armenian-Tatar clashes.<sup>2</sup> The ethnic clashes became an impetus for the consolidation of the Tatar-Azerbaijani population, which had previously demonstrated a relatively restrained demeanor, against the Armenian population, which was encircled by a dense Tatar mass in almost all regions of Transcaucasia, even in the territory of the future Republic of Armenia.

In this regard, the Azerbaijani author A. Balaev also notes that the Armenian-Azerbaijani clashes during that period became the main impetus for the consolidation of "Azerbaijanis" and had a significant impact on the nation-building processes in "Azerbaijan".<sup>3</sup> B. Rezvani, a researcher of ethnic issues from the University of Amsterdam, presents the ethno-political relations at the beginning of the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century quite uniquely, concluding that as a result of social and economic disparities, Armenians were disliked by their neighbors in the South Caucasus. Inter-ethnic clashes between Armenians and Muslims in the South Caucasus became routine, even before the First World War, the Armenian Genocide, and the mass migration of Armenian refugees from the Ottoman Empire. He notes that these clashes first erupted after the Russian Revolution of 1905, when various parts of the Russian Empire were dragged into widespread unrest, which soon turned into purely ethnic and religious conflicts, in which material gain also played an important role. According to B. Rezvani, they were clearly expressed in Nakhichevan, where Armenians were not as wealthy as the Muslim elite, but organized Muslim gangs took advantage of the chaos to kill and loot Armenians. The violence spread throughout Transcaucasia, and overall, 3,100 to 10,000 people were killed as a result of the Armenian-Tatar violence in the South Caucasus.<sup>4</sup>

As a result of all this, the undertaken reforms were not implemented, promises remained unfulfilled, and the national forces ended up at opposite poles. According to F. Shafiyev's conclusion, the brutal clashes between Armenians and Azerbaijanis in 1905-1906 were the first in a series of incidents that occurred in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which later turned into a protracted, large-scale inter-ethnic conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan.<sup>5</sup> This circumstance, according to Azerbaijani authors<sup>6</sup>, and particularly N. Gozalova, disrupted the ethnic and territorial delimitation of the South Caucasus in 1918, as well as the economic and everyday structure of its population, which had been formed over centuries, thus creating sharp contradictions between the national states regarding future borders. She finds that this was the result of the mass resettlement of Armenians from Western Armenia and Iran into the Transcaucasian territories, which was encouraged by the Russian government and was an integral part of Tsarist colonial

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<sup>2</sup> See Shissler 2002: 11.

<sup>3</sup> Balaev 2012: 212.

<sup>4</sup> Rezvani 2013: 175.

<sup>5</sup> Shafiyev 2015: 199.

<sup>6</sup> Yavuz 2023: 20.

policy, aiming to change the region's demographic picture by increasing the proportion of Armenians in the population of the South Caucasus.<sup>7</sup>

However, this only partially reflected the reality, as the Tsarist authorities did not provide final solutions to the issues, but merely situational ones, conditioned by the balance of regional forces. According to Russian sources, the clashes were characterized as "Armenian-Tatar massacres" or "Armenian-Muslim massacres"<sup>8</sup>, the reasons for which Azerbaijani authors see in the Russian colonial policy that caused uneven development in different ethnic communities in the South Caucasus.<sup>9</sup> Azerbaijani author F. Jabbarov practically concurs with the opinion expressed by Armenian author T. Vardanyan<sup>10</sup> that the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh is presented as an organic continuation of the Armenian-Turkish hostility from the 1890s to 1923 and the Armenian-Azerbaijani clashes of 1905-1906, as part of this conflict.<sup>11</sup>

### **A New Wave of Tension in Inter-ethnic Developments**

Under these conditions, extremist actions became frequent, committed by gangs united along ethnic lines, especially Kurdish groups, which became common in the Surmalu district and elsewhere, further exacerbating the food and security situation, which was compounded by the increasing attacks of Muslim gangs on Armenians in the autumn of 1917. The issue of creating the so-called *zemstvos* or autonomies based on the national-territorial principle inherited from Tsarism reached a deadlock<sup>12</sup>; it was sabotaged by the Tatar-Azerbaijani and Georgian leaders who found common interests.

According to the Polish researcher T. Swietochowski, inter-ethnic violence spread throughout Transcaucasia, as a result of which thousands of people perished in the South Caucasus due to the Armenian-Tatar clashes<sup>13</sup>, a view shared by the Turkish researcher E. Karakoç.<sup>14</sup> According to Swietochowski, the victims were mainly Muslims, although he later adds that Armenians also suffered significant losses: "In fact, all available evidence suggests that the Muslims, who were usually the aggressors, suffered greater losses than the Armenians, though not overwhelmingly."<sup>15</sup> According to T. Swietochowski, the fact that Muslims suffered greater losses than Armenians indicated the Armenians' higher level of organization and military superiority.<sup>16</sup> It is also

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<sup>7</sup> Gozalova 2019: 37, 39, 41-43.

<sup>8</sup> Shafiyev 2015: 199.

<sup>9</sup> Shafiyev 2015: 200.

<sup>10</sup> Vardanyan 2025.

<sup>11</sup> Dzhabbarov 2017: 55.

<sup>12</sup> Shahkhatunyan 1918.

<sup>13</sup> Hovannisian 1967: 264.

<sup>14</sup> Karakoç 2011: 1015.

<sup>15</sup> Swietochowski 1985: 41.

<sup>16</sup> Swietochowski 1985: 41. Swietochowski 1995: 69, 133.

worth noting that a large part of the Armenian armed forces had gained substantial combat experience on various fronts of World War I having served in the Volunteer units and the Armenian Legion and taken part in several key military operations. In case of proper organization, it was fully capable of defending itself against Muslim assaults.

### **The Russian Upheaval of 1917. The Self-Proclamation of Independent Caucasian Republics. A New Phase of Ethnic Clashes**

Inter-ethnic violence erupted again a decade later, during the First World War and the Russian Civil War (1917-1923), with severe consequences. It is not surprising that inter-ethnic violence in the South Caucasus has always emerged when the central authorities of the Russian Empire or later the Soviet Union were weak or absent, or simply when, due to various geopolitical reasons, processes of collapse occasionally occurred in the Russian Empire, which accompanied Russia throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

Such acts of violence took place in the period following the Russian Revolution of 1905, during the period of the First World War and the Russian Civil War, as well as during the period of *glasnost* and *perestroika* (“transparency, restructuring”) and the collapse of the Soviet Union<sup>17</sup>. In Azerbaijan and Armenia, respectively, the attitude of Armenians and Azerbaijanis grew into hatred, and conflict followed the hatred.<sup>18</sup>

However, the real turmoil arose immediately after the collapse of the Russian Empire in 1917, and for a short period—1918–1920—chaos reigned in the Transcaucasian region, and armed clashes erupted between Azerbaijanis and Armenians.<sup>19</sup> The Ukrainian historian Y. Pilipchuk believes that the prerequisites for ethnic conflicts in the South Caucasus were laid with the arrival of the Russian Empire in the South Caucasus, and by falsifying historical realities, he notes that the Romanov dynasty contributed to the resettlement of Armenians from Anatolia and Iran to the territory of the South Caucasus, considering Muslims to be an unfaithful population, not conscripting them into the army, and not involving them in the administration of the region. Y. Pilipchuk concludes that these very actions led to the start of inter-ethnic clashes between Azerbaijanis and Armenians in the provinces of Yerevan, Elizavetpol, Sharur-Nakhichevan, and Daralagyaz at the beginning of 1918.<sup>20</sup>

The Abkhaz political scientist E. Kavtaradze goes even further in falsifying historical facts, regarding the anti-Georgian-Azerbaijani policy of the First Republic’s political leadership. He finds that one of the first large-scale ethnic cleansing operations of Azerbaijanis from Transcaucasian territories by Armenian formations was carried out in the Yerevan province, writing that during the period from February 17-21, 1918, Armenian regular armed formations commanded by Colonel Pirumov, using artillery,

<sup>17</sup> Rezvani 2016: 175-176.

