

**BAKUR KARAPETYAN**



1915

**SUMGAIT DIARY**

1988

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# **SUMGAI DIARY**

Erevan 2015

## **March 27-April 5 1988**

### **PREAMBLE**

The tragic news of the February 1988 massacre of Armenians in Sumgait spread about. As I got informed by the Armenian refugees of Sumgait the trial of the slaughterers should start soon, I decided to leave for Sumgait before the process to film the traces of the pogrom. I was sure that it was the duty of every normal journalist. And I knew as well that after some time the authorities of Baku, falsifying the facts, would categorically deny: “Nothing has happened like that, there has been no massacre, it has been concocted by the Armenians...”, as likewise they support their big brother Turkey’s criminal denial of the Armenian Genocide of 1915-1923 carried out in Western Armenia, and all over the territory of the agonizing Ottoman Empire, as well as in Eastern Armenia and Eastern Transcaucasia.

In 1915 the Turkish slaughterers first of all brought together the Armenian intellectuals and exterminated them. The founders of the photographers’ studios and the first practitioners of photography in the Middle East and Turkey were Armenians but not a single Armenian made any shots of Genocide sceneries. As it seems, the Turkish butchers took severe measures beforehand - having in the first place destroyed those photographers’ studios and the photographers.

I made up my mind to find a way to leave for Sumgait where a new genocide had been committed against the Armenians. I couldn’t even find a cameraman to accompany me. Surely, it was dangerous to take a film-maker from Yerevan. They could immediately recognize him yet

everything should be disguised so that the Azerbaijani racists or the agents of secret services would not take notice of us.

As my friends learned about my plan, they started heaping reproaches on me: “Have you gone mad? Going directly to death? Don’t you know what’s going on in Sumgait?” But my wish to see everything with my own eyes, to find out the situation *in situ* and to tell the civilized world about it was beyond all measure. I knew for sure that still there were other criminals. Why, only ninety people were detained and even figures of secondary importance who would be set free soon. And still there would be no word about the ringleaders of the pogrom because the main figures of the country meddled in it as the very Mikhail Gorbachev and some other leaders of the Kremlin, and the authorities of Soviet Azerbaijan<sup>1</sup>. I was convinced of it by the story of my compatriot Major-General Roman Harutiunov, the Deputy Commander of the North Caucasus Military District. He was involved in the delegation staff which visited Artsakh being led by Karen Brutents, the first Deputy Head of the International Relations Department of the Central Committee of the CPSU. As soon as Major-General Roman Harutiunov got informed about the tragic events he left for Sumgait by his relative’s car to take his mother and sister away from Sumgait where they had resided. At the outskirts of the town he met the divisional commander, previously his subordinate General Valery Sokolov heading his column. Sokolov informed that still there had been no permission from the top to enter the town. They said it was not high time....

Soon after I got a practice of how to operate the buttons of the ordinary Japanese video camera M-3 given to me by Dionys Margaryan, a

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<sup>1</sup> In the mid of 1918 that name of “Azerbaijan” was stolen (with Pan-Turkic purposes) from the Iranian north-western region of Atropatene-Atrpatakan-Aderbaigan-Azerbaijan for artificially formed “Azerbaijan” in Eastern Transcaucasia.

lieutenant colonel of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, I first left for Stepanakert. The director of the regional stadium Razmik Petrosyan, also a member of the presidium of “Krunk” organization, informed me that every day eight trucks drove along to Sumgait to transport the properties of the refugees so I could leave for Sumgait with them. However, Maxim Mirzoyan, the director of the train of vehicles, told me that the departure of the trucks was delayed for two days. Later on he said that a resident of Sumgait, Suren Danielyan, who was going to transport his property, would help me there.

### **March 27, 1988**

I settled myself in the roomy cab of the truck of Valery Soghomonyan. As the drivers made a final arrangement (where to come together), they started the trucks. The Karkar River flew into a rage and was hurrying to the plain by clashing against its banks. I glimpsed at the terrace of Shushi as if I saw it for the last time. The castle town which was called *Karkar*<sup>2</sup> till the 14<sup>th</sup> century sat solemnly on the terrace. And the river was given the name of the castle town later.

In the midst of the incessant noise of the truck I was doing my best to guess from the occasionally caught words what the talk was about.

The buffaloes and sheep grazed on the green field near Aghdam. A young thin man having leant against the telegraph pole was telling a lad of fourteen about something. The boy was lying on the green grass and listening to him absorbedly. ‘The lad is either his son or a neighbour,’ I thought. And I wondered what he was telling about. He told of course that fifteen thousand Azerbaijanis from Aghdam and the neighbouring villages, all armed with stones, iron poles and petrol, made a broad frontline and

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<sup>2</sup> Քարքար (Կարկար in the Artsakh dialect of the Armenian language) means stone-stone.

moved along to Stepanakert on February 22<sup>3</sup>, having burnt everything on their way, beating the Armenians, destroying everything with a final aim to reach the square of the regional center and to slaughter the Armenians who held a demonstration day and night claiming freedom for Mountainous Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) from Baku's yoke, to disperse the demonstrators and to organize a meeting instead of them, to silence the voice of the Armenians. The Azerbaijani mobs were stopped and turned back by a group of brave native Armenians near Askeran. Or probably he told about the massacres of Sumgait. Didn't they say that the residents of Aghdam also had taken part in the crime as well? What was he inseminating in the soul of the youth?

"Look to the left," Valery told me at Giaravand village. "It seems as if they have put a mullah's papakha<sup>4</sup> on the top of the building."

The roof of the restaurant next to the monument devoted to the victims of the Second World War reminded of an oriental styled turban.

"I do not think they act rightly by constructing in such a way," the driver said.

I agreed with him.

The spring had long ago penetrated into the valley of the Kur and Eraskh (Arax) rivers. Ancient Partav-Barda during the years of Soviet power had been turned into a shabby regional center with its earthen huts.

After the division of Great Armenia between the Byzantine Empire and Sassanid Persia at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century and the fall of the Armenian Arshakuni kingdom (428 AD), several decades later, from the

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<sup>3</sup> The Azerbaijani mobs' march took place two days after adoption of the Petition by the NKAO [Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (Region) –NKAR] Regional Council of the People's Deputies to the Supreme Council of Azerbaijani SSR and Armenian SSR on secession from Soviet Azerbaijan and reunion of the NKAR with Armenian SSR (February 20, 1988).

<sup>4</sup> Tall fur hat, calpac.

end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century Partav became an important centre in the Eastern regions of Armenia. After the rebellions headed by Vardan Mamikonyan (450-451)<sup>5</sup> and Vahan Mamikonyan (481-484) Artsakh and Utik (the Eastern regions of Armenia), on the right bank of the Kur River and some regions of proper Aghuank (Aluank- “Caucasian Albania”) situated on the left bank of the Kur River comprised the Armenian kingdom of Vachagan Barepasht (the Pious) from the Aranshahik branch of the Haykazun-Sisakyan family<sup>6</sup>. During his reign the Armenian Canonical Constitution was adopted, as mentions the Armenian historian Movses Kaghankatvatsi.

After we had passed the ancient Armenian city of Partav we stopped our cars at a picturesque lake.

Before I left for Sumgait I had already familiarized myself with available information on the tragic events of that city. Once again I reread newspaper articles. The Washington Post (March 9, 1988), New York Times (March 11, 1988), and Financial Times (March 12, 1988) all reported accounts of a pregnant Armenian woman being disemboweled and her unborn baby being mutilated. Reports from the Financial Times (March 16, 1988) noted Armenians being “hunted” down and killed in their homes. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Claiborne Pell (D-RI) and Ranking Member Jesse Helms (R-NC) appealed directly to the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Mikhail S. Gorbachev and expressed deep concern about the “brutal killings of hundreds of Armenians in Sumgait” (March 18, 1988).

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<sup>5</sup> The war of the Armenians against the Sassanid domination in 449-451 led by St. Vardan Mamikonyan, The Sparapet (Commander, General military leader) of the Armenian Army, a saint of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

<sup>6</sup> In the 17-18<sup>th</sup> centuries the Armenians of Artsakh created a princely statehood of the Armenian Sghnakhs (militarized mountainous fortification). In 1720-s they waged a fatal war headed by Avan the Centurion (Avan Haryurapet) against the invading Turkish forces and defeated them.

Senator Bob Dole (R-KS) also personally appealed to Gorbachev, writing that he was “deeply concerned about widespread violence recently directed against Armenians in the Soviet Union” and noting the peaceful demonstrations expressing the “legitimate grievances of the Armenian people of the Soviet Union must be addressed with more than violence and repression” (March 19, 1988).

*“Los Angeles Times” (March 12, 1988): “It is a colossal military presence,” Andrei Shilkov, a member of the Glasnost independent publishing group, told Western reporters in Moscow. “The troops are wearing bullet-proof vests and steel helmets and patrolling the streets in groups of four.” Shilkov said that he spent six hours in Sumgait, an industrial center north of the Azerbaijan capital of Baku, after hitching a ride with a local resident to get into the closed city. No foreign journalists have been allowed to travel to Armenia and Azerbaijan since disturbances broke out there Feb. 28. Soviet officials have said that 32 persons died in the violence in Sumgait, which stretched over most of three days and was brought to a halt after the arrival of troops on March 2. “Armenians were sought out and indiscriminately killed,” he asserted. “No one I spoke to believes the official figure of 32 dead. Most of them believe the number is at least 350, maybe 600.” Shilkov emphasized, “I have never seen in the Soviet Union such a concentration of steel-helmeted soldiers,” Shilkov said. “On one street alone, I counted 47 light tanks...He said residents of the city told him of numerous atrocities allegedly committed by the Azerbaijanis...He said he was told that Azerbaijani youths entered the maternity ward of a hospital and mutilated at least one pregnant woman and several babies...”<sup>7</sup>.*

*The Economist, March 19, 1988: “... The official death toll in Sumgait slaughter is 32. This seems improbable. Armenian-born refugees who fled*

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<sup>7</sup> Charles T. Powers. Times Staff Writer Visitor Says Soviet Troops Keeping Azerbaijan Peace, [http://articles.latimes.com/1988-03-12/news/mn-817\\_1\\_soviet-union](http://articles.latimes.com/1988-03-12/news/mn-817_1_soviet-union).



*the city put the total between 300 and 500. Reports of atrocities, including the murder and mutilation of pregnant Armenian women and newborn babies in a maternity hospital, have not been denied. Other reports speak of gangs of young Azerbaijanis hunting down Armenian families and committing murder, rape and robbery. The Soviet deputy prosecutor admitted in a recent interview with the Azerbaijani Communist party paper, Bakinsky Rabochy, that there had been “massive disorders, accompanied by pogroms, arson and other outrages...the most terrible crimes” until the army moved in to restore order and impose a curfew”.*

By switching the lights off and on Valery made a sign to the driver of the bus coming from the opposite side. On the notice board of the bus it could be clearly read: “Baku-Chartaz”<sup>8</sup>.

“What kind of settlement is Chartaz?” I asked.

“It is an Armenian village of Jartar of Martuni region, the village of Adamyan<sup>9</sup>; the Azerbaijanis have a habit of falsifying a genuine toponym and replacing with the one they contrived,” Valery answered and began talking to the driver from Jartar so as to learn about the safety of the road. Vast fields stretched on both sides of the highway. It is Moukhank. The only things which brought vitality to the savanna were the telegraph poles. There grew only plants specific for the saline land.

Suren, a resident of Sumgait, recalled fragments of various incidents from time to time.

“It was the 28<sup>th</sup> of February,” he said, “the Deputy Director of our factory met me in the administrative building exclaiming surprisingly: “Ah! Are you still alive, Suren?...”. Later, when the massacres of Sumgait followed, I understood what he had meant. First Suren kept silent, then

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<sup>8</sup> The same as the Armenian historical village of Jartar of Artsakh.

<sup>9</sup> The famous figure of the Artsakh economy and the great Armenian patriot Suren Adamyan, <http://www.armworld.am/detail.php?paperid=3863&pageid=119773&lang=>

turned gloomy and having remembered about something as if getting strength he continued: "It was the 27<sup>th</sup> of February. I looked out of the window and saw a car burning in the street. I thought the Azerbaijani went mad. But what can one do? I saw an armored car crushing eight men. Only six names were mentioned in the newspapers. In the Chamber of Culture a Russian colonel told us that the Azerbaijani crowd burned down three armored vehicles and he drove straight at the mob crushing eight. He said that he had been an eyewitness to a similar situation in Alma-Ata, the capital of Kazakhstan, in 1986 when they crushed several people with an armored vehicle and the mob was silent. But in Sumgait there were specially enraged beasts who attacked tanks under the influence of drugs. Suren kept silence again and then went on: "They pulled out Shahen (from Karaqend) from his car 'GAZ-21', beat, poured petrol on him and torched."

"Eh! Gorbachev, Gorbachev!..." the man from Sumgait gave a deep sigh.

Among my papers there was information about Gorbachev's attempt to obtain a temporary break in massive demonstrations in Yerevan by giving a promise of heeding the demands of the protestors, nevertheless, the thing, how much dangerous it could be for the Kremlin leaders to make border changes, became obviously clear by the bloody events of Sumgait when the Azerbaijani mob attacked the Armenian minority. During the meeting in Moscow Gorbachev managed to make Silva Kaputikyan and Zory Balayan convince the demonstrators gathered at the Theater square to return home immediately so as to give a chance to the Politburo<sup>10</sup> and Gorbachev to examine and resolve "the problem of Karabakh". The very day, on the 26<sup>th</sup> of February, Zory Balayan and Silva Kaputikyan made a speech first from the site of the demonstration and then by television calling for stopping the meetings and demonstrations. Gorbachev knew that the massacres of the Armenians in Sumgait would

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<sup>10</sup> The executive and policy-making committee of the Communist Party.

start on the 27<sup>th</sup> of February. If the meetings and demonstrations continued simultaneously in Yerevan and Stepanakert then about one million people would gather there and the answer to the latter could only be the reunification of Artsakh to Armenia because the Kremlin had no other ready scenario against the demonstrations which grew stronger and stronger. During the tragic and horrifying events of Sumgait the Azerbaijanis attacked Armenian families, used violence, killed and burned, plundered the houses and then burned them down.

Thus the promise by Gorbachev to the Armenian leaders turned out to be a delusion...

We left for the criminal city of Sumgait and I tried to remember the information about the tragic events taken place there. The Soviet authorities have located a big amount of armed policemen and soldiers in “hot spots” so as to prevent the interethnic violence. The soldiers were on patrol in Baku streets, especially during the nights. The demonstrations in Azerbaijan started on the 24<sup>th</sup> of February when several thousands of students from Baku University and other institutions of higher education came together at the central square of Baku to protest against the demands of the Armenian demonstrators in Stepanakert and Yerevan to reunify Mountainous Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) with Mother Armenia. Thirty young Azerbaijani men who had previously arrived from the town of Kapan of Armenia told lies to the demonstrators of Baku about “violence” against an Azerbaijani during the demonstrations in Kapan. The same lies were spread by young men who went to Sumgait and told about the imaginary savagery against the Azerbaijani as if committed by the Armenians. The rumors about the violence in Kapan were not confirmed by the Soviet officials. Gerasimov, the representative of the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and other Soviet officials stated that a reason for the Sumgait disorders had been the unsubstantiated rumors, too. The Armenians absolutely denied any violence committed during the

demonstrations and the Soviet official press did not report about any violence, either.

Despite the presence of large contingents of armed policemen in Sumagyt, the unrest went on non-stop until the 1<sup>st</sup> of March when the army and tanks were dispatched to Sumgait. On March 1 a meeting was held between the Azerbaijani leaders in Sumgait and the representatives of the army, Communist Party and the Ministry of the Interior. The Azerbaijani leaders of the demonstrations presented the officials with three claims. The first claim referred to removing the capital of Nagorno-Karabakh from Stepanakert mostly inhabited by the Armenians to the city of Aghdam which was mainly populated by the Azerbaijanis. The second claim referred to the deportation of all of the Armenians living in Karabakh to Armenian SSR, and the third one referred to the dismissal of all of the local officials responsible for the continuity of the Karabakh conflict.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> of March Gorbachev received a group of USA senators. The USSR's leader listed all of the Republics having ethnic majorities and those in the border areas. "In case of redrawing the boundaries of Nagorno-Karabakh, by the same logic we shall have to redraw boundaries in various regions as well," Gorbachev had said, "yet I am not sure if it is still possible."

Certainly, if the leader of the country had decided with the Politburo to correct step by step the faults in ethnic issues made by the previous leaders at certain periods of time starting with Mountainous Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) and Nakhijevan, then the country would not have faced such a desperate situation. I am convinced that an epoch of national renaissance started all over the world when the nations decided to get rid of the pressure of the dominant nations and to become independent, to establish new economic relations with the neighbours, to feel on an equal footing with the others. And this is a process deriving from the necessity of the progress of the civilized world. This is a global movement which was preceded by slavery, serfdom, feudalism, capitalism and colonialism and mandated by the progress of humanity. The next stage is the solution to

the problem of sovereignty of oppressed nations and their inclusion among the independent countries.

At the meeting with Gorbachev the US delegation stated that a historical injustice was committed towards the Armenians. Several days later the Letter (March 18, 1988) from United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations to General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Mikhail S. Gorbachev stated: *"... We are also deeply disturbed by reports of the brutal killings of hundreds of Armenians in Sumgait. We would urge you to take whatever steps are necessary to end the violence and bring calm to that region. In the interest of peace and the preservation of the basic human rights of peoples everywhere, we are hopeful that the coming weeks will open a new and improved chapter on the future of the many nationalities that comprise the Soviet Union. Sincerely, Claiborne Pell [D-Rhode Island] Larry Pressler [R-South Dakota] Jesse Helms [R-South Carolina] Paul S. Sarbanes [D-Maryland]*<sup>11</sup>.

The ponds of Kobistan appeared before us. They pump water from here for all the settlements of Apsheron. We had a stop at Kobistan to buy mineral water. They sold it three times more expensive than the existing state price mentioned on the signboard. I paid the state price mentioned on the signboard thus making the 12-year-old seller furious. I had been in a similar situation before. The shop assistant had explained that he had bought the shop from a state official and he would suffer losses if he would not sell it more expensive. And yet the shop formally had a state status. The method of extra payment is characteristic to the Azerbaijani economy which is part of the black economy.