<sup>18</sup> Rezvani 2013: 14, 175.

<sup>19</sup> Yunusov 2002. 2.

<sup>20</sup> Pilipchuk 2021: 107, 109, 118, 137, 143.

razed 21 Azerbaijani villages in that province to the ground, and 197 Azerbaijani villages were looted and destroyed.<sup>21</sup>

In fact, the purpose of such historical falsification is to deny that, during this period of chaos in the Transcaucasus, efforts were made to incite anti-Armenian movements, undermine the rear of Armenian military units, and create a front against them, an attempt that ultimately failed. The newly formed Armenian forces succeeded in delivering crushing blows to the enemy, forcing it to halt the bandit raids on Armenian villages and the destruction of roads, railways, and bridges. This brought stability to Surmalu, Zangibasar (Masis), and Vedibasar (Aygavan), thereby refuting the above-mentioned false accusations of alleged Armenian actions aimed at ethnic cleansing.

On May 26, 1918, the fragile Transcaucasian Federation disintegrated, and Georgia was the first to proclaim its independence. After that, the question was raised: how best to focus attention on the national states in Transcaucasia (Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia) that had separated from the former Tsarist Russian Empire?<sup>22</sup> The proclamation of independence by Azerbaijan<sup>23</sup> and Armenia followed one after the other. Armenians went to this reluctantly<sup>24</sup>, which the first Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, Hovhannes Qajaznuni, considered as *de facto* captivity in the hands of Turkey (Tachkastan in the document – H.V.), battles with Georgia and Azerbaijan both outside and within the country's borders, the extreme collapse of the economy, famine, epidemic, the brutalization of morals, and general despair.<sup>25</sup>

And from that moment, Azerbaijan began to present accusations against Armenia, particularly accusing it of bellicose separatism, falsely claiming that Armenians had pretensions to Mughan, Zangezur, and Karabakh (Artsakh).<sup>26</sup> Azerbaijani author I. Niftaliyev, in this context, believes that the Azerbaijani people, who restored their state independence in May 1918 and at that time constituted almost half of the South Caucasus population, received a territory that did not at all correspond to its ethnic and historical borders. He states that in the territory of Western Azerbaijan (according to him, the former Irevan province), the Armenian state—the Ararat Republic—was the first in the South Caucasus to be created by the Dashnaks in May 1918, and this republic, not satisfied with the Azerbaijani lands already occupied, also claimed the territories of Karabakh, Zangezur, and Nakhichevan, which constituted the indigenous lands of Azerbaijan, and the majority of the population were Azerbaijanis.<sup>27</sup> According to Niftaliyev and authors in agreement with him, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaktsutyun/ARF), created in 1890, played a central role in the proclamation of the

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<sup>21</sup> Kavtaradze 2022: 36.

<sup>22</sup> Urushadze 2024.

<sup>23</sup> Harutyunyan 2025: 75-99.

<sup>24</sup> Suny 1994: 191.

<sup>25</sup> Qajaznuni 2023: 16.

<sup>26</sup> Gogitidze, Sabanadze 2019: p. 42.

<sup>27</sup> Niftaliyev 2010: 21, 110, 123, 132.

Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic in 1917–1918, and then the First Republic of Armenia, after the collapse of the Russian Empire.<sup>28</sup> But the creation of separate Georgian, Armenian, and Azerbaijani republics did not mean the end of inter-ethnic conflicts. The republics had competing claims over territories that, for historical or demographic reasons, they believed belonged to them. Georgia and Armenia entered a short-lived war for the border territories of Javakhk, Lori, and Borchalu.

According to the conclusion of Ch. Berglund, M. Dragojevich, and Th. Blauvelt, the outbreak of conflict prompted the Georgian authorities to take extreme measures against the peaceful Armenian population of Georgia—arresting Dashnak political figures in Tiflis, closing their newspapers, dismissing Armenian state employees, and even alienating merchants' property. Thus, in the opinion of the aforementioned authors, Armenians found themselves in a difficult situation in the Georgian state during 1918–1921, and the subsequent Soviet invasion did not alleviate their problems. The use of their native language by Armenians in Tiflis in daily life was relegated to the background; the majority attended Russian-language schools and learned Georgian through social interactions, and by the 1926 census, Georgians gradually gained a significant presence in Tiflis, and became the majority by the 1970 census. In Javakheti (Javakhq), Armenians adapted to a de facto isolated lifestyle from Georgians, and the presence of a Soviet military base in the region had a Russifying influence on the local Armenian population.<sup>29</sup> The Turkish military occupation of Transcaucasia continued until mid-November 1918. Soon Baku fell, and the Turkish army, accompanied by Azerbaijani fighters, took revenge on the Armenians. In addition to the war with the Ottoman Turks, Armenia fought wars with Azerbaijan over Nakhichevan, Zangezur, and Karabakh, and with Georgia over the Akhalkalaki and Lori regions, located in southern Georgia and northern Armenia.<sup>30</sup>

According to the Information Bureau of the RA diplomatic representation in Tiflis, based on data collected regarding only 18 districts of the Transcaucasian region, 393 Armenian villages, totaling 55,076 households, were destroyed during that period. Furthermore, the number of looted Armenian households in the regions of Alexandropol, İğdır, Ardvin, Nakhichevan, Nukha, Baku, Shamakhi, Guba, Derbent, Geokchay, and the areas near Baku reached about 100,000, as a result of which a population of more than 600,000 was deprived of means of subsistence<sup>31</sup>, (Nor Bayazet district, Gyokcha district, Novobayazetskiy, etc.: a district in the northeastern part of the Yerevan province, in the coastal region of Lake Sevan. It bordered Kazakh and Gandzak districts to the north, Jevanshir to the east, Sharur–Daralagyaz and Yerevan districts to the south, and the Ejmiatsin district of Yerevan to the west<sup>32</sup>) and the damage caused,

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Berglund, Dragojevich and Blauvelt 2021: 112–113.

<sup>30</sup> Rezvani 2013: 177.

<sup>31</sup> NAA, f. 278, c. 1, doc. 4, l. 41.

<sup>32</sup> Hakobyan et. al. 1998, 24.

according to 1919 data, amounted to about 8 billion rubles.<sup>33</sup> During the short period of Musavat rule—only in 1918-1919 in the Azerbaijani Democratic Republic—according to the testimony of the Baku newspaper “Komunist” on August 9, 1920, 120 Russian, 82 Armenian, and 110 Azerbaijani villages were fundamentally destroyed.<sup>34</sup>

In 1918-1920, inter-ethnic clashes and massacres were added to the horrors of war in Transcaucasia. The revolts organized and incited by Turkish and Azerbaijani agents among the Tatar (Azerbaijani) population of Armenia did not cease throughout the entire period of the republic's existence. And here, the Tatar-Azerbaijani side, supposedly to protect themselves from Armenian encroachments and demands, tied their hopes to the Ottoman state.<sup>35</sup> H. Adjarian noted this moment well: “Just at that time, the rebellion explodes even inside Armenia. West of Yerevan, from Mets Vedi to the Persian border, the Turks rebel and establish an independent government. The main stronghold of the rebellion was Böyük-Vedi (a village in the Yerevan district of the Yerevan province, now Vedi<sup>36</sup>), which the Armenians could not capture despite fighting for two months. On the other hand, the Turks (Ottomans) begin to encroach on the southern borders. Armenians reach all sides, curb the rebels, stop the Turks, and on the other hand, take care of internal order and the strengthening of the state.”<sup>37</sup>

### **Inter-ethnic Disputes Between the Republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan**

In 1918-1920, from the perspective of ensuring the territorial integrity and security of the Republic of Armenia (RA), the issue of those regions where there was a greater possibility of violating the rights of the Armenian population became particularly important, as a large number of Muslim inhabitants lived there who often did not maintain a law-abiding position towards the authorities. Thanks to joint measures by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and regular military units during the Armenian-Tatar clashes, a significant number of the Muslim population was expelled from Armenia. Concentrating mainly in the border zones, this population became a carrier of a unique explosive charge, creating anti-state and anti-Armenian pockets of unrest.

On February 12, 1919, the Council of Ministers discussed the issue raised in the telegram from the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan, as the Azerbaijani side had complained about the actions of Armenian military units in the Lake Sevan region, which allegedly crossed the border of Azerbaijan and attacked several Turkish villages, while not holding themselves responsible for the actions of the Turkish population. In this regard, the RA Council of Ministers adopted a corresponding decision: “Taking into account the report of the Minister of Military Affairs, the Minister of Internal Affairs is instructed to immediately appoint a strict investigation to ascertain the authenticity of the

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<sup>33</sup> Ghulyan 2009: 56.

<sup>34</sup> “Kommunist”, 1920, no 69, August 9.

<sup>35</sup> Gasimli 2024: 343.

<sup>36</sup> Hakobyan et. al. 1986, 729.

<sup>37</sup> Adjarian 2004: 465-466.



attacks and pressures mentioned in the telegram, as well as the actions of the so-called 'groups,' and to hold the culprits accountable".<sup>38</sup>

The Armenian side's response noted that regular RA troops had not participated in the unrest in the Basargechar region (Vardenis district; in 1969 it was renamed by a decision of the Supreme Soviet of the Armenian SSR<sup>39</sup>), but rather about 10,000 Armenian refugees had attacked Muslim villages. Seeking to regulate the situation, the RA authorities returned the Muslims to their villages and handed over their looted property, while the culprits were held accountable.<sup>40</sup> In this context, orientalist and historian D. Knyazyan supports the opposite viewpoint, noting that the cause of the aggravation of the situation in the Basargechar region was the Armenian side, in the person of Western Armenian refugees who had been left homeless and unfed. D. Knyazyan finds that the military unit that arrived from Yerevan removed the Armenian refugees from the Muslim villages, but the irresponsible conduct of the unit's commander, Rotmistr Alexander Silikyan, became an inciting pretext for the Muslim revolt and the massacre of the troops.<sup>41</sup> All this led to the escalation of tension, the infiltration of armed groups from Azerbaijan into the territory of the RA, and the delivery of weapons to the rebels. Following this, preparations began for the capture of Chambarak and Bashkend, while simultaneously a mobilization was announced, in which 1,000 Georgian officers came to the aid of Azerbaijan.<sup>42</sup>

It must be said that, nevertheless, it was positive for the RA that the British command and its military-political representative, Colonel Clive Temperley, practically supported Armenia in resolving the issue, unlike their overtly pro-Azerbaijani position shown in Nagorno-Karabakh, Zangezur, and elsewhere. Thus, they contributed to the preservation of the territorial integrity of the RA in the Sotk/Zod-Basargechar region, confirming the legitimacy of the RA authorities' actions. The incident also clearly showed that Azerbaijan was claiming, in one way or another and by all means, all those Armenian regions where there was a compact Muslim population.<sup>43</sup>

A very interesting observation made by the RA Ambassador in Baku, T. Bekzadyan, on May 5, 1919, speaks about the ambiguity of British policy on Karabakh and other issues, and the aggressive aspirations of the Azerbaijani-Turkish population. He noted that the "uncertainty and ambiguity of General Shattelworth's policy in the Karabakh issue is worsening the already grave situation of Karabakh, which is cut off from the capital cities."<sup>44</sup>

<sup>38</sup> NAA, f. 199, c. 1, doc. 96, l. 25; doc. 100 (43), l. 26; f. 201, c. 1, doc. 486, part I, l. 37; "Arev" 1919, February 13; "Yarach" 1919, February 16.

<sup>39</sup> Hakobyan et. al. 1986, 609.

<sup>40</sup> Knyazyan 2008: 92-93.

<sup>41</sup> NAA, f. 200, c. 1, doc. 263, l. 4, 6, 9-10, 15, 34, 44; "Arev" 1919, February 11.

<sup>42</sup> NAA, f. 200, c. 1, doc. 263, l. 47, 54-55, 60; doc. 294, l. 77.

<sup>43</sup> "Kavkazskoe slovo" 1919, April 5, 25, Tiflis; "Yedinaya Rossiya" 1919, March 26.

<sup>44</sup> Tigran Bekzadyan 2025: 113.

Addressing the military operations that took place in the Shushi district and the extremely reckless and unrestrained actions of the Muslim population, who did not even consider it necessary to reckon with the British command—being confident that, as in many cases, they would again remain unpunished and not answer for their criminal steps—Bekzadyan considered it necessary for the British command to provide clarifications regarding the overly tolerant attitude towards the Muslims. And on the night of May 3-4, “the Tatars, occupying the elevated part of the city—above the boulevard—began shelling the Armenian part of the city at 12:00 AM, as well as the British headquarters, shattering the windows of the houses where the British were stationed. The British moved their troops between the Tatar and Armenian positions, intending to end the fighting in this way, but the Tatars, ignoring this, did not cease fire. As a result, one British Indian soldier was killed by a Tatar bullet, one was wounded, and on the Armenian side, one officer was killed and four fighters were wounded.

It is known from reliable sources that Turkish officers participated on the Tatar side in the battles, and Kurds from the tribe of Doctor Sultanov and Turkish soldiers remaining from the Turkish army were in the positions. There are Russian officers in the Tatar military units, and the organizer of the Kurdish-Turkish military units is the Turkish officer Kazim Bey.” Bekzadyan recorded in his diary that he informed the presidium of the National Council about these facts.<sup>45</sup> These newly revealed facts shed new light on the history of both the Muslim movements and the Karabakh-Artsakh issue.

It is noteworthy that in a conversation with the Prime Minister of Azerbaijan, Nasib bey Usubbekov, on April 15, 1919, in response to RA Ambassador T. Bekzadyan’s assertion that the appointment of Doctor Sultanov was undesirable for Armenians, Usubbekov retorted that for them, the Muslims, the appointment of Andranik in Zangezur was undesirable, and he himself did not see an aggressive act on the part of the Tatars in the appointment of Sultanov.<sup>46</sup>

This explains the activation of Muslim movements throughout 1919. All the more or less significant cases of the expulsion of the Muslim population from the territory of the RA took place in the second half of 1918 - beginning of 1919, and conversely, from the Armenian regions of Azerbaijan to Armenia.