When we returned to our vehicles, Suren said: "It is clear who he is and it is doubtful who his successors will be but I think they will not be better than him."

On the right hand the Caspian Sea appeared. The car made a stop again waiting for the other vehicles. At last all the drivers came together.

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<sup>11</sup>[http://www.aaainc.org/fileadmin/aaainc/pdf/2013/SUMGAIT\\_THE\\_PUBLIC\\_RECORD.pdf](http://www.aaainc.org/fileadmin/aaainc/pdf/2013/SUMGAIT_THE_PUBLIC_RECORD.pdf)

Swinging his heavy body from right to left Ishkhan came up to the group and said: “The police of Sumgait have ordered that it is obligatory for us to introduce ourselves to the police station and be registered and only after that we can load goods on the trucks.”

“No police!” Aramais exclaimed who seemed to be thinner in comparison with husky Ishkhan, “their police do not deserve it for us to appear there. They supported the slaughterers and do everything to cover up the crime. After all they are dangerous, they may think of a new provocation...”

“Well,” Hayaser said, “we mustn’t introduce ourselves to the police, if they are interested let them come and register us.”

The drivers arranged where they should meet in the morning after loading the goods on the trucks at night and moved on.

“I have missed an important circumstance,” Suren said, who was trying his best to report full information on Sumgait events. “We have got a driver at our factory whose name is Zahid; in the morning of the 25<sup>th</sup> of February he began spreading provocative information and lies as if the Armenians had burnt down a Turkish<sup>12</sup> village and later on, surrounded by people, he had been convincing them that he had seen a car of an Armenian full of grenades. Another time he announced as if the fire-engine filled with petrol rushed from Stepanakert to Aghdam so as to commit the Azeri city to the flames but the state security officials sent it back. In such a manner they were continuously getting people strained and ready for action”.

“The Azerbaijani authorities”, the radio station of the “Voice of America” has reported, “headed by Hasanov, the secretary of the Central

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<sup>12</sup> In this book the term “Azerbaijani” (which instead of “Tatar” came into use since the end of the 1930s in the all-Union census records) is referred to a Turkic-speaking (the Oghuz branch of the Turkic languages) dominant population group in the present day so-called “Azerbaijan”.

Committee of Communist Party, have established a committee to support the Azerbaijani refugees to return to their settlements in Soviet Armenia where they came from the previous week. On Tuesday the radio of Baku informed as if the Central Committee of the Communist Party received a group of refugees from Armenia to listen to their “wishes and critical remarks”. Apparently, they were the very bandits who were among those who committed the pogroms in Sumgait and now demanded the sums of money and apartments previously promised by their organizers.”

“I have already made four suchlike tours in the route of Stepanakert-Sumgait-Stepanakert. I have transported household stuff of eight families,” the driver said to Valery, “a few days ago I drove Pavel Kutenko, a correspondent of ‘Izvestia’, to Sumgait who was seated beside me just like you. We talked to each other and he said: “Your job is honest.” The driver handed a piece of newspaper to me, “And this is the article of the correspondent of ‘Izvestya’ Dardokin on Sumgait and Karabakh movement which had been set up but later was cleared away.” Pavel told it was not to some people’s liking to report about the truth.

“Before the tragedy and after it,” he began to read loudly, “Sumgait is the closest neighbour of Baku. It is difficult to believe what has happened in that city. And from now on in thousands of Armenian and non-Armenian families Sumgait will always remain the symbol of enmity, horror, anger and disaster. On Saturday the crowd gathered again. The eyewitnesses said that at the beginning there were no local people there. They insisted that everything was started by those who had arrived by four ‘Ikarus’ buses and thirty ‘Zhiguli’ cars. Afterwards, the local people joined them. Muslimzade, the First Secretary of the City Committee of the Party interrupted his Moscow holidays and also joined them.

The eyewitnesses reported that there were also drunkards and drug addicts in the mob. They organized all that at the bus station. The black power becomes more apparent which finding no opposition on Sunday evening began the firings, slaughters, mockery and humiliation directed at the Armenian population of the city. The slaughterers had listed addresses

of the Armenians. And the local police did nothing to support the Armenians. Moreover, when the first military company entered the city and was attacked by the rabble of many thousands, the police kept on watching indifferently as the young boys were tortured and killed. Are all of these just contingencies? Did only the newcomers bring all of these 'contingencies'? No! We have got all the grounds to confirm that under the solemn shadow of the museum of the 'International Friendship' there were large omissions of interethnic relations in cultural affairs".

The sea had drawn back having left numerous ponds after itself and the road led through the ponds. The remains of the old oil fields could be seen around. We had a stop for the last time.

As Suren expressed his suspicion if he could find time to solve the problems of looking for a person in Sumgait to help me and find a place to spend the night I moved to Aramais Avanesyan's track where a passenger named Alyosha promised to settle the problems.

Driving out of the highway which led from Baku to Derbent and to the North Caucasus the caravan of our trucks turned to the right. The unusually unpleasant and pungent smell reminded us of approaching the city of chemical industry workers. With gigantic aluminum cast letters it was written "СУМГАИТ" ("SUMGAIT"). At the flat area, here and about, the skyscraper chimneys were exhaling poison gas profusely with their jaws outstretched to the sky. Just from the neighbourhood of these plants the notorious micro-regions of Sumgait started where the mob had for three days been butchering the Armenian population.

The squares and streets were spacious. Apparently, the authors of the plan of the industrial city suffered from a gigantomania which was peculiar to the mentality of the leaders of the Socialist countries who had long ago buried in oblivion the customs of the actual people and of the normal human environment. And in the neighbourhood with the latter the district of 'Nakhalstroy', full of self-built slums appeared to be the other extremity of human settlement and was near to the lifestyle of mice.

What is expecting me in this city?



Everything was covered with haze. I began to feel the disastrous situation which had fallen to my lot. To rely on Alyosha from Sumgait, as it seemed from his uncertain temper and self-content words, would mean to push all of my plans to complete failure. For a moment I looked around in despair. But a little later I found a thousand and one ways out. If there were any Armenian families left here, they would undoubtedly help me. The deported residents of Sumgait sheltered in the rest houses of Arzakan were kind and generous even in despair. After all wasn't it my aim to discover the truth and reveal it to the civilized world?

When we were walking along the Sumgait streets at midnight Alyosha showed me a bulky man who was walking with his head bowed and lost in thoughts, murmuring something to himself.

"Here is my friend! He has got a contusion from the blow of the metal lever, his brain doesn't work properly but he is a wonderful man."

Alyosha leaned out of the car window and exclaimed: "Hakob!, Hakob!....look here, he doesn't hear as he is occupied with thoughts or he thinks a Turk calls after him," and then he turned to me, "You will lodge yourself at his apartment, he will help you greatly."

The car entered one of the yards of the similar five-storeyed apartment houses of the 9<sup>th</sup> micro-region.

The apartment was on the fourth floor where Alyosha's sons had already bundled up the things and prepared for their father's arrival. A young man with a dark face came in.

Hakob put a bottle of vodka on the table. The boys got annoyed:

"Will you get busy with drinking instead of helping?"

"Hey, guy! Shouldn't we celebrate our leaving Sumgait? How it could be?" Hakob replied and turned to me trying to tell something but he continually repeated the same sentence.

Alyosha's sons whose faces expressed strain and distress as if they had temporarily appeared at a dangerous place and now seemed to be in a hurry to return back to homeland an hour sooner. They carried the goods down the narrow stairs silently and loaded the truck. At last Hakob suggested going to his apartment. Seyran Melkumyan, having felt that I wanted to find an excuse to refuse Hakob's offer, said, 'Ok, let it be as it will happen, I agree, let's go to my place, my apartment is free, my family has left for Krasnodar region and I live alone till I have my flat sold or exchanged.'

I made an appointment with Aramais so as to take me to Stepanakert in a few days on his way back from Sumgait as I had no other chance to quit Sumgait safe and sound.

Seyran's apartment was on the first floor. There were shoemaker's tools, wooden shoe models, shoe lasts, pieces of leather thrown about in the balcony.



**Seyran Melkumyan**

"I am a shoemaker, Seyran said thus preventing my question. "I deal with shoemaking in my spare time. All of the residents of the town, both the Armenians, Russians and Turks bring their shoes to me for repair. The Committee of Civil Affairs took away my pavilion and sold it to an unskillful person of whom the clients of the whole city complain now."

"But according to the new law on cooperatives you have got the right to..."

"According to the law-yes, the law permits but for how many times I applied I was refused. When the soldiers brought the Armenians together

in the Chamber of Culture so as to save them from the claws of the slaughterers, H.Seidov, the Head of the Sumgait Commission, the Chairman of the AzSSR Council of Ministers asked me why I wanted to leave Azerbaijan and I replied to him: "I have several times applied to restore my shoe-repair shop but the Committee of Civil Affairs refused me." The latter was present there, too. I also told about my father, a veteran of the Patriotic War, who had been wounded in his head and lost his vision. My father had several times made an appeal to receive a car. There was the USSR's decision on it. But neither Muslimzade, the First Secretary of the City Committee, nor T. Mamedov, the Chairman of the Committee of Civil Affairs, answered his appeal. Seidov declared demonstratively before people, "Can you prove your words? If you are lying, you'll be charged with it." I immediately showed the bundle of the appeals' copies. The Armenians had very little rights here though we had built this city. With the law we could get very little. Later on, when we had been taken to the Chemists' rest house, Seidov met me once again and asked, "Who did you appeal to restore your shoe-repair shop?" The chief architect of the city replied instead of me that I had four times made an appeal on that issue before I could utter a word. The Chairman of the Council of Republic's Ministers said, "You can reopen your workshop at any part of the city you like."

I could not stand any longer: "No, I want nothing now, after this slaughter I forever leave Azerbaijan. I have already registered myself at the settlement of Tsvetochny of Maykop region. My family lives there now."

"And what about your apartment, Seyran?"

"Certainly, it is a pity, I obtained it with great difficulty, it is a convenient apartment, but there is nothing to be done, it is already impossible to live there."

"A few years ago I happened to be in the settlement of Tsvetochny," I said, "I was there to conduct a series of television program about the local

Hamshen Armenians. They are kind, hospitable and patriotic people. They have recently opened courses of the Armenian language at school.”

It was already late. Seyran closed the door firmly. There was an axe hanging on the nail beside the door. He hammered another nail in the wall and hung a new axe.

“And this one is for you,” he said.

“Why?” I asked perplexedly.

He kept silent and then said, “If they force the door and break into the house, I shall just shoot with the diver’s harpoon at their bellies and then I shall strike with an axe who would try to enter. You will also help me. And if they come from the balcony...” he kept silent, looked anxiously and confusedly around himself, then continued, “excuse me, just every day, every hour I am waiting for them to come. And now that is most probable. If they learn there is a writer, journalist at my home, no doubt they will come...”

“They will not come, Seyran,” I said calmly and confidently deciding not to get into a panic whatever happens.

“You know the horrors of those days still remain,” Seyran confessed sadly, “the images of those days will follow me till the end of my life.”

The door creaked for a moment. Seyran was petrified. I watched the pupils of his eyes grow larger. I felt what kind of horror he experienced, the resident of Sumgait who had hosted me.

“Seyran,” I said calmly, “it’s me, I have leant against the door and it is giving in.”

He said nothing.

### **March 28, 1988**

Early in the morning I came down to the yard to get informed if everything was going well with the loading the truck with goods and furniture. The driver once again assured me he would take me back in a

week. Henrik Hayryan appeared at the truck; he had also come to move his goods to Stepanakert.

“They made an attempt of burning our car at night,” he pronounced in a hardly audible whisper very carefully looking around.

“How is that?” I inquired thinking simultaneously about the preventive steps to be taken by Seyran.

A stranger came up to the boy who was helping me to load the truck, took him aside and told him something.” Henrik said, “the latter told me as if they warned him: “Leave this place immediately, we shall come in half an hour to burn down the truck with its cargo.”

“So, all this hasn't ended yet, has it?” I asked.

“What kind of end are you talking about? Is it something to have an end?” Henrik said.

I placed my video camera in the bag which had a special hole for the lens and we went out to street with Seyran. I pushed the video button and directed the bag's hole to those parts of the city which would be helpful for the future film to depict the atmosphere of Sumgait. When we were already on our way back home having made purchases at the grocery store, Seyran said, “I watched everybody from aside examining you attentively at the store. And the shopkeeper didn't take his eyes off your case. Now they are very cautious and too much attentive and nothing escapes their notice.”

We entered home. I said I would like to meet the residents of Sumgait, to visit the apartments where the atrocities were committed. After having talked on the phone to somebody, Seyran said, “I have arranged an appointment with Sirvard, she's waiting us now. Probably she will tell you certain things and even if she has nothing to tell, maybe she will show the place of the people who were eyewitnesses to the massacre.”

At first sight, the city was quiet living by its everyday life. A more attentive look was enough to feel the inner tension which struck the eye.

We tried to catch a taxi. Nobody stopped. They did not trust casual passers-by. I raised my hand to stop the “Moskvich”.

The driver whose face expressed despair and gross insult ignored us and drove by.

“He's an Armenian,” Seyran said, “I know him.”

“And why didn't he pay any attention to us?”

“Don't be offended, the man who has experienced horror can't be otherwise. Now the Armenians of Sumgait look like a flock of sheep pushed by the pack of wolves to one of the corners of the pinfold being helpless, miserable...”

A type of people stood out against the passers-by in the street whose members were walking without looking around, they were extremely strained and it seemed to them as if the whole city's attention was fixed on them and any time now they could be shot in the back.

They were Armenians.

Sirvard's apartment was in the city center next to the Lenin square where the massacres and atrocities to the Armenians, the plunder of apartments and the fires had broken out.

The hostess said: “I would like to help you, but I am afraid of... there's a man who has got important materials. I have made an appointment with him and he will be at the ophthalmological polyclinics in an hour.”

“And were there any kind of threats on your address in those days?” I turned to her.

“No,” Sirvard said, “Well, everybody knows that this is Ahmad's apartment.”

“How? Does any Ahmad live here?”, I asked in despair looking for any “ahmadian” traces in the apartment.

“He was my husband,” Sirvard explained, “he left for Russia on an outgoing job and did not return any more.”

“It turns out the slaughterers were residents of Sumgait,” I said.

“Of course,” Sirvard answered.

The doorbell rang. Seyran fixed his alarmed inquiring look at Sirvard’s face.

“This is my sister Stella,” the hostess explained.

Sirvard’s sister was thin and gloomy with a stiff and strict temper. She was concerned that same massacres will break out towards the Armenians of Baku.

“Thus do you feel as well that you are a hostage?” I asked.

“Yes.”

“And the Armenians of Baku are hostages in their turn, too?”

“Yes, and you should understand it. Can you lodge half a million Armenians in Yerevan?” she asked.

“And why exactly in Yerevan? The border villages of Artsakh and Armenian SSR have been emptied” I said.

“Will a resident of Baku move to a village?” she asked.

“Earlier a number of Armenians from the villages of Artsakh have moved to Baku and became residents there, have not they?”

“No, they are the generation of those who left Artsakh before. I was born in Baku.”

“Excuse me,” I said repressing my anger, “I have recently been to Khutor district of Baku where the Armenians live. It is not worthy of the modern human being to live in such insanitary conditions. There is not even water for bathing, let alone drinking water. Yet, having Artsakh and Soviet Armenia at his back one shouldn’t permit himself to live under such humiliating conditions. Any Armenian village is several times better in all aspects rather than what is called Khutor. I saw crooked streets in

your Khutor one and a half meters wide. 250 thousand residents of Khutor are from Karabakh who came in the 50s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to study at technical and other colleges and as if they settled down in Baku having founded barracks here.”

“I would even say more,” Stella said, “the men of Khutor leave for seasonal outgoing work leaving their wives to casual men. Ok, in this case let's say they leave Baku. Where should they go to?”

“They prefer keeping their families under the threat of loss, as hostages.”

“I visited the region of NZS<sup>13</sup> adjacent to the airport. There were Armenians, too. The whole floor of the settlement was covered with gas-supply pipes and the unauthorized self-built constructions rested upon them. How many times the gas-supply pipes have exploded by blowing up the houses with their residents! Can it be really tolerated?”

“Most people are leaving for the North Caucasus.”

“They are doing the wrong thing,” I insisted, “they can't persist as Armenians there.”

“And what about Baku? Is it possible for an Armenian to survive here?” Stella made an attack, “there is no school, no cultural center and no atmosphere for national development here. Is Armenia so much concerned about the state of the Armenians living in Baku? Why do not the state officials come here, get acquainted with the local situation and pose a question before the Azerbaijani authorities? Indeed, in that case I would say that we have a republic to back us. Have the districts of Khutor and Nakhalstroy been ever covered in your press? Has any journalist ever been to Khutor? Never.”

“You also know well that in the conditions of the political regimes of Stalin and Brezhnev nobody would be allowed to write anything like that.”

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<sup>13</sup> Nasosno-Zavodskaya Stantsia-pump factory station, at the Sumgait airport base.



“What about now?”

“And now I am here...”

Seyran was anxiously walking up and down looking at his watch incessantly.

“Let's go, we'll speak later,” he said.

We hurried to the ophthalmological polyclinics. The Caspian cold wind was blowing.

My old illness of colitis again made me feel it and I couldn't bear the sharp pain in my stomach. There was no sign of the resident of Sumgait. We hurried home. After an hour Seyran returned home.

“There is no sign of that man,” he said, ‘it seems to me he is afraid of coming.”

The telephone rang. It was Sirvard. Having talked to her Seyran apologized to me and checked my documents. I showed my membership card of the USSR Writer's Union and the mission warrant but I made up my mind to refuse any help from her. She had suggested to receive me as a guest. I was not going outside to fall into the hands of the bandits then and there.

### **March 29, 1988**

I asked Seyran to accompany me to the Prosecutor's office of the city which became the seat of the USSR Prosecutor's Investigating Commission arrived from Moscow. They informed me here that V. S. Galkin, the Chairman of the Investigating Commission had left for Moscow in the morning. His deputy R. I. Popov and the other officials refused to accept and speak to me in spite of the fact that I presented the warrant issued by the Chairman of the ArmSSR's State Committee of Television directed to Galkin to help me in conducting my search. When I told them I was a

writer they immediately looked at each other with meaning and then cast a slight glance at me saying they had not been authorized to speak to me.