In a highly confidential report (N127) prepared on March 1, 1919, by Khan-Kotursky, one of the heads of the special department of the RA General Staff, which received the attention of the Minister of Military Affairs, special mention was made of the newly formed “Nakhichevan-Arazdayan” republic by Muslim leaders. It noted that the main reason for its emergence was the Garni-Basar events—the latter allegedly being the aggressors in order to prevent an Armenian invasion and protect the lives and property of the Muslims. This highly important document also noted that the general-governor of this essentially self-proclaimed republic was Jafar Quli Khan Nakhichevanski, his assistant was Kalabek Tairov, the commander of the troops was

<sup>45</sup> Tigran Bekzadyan 2025: 114-115.

<sup>46</sup> Bekzadyan 2025: 93.

Kerbalay Ali Khan Nakhichevanski (Jafar Quli Khan's son), and the head of the detachment operating near the Armenian border was Bagram Khan Nakhichevanski. It presented facts about the presence of a well-armed officer corps of about 100 people and 2,000 soldiers among the Muslims, despite a certain shortage of ammunition. The report emphasized that the goal was to unite the Arazdayan Republic with Azerbaijan, for which, on February 28, delegates led by Abbas-Quli-bey, a member of the Kars "Shura,"<sup>47</sup> were sent by British train to Tiflis-Baku-Elizavetpol, anticipating aid from Azerbaijan.<sup>48</sup>

Remarkable facts about the anti-Armenian activities of Muslims in Nakhichevan and the agency network are contained in the report (N 136) of the head of the special department, Podporuchik Bashinjaghyan, on March 13, 1919, which confirms the existence of the "Nakhichevan Republic." To realize this, Bagram Khan was sent to Tiflis-Elizavetpol-Baku and was very cordially received by the British, who in principle did not object to the existence of the self-proclaimed Nakhichevan government. It was also said that Bagram Khan was received by the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Georgia, who congratulated him on the success of the Nakhichevan government in the fight against Armenia, and asked him to greet the glorious Tatar troops. It was noted that one of Bagram Khan's goals was to obtain aid in money, weapons, and ammunition from Elizavetpol and Baku, that the rebels had a large quantity of bullets brought from Persia, and that military instruction was being conducted by Turkish and Azerbaijani officers, led by Khalil Bey. In this regard, it was also noted that Hajji Riza Kasumbekov, who arrived in Yerevan on the instructions of the Nakhichevan government, was arrested on charges of espionage and was required to pay a fine of 100,000 rubles and leave for Tabriz. It was also noted that a stable telegraph connection was maintained between Nakhichevan and Baku via the Tabriz-Tehran line. The information also stated that the necessary communication for the rebels was carried out via the Maku-Bayazet-Gharakilisa line.<sup>49</sup>

Important information about the activation of the Muslim movement is contained in the summary (N 8) of the Intelligence Department of the RA Ministry of Military Affairs General Staff on December 11, 1919, which speaks of Azerbaijan's activity in the Kulpi region<sup>50</sup>, in the person of Shamil-bey Ardlinski from the village of Parnaut, who had 3 assistants and 400 cavalry at his disposal, 80 of whom were Turkish *askyars* (soldiers).<sup>51</sup> They received large sums of money from Azerbaijan, and 50 *askyars* led by an officer were also sent from there for propaganda and the organization of detachments, with the aim of hindering the capture of Kulp (Koghb, Kokhb, Kulp, Kulb, etc.: a village, small town in the Surmalu district, on the right-bank tributary of the Araks,

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<sup>47</sup> Muslim National Council

<sup>48</sup> NAA, f. 200, c. 1, doc 212, l. 61.

<sup>49</sup> NAA, f. 200, c. 1, doc 212, l. 75.

<sup>50</sup> Surmalu district of Yerevan Province.

<sup>51</sup> NAA, f. 204, c. 1, doc. 133, l. 37.

the Koghb River (formerly Vardamarg).<sup>52</sup> <sup>53</sup> In an appeal dated June 21, 1919, addressed to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the head of the intelligence department, Lieutenant Colonel Al. Shneur, emphasized the destructive work of the Turks in the Nakhichevan region, and particularly the activities of the agitators of the Turkish “Union and Progress” organization’s committee, to prevent the return of Armenians to their native settlements<sup>54</sup>. Of interest is the secret report (N 00156) of July 2, 1919, from the commander of the Yerevan Army Group, Dro, addressed to the Commander of the RA Forces. It reveals that during the stay of the British military representative, General J. P. Plauden, in Nakhichevan, the Tatars complained about the illegal actions of the Armenian authorities, and particularly the arrests carried out on the orders of the Armenian counterintelligence that allegedly had “no reason,” which made a repressive impression on the Muslims, causing many to start leaving Nakhichevan.<sup>55</sup>

In the operational information of July 8, 1919, Colonel M. Zinkevich reported that the situation in Zangezur was very alarming. According to the head of the Shah-Takhti region, the movement of a Muslim cavalry hundred in the mountains in a northern direction was observed. A detachment of Turks and Kurds, about 8,000 people, prepared to attack Iğdır. For this purpose, on July 6, heavy rifle fire from the enemy began from the area of the Ali-Mamed village on the right flank of the Armenian positions, to which the Armenian military unit counter-attacked. It was reported that about 500 armed men from Sadarak, led by Meshadi Alasker Gamzaev, arrived from Yengija to Böyük-Vedi on July 5-6. However, representatives of Yengija cautiously appealed to the commander of the 3<sup>rd</sup> regiment with a request to send their *aksaka/s* to Böyük-Vedi to persuade them to submit to the legitimate Armenian authorities.<sup>56</sup> All this directly attests to the policy aimed at subjugating the separatist actions of the Muslim population living in Armenian territories, which was also facilitated by the effective work of the intelligence services.

In a memorandum presented to the RA Prime Minister on January 3, 1920, by the head of the Intelligence Department, Muradyan, and his assistant, Podporuchik Khachatryan, mention was made of the Tatar revolt in the Nakhichevan region, the participation of Turkish military forces in it, and the congress of representatives of Aralikh, Vedibasara (a village in the Yerevan district of the Yerevan province, now Aygavan<sup>57</sup>), and Milistan (Turkey) convened in Nakhichevan at the initiative of Khalil Pasha<sup>58</sup>. The summary (N 10) of January 22, 1920, testifies to Azerbaijan’s subversive activity in Nakhichevan-Sharur, as well as the Turkish officers and *askyars* secretly sent

<sup>52</sup> Hakobyan et. al. 1991, 196.

<sup>53</sup> NAA, f. 204, c. 1, doc. 133, l. 38.

<sup>54</sup> NAA, f. 200, c. 1, doc. 155, l. 41.

<sup>55</sup> NAA, f. 199, c. 1, doc. 73 (71), l. 67.

<sup>56</sup> NAA, f. 199, c. 1, l. 293.

<sup>57</sup> Hakobyan et. al. 1998, 794.

<sup>58</sup> NAA, f. 200, c. 1, doc. 441, l. 41, Ghazaketsyan 1993 (ed.): 165.

to Zangezur to organize a revolt. Moreover, the Azerbaijani government exempted Kurdish rural communities from military tax, in return for which the latter were obliged to provide riflemen with equipment, weapons, and horses, as the organization of Kurdish military units was planned under the leadership of Sultanov<sup>59</sup>, who later showed great activity in Karabakh. The report of Captain Muradyan and his assistant, Podporuchik Dodokhyan, on February 7, 1920, mentioned the situation in the Sharur-Nakhichevan region and the concentration of Tatars in Böyük-Vedi.<sup>60</sup>

Some intelligence memoranda and reports of 1920 report interesting data on the coordinated Azerbaijani-Turkish actions in Sharur-Nakhichevan, Surmalu, Kars region, and Zangibasara (a village in the Yerevan district of the Yerevan province, now Masis<sup>61</sup>), which is also confirmed by T. Devoyants, one of the heads of the Intelligence and Counterintelligence Department of the RA General Staff: "Information from our agents shows that the Muslim population of Armenia, especially in the Kars province and the Sharur-Nakhichevan regions, did not want to reconcile with the idea of submitting to the Armenian authority, and with the help of Turkish officers and soldiers who remained there or newly arrived, they organized armed groups and prepared to revolt against Armenia".<sup>62</sup>

In the memorandum of March 20, 1920, the head of the Intelligence Department, Captain V. Muradyan, and his assistant, Captain T. Devoyants, presented facts about the activation of the Muslim movement, the activities of Turkish-Azerbaijani agents, and the 300 *askyars* who arrived from Shah-Takhti to Davalu (a village in the Yerevan district of the Yerevan province, now Ararat.<sup>63</sup>). It was reported that the Tatars, being interested in friendship with the Kurds, rewarded their leaders with large sums and gifts, sending 60,000 rubles to Fatti Bek Shamshatdinski. Kerbalay Khan Nakhichevanski became the commander-in-chief of the Nakhichevan forces, and he began organizing Kurdish detachments, expecting the arrival of a cavalry detachment of 500-600 people and numerous officer-instructors.<sup>64</sup>

That memorandum of March 20, 1920, reported on the activity of Muslims in Surmalu, noting that in Kulpi, besides local gangs, Shamil-bek Ayrumlinski had 200 Turkish *askyars* and 2 cannons, adding that ammunition was sent to Kulpi from Bayazet by 7 camels.<sup>65</sup> The intelligence summary of April 5, 1920, testifies to the arrival of Turkish *askyars* from the Bayazet *sanjak* (district) to Nakhichevan, led by Jafar Quli Khan and Kerbalay Khan Nakhichevanski.<sup>66</sup> In the summary, Captain Devoyants and

<sup>59</sup> NAA, f. 204, c. 1, doc. 133, l. 42.

<sup>60</sup> See Ghazakhetsyan 1993 (ed.): 166-167.

<sup>61</sup> Hakobyan et. al. 1988, 266.

<sup>62</sup> Devoyants 1945: 84.

<sup>63</sup> Hakobyan et. al. 1998, 41.

<sup>64</sup> NAA, f. 200, c. 1, doc. 33, l. 11-12.

<sup>65</sup> NAA, f. 200, c. 1, doc. 33, l. 11-12.

<sup>66</sup> NAA, doc. 427, part II, l. 252.

Podporuchik Dodokhyan reported that the Tatars of the Nakhichevan region were fully arming themselves, learning the art of marksmanship, and also receiving machine guns from Baku.<sup>67</sup> The summary (N 15) of April 23, 1920, contained facts about the arrival of 300 Turkish and 550 Azerbaijani *askyars* and 15 officers in Nakhichevan, who brought 17 million rubles with them.<sup>68</sup>

The intelligence department's summary (N 16) of May 7, 1920, provided data on the Sharur forces' Bash-Norashen headquarters, which was headed by the Turkish officer Osman Pasha, who was looking for ways to establish connections with Zangibasar.<sup>69</sup> The summary (N 17) of May 23, 1920, expressed alarm regarding the military-political situation in the region, reporting that money and ammunition were entering Nakhichevan from Azerbaijan through Persia via smuggling routes.<sup>70</sup> And in the summary (N 20) of July 6, 1920, the arrival of cavalry from Maku to Yayji and V. Aza (10 versts from the Julfa station) was reported, consisting of 125 men accompanied by two Turkish officers, as well as an expected attack by Edif Bey on Tsghnakh (Chananaab) and Goghtan.<sup>71</sup> And finally, the intelligence summary of the RA General Staff of September 25, 1920, already testified to the activation of the Red Army in the Nakhichevan region, emphasizing the near unfitness for combat of almost half of the Red troops<sup>72</sup>, which was not confirmed by subsequent facts.

Data on the activation of the Turks in the Kars region are also of interest, if only from the perspective of the background of the Turkish-Armenian war of 1920. An intelligence summary (N 8) of the General Staff, which relates to the events and various incidents that took place in the Kars Province during the period up to January 5, 1919, is quite interesting. The author of the summary, officer L. Bashinjaghyan, addresses the order prevailing in some military units of the Kars Province, emphasizing that despite the measures taken, desertion continues. He simultaneously addresses the situation prevailing in the remaining small Turkish military units and the widespread propaganda of Turkish officers among the population of the Kars Province, and particularly the Kurds, against the Armenians. The memorandum noted that the Turkish population of the province was well-armed, stating that large reserves of food had been accumulated by the Turks in the Nakhichevan region of the Kaghzvan *okrug* (district), in Digor and other villages, as well as at the Kızıl-Chakhchakh (or Ghızıl-Chakhchakh) station. The final part mentioned the activity of the Shah-Takhti Tatars, as well as the active accumulation of Kurds in the Aralikh region (in the villages of Bashkend, Ortakend, Shakhler, and others).<sup>73</sup> Also interesting is the operational-intelligence summary of the

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<sup>67</sup> NAA, doc. 427, part II, l. 252.

<sup>68</sup> NAA, doc. 427, part II, l. 262.

<sup>69</sup> NAA, doc. 427, part II, l. 279.

<sup>70</sup> NAA, doc. 441, l. 122.

<sup>71</sup> NAA, doc. 33, l. 40.

<sup>72</sup> NAA, doc. 427, part II, l. 383.

<sup>73</sup> NAA, doc. 92, l. 60.

Commander of the RA Forces, which provides data on the situation prevailing in the Kars Province up to August 23. It reported that the provisional government formed in Erzurum decided to occupy the Kars Province up to Arpachay, noting the violation of the Armenian border by Turkish officers for intelligence purposes. A conclusion was drawn that all Muslim revolts in the territory of Armenia take place on the instructions of Turkish agents, who had organized widespread espionage in the Republic of Armenia, relying on the local Muslim population. It was noted that having been expelled from the Nakhichevan and Sharur regions by Armenian military units, the leaders of the Tatar bands had moved their activities to the Kars Province.