“But I have important news to report you,” I didn't give in thinking that the information on the attempt of burning down the truck arrived from Artsakh would interest them.

“We are not authorized,” the members of the investigating body replied in an offensive tone, “we can say nothing during this process of investigation.”

“I myself have something to report you...”

“We have no right to listen to anybody.”

Disappointed with the first failure I had a desire to leave that criminal city immediately. Surely, it was not the first case in my practice as a journalist. Recalling all of the cases when I had overcome many obstacles due to my virtues of persistence and patience I decided to stay and continue my work especially as the civilized world was ignorant of what had really happened and was still going on in Sumgait and all over Azerbaijan SSR.

I stood in despair at the entrance of the Prosecutor's office when a bulky man of about 40 with an Army major insignia left the building of the Prosecutor's office and looked at me steadily.

Having noticed my embarrassment he smiled. I also smiled back at him. He approached me.

“Don't you remember me?” he addressed me speaking Russian in a low voice.

“I don't remember”, I replied trying my best to recall where I had met this man with rounded cheeks and big eyes.

“We met in Stepanakert. You were tired as you had just returned from Martakert. Let me introduce myself once again; Hovhannisyan Valera Armenak...”

“Ah, yes, sure”, I cheered up, “I just couldn’t match your uniform with your face. As far as I remember we had to meet the next day as you said you had a lot to tell... And what do you do here?”

“During the days of pogrom I was here... And now I have visited this dreadful city by the order of the USSR Prosecutor” he said.

Then he continued: “But it is dangerous for you in Sumgait. Have you got a companion or a bodyguard?”

“No, what kind of bodyguard! They will notice immediately and...”, I answered.

“You are right but I think they follow you,” he said.

“You will never notice it. But the Azerbaijanis don’t follow me. I think so.”

“Well, it will turn out at the end...” he warned.

And Valera gave a wistful smile:

“You don't know this stuff and you'd better never had such an occasion to know them. I'd rather tell you everything in order. Let's just hide from public view or else they will notice us and no good will come out of that.”

Having walked around and making sure that we were not followed, we went to the seaside. The Caspian billows touched the wet sand and retreated leisurely.

“This year on February 10 a mutiny broke out in the jail of Ghzldash,” Valera, the former Baku policeman started his story, “the reason for that was the dissatisfaction of the Talish with the prison warden who was from Nakhijevan<sup>14</sup>”. He had appointed his Azeri friends to important positions and created more favourable conditions for the inmates from there. It

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<sup>14</sup> The ancient Armenian region (with its centre of the same name) of Nakhijevan was annexed to Azerbaijan SSR by the illegal Bolshevik-Kemalist treaties of Moscow (March 16) and Kars (October 13) of 1921.

goes without saying that everything had its start from Heydar Aliyev who was also considered to be from Nakhijevan”, he said.

“Yet in reality, he was born in a Kurdish-populated village of Jomartlu<sup>15</sup> of the Sisian region in Armenian SSR,’ I said.

“I don’t know, the official version is that he is from Nakhijevan, it means he is from a family which turned Turkish. Tofik Aslanov, the deputy minister of the Azerbaijani Interior Affairs, who was the son of Azi Aslanov, a hero of the Soviet Union, didn’t like the situation in the prison. He also did his best in his turn to protect the Talishs, his compatriots. Do you know that this people are of ethnic Iranian origin whose country was divided, the northern part is in the Azerbaijan SSR and the southern part is in Iran? Finally, one day clashes broke out inside the colony. Apart from the inmates, the prison officers and officials were engaged in the fighting, too. They killed the prison officials from Nakhijevan, hanged some of them and burnt the others. The inmates burnt the control panel of the jail so as to be able to escape from it. But the soldiers, with the automatic rifles and machine guns ready in their hands, shot the prisoners approaching the barbed wire. They raised the alarm, mobilized the Interior Ministry troops quickly and sent us to suppress the mutiny. We broke down the entrance gates by tractors and put down the mutiny pitilessly. Several weeks later, on February 27, our regiment moved to Baku. But at midnight they again raised an alarm, and the service buses were again filled with the police. In full gear, including truncheons, shields, bulletproof jackets, but with no firearms, we set out for Sumgait. They informed us there were

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<sup>15</sup> From ancient times there has been the original Armenian village Tanahat (an Araratian-Biainian inscription was discovered there), famous for its early medieval monastery complex (5th -13th centuries AD) (**Թ. Խ. Հակոբյան, Ստ. Տ. Մելիք-Բախչյան, Հ. Խ. Բարսեղյան**, Հայաստանի եւ հարակից շրջանների տեղանունների բառարան, հ. 5, Երևան, 2001, էջ 674): At the beginning of the 20th century a nomadic Kurdish tribe group appeared there and used an alien “Jomartlu” name. At present the original Armenian name of the village of Tanaht is restored.

demonstrations in the city squares and as if Muslimzade, the First Secretary of the City Committee, had been killed. In an hour we reached Sumgait. There were stones and pieces of broken glass scattered about the square. "What has happened?" I asked a policeman. "How should I know? The crowd has rushed to the direction of the sea," he answered. We went to the municipal administration of the Interior Affairs. Colonel Chapay Aghayev, the chief of public order, was also with us. 80 percent of the policemen in my battalion were Azerbaijani, that's to say they were Turks, six of them were Lezgins, two Armenians and three ethnic Russians. They informed us at the municipal administration that the infuriated mob was breaking the shop windows, looting and beating the Armenians. It was as if we had been sent to suppress the slaughterers but by the order of Ramiz Mamedov and Tofik Aslanov, the deputy ministers of Internal Affairs, we were forbidden to interfere in the events in the city. We turned to a simple audience. "Don't undertake anything!" Ramiz Mamedov, who was also the chief of the special police squad, said, "sit down and wait." Colonel Aghayev, who watched the mob mercilessly smash everything into pieces and make a mockery of the people, let forth a stream of oaths directed his chiefs and ordered me to arrest the villains. I cut through the mob with my boys and arrested seven of the activists taking them to the municipal administration. They had cold weapons in their hands and their pockets were filled with looted jewelry from the Armenian victims. When we started to disperse the mob somebody declared loudly, "Let all of you go home, we shall start our work tomorrow morning!" I approached Colonel Fatullah Huseynov, the chief of the water supply security, who had been the chief of the state motor vehicle inspectorate of the Republic and told him that most mobsters were the students of special patrolling and vocational school. "Why do you interfere?" F. Huseynov cut in roughly, "put your boys into the buses and leave Sumgait immediately!" "But you are not my chief and I do not obey your orders!" I replied to him. I already

felt in my bones that some evil forces were plotting a large-scale event. They were bringing together sharp objects, various weapons and stones. When we delivered the detained thugs to the watch of the municipal administration, the very moment they were set free. "Why do you release the offenders?" I complained. "That's not your business," the policeman on duty said and then turned to the thugs who had been set free, "You have been brought here by this Armenian and we haven't got any guilt in this affair, so excuse us and go, continue your work." The killers stared at me menacingly and left the place. I reported my superior about this. "We'll find it out," Chapay Aghaev said who tried to make out what was really going on. Because of having been engaged in the suppression of the mutiny at the prison they didn't manage to explain what had really been plotted in Sumgait. At 3 o'clock in the morning they informed that new massacres had broken out. A homebrewed combat car filled with Azerbaijani policemen left for the districts of Sumgait. Then we found the car completely crashed and the policemen heavily beaten. And we drove to the tube rolling factory. The Azerbaijanis had closed the city gates and set up a barricade there. I asked an Azerbaijani: "What's going on here?" "The Armenians are killing, slaughtering us," he said, "I have fled from Kapan." "Listen here, boy!", Aghaev addressed to him, "if they are killing your people there, then why have you left your wife and children and come to Sumgait? Please, bring witnesses to conform your words and do not organize slaughters of innocent people in Sumgait. I see you have specially come here to engage people with your provoking news." "As it seems, you have also sold yourself to the Armenians", the Azerbaijani provoker who had arrived from Kapan, said. I was gradually being surrounded by the Azerbaijanis and gripped in a steel vice. The members of my battalion began to disperse them so as to make me free. We returned to the City Committee of the Communist Party".

I noticed a policeman approaching us along the coastline glued to a girl. But we were in the focus of his attention and not the girl. I made a sign to Valery by look. When the couple caught up with us, Valery turned to the lieutenant in fluent Azerbaijani: "Alik Rustamov, what are you doing here?" The lieutenant asked his girlfriend to walk along the coastline until he reached her. When the girl was at a safe distance, he spoke, "Comrade Major, I have been ordered by the mobsters' staff to follow you and make a signal to them in case I notice something suspicious so that the group would come and square accounts with you. I myself decided to take the opportunity and warn you." Valera smiled and said, "Tell me 'Let me die' and I shall believe you." This expression was a "sacred" oath for the Azerbaijanis. "I swear by my Armenian mother... you need to leave Sumgait at once," the semi-Armenian, semi-Azerbaijani replied. "Well, Alik, I believe you, and tell them my companion is a Jewish man who has arrived from Moscow..." "Well, I understand," Alik Rustamov answered hastily and hurried to the girl who was waiting for him.

"Let's leave this place," Valera said, "as it seems to me, I shall not be able to visit the hotel any more. Well, I shall in a way snatch my case and leave this place, too."

'Where will you go?'

'I will leave for Yerevan, I have got a wonderful friend, Dionys Margaryan, he promised to find a position for me at the police.'

"He's also a friend of mine, he and his deputy always support me greatly. They have provided me with a video camera to shoot videos here. By the way, will you agree if I make a video of our conversation?"

"Well, let's put this way, as soon as we meet in Yerevan whatever you want I shall speak before your camera but now let's be satisfied with what I have already told you. Where did I pause?..."

"Well, you came back to the City Committee."

‘They said the Azerbaijani leadership was coming. It was five o’clock in the morning when the column of the cars of ‘Gaz-24’ entered the square. They had left their government cars at the city gates, took other machines so as to stay unnoticeable for a stranger’s eye. Kh. Bagirov, V. Konovalov, Seidov, the other members of the Bureau of the Communist Party, the leaders of the Committee of the State Security and Internal Affairs got out of the cars. The leaders of the plants, organizations, educational institutions and housing authorities had come together at the hall of the City Committee beforehand. The session of the political-economical activists was over at 7:30 pm. As my battalion was instructed to secure the safety of the activists’ session sometimes I heard their speeches. Without hiding anything they spoke freely of how many gangs were to attack, which districts they should attack, what they were armed with and whether the police would guarantee their safety.

When the residents of Sumgait expressed their concerns about the Russian troops, Khamran Bagirov, the First Secretary of the Central Committee, said they wouldn’t enter the city for three days. There was such a command and they had so much time to act freely.

The session was over and the leaders of the republic sat in the cars and left the place quietly. We moved towards the bus station. And the ball-shaped tea house of Sumgait reminded of a beehive. People went in and out frequently. That was the headquarters of the killers. When I asked the major of the police why they didn’t arrest the leaders of the killers he gave a short answer: “There is no command and we do not interfere.” We were also looking forward for the command. But the command was being late. Here the command was given at last: “To get on the buses and leave Sumgait”. A mob was again gathering in the square. At the outskirts of Baku, on the highway leading to Shamakhi they informed by radio contact that another massacre broke out in Sumgait. The buses turned back and



we drove directly to Sumgait. It was already impossible to enter the city. From every corner they were throwing stones and Molotov cocktails at us. We moved onwards as a chain in a line and began to pressure the killers.

“Stop! Do not move!” the Azerbaijani commanders exclaimed. But the Russian civilians approached us and begged in horror: “Please help, they are killing people over there...!” At that moment I felt a burning in the right side of my breast. They shot at me with a sharp electrode from the diver’s harpoon. My soldiers pulled out the arrow and helped me to the car. “Sit down and keep silent!” the Colonel commanded. With a Lezgin driver loyal to me we reached the highway. I was naively thinking about reaching Baku as soon as possible to inform the state authorities about the events still going on in Sumgait. The armoured cars and vehicles full of soldiers stood in a line at the outskirts of the town. “They are killing the Armenian population in Sumgait,” I turned to the Russian officer. “And we have been instructed to stop and wait,” he replied to me bitterly. Big military units, the regiments of naval and infantry colleges had been centered here. Only on the third day of Sumgait pogrom (the 1st of March), they allowed the 3<sup>rd</sup> Balujarian regiment of the Internal Affairs to enter Sumgait.

“Didn't you go to have your wound cured?”

“No, they just applied iodine to clear the wound and then bandaged it. The time was inappropriate. Our regiment was sent to Baku and I was appointed as a sergeant-major at the Republican mortuary. Gabil Aliyev, the deputy of the Ministry of Interior Affairs, was also with me. During the first two days they brought thirty six dead bodies among which there were Russians, a Lezgin and two Azerbaijanis. The rest were Armenians. The Azerbaijanis were killed because their wives were Armenians. They tried everything to protect their wives and children. The young Lezgin, having fallen into the hands of the killers during the pogrom, tried to explain he wasn't Armenian but the Azerbaijani gang went on mocking him. At last, by the demand of the mob, the Lezgin showed them his circumcised penis. At

that moment an Azerbaijani cut the Lezgin's penis from its other end with a sharp knife and raising it high in the air declared solemnly under the mob's roars of laughter: "Look here, the *sunnat*<sup>16</sup> of the Lezgins must be performed this way." The young Lezgin died of hemorrhage. Then they brought a corpse of a Jew. The third day it seemed as if there would be no end to the flow of the dead bodies. But they already registered them as casualties, victims of fire or skirmishes with bandits. For several days they had kept them at hospitals and local mortuaries and only after that they took their corpses to the republican mortuary. But all of them bore the noticeable traces of torture. A part of them had died just in hospitals. I saw 300 corpses that day."

"And couldn't you take the register with you?"

"No, they kept watch on my every step. A special commission of the Central Committee of the Communist Party arrived. They brought suits to put on the corpses. For each victim or invalid they paid a thousand and five hundred rubles to their family members. I clothed five victims of the Melkumyan family.



**Gevorg and Sona Melkumyans**

They were first buried in the international cemetery called 'Wolf's Gates' but after some time the relatives of the family removed the corpses to take them to their homeland - Mountainous Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh). I remember they brought

burned corpses from the mortuary of Mardakian. You can never prove they were burned in Sumgait. They acted in such a way so as to conceal

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<sup>16</sup> The term for the action or traditional circumcision of Muslim people.

the traces of the crime. Then they took us to Baku where anti-Armenian demonstrations were continuously being held. The mob wanted to attack the Armenian church and destroy it. We had to apply tear gas and truncheons at the Oilmen Avenue. After some time I was called by the USSR Prosecutor's Commission and asked on what basis I set free the killers detained on February 28. "Let you first examine my reports and then make it clear who had let them walk," I told them, "and after all why should I have set free the bandits when I had myself detained them and took them to the municipal police department? Besides, I am an Armenian, am not I? ...". "Ah, yes, pardon me," the Russian investigator said having understood that nothing came out of their attempts to rig the truth, "just they informed from the police that you had set them free."

I could hardly take my bearings and find the district and the apartment house where Seyran's home was. Seyran was chain smoking and pacing the yard. He was anxious and he watched the street where I should appear from. But I entered the yard from the opposite side. As soon as he noticed me a slight smile appeared on his face. We went up to his flat silently.

"Seyran, I want to visit the apartments of those who suffered the pogrom and talk to the people. Can you help me?"

"Look here," Seyran said having thought a little, "of course, I can but let you know it is a dangerous affair. If they learn...we are lost."

"Nothing will happen, nobody will learn anything," I gave him heart.

"Well, for the sake of good work, Motherland and truth...what matters?"

### **March 30, 1988**

In the morning having learned about a family Seyran said, "Now we shall go to the apartment of the Hayrapetyans."

In half an hour we were at the 4<sup>th</sup> district in the neighbourhood of the Lenin square. The door was opened by a Ukrainian-looking woman who invited us in as soon as she heard the Artsakh dialect. It seemed as if a tsunami went through the apartment. Everything was topsy-turvy. The inner doors were not in their places. Besides the big oval table and the chairs nothing was left in the apartment. The crystal chandelier was broken and hung helplessly from the ceiling. I don't know what they looked like before the tragic events of Sumgait but now it was impossible to catch a notion of smile on the faces of Gevorg or Sona and their 16-year-old daughter Nelly.

I introduced myself and explained my purpose of visit. I was preparing the recording camera and trying to support the conversation at the same time. I should act in a manner so that they wouldn't feel my intentions and feel easy while speaking. I myself had a kind of problem. While watching after the recording process I should keep to the subject of the conversation.

"Humankind must learn the truth," I concluded.

"If my husband doesn't mind..." Sona said staring at the floor.

"Well, what is the matter? For the sake of truth it must be done," Gevorg Hayrapetyan said and began to tell: "It was February 26 and we went out for shopping. I saw a crowd gathered at the City Committee. They were shouting and crying loudly: "Karabakh is ours, Armenians, clear out!" The following day it was repeated. Then the mob gathered at our yard. First they rang the doorbell then broke the door down, started beating and robbing...thus we found ourselves in the hospital."

"Did you not try to hide yourselves in advance?"

"We didn't expect them to break into apartments."

"How can it be explained?"

“Someone lied that the Armenians had committed violence against them in Karabakh and they should act likewise in Sumgait,” Sona said, “I told him that was impossible and that I didn’t believe that. But it was all the same to them, they broke the wooden stick over my husband’s head.”

“Where do you work?” I asked.

“I work at the ‘Organic Syntheses’ production unit.”

“And how do your Azerbaijani colleagues interpret the latest events?”

“They pretend as if they sympathize but it can be felt that they are not particularly inclined to blame their brothers. I have well felt it. Though they said, “Hell with them, they have stolen goods, it’s most important you survived”, but why such a thing had been allowed they kept silent in this respect. If they wished to prevent that wouldn't be difficult for them. The policemen watched and enjoyed. It was a real show for them. The feeling of resentment that has been left in us will never dissolve. Our disappointment knows no border. All of our Azerbaijani neighbours had closed their doors.”