The summary was sent to the RA Diplomatic Representative in Georgia to be handed over to the Supreme Commissioner of the Allies in Transcaucasia, W. Haskell.<sup>74</sup> Valuable information regarding the Kars Province is contained in the Intelligence Department's summary (N 14) of April 5, 1920, in which T. Devoyants and M. Dodokhyan reported that on the eve of the Chaldyr revolt, a Turkish regiment of 700 men was sent towards Merdenek, of which 300 left for Oltu. However, due to the events that took place in Dersim, they were forced to send them in the direction of Erzincan, and that allegedly on the eve of the Chaldyr [Chyldyr] movement, Eyub Pasha was summoned to Erzurum, where he was offered to organize a group of *chetniks* (irregular fighters) and operate in the direction of Sarighamish. At the same time, it was reported that Khalil Bey, the former head of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Caucasian Rifle Division, along with several Turkish officers and *askyars*, was conducting a mobilization of 18-40 year-olds in the Oltu region, accompanying it with exercises, and then sending the organized groups to the border villages.<sup>75</sup>

On April 14, 1920, Major General Hovsepyants, in a telegram (N 00322) sent from Kars to the Commander-in-Chief and the Minister of Internal Affairs, reported that after the Chaldyr battles, he had arrested the leaders of the revolt, Qamil Abdullah Oghli and Veysal Yusup Oghli, who were handed over to the governor at his request. He added that the arrested individuals possessed valuable information about the participation of Azerbaijani and Turkish agents in the organization of the revolt, emphasizing that for the welfare of the region, he considered it necessary to subject them to strict judicial punishment. This important message was sent to the Minister-President for his information by Captain Devoyants on April 15, 1920 (N P 0269).<sup>76</sup> The intelligence memorandum of June 3, 1920, testified to the coordinated rebellious actions of the local Muslims of the Kars Province, and even Molokans, with the Turkish army of Qamil Pasha. For this purpose, 4 Turkish officers and 15 *askyars* had arrived in Bashkey and Bekkey, and a consultation had taken place in Nor Selim with representatives of the Molokans of the Kars Province.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>74</sup> NAA, doc. 92, l. 387.

<sup>75</sup> NAA, f. 200, c. 1, doc. 427, part II, l. 249.

<sup>76</sup> NAA, doc. 271, l. 172-173.

<sup>77</sup> NAA, doc. 33, l. 33.

The fact that the RA government was relatively well-informed about the events taking place in the Kars Province (June-July 1919), including the intelligence activities carried out by Colonel G. D. Leslie<sup>78</sup>, representing Denikin's Volunteer Army, related to securing the influence of the Russian Volunteer Army in the province, undoubtedly attests to the sufficient activity of the Intelligence and Counterintelligence Department of the General Staff. It became clear to the Armenian side that Leslie, the military and political representative of the so-called "Special Council" under the Volunteer Army to the RA government, negotiates in Kars with Muslim representatives and the command of the Turkish 12<sup>th</sup> Army, so that after their withdrawal, the province would be handed over to the Russians.<sup>79</sup> Colonel Leslie's meeting with the "Shura" and the Turkish command in mid-January 1919 caused dissatisfaction among Armenian party-political circles. In this regard, on January 21, S. Tigranyan, in a letter addressed to Colonel Leslie, demanded an explanation regarding the negotiations held with the British Governor of Kars, K. Temperley, as to whether there was an intention "to establish not Armenian but Muslim rule under the leadership of a Russian governor".<sup>80</sup> Leslie replied on January 22 that "I have not had an official conversation about political issues in Kars, but I advised the British military governor, Colonel K. Temperley, that to get out of this difficult situation, it is necessary to appoint a Russian by nationality as governor, who will be in direct contact with the Government of Armenia. It was never demanded by me to establish Muslim rule in the province".<sup>81</sup>

All this, however, deepens the dissatisfaction with Leslie's activities, and the Yerevan newspaper "Zhoghovurd" simply wrote in N 10 of 1919 that "Colonel Leslie, General Denikin's representative, entered into unauthorized negotiations with British Colonel K. Temperley and conducted anti-Armenian propaganda in Yerevan, Echmiadzin, and strives to pit the British against us. His goal is to create a Russian-Tatar administration in the Kars Province".<sup>82</sup> Accordingly, the Popular Faction of the RA Parliament demanded that the Presidium of the RA Council inquire of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Military Affairs whether it was known to them that "Colonel Leslie, the representative of the Volunteer Army, is absolutely conducting agitation against the Armenian people and the Republic of Armenia, and is it true that Colonel Leslie receives 1000 rubles monthly from the Ministry of Military Affairs, and if so, from what funds".<sup>83</sup>

Naturally, the session of the RA Parliament on February 11, 1919, addressed this issue and expressed its attitude, presenting facts, and trying to reveal who Leslie was,

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<sup>78</sup> Leslie Georgy [Yuri] Dmitrievich [April 1, 1887 - February 2, 1957] - (December 1, 1917 - 1920 - Volunteer Army). Ganin 2009: 266, 481, 537, 595, 730.

<sup>79</sup> See Petrosyan 2006: 156.

<sup>80</sup> NAA, f. 200, c. 1, doc. 164, l. 4, 10.

<sup>81</sup> NAA, f. 200, c. 1, doc. 164, l. 5, 11.

<sup>82</sup> NAA, f. 200, c. 1, doc. 164, l. 6, 14.

<sup>83</sup> NAA, f. 200, c. 1, doc. 164, l. 17.



whom he represented, and what position he held<sup>84</sup>, but many questions were not made public. It is understandable that the RA government and the military department, including the intelligence service, were trying to maintain secret ties with non-Soviet state and other formations in the South of Russia, which could give rise to various parliamentary and political speculations. Based on this, the heads of the RA Foreign Affairs and Military Departments assured that the Colonel of the Volunteer Army had not abused his position and had not engaged in any specific anti-Armenian activity. This demonstrates the fact of cooperation between the special services of the two sides.

The Commissioner of Administration and Police of the Territory of Armenia, in a report addressed to the Minister of Internal Affairs on March 11, 1919, emphasized that throughout the Armenian-Turkish clashes, 111,560 Tatars and Kurds were expelled from the borders of the RA, including 15,000 Kurds. Of these, 29,000 Tatars returned, but the expelled Kurds did not return. He also stressed that the number of villages free from Muslims in the territory of Armenia reached 248, of which 50 were ruined, and the 56 completely free villages were occupied mainly by refugees from Western Armenia and the Kars Province—142 villages.<sup>85</sup> The RA government sought to create a homogeneous population in the border zone, securing itself from the dangers coming from Azerbaijan and Turkey. In this regard, H. Harutyunyan expressed disagreement with this view, finding that it did not correspond to reality and that such phenomena did not occur.<sup>86</sup>

In this context, we want to emphasize that it is one thing for any more or less established state to strive for the indigenous population to prevail in its territory, and for only the problems of governing and “using” ethnic minorities to remain, as we can find in many European countries today. It is another thing to be a minority in the territory of one’s own homeland and constantly be endangered. At the present stage, any more or less organized country, for example, the USA, the Russian Federation, and other countries, cannot feel threatened, say, by even a few million non-ethnic Russian, Armenian, and other populations living in their territories.

### **Search for a Way out of the Ethno-Political Crisis**

Nevertheless, during the years of the First Republic, the significant mass of the Muslim population living in the territory of Armenia itself was so large that it truly posed a problematic situation from the perspective of securing the RA’s security interests. It was sufficient to keep the RA in a state of alarming tension, especially since spies, various emissaries arriving from Azerbaijan and Turkey, were trying to organize this population and incite “rebellion” against the legitimate authorities, thereby supporting separatist sentiments. According to the RA government memorandum presented to the US Senate by Hovh. Qajaznuni on November 10, 1919, the number of Muslims—

<sup>84</sup> NAA, f. 198, c. 1, doc. 15, l. 133.

<sup>85</sup> NAA, f. 200, c. 1, doc. 44, l. 16.

<sup>86</sup> Harutyunyan 2012: 307.