“Did it happen in other places that the Azerbaijani neighbours showed support to the Armenians?” I said having guessed what the talk was about.

“But our neighbours watched indifferently at our place,” Sona said, “there was not even a person to warn about the danger. Maybe our Russian neighbours didn't know what was going on but the Azerbaijanis were well-aware what was to be expected. My daughter Nelly’s girlfriend, a Lezgin by nationality, wanted to come at our place and warn but her parents didn’t allow her by saying that it was dangerous.”

“How many days did you stay at the hospital?”

“Twenty days. They had broken Gevorg’s ribs. The concussion of the brain and the contusion of the right eye still remind of the pain. The neighbours said after we had been taken to hospital some dozen people

came and stole all our property. They even took bed-linen with them. Who would have it taken? It was the handiwork of the locals. As if there was nothing found to take away.”

There was a heavy silence. Gevorg disturbed the silence.

“They made an attempt of rape. There was a comrade among them...”

“Do you still call him a ‘comrade’?” I asked surprisingly.

“Well, I don't know, it just sounds like that,” Gevorg pronounced in confusion, “he didn't allow, he said it was enough, let's go, we've still a lot of work to do.”

“Who were they?”

“Young men of 25-45 years old. And the street urchins were keeping them company! They are looking for excuses, they say the bandits were drug addicts but they broke into the apartments of the Armenians only and not the ones belonging to the Azerbaijanis.”

“And so close to Baku,” I noticed.

“Then naval forces arrived from Baku,” Gevorg answered, “I asked a captain why they came so late and he replied: “The fathers of your city didn't give permission saying that everything was in peace at their place and they did not need any support.”

“He also said they had stood up under alert and waited for an instruction,” the wife added, “Muslimzade and the others convinced them not to come, there was no need for that. The guilty were the City Committee and the City Executive Committee of the Communist Party.”

“The demonstrators passed near your apartment house,” I reminded her not forgetting to change the plans on the screen so that the editing would be easy to do.

“I haven't seen them,” the husband said.

“I have seen them,” the wife said, “I was looking from the balcony. I noticed some of my colleagues among them. Thus they were together as one soul. I am not sure, perhaps they did not take part in the pogrom, but they supported the mob and the murderers.”

“And was it connected with the events developing around Nagorno-Karabakh?,” I asked.

“I knew nothing about the events of Nagorno-Karabakh,” Gevorg said.

“We always learn news very late,” his wife added.

“I am from Baku,” her husband said, “my ancestors were from Baku as well. I had no connection with Karabakh. My chief once said as if he had seen a peaceful demonstration in Baku where they declared ‘Karabakh their land’.”

I asked Nelly: “After having seen all this haven’t you lost your trust in men?”

“No, well, all people are not like them.”

“But as for me, I have lost my faith,” the mother said.

“And do you blame those people who have left Sumgait?” I asked them.

“Why, we would leave for Odessa,” Sona said.

“Why exactly to Odessa?”

“My sister lives there.”

We went out to the street. Seyran greeted us with the old vendor of the newsstand.

“What happened in your city?” I asked in Azerbaijani.

“It was a flood which appeared suddenly and passed away,” the vendor replied, “it was a disaster, a calamity, it will never happen again...”

“But why did it exactly happen to us? What was the matter?” Seyran asked him angrily.

“Well, it was a kind of flood...” the Azerbaijani repeated confusedly.

Seyran turned to me, "Seidov, the Chairman of Commission, also expressed it in the same way, they repeat his words."

We stopped at the advertisement panel of the city. Seyran went through the papers being interested what opportunities there were to exchange the apartment. Two young Azerbaijanis in black suits and ties appeared at the advertisement panel. They examined the advertisements carefully and tore them up after a small discussion with each other. I watched them attentively. They mainly tore up the advertisements offering to exchange apartments with the Azerbaijanis of Kapan. If these men were employees of the City Committee then they had a special instruction to prevent the Azerbaijanis of Syunik from changing their places of living. The Pan-Turkic ideologists of Azerbaijan are most notorious in their absolutely groundless and illegal claims with regard to Armenian Syunik. This historical region of Armenia hindered the Turks from expanding to the East, to realize their Pan-Turkic and Pan-Turanian ambitions by moving towards their ancestral homeland of Altai and "recreating" the "Ottoman Empire."

"Why are you tearing up?" I addressed to them with a kind of strict tone in my voice.

They were taken unawares and looked at me from head to foot. Seyran's face lost color with excitement. I looked self-confidently straight into their eyes with a calm, slight smile. They looked at each other significantly, turned back and went away.

A young man with a smiling face approached us. Seyran brightened.

"He is a Georgian and he has got a lot to tell you," Seyran said and immediately introduced us to each other.



“Konstantin Pkhakadze,” the Georgian said, “the fact of my being a Georgian gave me an opportunity to follow the course of the demonstrations for three days.”

“Seyran,” I said to him, “you can get busy with your affairs and besides you have already lost enough time and as it seems to me I have got a lot to speak to Kote.”

“Yes, well,” Seyran agreed, “I have to be dismissed from work. They issued an order of discharge.

Besides there is the problem of my apartment, I shall see what can be done.”

Kote and I decided to enter the public park together and have a talk to each other in a quiet corner. Kote, while telling about his impressions of the events, underscored the lies told by the leader of the mob about “cruelties” as if committed in Kapan in order to infuriate the Azerbaijanis gathered in Sumgait.

“I work at the factory of superphosphate,” Kote, a resident of Sumgait began to tell his story, “on February 21 my Azerbaijani colleagues informed me that a big demonstration would be held on the 28<sup>th</sup> of February in relation to the events of Karabakh. I didn’t treat it seriously. On February 26 there were 50 people gathered at the square who were shouting ‘Karabakh’. I live not far from the square: the 1<sup>st</sup> district, apartment house 5<sup>a</sup>, apartment 8. I immediately noticed their leader. He declared that he had come from Kapan and started to tell lies about the actions of the Armenian demonstrators there.



**Konstantin Pkhakadze**

The people gathered in the square in Sumgait began shouting, "Let's drive the Armenians out of the Azerbaijani land!" Having finished my duty I again passed near the square. Up to 9 o'clock in the evening cries and shouting were continuously heard. That day they smashed the doors and the windows of the shops and pavilions where the Armenians worked. The next day, beginning from 10 o'clock in the morning, the voice of the loudspeakers installed in the square was heard at all the edges of the city. There were about 400 people gathered in the square. The mob was full of boastful rage. The same leader with an oblong face and short beard, inventing horrible lies was deliberately inciting and straining people against the Armenians", told Kote.

It was a pity I couldn't make a video of our conversation with Kote at that moment so as not to draw somebody's attention to us.

"After dinner I came back to the square again," Kote continued, "I met some Azerbaijani acquaintances who were present there. "Go away, Kostya!" they said, "all this may have a bad ending also for you because your wife is an Armenian, isn't she?" The first speech belonged to Mulyuk Bayramova, the Second Secretary of the City Committee of the Communist Party of Sumgait. She turned to the crowd: "Muslim brothers! Do not touch the Armenians, let them leave our city by their own will!" Muslimzade, the First Secretary of the City Committee of the Communist Party, appeared at five o'clock. The leader cried out: "Death to the Armenians!" Muslimzade mounted the rostrum. "Muslim brothers!", he addressed to the crowd gathered at the square, "the Armenians and Azerbaijanis have been enemies to each other a long time. But now there we live in peace. Comrade Gorbachev has declared that nobody would take Karabakh away from Azerbaijan, we shall never allow it, calm down, you do not need to kill the Armenians, let's allow them leave Sumgait freely". Muslimzade was aware what was in store for the Armenian population. And the crowd was in exultation."

“If they say no residents of Sumgait participated in the demonstration,” I interrupted, “why did the city authorities make a speech before them?”

“It had been prepared specially,” Kote said and drew back his lips. By finishing his speech Kote lingered over the moment so as to collect his thoughts before starting the following sentence, “the main idea of the First Secretary was to drive the Armenians out of Azerbaijan. At half past six the crowd moved forward. I was standing at the Chamber of Chemists and everything was clearly visible. Muslimzade came down from the platform, bypassed the demonstrators, dissolved among the crowd and marched with them. The rabble passed Nizami Street where there were the tramway rails and immediately surrounded two people. One of them was a bulky man of about fifty and the other was a tall and thin young boy of eighteen. The square had a little higher position from where everything could be clearly seen by me.”

We walked out of the park talking to each other and we were about to reach the square on one side of which there stood the building of the City Committee of the Communist Party its facade decorated with a green plant and on the other side there was the Chamber of Chemists. In front of the building of the City Committee the memorial of Lenin stood. As in many other places the leader had his hand outstretched. I wondered what the leader's outstretched hand really meant when at the end of February just at the foot of the statue they were shouting: “Slaughter the Armenians!...”

In the first days of March these two buildings were full of the Armenian families who had survived the pogrom.

“The young boy broke off and disappeared out of sight in the 4<sup>th</sup> district,” Konstantin Pkhakadze went on with his story. “In several minutes the mob moved to the direction of Druzhba Street leaving the still body of the fat man lying on the asphalt. Certainly, he was an Armenian. In the

evening they telephoned me and informed that they were destroying the apartments which belonged to the Armenians, raping women, robbing and burning down everything in the city. The following day, in the morning of February 28, Yelena Valentinovna, a Ukrainian, told me over the telephone that they had undressed her neighbour and driven her along the streets. I came out again onto the street to see what was happening in the city. And again everything started with the demonstrations. I met my colleague Kyamran, a 4-year student of external faculty. He told me proudly that he and Gummetov had thrown an Armenian old man out of his apartment's window the day before. There were about five thousand people around us. That day the leader was absent. He had already committed his black work. There is no doubt that everything had been prepared in advance. You cannot find even a single stone within a radius of 150 kilometers all around Sumgait and here the city was filled with fist-sized stones beforehand. There was an undeclared war of stones against the Armenians. Starting from 12 o'clock in the morning of February 28 they had already switched off the telephones of the citizens. That day was a real St. Bartholomew's Day for the Armenian residents."

We passed through the districts of Sumgait where one of the vilest crimes of human history had been committed for three days long.

"At 7 o'clock in the morning of February 29 I went on duty. I was astonished with surprise. They were plastering over the houses destroyed and burnt by the hands of the slaughterers' gangs, new window frames were placed instead of the old ones, and the interior of the apartments was decorated. Thus, the authorities had instructed to conceal immediately the fact of the massacre. Two of my friends, the Avanesyan brothers, Albert and Valery, were killed. They came forward to the mob thus giving their mother an opportunity to flee. And the infuriated crowd immediately slaughtered them".

We reached the bus station. The huge posters in Azerbaijani and Russian, announcing in advance about the upcoming community work day in Sumgait on April 16 arrested everybody's attention. In the spacious square of the bus station, around the circular structure the emblems of the fifteen "brother" republics were fixed. The emblem of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia was new and stood out among the others with its brightness. Mount Ararat was considerably stuck out from the surface of the emblem. During the February events the infuriated throng had pulled out the ArmSSR's emblem and trampled it with their feet and broken it into pieces by the sanctions of the massacre organizers.



**A destroyed and burnt building where Armenian families lived before the massacre in Sumgait (February 27-29, 1988).**

“For forty years we have built and raised Sumgait in deserts yet it has now become a city of violence and barbarism,” my Georgian interlocutor continued, “I shall leave the place and will never be back again. We were walking in this square with my friend and examined the surroundings with surprise. Here two ‘Ikarus’ buses were overturned and burnt down and a little farther from here there was a burnt minivan, then a huge freezer truck as well as a ‘Zhiguli’ car, overturned and burnt. Look here, the traces are still visible on the asphalt. There was a metal heap at the air travel office. We

went up to it. We guessed from the metal staircase of its backside that it was a military vehicle of 'Ural' type. A 'Zhiguli' stood not far from the armoured car. A sharp smell of something grilled had spread about. Human bones could be noticed in the burned car. They had thrust the people into the cars and burnt them alive. We saw at least eight cars in the same situation. At that moment, we watched the soldiers surrounding the cars and the Azerbaijanis attacking them. The soldiers had no instruction to fire and very often the fights were of an unequal nature. When they had taken us to the Culture Chamber, a Major of the Committee of the State Security brought an Azerbaijani to the police station shouting angrily: "Damn it! This is already the third time I have caught this villain and have seen him armed each time!" The soldiers caught the bandits and murderers yet the police set them free. The Soviet press wrote that "ninety" criminals had been arrested. But let's turn to the reason. In those days, certainly, with considerable delay special military units of ten thousand, particularly the Dzerzhinsky division as well as the special detachments of the Soviet Internal Troops, landing force and the marines were concentrated in Sumgait. And ten thousand soldiers against "ninety" bandits? At the evacuation centre four thousand soldiers protected 18 thousand Armenians from "ninety" bandits. Where is the human reason? And this is in case when no Azerbaijani will dare ever attack an Armenian or a Russian alone. And yet the press covers everything."

"Haven't you given testimony to the investigating committee?"

"I offered the investigators to take pictures of the leader who had been provoking the mob so as to find the instigator and through him the organizers. Yet they refused. Probably they didn't need to find the organizers."

"And where are you going to leave for? To Georgia?"

“I don't know, probably to Armenia, well, even to Chukotka, it's all the same, just only I'd like to be well away from this city.”

We arranged with Kote to meet in a week in Yerevan and to make a video and a sound track for a film. After having wandered a little in the streets of Sumgait I returned home.

Seyran was anxious again waiting for me restlessly.

“I shall never leave you alone in the city again,” Seyran said.

“Nothing will happen to me,” I calmed him down.

“I understand. But I am saying this for me. I very much fear for you. I am always in a strained condition. One or two more times and my heart won't resist any longer.”

“And what was up at your workplace?” I changed the subject of the conversation.

“Three Armenians working at the inspecting organization had visited the municipal electric network station to record the figures of the electrical counter and the electricians of the network became panic-stricken and fled immediately having thought that the Armenians had come to avenge them”.

“Do you see what kind of cowards are they in reality? It's clear that those electricians took part in the pogrom.”

“A little later the director of the electricity network system broke into the office out of breath with 15 people as if to support and saw there was only a man on duty at the office. He asked: “Where are your colleagues?” The man on duty answered that they had run away. “And who were those people who came here?” “Three Armenians came, copied the figures of the electrical counter and left the place to pay the bill.” “And nothing more?” the director asked in surprise. “Nothing more,” the man on duty replied. “And I was informed the Armenians were slaughtering the Azerbaijanis in the electricity network office,” the director said and abused

his compatriots for cowardly behavior. So, do you see dear journalist, they also fear us, and our revenge.”

### **March 31, 1988**

After several meetings and video sessions with members of the families who had suffered casualties I made up my mind to introduce myself at the City Committee of the Communist Party and speak to the First Secretary. As the newly-appointed First Secretary, who knew me from Nakhijevan, he<sup>17</sup> was informed about the purpose of my visit, instructed the Second Secretary to receive and support me saying that he had recently moved from Nakhijevan and didn't know what had really happened here.

Malek Bayramova, the Second Secretary of the City Committee of the Communist Party, was a short woman of about fifty with round, dark face. She came to meet me and shook hands with me. I decided to attack immediately.

“What has happened in your city?” I said, “why did you let the Azerbaijani people to be disgraced before the whole world?”

“We never expected such a situation...But the roots of all this come from far away, from the other side of the ocean.”

“I don't think so,” I cut in, “I want to get acquainted with the real situation in the city and describe it in an objective way. How did it happen that for three days long you allowed to kill people in front of Baku's nose.”

“You know, there were meetings held on the 27<sup>th</sup> of February and there were no murders, no damages. In the evening of the 28<sup>th</sup> of February the disorders started. It was the handiwork of some separate criminal elements and the old offenders.”

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<sup>17</sup> I met him in Nakhijevan in 1987 where I had come to continue my travelling on the trail of the creative heritage of Raffi (1835-1888), the famous Armenian novelist.



“As far as I know you also made a speech during that meeting.”

“Well, I had to do that, to make an effort so as to calm down the crowd. The demonstrators have nothing to do with those massacres and murders.”

“Excuse me but I don't understand why the convicts, old offenders needed to kill the Armenians.”

“But there were both Armenians and Jewish and Russians among them...”

“Did only strangers take part in the demonstration?”

“No, why? They had passed round the streets for six times and had continuously engaged new people. But why did they want to thrust a wedge between the friendship of the two nations? This is the question. The connections go so far away. Nobody either in Yerevan or in Stepanakert thinks about it.”

“I think you are in vain looking for the roots of the evil in the far distance,” I said, “you'd better look for them here. Can I meet the families which suffered losses?”

I understood if they learned about my meetings with the families they would just immediately take away the videotape and I would return to Armenia empty-handed.

“No, they are in Baku now,” Bayramova replied to me and took her chance to ask me a question in her turn, “have you met any residents of Sumgait in Yerevan? Will they come back?”

“Well, yes, I have met some and spoken to them. The insult is too deep. They will never come back again.”

“I can understand concretely those people who have suffered,” Malek Bayramova said, “and those who haven't...”

“As for me there are no people who haven’t suffered. For three days long they expected the slaughterers to break into their apartments each moment and kill them, too.”

“So, there’s is no wish to return, yes? And what do they say?”

“Now they are looking forward to their settlement.”

“How many people are there?”

“About three thousand.”

“We have got information from Stepanakert, but nothing about Yerevan.”

“Most of them didn't manage to take clothes and money. But the local people support them. When I told them I was about to leave for Sumgait they replied I was coming to the city of death and I would never be back again.”

“Eh, they are not right, don't you see how the city is peaceful now! It will be never repeated again. And what's the feeling of the residents of Sumgait who are in Stepanakert now?”

“They are natives of Artsakh (Karabakh) and have returned to their Homeland. And here is their feeling. Well, I mustn’t forget to say,” I added, “I have heard the same forces are about to hold a demonstration at the factory of superphosphate for protection of Muslimzade. There's already such a movement in the city.”

“I know nothing about it,” the Second Secretary of the City Committee said, “just think of it! Then I must immediately inform the State Security Committee to stave it off.”

“It seems to me that the protection of the first ex-Secretary of the City Committee is also the protection of the pogrom and massacres as well,” I concluded which was ignored by my interlocutor.

Valery Petrov, the instructor of the Central Committee of Azerbaijani Communist Party followed our conversation with utmost attention

probably, the very representative from the Central Committee of State Security. M. Bayramova went out of the room probably with the intention of leaving us alone, face to face. I thought she would follow the course of our conversation from the neighbouring recording room. I already knew that I mustn't give way to provocation and I mustn't avoid telling the truth on the other hand. V. Petrov was the first to break the silence.

"I am interested in your attitude towards the unification of the NKAR<sup>18</sup> to Armenia. If we start to nationalize the republics then what would happen to the Internationalism? If we settle all of the Azerbaijanis in Azerbaijan and all of the Armenians in Armenia, then return your Armenian Karabakh to Armenia, what will it result in? And why act like that?"

I said: "That would be advantageous both for the country and the republics. That would be favorable for the overall development. If there is a social movement then that's a need. Lenin also stated that way."

"And why acting in such a manner?" the instructor of the Central Committee persisted in, "as a Communist I put this question."

I answered: "Artsakh (Karabakh) is Armenia even if it is within the borders of Azerbaijan. That's well understood both in Baku and Moscow. And the people of Karabakh are attached to the Motherland Armenia. During the years of stagnation of Brezhnev and even before they were always ill-treated by Azerbaijan. And the only way out of this situation is the reunification with Armenia."

"But why? What is the final goal? What shall we gain? What will it give to you?"

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<sup>18</sup> Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region, since September 2, 1991 - the Republic of Nagorno Karabakh-NKR.

This was the case when none of us was going to yield. It was beyond my comprehension why he didn't understand or didn't accept my point. I decided to approach from another side.

"Would it be right if we liquidate the republics?" I asked.

"No, it wouldn't," Petrov replied.

"Why not?"

"The roots and identity of the nations would persist."

"Well, then the roots are essential here, too. You can never destroy them either with the endless talks on Internationalism or about amity."

"But what would you achieve by isolating the nations?" Petrov returned to the same question. "What's the use of it?"

I turned to Bayramova who had just come back to the room, "If one nation wants to be united will there be a great harm to the whole country because of it?"

"I do not know," she said easily avoiding being engaged into a difficult and dangerous conversation for her.

"Well, let's suppose Karabakh is given to you and the personnel of the party bodies is changed," Petrov said.

"In Nakhijevan, before it was annexed to Azerbaijan by the efforts of Turkey, the majority of the population was Armenian. Now it doesn't exceed two percent. Baku has created such conditions that people leave Nagorno-Karabakh. Now the people of Karabakh are concerned over the threat of losing their ancestral Homeland."

"That's true," my companion confessed.

"And if there were no suppressions from Baku probably all this wouldn't have happened."

"Then all are guilty here," Petrov said, "and why do they leave Karabakh? If the shoes press we are not to choose a new pair but to pull out the nail."

"And if the shoes are of a small size? Then the nail has nothing to do with it. Baku isn't a nail and you can't easily get rid of it," I said.

"The decision of the Politburo is an attempt to pull out the hindering nail."

"Really? But there is no nail, do you see? They want to pull out a nail yet in reality there is a need of new shoes. The only solution is the reunification with Armenia."

"Well, you know that everything has its consequences," the Russian instructor said, "and nothing happens suddenly. Why did all of you want it at once?"

"We didn't want it at once. Its roots lead us too deep, to the depths of history in centuries, when Armenia was divided into parts."

"Well, I know the history of Armenia. You see, I was born in China and lived in the Far East. I have wandered from country to country. I just want to understand."

"When I look at the Russian rivers, such powerful, calm, even and broad, I really think that the people owning such kind of rivers may have given birth to Tolstoy, Chekhov, Dostoevsky, Bunin and Bulgakov. And vice versa, we have mountain rivers and more poetry. The worldview of the Armenians is a little bit different from the Russian one. Even in that I find the origin of your question. You can't understand, you can't perceive the nation who owns tumultuous, rapid rivers of the mountains..." I said.

At last the Second Secretary of the City Committee took her seat. I told her that it was already three days I was in Sumgait and because of sickness I lay at the apartment of a resident of Sumgait. Then I told her about the problems of Seyran Melkumyan, about the car which his

disabled father should have received and which had never been received by him, about the shoe repair shop and about the appeals which never received their answers. M. Bayramova promised to give quick solutions to those problems. Then she instructed Rahim Hasanov, the instructor of the City Committee, to honour my request and lead me first of all to the factory of synthetic rubber which provided the tyre producing factory of Yerevan with raw material, then to visit the editorial office of the newspaper of “Коммунист Сумгаита”<sup>19</sup> and afterwards an institution of higher education where I should speak to the workers, employees, students and to obtain appropriate video coverage of the city.

Accompanied by Rahim Hasanov and Vezirkhan Nabioghli, the instructors of the City Committee of the Communist Party, I visited ‘Sintezkauchuk’ industrial plant, one of the major chemical hubs of Sumgait. M. Rashidova, the secretary of the party organization of the plant, led us to the department of the supply of materials where mainly Russian women worked. From the first look I understood that the conversation wouldn't be sincere. And I saw no point to demand from the instructors of the City Committee and the party secretary of the factory to come out from the office. Tamara Andreeva and Alexandra Puzovskaya praised the Armenian masters but on the other hand they also blamed the ones who had left both the factory and the city. According to them those people who had not suffered physical or material damages had no right to leave the city. And to my question how they would explain why the Russians had left the city as the genocide was only against the Armenians they categorically denied the fact of the Russians’ leaving. I asked them to be honest in speech but at the end I blamed them of dishonesty. Surely, in other circumstances they would behave in a different way. They had been already well-instructed in advance. At the control panel they introduced

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<sup>19</sup> “The Communist of Sumgait”, a local newspaper.

an Armenian girl. She was too much excited and frightened and she refused to respond to my questions.

“I was at my workplace and haven’t seen anything,” she whispered.

As I felt her condition I never again insisted on my inquiries.

All who had accompanied me, among them Mustafa Hasanov, the head production engineer, formally condemned the bandits of Sumgait describing them in a manner as if the slaughterers had no relation either to their city or the authorities of their city and the country. They represented it as if it was an outer phenomenon, a kind of ‘storm’ which came unexpectedly and engulfed the city.

“Maybe we’ll visit another factory?” Rahim Hasanov suggested having felt my disappointment.

“No,” I refused, “it makes no sense to me, they won’t tell the truth, Malek Bayramova said that we could meet at the newspaper office. Can you accompany me again tomorrow?”

“Surely, Comrade Bayramova has made an appointment with the newspaper editor of ‘Communist of Sumgait’” Rahim said.

### **April 1, 1988**

Mark Grigorich Voroshilovsky, the editor of the newspaper “Communist of Sumgait” was waiting for me. Yevgeni Popov, the deputy head editor of Moscow weekly newspaper “Неделя”<sup>20</sup>, A. Hadjiev, the editor of the Azerbaijani version of the Sumgait newspaper and Anahit Martirosyan, the newspaper correspondent of “Communist of Sumgait” had come together at Voroshilovsky's office, too.

The conversation started with the questions concerning the fate of the refugees from Sumgait in Yerevan and Stepanakert.

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<sup>20</sup> In Russian: “Week”.

“I know many people,” M. Voroshilovsky said, “who have definitely decided to live in Sumgait.”

“And what has happened here, does it have anything to do with the problem of Karabakh in your opinion?” I addressed him.

“Well, how shall I put it? Now it’s difficult to give such an appraisal,” the editor of the Jewish origin avoided the answer.

“Certainly, avoidance of giving an appraisal is also a kind of interesting answer,” I said with a firm decision to attack incessantly, “after all Karabakh is only three hundred kilometers from here...”

“The distance doesn’t matter,” the editor replied, “of course, the issue of Karabakh made heavy waves. “Nagorno-Karabakh and around it”, and here around it: the echo of Sumgait...”

“But such a response to the demand of the Armenians of Karabakh probably is unacceptable for you, too,” I said.

“Well, that was not a response,” the newspaper editor denied.

“Well, what was the demonstration held for?” I restarted from the other end.

“I was passing them. They were shouting...” Voroshilovsky said avoiding the expression of reproach of my face.

“And what were they shouting about?”

“I don’t know Azerbaijani.”

“But they were shouting about the Armenians, weren’t they?”

“Yes, it happened so.”

“And did you see familiar faces?”

“Well, you know, I have been living here for thirty years but I had never seen them before. They were not residents of Sumgait.”

“Did the secretaries of the City Committee also make speeches?”

“Yes,” Voroshilovsky yielded, “they called the Armenians to come to reason.”



“In Azerbaijani? But did they know in front of whom they were making speeches?”

“Before the crowd, the people.”

“But could it be possible that thousands of people come to Sumgait by chance from various places and hold a demonstration here? And why exactly here and not in the squares of Baku? And as you insist on they were criminal elements...”

“I cannot say that. I never met an acquaintance among them. I know almost everybody in the city.”

“So, had the residents of Kapan come to Sumgait to hold a demonstration here?” - I asked ironically.

“Why not?” - Voroshilovsky asked.

Popov had switched on the dictaphone and now favoured me with a slight smile.

The City Committee instructors didn't break into the conversation as well, leaving everything under the responsibility of the editor.

“Will you publish the results of your conversations and meetings?” Anahit asked anxiously, “I think we are not liable to make assessments and to incite people. I also felt myself as a host of the city before but now...there is nothing to be done, that horror... I would just like you not to put the accent on the dramatic events. You'd better not shed light on them.” Certainly, according to the preliminary instruction, she should protect her chief otherwise what was her business here?

“And I see things differently,” I said, “so as not to be repeated again, the civilized world should learn the truth about the tragic events. And this issue concerns the whole humanity as it is an insult and a threat to it. It makes no difference, uncountable news spreads worldwide. Why isn't there a true program? It's a shame that such a thing happened in our country, that there are still such type of people and they are in thousands.

The Government of the Republic has never even echoed, has never condemned... No, we need to write down one by one, to restore everything part by part, every phenomenon, every case. Besides, the process of publishing materials in world press has already started”.

“Have you read Comrade Chebrikov’s speech?” Hadjiev asked, “it was devoted to the tragic events of Sumgait. He spoke about many various reasons. So, the fear had no basis.”

“But it still exists. The fear doesn't disappear.”

“Well, those are the psychological remnants of feelings which will pass away,” the newspaper editor said. “Here they have informed by a letter that an Azerbaijani woman had gone out of the Institute and thrown her kerchief in front of the bandits’ feet. In Azerbaijan we have got such an old tradition. And she said: “If you cross it...” Professor Sadykhov, the head of the chair, had come out onto the street and said: “If you need blood beat me but don’t touch the people!...” Here, another woman had come out onto the street cut her leg, it started bleeding and she said: “Will you really cross this blood?...”

“You are telling legends,” I said.

“They thought about how to save the Armenians.”

“And the bandits listened to them, respected the old legend and drew back?”

“Yes.”

“You, Mark Grigorevich, you justify the murderers, slaughterers and make good knights of them and even endow them with gentleman’s features,” I turned to him bitterly, “well, excuse me, it is not becoming to the newspaper editor.”

“Well, you know, there were bandits but there were also kind people who saved many people,” Voroshilovsky went on steadfastly with the party mission by swallowing the accusation from my side.

“And why did the bandits need to kill the Armenians?”

“Well, there could be instructors among them as well. Now an investigating commission of 120 people tries to find out. Do not hurry. They do not hurry as well, they say as soon as we finish up the case we shall inform about it. The bandits already get their well-deserved punishment. The trial procedure will be launched in the second half of April. Already a person from the tube rolling factory will face trial. Five bandits have already stood trial. One got one year and the other two...they get deserved punishment.”

“The ‘heroes’ of Sumgait...” I said. They pretended not to have heard my hint.

Voroshilovsky said, “The leaders of the Republic immediately arrived at Sumgait.”

“Really?” I stung with irony.

“Of course. What concerns the police that is another thing...”

“They absolutely stood idle,” I said.

“Our newspaper has already published about it,” he turned the newspaper’s page. “Look here! ‘Where did the police watch?’. They dismissed a colonel from service.”

“Generals and marshals should be fired for this case.”

“They said all of the guilty ones would be punished.”

“I doubt,” I said.

“Why?”

“Because most of the bandits have already slipped away, they have been set free. Why did the police stand aside? Why didn’t the army support? Why did the City Committee undertake no measures, no steps? Why didn’t the secretaries of the party organizations bring the workers together at the factories and block the way to the murderers? Because all were heart and soul of one another. At the very first signal appropriate forces would be brought.”

“That issue is also being investigated by them,” Hadjiev said.

“Here! Another title of our newspaper!” Voroshilovsky said by showing the pages of the newspaper. “Catch and punish the guilty” or “With utmost strictness”...To publish them in the city’s newspaper was not a small deed. An Armenian writes in the newspaper: “My city of Sumgait...”

Mark Grigorich said: “Three cases have been disclosed in our newspaper so far. Recently a fire has broken out in one of the districts. Such cases also happened in the past. But news was immediately spread as if it was the business of the Armenians. We went to the place and checked it out. The Armenians had nothing to do with that.”

“The tube rolling factory was one of the plants hampering the development,” A. Hadjiev said, “now it has accomplished the state plan first. There is such a rise in the city now. We want the Armenians to come back. There was a man named Artem Djanumov in our printing-house. His wife was a Russian. I was surprised to learn that he had left, too. And yet he didn't suffer.”

“Maybe they expected an occasion to return to their Homeland - Armenian SSR and Artsakh (Karabakh),” I said. Swallowing my words they answered nothing. “But most of them have already left for Krasnodar region or Central Asia. Thus the reason for departure is very serious.”

“It’s surprising, here, the writers have also fallen under the influence of emotions. Malyan is a member of the Party's City Committee. I am breaking my head over why he has left? Though he is a wonderful locksmith he writes splendid stories, too”.

“I was hovering among the participants of the demonstration but I saw no familiar face,” I don't know why Voroshilovsky remembered again.

“Ah! Have you also taken part in the demonstrations?” I said jokingly, “here is the one to be immediately arrested!”

My words brought cheerfulness into the editor's room.

“Well, what a participant am I?...” the editor tried to protect himself.

“Would the tragic events of Sumgait happen if NKAR was a part of Soviet Armenia?” I turned to them seriously all of a sudden.” I turned to them seriously all of a sudden.

“First I ask you not to speak about giving Karabakh back,” the Azerbaijani editor uttered in a tone as if my words hurt his feelings, “if the central press has published then it's finished!”

“You are a journalist yet what your 'if' can lead to!...”

“The guilty are those of the members of the Young Communists' League,” A. Hadjiev changed the subject of the conversation. “On February 27 at 2 o'clock pm we gathered at the office of the president of the Executive Committee of the City Council, now he is dismissed from work. We talked about the session. We made an arrangement to gather at the deputy president at 5 o'clock. We lived with the questions of the session. What's the difference which republic Nagorno-Karabakh will be part of?”

“In that case why have your leaders so firmly stuck to Nagorno-Karabakh? If you gave it up then you wouldn't have to organize the pogrom of Sumgait thus sparing no effort to conceal its traces later. You see, it has left a brand of disgrace on your people, your republic and your nation, hasn't it...?”

Having arranged with Rahim Hasanov and Anahit Martirosyan to meet at the City Committee the following day for visiting the students I came back home to Seyran.

“It seemed to me you'd never be back again,” Seyran said anxiously.

“Don't worry, everything is okay,” I said, “I have made no shootings but I have met and talked to people and have everything recorded. Even I told Bayramova about your problems. Soon she will call you and offer something.”

“It’s useless. I want nothing from them now. They are right by saying that I should praise God my family escaped from the massacre with their lives, so I need to make off quietly from this cursed city safe and sound.”

“I have contacted Yerevan, too. I have talked to Hrachya Hovhannisyian, the President of the Writer's Union.”

“So what?”

“A KGB<sup>21</sup> official had told him I was in a hard situation here in Sumgait and he ordered to leave the city immediately”.

“Should you leave the city?”

“I told him I had still some piece of work here. There is no need to hurry. Let the authorities think I am kept under their watch and we shall continue with our meetings in the families. Tomorrow I am going to the Institute of Chemistry with the employee of the City Committee.”

### **April 2, 1988**

At 10 o'clock in the morning I met Anahit, the newspaper correspondent and Rahim, the instructor of the City Committee at the entrance of the City Committee. We drove about the city streets. I filmed the city districts, streets and squares from the car window. One could see the aluminum bas-reliefs of the commissars Shahumyan, Azizbekov, Japaridze and Fioletov in small squares. Shahumyan's sculpture looked fresher than the others. Nelson Khachatryan, a resident of Sumgait, who had moved to Stepanakert told us that in the evening of February 27 he witnessed by chance the demonstrators demolishing the high-relief of Stepan Shahumyan, trampling it, hitting with stones and shouting: “Armenians, get away from our city!”

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<sup>21</sup> Committee for State Security, foreign intelligence and domestic security agency of the former Soviet Union.

The secretary of the party organization of the Chemical-Technological Institute and the president of the trade union stubbornly refused my request of meeting with the students and lecturers in any auditorium.

“All of them are outside for the community work day,” the secretary of the party organization said.

“But the community work day has been declared for April 16,” I said.

“We are doing a special one as well.”

The students surrounded me. Turning the video camera at them I asked, “Which of you took part in the February events? I ask you let’s be frank.”

“I saw a group of 14-year-old boys from our window,” an Azerbaijani student said.

“Where were they from?”

“We don’t know, probably they had come from another place.”

“They shouted, broke the windows of shops and offices by crying out “Karabakh...!”

“Did fourteen-year-old boys really claim Karabakh?” I asked, “do you believe that?”

The students kept silence. The president of the local trade union said, “There was a meeting at our place on February 26, they reported about the appeal of Gorbachev. Afterwards we took part in the funeral ceremony of Zhora, the father of one of our students, Davit Muradkhanyan.”

Rahim went to the City Committee saying that there were no day and night for a party member. Despite my refusals Anahit led me to the cooperative restaurant of ‘Leila’ with the purpose of having supper. It was a cylindrical structure with narrow, grill windows and a heavy metal door. A white-dressed young man in white clothes met us at the entrance. It was clear he had been instructed. I thought he was either an Armenian or a Georgian.