Tatars, Turks, Turkmens, Karapapakhs—was 588,000 people, or 27% of the entire population.<sup>87</sup>

However, the data from a French statistical document (1919) on the ethnic composition of the population of Transcaucasia and the Black Sea region are of greater interest:

**Table 1<sup>88</sup>**

Province/Region	Area, sq. km	Armenians	Muslims	Georgians	Other Ethnic Groups
Tiflis	32,289	411,747	116,562	642,636	302,363
Kutaisi	19,776	4,605	281	939,412	36,113
Elisavetpol (Ganja)	41,529	418,859	797,593	1,030	57,649
Baku	36,572	120,087	934,616	9,004	317,798
Kars	17,569	123,170	153,401	136	114,227
Batumi	6,450	15,182	16,079	76,839	12,811
Sukhumi	6,179	20,743	2,799	50,383	136,746
Zakatali	3,737	2,530	35,736	4,664	368
Total	164,001	1,117,723	2,057,067	1,724,104	978,081

Let us also add that 139,691 were considered Georgian Muslims, 452,691 were Russians, 56,977 were Yazidis, 40,401 were Roma, and the Jews were 65,822 people.<sup>89</sup>

And here is the picture presented by Armenia and the adjacent regions from an ethnic description perspective in another proportion, according to the same French source:

**Table 2<sup>90</sup>**

Region/District	Area, sq. km	Armenians	Tatar, Turkmen, Khazar	Kurd	Georgian	Russian
Ardahan (partly)	15,000	120,690	73,321	44,967	4,095	49,292
Akhalkalaki	2,550	82,775	8,308	904	7,428	7,759
Borchalu	3,200	64,000	7,600		1,150	2,050
Qazakh	3,400	61,000	90,000			1,929

<sup>87</sup> Qajaznuni 1993: 11.

<sup>88</sup> NAA, f. 200, c. 1, doc. 452, l. 1.

<sup>89</sup> NAA, f. 200, c. 1, doc. 452, l. 1.

<sup>90</sup> NAA, f. 200, c. 1, doc. 452, l. 1.

Elisavethpol (Ganja) (partly)	4,000	32,000	16,500			6,200
Jivanshir	3,700	22,000	17,000			
Shushi <i>gavar</i> (district)	2,300	98,000	30,000			
Zangezur	6,000	100,000	50,000			
Yerevan	24,750	669,871	373,841	36,508	21,854	7,012
Total	64,900	1,250,336	666,570	82,379	34,527	74,242

Another, more complete version of the ethnic composition of the Ardahan and Yerevan Provinces is also of interest:

**Table 3<sup>91</sup>**

Province/Region	Area, sq. km	Armenians	Muslims	Georgians	Others
Ardahan	15,000	120,896	118,188	4,095	109,730
Yerevan	24,750	669,871	410,349		34,778
Total	39,750	790,767	528,537	4,095	144,508

Moreover, of that calculation, 81,375 were considered Kurds, 49,558 Yazidis, 23,504 Roma, Russian, Greek, and 32,236 Assyrians.<sup>92</sup>

In this regard, the RA government had significant tasks to perform, facing serious security challenges, trying to resolve the issues and mitigate inter-ethnic tensions, and manage ethnic developments based on the strategic interests of the RA almost everywhere: in Sotk-Basargechar<sup>93</sup>, in Zangezur, in Kars, and in general. Historian E. Gevorgyan addresses precisely this issue: “In 1918-1920, inter-ethnic clashes and massacres were added to the calamities of war in Transcaucasia. The disturbances organized and incited by Turkish and Azerbaijani agents among the Tatar (Azerbaijani) population of Armenia did not cease throughout the entire period of the Republic’s existence. Their goal was to destroy and weaken the independent state of Armenia, and to prepare the ground for its conquest and thereby eliminate the territorial division between Turkey and Azerbaijan. After the withdrawal of Turkish troops from Armenia at the end of 1918, a significant number of officers remained there, who had armed detachments to organize disturbances.

<sup>91</sup> NAA, f. 200, c. 1, doc. 452, l. 2.

<sup>92</sup> NAA, f. 200, c. 1, doc. 452, l. 1-2.

<sup>93</sup> Basargechar - a district and a village of the same name in the Nor Bayazet *gavar* (district) of the Yerevan Province, currently in the southeastern part of the Gegharkunik Province of the RA. By the decree of the Supreme Soviet of the Armenian SSR on June 2, 1969, it was renamed Vardenis. The place name originates from the Turkish words “basar” (to attack, to trample) and “geçer” (to pass). Hakobyan, Melik-Bakhshyan, Barseghyan 1986: 609; Hakobyan, Melik-Bakhshyan, Barseghyan 1998: 782-783.

After the departure [of the Turkish troops], the Tatars organized gangs and began looting operations against neighboring Armenian villages and military units. Turkey and Azerbaijan were making territorial claims against a number of parts of the Republic of Armenia: Kars, Mountainous Karabakh, Zangezur, Nakhichevan, Sharur, Daralagyaz, and Basargechar. To achieve their goal, Turkish agents and the Azerbaijani diplomatic representatives in Yerevan had carried out subversive activities during those tense years, resorting to plots against the RA authorities and the Armenian population that had barely survived the Genocide.

After the withdrawal of Turkish troops from Armenia at the end of 1918, the not-small number of officers who remained there, who had armed detachments, were the main instigators of the anti-Armenian, anti-state revolts. At the same time, a significant part of the Azerbaijani population voluntarily left their settlements after the Turks' departure, fearing that the Armenians would punish them for helping the Turks and for their provocative actions. However, all this became a cover for further provocative steps. After leaving, the Tatars organized gangs and began looting operations against neighboring Armenian villages and military units. And despite all this, nevertheless, around 30,000 Azerbaijani refugees returned and resettled in Armenia by the spring of 1919. Simultaneously, a large number of Armenians emigrated from Azerbaijan during the First World War and inter-ethnic clashes—around 300,000 people.<sup>94</sup> According to V. Khojabekyan's data, the number of Armenians who emigrated from Azerbaijan during the First World War and inter-ethnic clashes (not counting all the districts of Elisavethpol) was around 235,000 people, only a part of whom later returned.<sup>95</sup> The main part of them settled in Eastern Armenia, and the other part passed through Georgia to the North Caucasus. During the years of Musavat rule, other nationalities also emigrated from Azerbaijan along with Armenians. Only in 1918-1919, due to emigration, the total population of Azerbaijan decreased by 401.5 thousand people.<sup>96</sup>

Azerbaijan's new strategy towards Armenia was to create independent Muslim formations inside and bring them out against Armenia. On July 6, 1919, the RA diplomatic representative T. Bekzadyan, visiting the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Azerbaijan, N. Usubbekov, and S. Jafarov, newly elected as the Minister of Foreign Affairs, also raised the issue of means to influence the official and non-official press so that they refrain from influencing the Muslim population in Armenia and from false, inflammatory publications about the condition of the Muslims<sup>97</sup>, because those rumors deepen the enmity and ruin inter-ethnic relations, that is, sow hatred. However, while outwardly showing that they shared the Armenian side's concern, the Azerbaijani leaders by no means abandoned the strategy of inflaming passions among the Muslim population of Armenia. This was vividly manifested during the aggressive preparations

<sup>94</sup> Qajaznuni 1993: 12. Gevorgyan 2024: 26.

<sup>95</sup> Khojabekyan 2001: 136-137.

<sup>96</sup> Khojabekyan 1979: 190.