"Hussein Samezade," he introduced himself and then it turned out that he was from Georgia.

The hall was not crowded. Several people were absorbedly watching a video clip. Anahit said that Hussain had sheltered eighteen Armenians inside the cooperative restaurant on February 28 and firmly closed the door.

"There was a heavy rain of stones falling onto the door and the windows," Hussein said, "the mob of slaughterers came and demanded the Armenians. You have seen the door, it's as firm as a castle's door. But they somehow managed to damage it. I am from Marneuli, Georgia. We dislike the Azerbaijanis of Yerevan, they have a habit of slandering and writing letters of complaints."

Then he told that the prices at his cooperative were lower than those of restaurant prices and the quality was higher.

"But anyway, I gain some fifty copeck," he added, "and I don't want to fix my eyes upon many things. The owners of the other restaurants of the city complain why I keep such low prices. I usually don't let come-and-go people in. Look over there, the members of Moscow investigating commission are sitting around that table."

"And may I speak to them?" I asked.

"I shall ask them," Samezade said and approached their table.

Two of the officials of the all-USSR Procuracy gazed intently at my direction and quickly came out of the restaurant. It looked like an escape. The third colleague of them, a dark-faced young man with thick eyebrows came up to us and took his seat beside me.

"I am engaged in the investigating commission with twenty other people from the Azerbaijani procurator's office."

"I am glad to learn that," I said in a friendly way, "would you, please, tell your name and surname? I am a TV reporter from Armenia."



“I can't say as we prosecutors have no confidence in journalists and reporters.”

It was already clear his gesture of joining us wasn't a friendly one but he had come to conceal the Moscow investigators who were horrified to meet an Armenia reporter. Thus, as the Russian saying goes: “Who breaks pays...” But their avoidance of meeting with me came to prove in its turn that there was an absolute partiality in the investigative procedure. About hundred investigators had arrived by the Kremlin's order not to disclose the case but with the aim of disguising everything.

All that remained for me to do was to speak to and extort some information from this horrified Azerbaijani investigator.

“Well, probably you'd talk more freely in this way,” I said in a conciliatory tone, “what was the motive of the pogrom in Sumgait?”

And again I heard a lie to my question.

“The motive lay in the ill-treatment of the Azerbaijanis in Kapan. They had fled from there and Sumgait was a response to that,” he said.

“Were all of them from Kapan?” I asked ironically.

“In general they were bandits who were busy with robbery. It was a pity, Muslimzade, the First Secretary of the City Committee, fell victim to those events: he was released from his duties. He was an official with a great future,” he said.

“He made a speech before the mob, didn't he?” - I asked.

“Yes, but that's not important,” he mumbled.

“And how do you estimate the role of Katusev, the deputy Prosecutor General of the USSR? Not having still cleared up the details of the attack by many thousands of Aghdam residents against Stepanakert, as well as the murder of two people, he had made an announcement on TV and irritated the crowd. Now he is doing everything to lay the blame of at least one of the murders on the Armenians.”

“Katusev is our commander and I shan’t tell anything about him,” he said.

“And hasn’t anybody shot a video of the events of Sumgait?” I asked.

“I have investigated a case,” the investigator said, “a case of a boy who had taken shots of the events. But it turned out later the photos just introduced general scenes and we closed the case.”

“That is to say taking photographs is prohibited. Well, so close to Baku...why didn’t they avert it?”

“Who would expect that? There was only a demonstration held on February 27 and nothing else.”

“But they screamed “Death to the Armenians”.

“Everything had its start on February 28. If there were such disturbances in Yerevan would it be possible to stop it? It seems to me it wouldn’t. They failed to do it here, too.”

“Such disturbances are impossible in our country. Yet everything was known in Sumgait and Baku beforehand and instead of preventing it the authorities had contributed to it in any possible way.”

“In Kapan the Armenians threatened the Azerbaijanis and made the latter quit the place and everything started from there.”

“Sure, that is one of the well-elaborated versions of falsifying the facts and justifying the horrible events of Sumgait. I must say there is no evidence related to the events in Kapan and there cannot be because this is a fabrication. Being a member of the investigating committee in spite of seeking justice you conceal it and vindicate the murderers which is a deplorable fact. I already don't trust you and doubt all members of the commission. You should search for the roots of all this in Baku and further. If you don't want to understand and admit the truth which is apparent you'll never accept it. After all where did people get such malice generating the horrible events in Sumgait?”

“They were repeat offenders...”

“No, that could not be a mob of habitual offenders,” I said, “so what? Did the whole criminal world of Azerbaijan come together to slaughter the Armenians? Did they claim Karabakh? Do you find the civilized world so unsophisticated? Or you can’t cling to anything else?”

“I am myself engaged in the investigation of robbery and plunder cases,” the young Azerbaijani said, “we also met Armenians among them and some of them are accused of committing rape.”

“I don't believe you. You are intentionally falsifying lest it should be qualified as genocide. They say genocide is impossible in a Socialist country. Though you don't tell your name I see your face.”

“Everything started from the interview of the academician Aghanbekyan.”

“But didn't he just say that Perestroika could and should settle down such an issue? His interview with the French reporter couldn't irritate the Azerbaijani habitual offenders against the Armenians who have built Sumgait.”

The Azerbaijani prosecutor had already nothing to reply.

“Do you still refuse to introduce yourself?” I addressed to him.

“Yes, I refuse to.”

I reached my hand for the pocket of my shirt, took out the recording equipment demonstratively and switched it off with a slight click.

The Azerbaijani member of the investigating group shuddered. He fixed his reproachful glance at me. He rose up, turned back without saying good bye, dropped the chair onto the floor in confusion and quickly left the restaurant.

Hussein Samazade was anxious.

“What happened...?”

“Nothing special,” Anahit answered, “our guest asked him to introduce himself, tell his name, he refused and went out.”

Seyran was troubled again.

“I can’t bear it any longer. My heart will break from this strain.”

“Dear Seyran, I have already told you nothing will happen to me here.”

“This is a city of murderers, do you understand comrade journalist? Every hour I expect the mob to appear here and there will be no salvation.”

“Let me tell you a secret, Seyran. When I have a premonition that nothing threatens me, it happens. Sometimes I hear the flap of invisible wings over my head. They protect and watch over me.”

“Who?”

“I don't even want to know...”

“Well, then I have arranged two meetings for you. If you want we can go tomorrow morning because they will wait for you.”

### **April 3, 1988**

Zinaida Mudretsova was a more than medium-sized cheerful and energetic woman of fifty. Her face still bore the attraction of former beauty. She was waiting for us in one of the seaside gardens of Sumgait.

She began to tell without any hesitation: “It's already twenty six years since I have been living in Sumgait. I am a Russian and my husband is an Armenian. Why did innocent people find themselves in such a situation and become victims? We had no idea of Nagorno-Karabakh. I have just recently heard that it is located about



**Zinaida Mudretsova**

400 kilometers from here. What was going on there the mass media kept

silent. If we knew the truth probably the Armenians would jointly come out onto the streets and display our solidarity. I live next to the Lenin square. On Saturday I watched the mob as something dirty and unbridled. However they seemed to be like that from our balcony. My neighbour said they claimed to drive the Armenians away from Sumgait. I asked, "And what was the answer of the party authorities, the Soviet administrative officials and the organizations reply?" He said they had promised to help. And who it concerned I don't know. "My daughter took trolleybus on her way back from Baku. A group of Azerbaijanis stopped the trolley and demanded from the Armenians to get off. She got home in such a highly nervous state that she could only utter, "Mother, they are killing the Armenians..." The following day at five o'clock I saw the First Secretary of the City Committee heading the demonstration. The newspapers wrote that the tail of the demonstration had separated and had gone to plunder the districts and to slaughter the Armenians. And yet the authorities wanted to give a peaceful character to all that."

"In the future they also tried to explain that way," I said.

"Maybe," Mudretsova said, "I understood there would be murders and told my husband to take out the tablet hanging on at our entrance where our family name was mentioned: Sarkisov. My daughter's father-in-law, who lives near the bus station, informed us on Sunday a man had been killed on their ground floor. I saw that apartment later. They had undressed his wife, beaten her and then they had thought she was dead. The son of these poor victims jumped out of their window and fled. I went to work on Monday. I saw the robbed pavilions. The Armenians usually lived either on the ground or the fourth floor and all of them had been robbed, fully destroyed. There were mattresses and beddings thrown about the yards and streets. It is no secret for everybody that it had been specially planned and well prepared. They had switched off all the telephones for the Armenians not to have a chance to get in contact with

each other and offer them an organized resistance. We had axes in our apartment. I had gathered five of my relatives at my place having thought that if I introduced them as Russians I would have saved their lives. And my daughter who had seen a slaughtered family said by crying, "Let them kill me, only let my daughter be saved..." Until the troops entered the city no one protected our right to life. Great thanks to General Krayev who has done a lot to save the people from the slaughterers. If the army hadn't entered the city not an Armenian would be saved, because the Armenian civilians of the districts would be left alone against the bandits."

"Who are they?"

"General Krayev said the majority are residents of Sumgait. I personally know fifteen victims."

"Maybe you'd tell me their names and surnames?"

"I need to remember. I still need to come to my senses. What we have experienced... When I went to the fourth micro-region from the Lenin square two Azerbaijanis were walking towards me. When they were passing by me one of them said, "Let's hit her with stones". I turned back. I still can't understand how the stones appeared in their hands. I ran away and the stones of fist's size were flying over my head. Surely, if they hit me I would be killed immediately. Meyrabashvili, a Georgian woman, who was the principal of our housing and communal services lived in the apartment which is under us. On March 1, when the soldiers came to move us to the Chamber of Culture she cried and told that the bandits had thought she was an Armenian (as she looked like an Armenian woman) and wanted to kill her. But as soon as they were convinced she was a Georgian they gave it up. Such a monstrous act cannot be depicted even by a fantasy writer. It surpasses all imagination."

"They say the racists were generally young people."

"The young men would never hold a demonstration on their own initiative. The boys of the trade school would at the most throw stones, carry slogans, yet the instigators were adults. Well, let me not forget to

tell that shots were also heard from the side of the market. I have recently been to Moscow and spoken to Pavel and Nina Manvelyan, the parents of the killed girl. Their daughter Lola Avagyan was brutally killed in her sixth month of pregnancy. Her father found his daughter's corpse marked with the number seventy one among the unrecognizable dead bodies at the mortuary of Mardakyan which is 100 kilometers far from Sumgait. Before that he had been to the mortuaries of Sumgait and Baku and had seen three hundred dead bodies. He had recognized the body of Lola from her little finger, as one finger was shorter than the usual size. Her husband was a famous master of judo. They had struck him with a metal pole and he was not able to protect his wife."

"Don't you confirm the published number of thirty two victims?"

"No resident of Sumgait will confirm it. The casualties were much more. Most people have already scattered about various places and it's difficult to determine the real number."

"Could you believe a human was apt to commit such atrocities?"

"To tell the truth I didn't believe. And for the sake of what? I can understand war, the mass destruction of people. But in this case it's neither possible to understand, nor to justify it."

"Now many people in Baku call Sumgait a 'hero' city and consider the murderers 'national heroes'."

"That's a pity. Then there will be another "Sumgait". People need to be warned. Thus it was not an accidental phenomenon."

"Have you heard about the Armenian Genocide of 1915?"

"Yes, sure, I have read many books about it. And this is the continuation of the same genocide. Similar crime has been twice committed towards the Armenian nation in this century. The human mind is incapable to comprehending this horrible crime."

"And could all this be related to the events in NKAR?"

“The people of Karabakh are just in their claim. They hurt nobody there. And here...They placed 32 corpses in the central mortuary and then informed General Krayev that there were only the dead bodies of those killed ones. How could Krayev be aware that the mortuaries of Mardakyan and Baku were full of the casualties of Sumgait. Besides, most of the corpses were burnt by the bandits just on the spot. Krayev had believed them. Then they announced about 32 casualties all over the world. Pavel Manvelyan said that the employees of the Procuracy had taken shots on the heaps of dead bodies. Of course, there had been also casualties with heavy wounds, too, who later died in the hospitals. They threw Molotov cocktails at armoured vehicles. The casualties had been quickly hidden. I know an Armenian casualty who was buried on the 8<sup>th</sup> of March. A gang of bandits raped the daughter before her mother's eyes; the mother could not bear it and went mad, then she passed away. They exterminated the whole family with their grandchild. They have destroyed and robbed 200 apartments. I spoke to Blinyov in Moscow, a correspondent of “Izvestia”. And how could they one by one break into apartments? Blinyov happened to be in Sumgait. He informed me they hadn't permitted him to publish the second half of the material. Many people told me in Moscow if it were not for Gorbachev the Armenians would be fully exterminated.”

“Do you believe that?”

“This is big politics. It seems to me the Armenians are its victims.”

“I usually make videos of these kind of conversations,” I said, “can we arrange another meeting?”

“Certainly,” Z. Mudretsova replied, “I have come here to settle down some questions and I am going back to Yerevan again in several days. And now I must quit you, my husband is probably anxious about me.”

We stopped at one of the yards.

“Wait here,” Seyran said, “I shan't be away for long.”



In a moment he disappeared in one of the entrances. After half an hour he came out of the entrance with a thin, stumpy man of fifty with deep wrinkles on his cheeks and gave a signal to follow them.

“Zaven Badasyan,” he introduced himself, “I work at Baku but I am a resident of Sumgait. I’ve suddenly dropped a word about Karine while speaking to Seyran and he said there was a man from Yerevan who should meet him. Let’s go, I shall tell you everything on our way.”

We walked about unknown districts and yards, crossed streets and lanes.

“Well, do you see this school?” Zaven addressed to me. It was dark and the building was not clearly visible. “At the night of March 1 we found shelter here. I called the City Committee from the school and there was a kind of reply: “Hullo, this is Muslimzade”. I immediately recognized the voice of the First Secretary of the City Committee. I introduced myself and told him that our three families had taken refuge at School N 33 asking to send army soldiers so as to move us to the evacuation centre. He replied to me: “I shall send them immediately.” In an hour a bandits’ gang came to the school and demanded the Armenians from the school guard. The guard having feared of their revenge for concealing the Armenians told them as if we had a bit earlier left by the secret entrance. The gang hurried to catch up with us.”

We stopped at a building. It was the apartment house N 17.

“Which district we are at now?” I inquired.

“At the third microregion.”

“Did the events reach this place as well?”

“Sure, the most horrible things took place here.”

“Yes, I have remembered,” I said, “I met a group of people from Sumgait in Ejmiatsin who told me about the atrocities taken place at the N6 apartment house which won’t be far from here. Armo Ashot Aramyan resisted the mob for seven hours but when he saw the gang was about to

win him and there was no point in opposing, turned to his son and cried out: "Run away, Arthur!" The young boy of twenty five flounced down from the balcony of the first floor but having crossed one hundred fifty meters he met another throng which killed him by several blows of metal poles and threw his dead body on the burning things of another casualty".

"Yes", Zaven said bitterly, "Gavril Trdatov, a carpenter of the tube rolling factory, Rafik Tovmasyan, Volodya Arushanyan lived in that house, too, and were also killed in a cruel way. And they caught Volodya's wife Razmela at the factory entrance, undressed and mocked her, then they drove her up to the shop "Caucasus", forced her into the car and burnt her alive."

"Do workers of the tube rolling factory live in this building?"

"Yes," Zaven said, "as it seems, that factory was one of the main dens of the bandits. They had taken the addresses from the personnel department and without hindrance carried out the carnage suitably prepared in advance."

We stopped at the second entrance. Zaven went in and returned a bit later and we went upstairs together. A nice-looking girl with big, attractive eyes met us at the threshold on the fourth floor. One could notice scars on her face and hands.

An old woman came in after us. Zaven turned to her, "Mother Vardanush, that's good you have come. When are you going to leave?"

"Tomorrow we are going to leave. I have lived here for thirty five years but I shall never come back again, it's already decided!"

"Mother Vardanush you'd better tell the reporter from Yerevan what the teenager had told you," the nice-looking girl said.

"Eh, what should I tell, my dear? I worked at a drug-store, I cleaned and swept the area... an Azerbaijani boy of fifteen who was sitting in the yard suddenly approached me and said: "Aunty, your wedding party will take place in a few days."

There was a heavy silence.

"Afterwards, when the pogrom broke out," the seventy-two-year-old Vardanush went on, "I understood what the Azerbaijani boy had meant."

I looked attentively at the face of Karine. Probably, the wounds were the traces of the pogrom. Therefore she had a lot to speak about.



**Karine Mirzoyan**

"Your fact would help us a lot to unmask the bandits and I need your help for that," I said feeling that one needed to be direct and frank otherwise it would be impossible to get in contact with her. "I let everything be on your conscience."

Karine kept silence.

"Have you reached the truth and the justice?" I asked.

"No, it'll be never reached."

"The only right thing is neither me nor the so-called jurisdiction," I said, "the only truth is the Japanese video camera."

"No, let's leave the video camera for later, when I come to Yerevan, and for now let's do without a camera, you are welcome," Karine said.

A bitter smile shined over her face and died out. She was telling and had little pauses in the intervals of her speech sometimes restrained her excitement as if pulled herself together and pronounced the words with all her might. And I felt that was a burst, a burst of complaint on behalf of all the Armenians of Sumgait.

"On the 28<sup>th</sup> of February, ignorant of anything my sister and I went to the Chemists' Culture Chamber to watch a movie. Twenty minutes hardly ever passed and a group of sixty boys all of a sudden started breaking the windows, doors, then broke into the hall and directing their words to the hall, demanded the Armenian girls. I was afraid for my sister. The demand of the infuriated mob was not taken as serious by the people in the hall.

They were howling and looking into our eyes. It seemed to me they were dreadfully drunk, maybe they were under drug influence because I had never met such infuriated faces before. They began to leave the place. A young man was giving orders and the others obeyed him. I recognized a young boy from Sumgait who used to attend the dance floor with a relative of mine. I looked down lest he should recognize me from my look. Indeed, he didn't recognize me. I decided to leave the place immediately but my sister convinced me to stay because our early leaving would betray our being Armenian.

It was already dark. The square was full of young boys who were shouting continuously: "Karabakh!" or "Let's kill the Armenians!" The bus still worked. We reached the bus station by taxi. "Kill the Armenians!" could be heard here as well. We could hardly get home. My mother said: "It's the end, well, from tomorrow on they will start killing the Armenians."

We, youngsters accepted the words of our parents as a kind of false panic though the alarm had already seized all of our essence. The following day we pretended as if nothing had happened. At two o'clock my Russian girlfriend Lyuba came. She told about the infuriated mob running in the streets and yards trembling all over her body. At that moment the yard was filled with noise. I went to the apartment of my Azerbaijani girlfriend whose balcony was on the opposite side of the apartment house. I saw a throng of a thousand people which was attacked by a small division of soldiers. The mob was taken unawares, retreated a moment, moved back, and then attacked the soldiers. One of the soldiers didn't manage to run back, they threw him onto the ground and began trampling down. I was shivering with horror. In twenty minutes they were shouting at our porch: "Come out Armenians, let's settle our accounts with you!" The yard was filled with the mob. They burned the motorcycle of Sergey Sargsyan, a post office worker, then cried out: "Grisha, we are

coming to slaughter you.” Grisha is my father. I told my girlfriend and my younger sister to hide themselves under the bed and I went out onto the threshold with my parents. My father held an axe in his hand. Mother snatched it and threw under the bed. I went up to meet the crowd at the threshold and turned to them in Azerbaijani thus trying my best to calm them down. Probably, they expected a humiliation from our side and here I addressed to them strictly: “What do you want? What do we owe you? Go back.” They were taken unawares, stepped back and then they said: “Get away to your Armenia!” Somebody cried out in the entrance: “We have come not to set free the Armenians but to kill them.” The throng dashed forward. They squeezed me in the space of the door, then they drove my father to the other room and started beating. I was pushing and beating them, too. I was surrounded by the gang. Mother shouted not to touch me. I noticed at a moment that they were tearing out my sister's clothes. Then they began pulling me out and tearing my clothes. I was crying, bit their hands, there was no use of that. They started to beat my mother, broke the furniture and hit her with the pieces of wood. She lost her consciousness. Suddenly they started to beat me with their legs. They wanted to throw my elder sister from the balcony but the door-bolt was stuck, they failed to open it and threw my sister aside who fainted. What happened to Marina, my younger sister, and Lyuba, my girlfriend, was unknown to me. I didn't know whom to ask, I couldn't manage to look at them, the bandits were incessantly going in and out, changed and the circle around me was getting thicker and thicker. They started in parallel to steal our goods, they carried my trousseau in boxes and the carpets. A young man, who probably led this gang, came in. All of them turned to his side and looked at him expectedly. He said: “That'll do with this apartment, they are not alive.” I don't know why but I had the feeling as if when looking at me they always wanted to tear out my eyes. And here he looked at my direction and said: “We can take this one to the street, it's

crowded here, we'll get through with her there." It seemed to me he said they would burn me on the motorcycle. At that moment it was already the same for me where they would throw me, the only thing I wanted them to finish their job quickly, kill me, because the humiliations were unbearable. Caught by my hands and legs and beating me against the stairs and the metal balusters they dragged me downstairs, threw me at the entrance and started kicking. I felt nothing. A moment when I came to my senses I saw many legs around me. All of them wanted to get something from me, to hit me. I opened my eyes and saw our house. From all the balconies heads were outstretched looking at my direction. "What's going on?" I asked to myself, "probably there is a civil war." All of our Azerbaijani neighbours were watching a horror film from their balconies. Nobody wanted to protect me. Well, they could but they didn't want. Therefore, they enjoyed it. I again lost my consciousness."

I wanted to ask Karine to stop speaking and keep silent and never ever tell it again.

Everything was reviving in my look and becoming a reality getting flesh and blood, I was feeling blows and I was convulsed with pain instead of Karine, suppressed wail inside me then I felt my heart aching.

"When my mother came to herself they demanded the golden things. My mother pointed at the wardrobe in despair where our documents and the jewelry were kept which she had never worn before. They fell onto the golden things and my mother got up from the floor and found my sister fainted. She found my father whose face, eyes and ears were bleeding. He had already gone deaf. My mother started to knock at our neighbours' doors. Nobody wanted to open the door. On the second floor Kasimov, a Lezgin by origin opened the door. He was an army serviceman and often returned home drunken. At that moment he was drunk as well but as soon as he saw the state of my parents he came to himself.

And before all this when they were busy with carrying out my trousseau they also pulled out my girlfriend Lyuba and my sister Marina from under the bed. Lyuba said she was a Russian. They reproached her as if what kind of business she had at the apartment of an Armenian and ordered her to be away immediately from here. At that moment a familiar boy named Igor from the neighbouring house came and took them from our apartment and as it was dangerous to bring them to the yard he pushed them into one of the apartments of the first floor, went down and waited what would happen to me.”

I suffered deep stress from listening to all these things. The people were telling endlessly, all the stories were mixed in my mind by creating a chaos and I had lost the borderline between the reality and the imaginary things. Well, I was in an apartment where the vicious crime had taken place. To listen to people was very hard by itself. So, what kind of strength and courage this girl should have so as to experience and tell me the past accidents again and again.

“Suddenly they left me. They said that in the third entrance the Armenians defended themselves. All of them ran immediately to the third entrance. Igor who had served in Afghanistan and was assessed with a second-degree disability raised me on his thin hands and took me to the second floor where my parents were. For three hours I didn't come to myself. When I came to myself I didn't recognize my parents, I had forgotten my name and didn't understand what was going on and where I was. Everybody thought I had gone mad. Then they put the neighbour's short dress on me. Marina came and she couldn't look at me for a long time. My eyes, half of my face and my forehead swelled and my hands were all in blood. All my body was covered with wounds. I was told when they had been killing the members of an Armenian family living in one of the apartments in the third entrance which tried to protect themselves

the villains returned to go on with the cruel and inhuman crime but not having found the victim on the spot they began to run about the place, to look for me everywhere. They demanded from the dwellers of the ground floor to show my place, saying that they hadn't finished their "work" yet. So as to calm them down someone told them as if I had come to myself and concealed myself in the cellar. And the cellar was full of dirty water with one meter depth. I don't know what other worse things could happen to me. Probably they wanted to cut me into pieces or burn me so as to conceal the traces of the crime as if I had never existed like they had acted in other cases.

Having thought that I was drowned in the cellar they left the place joyfully. When I fully came to myself I called the chief of our factory. A bit later he came with his daughters. As he saw me he lost the power of speech because of excitement for half an hour. They could hardly put me into the car and take me to the political department of Internal Affairs where dozens of "Ikarus" buses full of soldiers and military servicemen stood in a line. It was a great surprise to me. If the soldiers had been brought to save us from the jaws of massacre why were they still sitting in the buses when people were killed over there. The political department was full of ambulances, fire-engines, police cars, servicemen with their dogs. Whom they protected here I couldn't understand. Probably they waited for corpses so as to put in the coffins and take them away. My mother began to cry and reproach them: "Why are you sitting here? Don't you know they are killing people over there?" The doctor of the ambulance examined me and decided to send me to the maternity hospital. Pashayeva, the head doctor of the maternity hospital first examined me then began to reproach me why I was crying, nothing had happened, I had survived...Thus I should still be thankful to somebody that I was alive. I am sure no Armenian youth would raise his hand against



women. I spent three days at the hospital. All the time a panic was spread for any reason, always someone fled from the window in panic.

News spread as if the Armenians had come in tanks to revenge and they were fleeing away in panic incessantly. That was funny and sometimes I even forgot about my wounds. They took Ira Babayeva and my sister Lyuda to our ward. They discharged them from hospital next morning. The chief of our factory had taken the members of my family to his apartment which was in the 45<sup>th</sup> district.

Horrible slaughters broke out there. Lola Avagyan was killed brutally there, too. And all this took place before my parents' eyes. A young woman entered my ward and asked what had happened to me. She was well aware what was going on in the city and what could have happened to me, so she asked with a kind of intention to get pleasure from my answer: "Ask your brother, father and husband, whether they have been there or not and you will understand everything," I said. She felt bad. They called a doctor, the nurses came together, too. She was flinching convulsively and shrilling hysterically. Everybody accused me. The head doctor said if he saw someone talking to me from then on she would dismiss both her and me. Many people at my workplace were anxious about what had happened to me. The chief secretly informed the Russian workers what had happened. They said some people want to pay a visit to me. It was hard to walk.

Overcoming the unbearable pain I could reach from my bed to the window yet I didn't want my girlfriends to see me. Half of my face had turned black, the wounds and the swellings made my appearance unbearable. But I was glad that they remembered and were interested in me and even visited me. It meant I still existed and was among the humankind...

Now, the scars on my face are healing and probably this trace will remain and the deepest scar will remain here, in my soul..."

"The next day the head doctor was in alarm," Karine said, 'she hurried to inform me that I should go to the Osteological hospital. She wanted to get rid of me quickly probably fearing that the evil powers acting in the city districts could appear and continue the unfinished work with me and they would blame her for concealing me. It was the 1<sup>st</sup> of March. I was stuck in a car of "Moskvich" and covered with a cerement. If they feared, got nervous that meant there was still something going on in the city. They wanted to leave me and quit the place but after I had been radiographed and the head doctor had examined me he said that I had a trauma in my lungs which had nothing to do with bones. Thus I was not their patient. They had to take me back. Pashayeva was displeased. After an hour they put me into a bus full of policemen and took me from there. The Armenians were so little left in amount that they sent a bus full of guards for each of them. I got terrified from this idea. We stopped at the building of the City Committee. The square was surrounded by the chains of the armed soldiers and armoured vehicles. The soldiers cooked food and handed it to the people. I saw several familiar faces. Somebody told me he had seen my parents there. They accompanied me to the club where my misfortunes had begun three days ago. The hall which was accommodated for seven hundred people was filled with more than five thousand people. People had nowhere to sit or even to stand. Every time somebody lost consciousness. Mourning could be heard around me. As they saw me they began to wail and kiss me. I myself had cried a lot at the maternity hospital and my tears had already finished. I found my parents. We could hardly find a place on the stage. In the morning they informed that they had surrounded and captured all of the bandits and we could return home. But the people refused categorically. The party cadremen and the

trade union employees came and asked us to return home. My chief came as well. He didn't say anything. What to do? Where to go? How to behave? On March 2 they said that comrade P. Demichev had arrived and we should make a delegation of six people to meet him. Two disabled war veterans, two party members and two members of the Young Communists' League one of which was me, were included in the delegation. They immediately classified me as defective, they wouldn't allow me to appear before Demichev with such a face. Then they refused the other girl, as well. They led the four people into a room. They made them wait for a long time then send them back. The meeting wasn't held. The people began to demand that Demichev and Bagirov should come personally and speak to them."

I remembered the February days in Stepanakert. Fifty thousand people gathered in the square shouting: "De-mi-chev! De-mi-chev! Ra-zu-mov-sky!", asking the supreme authorities to come out and speak to the people. They appeared on the rostrums with great delay but to the disappointment of the people they had nothing to say.

"Lieutenant-general Krayev, the commandant of the city appeared and talked to the people saying there would be no murder in Sumgait thereafter, that the soldiers had come to save the Armenians and would never let anybody offend them," Karine got more excited. The words were flowing more quickly and the pauses lasted longer. "We demanded to provide us with buses so as to leave for Armenia and Russia because we didn't want to live in Azerbaijan any longer. Then the Azerbaijani agitators came and we refused to get in contact with them. We demanded the chiefs of the factories and enterprises or their wives and children to come and see all that and only after that they would continue their agitation. Next some Russian agitators were sent instead. They understood that our lives in Azerbaijan was impossible any longer and refused voluntarily to do

the errand. They took the Armenians to the health-centers by buses. Everybody was going to leave Azerbaijan for Armenia or Russia. And we didn't have documents. The representatives of the Procuracy all the time visited us and questioned about the robbery, rape, severe beatings and thrashings. The question of our departure was all the time being delayed. All members of my family got passports but I couldn't be photographed with such a face and probably I would be photographed in several days and get my passport. But it didn't matter anyway the investigators wouldn't allow me to leave the place. My sister Lyuda has already recognized many bandits. She has been to prison and jail cells. She remembered many of them. But something was wrong with my memory. I recognized nine of the bandits by photos whom I had seen in our apartment and the investigator said with dissatisfaction that I was wrong all the time and condemned me as defective. My mother also recognized some of them. When they demanded from her to tell the place of the golden things she noticed a twelve-year-old teenager who took out the bag from window. She recognized the teenager by the photo. But the representatives of Moscow Procuracy refused to fetch the boy arguing that he was seriously ill and it was impossible to speak to him. Surely, the boy could disclose a lot of things which I don't know why didn't agree with the interests of "jurisdiction". After that case my mother forbade us to give testimony to the injustice. But Lyuda still continued her struggle. She still believed. But after the first judicial procedures when I made sure that there was a strange injustice in the investigation of Sumgait events it was depreciated for me."

Yesterday I met two young men while crossing the Lenin square. The hand of one of them was bandaged hanging from his neck, the other one was walking with a stick and was limping. I had a wish to approach them and ask: "What kind of wound is that? When did it break? Let's go to a

doctor, has it been registered? Are the investigators aware? Maybe you would tell who has broken your hand before his cruel and heavy death while protecting himself? And what about your criminal friend? Or did he fall down and break his leg while climbing up the long staircase of the fire-engine to the balcony of the apartment of an Armenian family living on the fourth floor? Now they are loitering freely, telling one another about their “heroic deeds” when meeting each other, competed with each other about whose crime was bigger and whose murder was more cruel and inhuman, how many rapes each took part in, how much plunder each took home with himself.

I remember my old friend Ivan Kornilov, a Russian prose writer telling about his meeting in Saratov with a certain Bakhtiyar Akhmedov from Kirovabad. The Azerbaijani boasted as if his grandfather Heydar Ali-oghli Akhmedov had once personally shot two hundred eighty nine Armenians. Probably he remembered the massacre of the Armenians in Baku when after the defeat of the Commune of 26 Commissars the Turkish army and the Muslim population in September 1918 were slaughtering and robbing the Armenians mercilessly for three days where my grandfather, Ghukas Karapetyan, a resident of Metsshen, was also killed in a cruel manner. Maybe the grandfather of belligerent Bakhtiyar remembered the slaughter of Shushi in 1920 when the Musavatists with the Turkish detachments during a night committed to the flames the “Little Paris of the Armenians”, the Armenian district of Shushi then put to sword the unarmed population and the next day Enver's half-brother Nuri pasha stuck his fingers into the nostrils of the Armenian youths at the yard of Melik-Beglaryans, raised and cut their heads with yataghan. If the grandchild was proud of it, that sounded like the soul of a villain living inside him as well. The tragic events of Sumgait come to prove that the malicious soul of the genocide

perpetrators still lives<sup>22</sup>. Everything was done to set them free. Otherwise this criminal phenomenon, generally the idea of committing a massacre, would absolutely disappear from our planet because in the modern civilized world it had been already long ago condemned to oblivion almost everywhere. And here where the freed bandits who were backed by Katusevs and Trushins and maybe more influential persons and groups, central press and television, were loitering about the settlements of AzSSR, once in Aghdam, Mingechaur and then appearing in Kazakh, Tovuz, Shushi, Gandzak (Kirovabad), Baku, instigating people and inciting them to new horrible crimes. Well, the residents of Sumgait, where have you broken your hands and legs? Tell me please, the investigators don't know anything and maybe they are not eager to. And I must know about it.

“A few days ago I met Lydia Rasoulova, the head of Azerbaijan SSR labor union,” Karine went on telling, “I asked her to support me with the question of our apartment. We wanted to give back this apartment of ours and receive a similar apartment somewhere out of Azerbaijan. She answered she did not deal with that kind of issue and we should refer to Seidov, the president of the state committee of Sumgait. We have turned into paupers who must beg, ask for something so as to achieve it. Part of the aggrieved people received apartments in Baku. I agreed because I no longer wanted to live in that apartment where I was born and lived for twenty three years. Now I hate this yard, this building, our apartment on the fifth floor, these walls, they are unbearable, now I want to stay there not even a second... I do not want to get registered in Baku because it will

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<sup>22</sup> The fact of remaining unpunished for the Armenian Genocide and its continuous denial by Turkey resulted in future genocides, such as the Holocaust, the massacres organized and committed by the Azerbaijani authorities against Armenians in Sumgait, Baku, Gandzak, Maragha and others. The anti-Armenian and anti-human policy adopted by Baku authorities starting from primary school implement genocidal behavior among the population of Azerbaijan.

be impossible to strike my name from the registration afterwards. They say everything will be forgotten. Personally my relatives and I will never forget that terrible crime.”

“Well, then who is guilty?” Seyran asked.

“I blame the Central Committee of Azerbaijani Communist Party, the authorities of Sumgait; all of the directors of factories are residents of Baku and at weekends they are usually in Baku. They knew what was about to happen in Sumgait and what was going on. At NZS there are great masses of soldiers. They were not allowed to prevent the demonstrators.”

“Certainly, it could be prevented and where were the police? I am sure they were well-interested in the extermination of the Armenian families. Usually our Azerbaijani neighbours permitted themselves to knock at our door with any kind of request even at 3 o'clock a.m. they used to wake up my father and ask him for any kind of help, like driving them to some place, somebody felt bad, the other one was in need of money, another one was about to give birth, and one was about to organize a wedding party. My father was ready to help all of them yet here on Sunday when all of them were at home and knew what was happening in the city, nobody of them came to offer his support or even to ask what had happened, why they were slaughtering and killing us. It surprised me greatly and I shall never forgive them for that. I understand all that had been prepared beforehand and pursued a big aim and it seems to me I am getting closer to it. Here they tell me that in vain I think like that, the whole city suffers, mourns for what has happened and the bandits are those who are devoid of judgement. But I think that the man who lacks reason could kill his sister and mother as well. In those days no Azerbaijani touched his kinsfolk. And when the soldiers started to arrest the criminals the whole city stood behind them, having sheltered and hidden them in their apartments. Nobody speaks anything about this. Sunday night the

slaughterers killed many people in the N5 and N6 apartment houses of our district, broke the ribs of women, young boys of twenty, beat Emma Grigoryan and burned her on the dumpster, at the same time the soldiers were sitting in "Ikarus" buses and waiting for God knows what. On March 1 they brutally slaughtered the family of Melkumyans. Generally, it was the most brutal day. They burned, killed and raped people..."