<sup>97</sup> NAA, f. 278, c. 1, doc. 3, l. 37; "Nor Ashkhatavor" July 12, 1919.

against Zangezur and Nakhichevan in the summer of 1919 in the border regions of Armenia through propaganda, strengthening anti-Armenian Muslim groups, and supplying them with arms and ammunition. On July 17, 1919, T. Bekzadyan informed the Chairman of the RA Council of Ministers about this: “The recent events in Zangezur and Nakhichevan are being covered in the local Muslim press in such concentrated colors that it causes absolute hatred among the backward masses and pushes them to undesirable incidents in the form of demonstrations, which were supposedly planned for July 18”.<sup>98</sup>

And by the time of the Sovietization of Armenia, the country was at the extreme low point of its modern history. Armenians were not only expelled from the part of the Armenian Highlands under Turkish rule by the genocidal massacres and forced displacement of 1915, but the population of Russian Armenia had also sharply declined since the outbreak of the First World War due to war, migration, and epidemics. As a result of the war, epidemics, and emigration in 1914-1919, the population of present-day Armenia decreased by about 600,000, a 30 percent decline, and as a result, at the moment of the establishment of the Soviet regime, on December 2, 1920, 720,000 people lived in Armenia.<sup>99</sup> Moreover, almost half of this population consisted of refugees. In fact, by force of circumstances, Eastern Armenia, which had provided shelter to Armenian, Greek, and Assyrian refugees during the war years, also became a center of emigration.

### **Sovietization and the Proposal of Radical Variants for the Resolution of Inter-Ethnic Tension**

The numerous public and political institutions that Armenians had built over the centuries in the Caucasus and Turkey were destroyed. The Armenian middle class, at one time the privileged elite in Tiflis and Baku, no longer enjoyed the confidence of the new Soviet governments of Georgia and Azerbaijan and was pushed off the stage. Their unenviable choice was either to adapt to the foreign socialist order or emigrate to the West. During the seven years of war, genocide, revolution, and civil war (1914–1921), Armenian society had in many ways been “de-modernized,” reverting to its pre-capitalist agrarian economy and a more traditional peasant society. As historian V. Virabyan describes, this was a difficult period during which the Turkish side, taking advantage of the deepening political chaos and instability in Russia, expanded a destructive intelligence network in Western Armenia—Erzincan, Baberd, Erzurum (Karin), and elsewhere—operating behind the Russian lines through its agents and with the provocative support of the Muslim population, particularly the Kurds and their tribal leaders. Kurdish cavalry units also carried out marauding attacks against the Armenian population, a situation further facilitated by the indecisive actions of the disintegrating Russian army’s command, widespread desertion driven by the circumstances, and

<sup>98</sup> Mikayelyan *et al.* 1992 (eds): 307-308.

<sup>99</sup> Khojabekyan 2006: 101.

revolutionary unrest. Turkish agents infiltrated Erzincan, Baberd, and other cities of Western Armenia, conducting active propaganda among Kurdish tribal leaders and the broader Muslim population, working to incite strong anti-Armenian sentiments, fuel the already spreading desertion within army units, and encourage Kurds to launch plundering raids against the Armenian population.<sup>100</sup>

And so, the First Republic, without real sallies and overly ambitious in its attempts to create a Greater Armenia under conditions of severely limited resources and powerful adversaries, found itself in a narrow geopolitical dead end and collapsed, the only alternative being the forced option of Soviet Armenia.

According to the Azerbaijani author T. Zeinalova, Sovietization led to the loss of a part of Azerbaijan's historical territory. In her view, Northern Azerbaijan occupied 113,895.97 square kilometers at the beginning of 1920, but after Sovietization, it lost 29,338.2 square kilometers, of which 12,779.6 square kilometers were transferred to Armenia. As a result of the policy pursued by Soviet Russia, the territory of Armenia, which was 9.2 thousand square kilometers when the Republic was formed in 1918, increased to 28.1 thousand square kilometers in the period 1920–1922.<sup>101</sup>

Summarizing the contradictory data, according to the Azerbaijani authors themselves, the territory of Armenia, according to the 1926 census, was 30.24 thousand square kilometers<sup>102</sup>. However, ignoring these facts, they make unsubstantiated claims that Azerbaijan supposedly lost 12,000 square kilometers of its territory during the years of Soviet power<sup>103</sup>, which contradicts the census data they themselves cite. V. Gafarova concludes that the following regions were “given” to Armenia: Kapan, Goris, Sisian, and Meghri, which total approximately 4,504.5 square kilometers, and it was only the presence of Turkish troops in Nakhichevan and the resistance of the local population that prevented Armenia from annexing this region as well.<sup>104</sup> To emphasize its importance, another Azerbaijani historian, Y. Mahmudov, invokes the aid of K. Atatürk, who supposedly considered Nakhichevan the “Gate of the Turks”.<sup>105</sup> These are factually unfounded claims, based on distortion of data, which contradict the statistical data circulated by the very same authors.

And so, in Transcaucasia, and particularly in Armenia, the aggressive aspirations of the Muslim population in the Muslim-inhabited regions of the Republic of Armenia and anti-state, anti-Armenian movements aimed at violating the territorial integrity of the Republic of Armenia became active in 1918–1920. Inter-ethnic clashes and conflicts escalated unprecedentedly throughout the Republic, as a result of which some national minorities, particularly Azerbaijanis, left the territory of Armenia. At the same time, a

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<sup>100</sup> Virabyan 2018: 104.

<sup>101</sup> Zeinalova 2004: 33, 49.

<sup>102</sup> TSFSR 1929: 1.

<sup>103</sup> See Musaev 1996: 328.

<sup>104</sup> Gafarof 2010: 205.

<sup>105</sup> Mahmudov 2005: 32.

much larger number of Armenians were forced to leave Azerbaijan, attempting to find a peaceful refuge and escape massacres. In this regard, the Turkish researcher Ç. Çağla arrives at an interesting conclusion, finding that the process of Azerbaijani nation-building had a specific regularity, where the rise of nationalism was based on ethnic identity and preceded the formation of the national state, and that Azerbaijani nationalism emerged in the unusual cultural and political liberal constitutional atmosphere of Baku.<sup>106</sup>

T. Vardanyan-Ayvazyan concludes, to which she adds the opinion of Harvard University Professor T. Martin, that in the USSR, and naturally also in Soviet Armenia, national issues in the 1920s–1930s were mainly resolved within the framework of the policy of indigenization and were subject to the logic of that policy. Generally having a progressive direction, she characterizes it as a “policy of positive action,” and this approach gained universal recognition in both post-Soviet and Western professional circles.<sup>107</sup>

And indeed, at that stage, the national policy in the Soviet republics was manageable, generally balanced, and notable successes were recorded in the cultural and economic spheres of the life of the ethnic communities. However, border issues did not find a final solution; they remained among the main causes of bloody wars between the two states. They partially ended after the establishment of Soviet power in Azerbaijan and Armenia in 1920, as the Soviet government “imposed” a moratorium on these conflicts.<sup>108</sup> Peaceful coexistence was not established between the national states of Transcaucasia because it was not possible to eliminate the reasons and grounds that gave rise to them, which mainly stemmed from irreconcilable disagreement over territorial delimitation, incited by regional geopolitical forces. As a result of all this, inter-ethnic clashes, the mutual expulsion of large groups of the population from one republic to another, and a discriminatory policy against national minorities were common occurrences during that historical period, the violent manifestations of which were most clearly and negatively expressed in the national policy of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic in 1918–1920.

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<sup>106</sup> Çengiz 2019: 52.

<sup>107</sup> Vardanyan-Ayvazyan 2015: 91.

<sup>108</sup> Niftaliev 2021: 57.

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