"Generally, I am convinced that they were mainly local people," Seyran said.

"At the Committee of State Security I was shown a fellow from Sumgait whom I had never seen before and did not know. He works at the tube rolling factory. They said that when he was pulling me to the street another boy passing through our yard who lived together with that criminal in the same room of the dormitory, noticed him and brought to the prosecutor's office later on. I did not know most of them. A boy with golden teeth had spoken to me. I remember one of those young men with evil and protruding eyes, and another boy wore a leather jacket ... and that he was from Sumgait. Mainly they were residents of Sumgait. After all the life of my family and all of the Armenian residents of Sumgait has no future in Azerbaijan."

"And what about Nagorno-Karabakh?," I asked Karine, "after all it is the Homeland of your parents and ancestors."

Karine answered: "When Nagorno-Karabakh is ours, when it will rejoin Mother Armenia...I say Armenia not only for the reason that I am an Armenian woman but for the reason that only there you can see people who fully perceive and deeply understand what has happened in Azerbaijan, in Sumgait. They estimate all this righteously."

There was a heavy silence. I referred to seventy-two-year-old mother Vardanush, "Mother, how do you estimate all this? Was all that human?"

"You say human? That was bestial!" she said, "you sit innocently at your home, yet they break into it and act like that..."



“You should remain at your Hadrut, Martakert, Gioulistan...”

“Oh, it was hard after war.”

“And what about now?”

“It is harder and unbearable now...”

When we went out Zaven said, “I know someone else, maybe she will tell nothing but it is worth to meet her.”

“Who is she?” Seyran asked.

“You have been at their place. Her name is Marietta.”

“Marietta?” I wondered, “Yes, Borik has told me about her.”

“To be sincere after this story it is already difficult to come to myself especially when I want to leave tomorrow.”

“Tomorrow?” Seyran asked, “Have you already finished everything?”

“Certainly,” I said, “I need to take all of this material to the place. Probably, I shall make a film of it.”

“Will you leave for Yerevan?” Zaven asked.

“No, he should first go to Stepanakert,” Seyran replied instead of me, “anyway, let us visit Marietta and her family.”

“Well, Seyran, let us go,” I yielded to him.

A woman of fifty opened the door and stared at us startled. The door and the windows were new. In one of the corners of the apartment the piano stood shattered into pieces. From the ceiling the broken chandelier was hanging.

“He is from Yerevan, Raya, he is interested in those events,” Zaven said, “are your sons and daughters at home?”

“Yes, all of them are at home.”

“Are you from Artsakh, mother?,” I asked her as I heard the native Artsakh dialect of the Armenian language.

“Yes, from the region of Martakert. Ah! How many apartments were destroyed by them! Their neighbours informed on them. We used to be

good neighbours, who would suspect...? Probably that Azerbaijani Yaghasap is a drunkard, his wife Nina is a Russian. The other day they came and apologized saying that they just answered to the questions they were asked but didn't know the reason. At first they burned down my son's car then they broke the windows with huge stones, pulled the door out from its place, first beat me, than began beating my sons and surrounded my daughter...we had hidden the child under the table so they did not notice him. One of them was specially destroying everything with a crowbar in his hand. When I came to my senses I wondered where my sons were. They had broken everything and taken everything useful with themselves and the other ones had thrown away. They had taken my sons outside as they thought they were dead and heaped the refrigerator and household stuff over them. Suddenly I noticed a leg lying under the refrigerator. I guessed it was the leg of my Yuri. We pulled him out under the fridge. He was breathing. We took both of them home. A little bit later the Turks appeared again with the aim of killing the boys if they were still alive. I begged them saying that they were lying breathless and what they wanted after all. They left us and quitted the apartment."

Marietta refused to speak. Yuri and Anatoli came and set opposite me. They seemed to be a kind of indifferent towards everything. When you look at them you feel that it is impossible either to cause joy to them or to make them sad. After the horrors they had experienced they maintained a specific appearance which only time was able to change. It was very difficult to find any ways of contact at that moment. It seemed as if they were creatures descended from another planet, whose language was unknown, you do not know what they thought about...

"They assure that it will never be repeated," I said ironically.

"Let's live and see," Yuri, the younger brother said, "perhaps it will be even worse. After all this we believe nobody."

“After having seen all this has your attitude changed towards people?”

“There are both bad and good ones,” Yuri said.

“We do not even want to ask the time in the street,” Anatoly said, “they will say we are Armenians. You meet your acquaintance and do not even ask how the things are. We do not want to greet the Azerbaijani.”

“The Russians also leave the city,” Yuri said.

“It seemed to be a kind of evil for the neighbours,” the mother said, “my Anatoly served in the army in Germany for five years and had brought some goods from there. The neighbours put the evil eye on him, they could not bear it and said why the Armenians should live better than we. Let God help me to find a lodge for my children, they are bare and disabled now...”

I felt my senses had blunted and I was not able to perceive, understand anything.

“We did not know where to go,” his mother said.

“Exchange your apartment with another one in Kapan,” I said, “the Armenians are good people. This is an Armenian town and it is in Armenia.”

“We have no relatives or acquaintances there...”

“Then go to Arstakh (Karabakh).”

“If they return Arstakh to Mother Armenia we shall go. Will they return?” Seyran asked, “what do you think of it?”

Being an eyewitness to the permissiveness of the authorities towards the slaughterers of Sumgait I was already inclined to be convinced that the scales of justice wouldn't turn in our favour from the very beginning. I only replied to Seyran that the just question of Artsakh (Karabakh) would be solved by a hard struggle of long years and with a price of numerous victims.

## April 4, 1988

As there was no bus directly leaving for Stepanakert I took a place at the back seat of the bus going to Aghdam. It seemed I leave from a place for the first time in my life for which I had no feeling of missing or loss. I dreamed of quitting that awful place as quick as possible. “Quickly, very quickly I must leave this place,” I desired. I looked back. No, I felt as I had lost something. I missed those people who I had met and talked to, who are in Sumgait now, I missed all those looks full of horror. I would like to fill them with a feeling of tranquility and peace...

Sumgait was left behind me. In my imagination it was a big cauldron which was filled with poison. I was in a hurry to reach Homeland as early as possible and warn the people of the genocidal menace. . The pogrom of Sumgait is a modern fascism and a genocide in their full manifestations. Those Armenians who hardly survived the genocide left their own workplaces, the apartments and left the place without looking back...

In the evening I was at the outskirts of Aghdam. In the field the boys were playing football shrieking.

The bus stopped at the north-eastern bus station of Aghdam. I could not ask about the bus leaving for Stepanakert because they would immediately guess that I am an Armenian and nothing could save me then. I went up to the conductor.

“How can I leave for Shushi?”

“The buses leaving for Shushi depart from the other bus station. It is at the other end of the city.”

I stuck my hand into the case and adjusted the objective of the video camera to the specially made hole then I pushed the video button. It was possible that the objective has a little bit been moved aside from the hole but it would also produce an effect of secret video shooting. I had to get from the north-eastern side of the city to its south-western side. I was calmly and slowly walking along the streets of Aghdam. I was whistling a

tune to more show off my serenity. The residents of Aghdam followed me suspiciously. But not a resident of Aghdam could ever imagine that after such violences against the Armenians any Armenian could calmly and negligently walk along the streets of Aghdam. Among other cities Aghdam was notorious for its utmost enmity against the Armenians. I reached the bus station and the conductor told me that a “ПА3” bus was about to leave for Shushi. I took my seat at the second row. The bus was filled with passengers. The women massed in the passageway. The young woman standing by me was pregnant. It seemed probably she was going to Shushi to give birth. I stood up and giving up my seat to her said (in Turkish): "Sit down"!

The Azerbaijani woman took the seat. The passengers turned back and stared at me. Surely, they caught an accent of the Artsakh dialect of the Armenian language in my pronunciation. The pregnant woman turned to her girlfriend and said (in Turkish): "He is an Armenian, what's he doing here?"

A kind of tension seized the passengers. The bus should pass through the regional center of Askeran and then through Stepanakert.

At the edges of the road there still remained horrible traces of destruction as a result of the failed march of the Azerbaijani mobs from Aghdam against Stepanakert on February 22.

If they tried to attack me I should throw myself to the driver's side and from his door out of the bus.

A bit later we reached the fuel station of Askeran. I approached the door and ordered, "Sakhla!"<sup>23</sup>

The driver stopped the bus obediently. I paid money and got off the bus.

I thought that here I was born again.

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<sup>23</sup> Stop! (in Turkish).

## April 5, 1988

As soon as the refugees sheltered themselves at the University dormitory of Stepanakert they got informed about my visit to Sumgait and surrounded me. The question rush started from different sides. But I was mostly interested in their answers to my questions. Spontaneously an interesting talk took place there which attracted everybody's attention.

"Everything roused in Sumgait after the TV speech of Katusev at Azerbaijani Television, the deputy of USSR General Prosecutor," Lensei Grigoryan, a refugee from Sumgait said, "after half an hour everything was being committed to the flames all along the Street of Peace while the police watched and triumphed. Five workers of fire brigade had entered our apartment and put the knife to the throat of a nine-month baby and demanded money and gold from my wife. When we came back home they had taken everything with themselves."

"Did not you turn to the inquiry committee?"

"They showed no interest in that affair. They said there was no murder. Still on February 20, they brought stones by a truck and emptied at the bus station. The stones were of fist size. They could not be used in any place. They were useless stuff. While in those days of the massacres they came here and having the special bags hung from their hands filled them with stones and hurried to the apartments of the Armenians. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of March, when I went again to Sumgait to take my documents from my apartment I saw a naked girl in the street her body covered with blue spots, she was running here and there and did not know where to go to. There was an Armenian man named Gurgen, I told him: "Gurgen this is an Armenian girl, most surely she has been disgraced by the slaughterers and set free then, she is a pitiful sight, take her home". He covered the girl's nudity with his mantle and took her with him". The tragic events of

Sumgait followed each other in front of our eyes one after another and revived the cruel February days.

The bitter breath of Sumgait rushed in a moment, filled the inner world of the people, mixed with their feelings then poured out onto the streets full of dramatic tension. The Armenians' appeal for help spread all over Mountainous Artsakh and Armenian SSR and before the eyes of the civilized world it turned into a call that evil still exists and lives, the source of carnage is in Azerbaijan.

The meeting with fifteen-year old Vitaly Danielyan was not of a less excitement. The former smart and brisk youth had turned into a taciturn, sad person who could hardly utter words, His black eyes were filled with sadness there was a complaint in them a hopeless claim against everything. Maybe just against the destiny. He was still waiting for his parents, Nikolay and Seda Danielyans who were left lying in the street at the night of February 28....

Jeykhun Mamedov, a member of his father's brigade, called at midnight and ordered not to leave for anywhere and as if they were going to save their family. In fifteen minutes the throng came and said: "Kolya we have come to kill you."

It was similarly difficult and hard for me to give cause the youngster to remember and experience the tragedy once again.

The leader of the criminals turned over the pages of the passport: "Danielyan?...yan? This is already enough to kill you." They took Kolya, Seda and me out to the yard and having solved their problem with the blows of metal clubs left the place.

I came to my senses and I tried to help my parents rise but I could not. My arm was broken. I addressed to my neighbours asking to call ambulance but all of them closed their doors. In a way I could hardly go up to our apartment which was on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor. The following day at 12 o'clock they came from the police and took my parents and sent me to Baku, to the hospital after Simashko."

"How could such a thing happen? How do you explain it?"

“I do not know, they were young boys of twenty five years old,” Vitaly said, “I remember when they were beating an Armenian woman in the street, her Azerbaijani neighbour cried out why they were beating the innocent woman, her daughter interrupted her shrilling that they are doing the right thing because all of the Armenians lived on the second floor while they lived in barracks. They should exterminate all of them and take their places.”

“Vitaly do you trust people now,” I referred to him.

“I do not trust the Azerbaijanis. I hate them now...”

“We went to Sumgait to give testimony to the investigation authorities,” the husband of Vitaly's sister, Nelson said, “we met Rasulova Lydia Khudatovna, the president of the Azerbaijani Labour Union who had promised before to settle the problem of Vitaly's apartment but as soon as she got informed that the son of the victims had an intention to move to Stepanakert, she said: “Do you really think it will be better in Stepanakert? Worse things are expected to happen there; our people have been killing the Armenians in Sumgait...”

In these last days they told us from the regional labour union that V. G. Lomonosov, the Deputy Chairman of the Central Council of All-Soviet Trade Union and L. Rasulova had arrived, the former from Moscow, the latter from Baku and invited the victims of Sumgait events to a meeting. I went together with my wife, too. At the beginning they were speaking about the issue of Karabakh. Then someone asked from the hall: “Why did not you find a Khuraman in Baku and Sumgait who would cast her kerchief on the ground and stop the throng?”

He meant the concocted legend that when the Aghdam mobs, making a front stretching several kilometers, marched against Stepanakert where there were incessantly held demonstrations, as if a woman named Khuraman spread out her kerchief onto the ground and nobody dared to pass the border of the kerchief, because suchlike were the Azerbaijani



bandits and murderers. When it was already the time for my wife's speech, Lyudmila Aliyeva, the deputy of the republican labor union approached us and asked on behalf of L. Rasulova not to make a speech and leave the hall.

My wife did not agree and mounted the rostrum. Indeed, Rasulova had something to fear about. My wife addressed her words to the president of labor union from the rostrum: "You have had specially gone to Aghdam and taken part in the funerals of the two criminals who participated in the attack of Stepanakert while here you did not deign to attend the funeral of the foreman of the complex brigade in Sumgait, the thrice winner of socialist emulation of five-year plan, the knight of numerous orders Nikolay Danielyan and his wife."

Rasulova jumped up from her seat, shook the party membership card in the air and swore that she hadn't said such a thing, she had not been in Aghdam that the daughter of the victims had got a high temperature and was raving.

My wife got excited, wept and went down from the rostrum. It's difficult to lose parents and bear such insults.

The next day L. Rasulova sent her driver to our apartment saying that I could go and make a report in another way and reject the words that I had said because my words should reach Moscow and they would do a great harm to my career. We didn't go. But our friend Vitaly needed an apartment. The investigators from Moscow told us that the door had been open till the 11<sup>th</sup> of March and whoever took it into his head would enter the apartment and rob it. Now the Azerbaijani witnesses gave up their first testimonies, as if they had not seen anything or had not said anything like that. The neighbours who had been present said that the investigators would leave the following day and the criminals who were still free would take revenge on them. The divisional police inspector had arrived and shouted loudly: "Who has seen the murder?" One of the neighbours called out: "Haven't you seen it with your own eyes? Weren't you watching and

admiring the scenery standing in front of me...?” The divisional police inspector attacked with threats the latter and said: “Shut up and let you think about tomorrow”. A captain of internal affairs who had been also called by the prosecutor told us that some of the main felons had been already arrested but instantly released by the command of the ruling top".

Having returned to Yerevan I started (on the basis of my video shootings) to make a documentary film on the tragic events that took place in Sumgait<sup>24</sup>.

The Azerbaijani secret services pursued the former activists of Sumgait in the territory of Russia and tried to take revenge from them. Soon I got informed that Mudretsova was abducted and taken to Baku where she was subjected to torture and killed in a cruel manner. A lot of people had a similar kind of fate among them the Lezgins, Talishs, Avars, Tats, Udis, Tsakhurs and Tabasaranians....

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The leaders of the USSR never understood that by not catching the criminals by the throat they actually encouraged the act of genocide. The leaders of the USSR never understood that by not catching the criminals by the throat they actually encouraged the act of genocide. After the Armenians' carnage in Sumgait the massacres and deportations of the Armenians of Gandzak (Kirovabad), as well as in other places followed by the sanctions of criminal leaders of Azerbaijan. On the 24<sup>th</sup> of November of 1988 I could manage to get an allowance from the Command of the 7th USSR Army to fly to Kirovabad by a helicopter. That day we shot the tragic events of Kirovabad. The Armenian district of Gandzak (Kirovabad) with its

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<sup>24</sup><https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-omp7aqF8Tw>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a18QN4Zw8EE>  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZUfl33gQ\\_lg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZUfl33gQ_lg)  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a1K2\\_siwck8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a1K2_siwck8)

40 thousand Armenian residents was under a strict siege. The school at the church reminded of a military hospital. There were more than 200 wounded and raped people. The Azerbaijanis sent a regiment to arrest us. Our pilots managed to get out safe and sound and land at Barum village (under the siege of Azerbaijani OMON<sup>25</sup>) and organize transportation of 52 children with their mothers to Yerevan. I remember the joyous fireworks displayed at Shushi by the Azerbaijanis on the occasion of the earthquake of Spitak. On the 8<sup>th</sup> of December of 1988 all night long there was a demonstrative celebration at the platform of Shushi. People from Stepanakert would see the Azerbaijanis wildly jubilating on the occasion of the disaster happening to the Armenians.

The hot spot of the massacres of 1990 was Baku. Hundreds of Armenians were martyred here. The whole of Azerbaijan was jubilating. They thought to have already defeated the Armenians. But the more furious the Azerbaijani racists became in their aspect, the more persistent the Armenians of Artsakh became. The confrontation between Artsakh and Azerbaijan was getting bigger and bigger as a snowball rolling down from the peak of a mountain and taking on formidable dimensions. The Baku authorities made up their minds to suppress the free will and freedom-loving spirit of the Artsakh Armenians by besieging the NKR<sup>26</sup> and launching military aggression which ended with the complete defeat of Azerbaijan by the Armenian freedom-loving forces in the Artsakh Liberation War (1991-1994).

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<sup>25</sup> Abbreviation of "Отряд мобильный особого назначения" meaning "Special Purpose Mobility Unit".

<sup>26</sup> A joint session of the People's Deputies of the NKAR and Shahumian (with Getashen sub-region) regional councils, on September 2, 1991 (in full compliance with the fundamental norms and principles of the international law) declared the establishment of the Nagorno Karabakh Republic (NKR - the Artsakh Republic, the capital city of Stepanakert) within the borders of the former NKAR and Shahumian region (<http://www.nkr.am/en/history-and-current-realities/79/>)

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