

THE ARTSAKH INDEPENDENCE PROCESS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE USSR COLLAPSE

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The whole process of the origin of the *Karabakh (Artsakh) movement*¹, as well as of the collapse of the USSR proves that these two phenomena are in need of deep analysis of their motives also conditioned by external factors². CPSU General Secretary M.Gorbachev's idea that the whole society is in need of serious reforms with the slogans of *glasnost* (publicity) and *perestroika* (reconstruction) was acceptable to all but extreme conservatives. The danger of collapse of the social system was real. But the West, the experts of which had probably calculated its inevitability, encouraged Gorbachev, praising the "courage of the great reformer"³. It resulted in making him a Nobel laureate (October, 1990) after Sumgait (February, 1988) and Baku (January, 1990) atrocities. However, the positive attitude of the West towards Gorbachev's *perestroika* was evident from the very beginning.

The next important fact for understanding the inner political life of the USSR is related to the national question. And it was this very national question that became the explosive for the possible breakup of the USSR.

The experience of the last decades had already shown that all those unfair deeds that the Bolshevik party did in determining the boundaries of the national states became delayed-action mines. The previous history had also shown that it was possible to put the very explosive in action mostly in Nagorno Karabakh, not only because in the 1920s the biggest injustice was committed against the Armenians of Artsakh in the most cynical way. It was well known both to the political leaders of the upper rank of the country and outside its borders that the native Armenians of Artsakh from time to time had risen the question of the correction of that injustice⁴.

¹ It was a result of the 70-year resistance of the Artsakh Armenians against artificially-formed Azerbaijan's anti-Armenian policy.

² Մանասյան Ա., Ղարաբաղյան հակամարտությունը ԽՍՀՄ տրոհման համատեքստում, 21-րդ դար, թիվ 4 (62), 2015, էջ 47-77:

³ It is known that Margaret Thatcher "discovered" M. Gorbachev as a new kind of politician of the Soviet Union during his visit to London in December 1984. Thinking that he was the man the West could cooperate with, she left especially for Washington to let the US government know about it. It was the time when Gorbachev was not the General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee yet.

⁴ The Bolsheviks included Nakhijevan and Nagorno Karabakh into Soviet Azerbaijan under different statuses with consideration to please Turkey and to make it the torch-bearer of Islamic revolution in the East (this is an official but apparently not the only point of view). Plunder of the Armenian lands was committed immediately after the Armenian Genocide. Instead of being punished for the crime of the genocide the Turks received peculiar "awards". The Armenian Genocide and "granting" Turkey and Soviet Azerbaijan with the Armenian lands as a political bribe have

And so, Karabakh was one of the most painful issues, and it is natural that if there was a plan to disintegrate the Soviet Union, it would be logical that Mountainous Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) to become its “launch pad”. We say: *if there was a plan to disintegrate the USSR*. But it would be strange if the West, “carrying the burden of human progress”, did not have an aim or plan to remove the Soviet Union⁵, proclaimed as “evil empire”, from the historical arena. The core of discussions should be the implementation of the plan rather than the question of the existence of such a goal. In that sense the history of *Karabakh movement* provides exclusive material.

It turns out that since the well-known April plenary session of 1985 up to December of 1991 all the events had been taken as skillfully designed steps to remove the USSR from the arena.

It was at the starting point of the breakup of the Soviet empire and the transition process to a new economic and political order as well as during the period of encouraging an atmosphere of publicity and reconstruction slogans that the European Council adopted the Resolution on a political situation to the Armenian question on June 18, 1987⁶. It was beyond doubt that this document would find some resonance among Armenians, and, of course, among Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh. Although the Resolution of the European Council was not particularly about Karabakh, objectively, it also became a message to the Armenians in Artsakh.

The West and the Nagorno Karabakh movement in 1988-1989

The position of Europe and the USA towards the Nagorno Karabakh movement in 1988-1989 can be described as a period of evident sympathy⁷. Moreover, “Resolution on the situation in Soviet Armenia” of the European Parliament, adopted on July 7, 1988, openly described all the events taking place at that time:

“The European Parliament,

always been and will remain as questions of “short circuit” character in the Armenian political consciousness. Discussions or even a slight hint about the Armenian Genocide awakened the questions relating to the Bolshevik purchase and sale of the Armenian lands. Touching the first, meant putting also the second one on the agenda.

⁵ This phrase was coined during the cold war [see: Ronald Reagan, “Evil empire speech” (8 MARCH 1983)]. <http://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/reagan-evil-empire-speech-text/>

⁶ That year “Izvestia” (“Известия”) and “Rural life” (“Сельская жизнь”) newspapers published an article “Such a long pending” on how Armenians were persecuted in Azerbaijan for their national identity (Евгений Жбанов, Виталий Пименов. Столь долгое ожидание. Газета “Известия” от 18 апреля 1987 г.; Беккер А., У прошлого в плену. Газета “Сельская жизнь” от 24 декабря 1987).

⁷ During the 20th century the West had also other occasions to express its attitude towards Artsakh. It is known that in the second half of 1918 the German military experts accompanied the Turkish troops attacking Baku under the command of Nuri Pasha. It was just the time when the Turkish bloodthirsty commander presented the Armenian National Council of Baku with an ultimatum (July 31) (Ավետիսյան Հ., Հայկական հարցը 1918 թ., Երևան, 1997, էջ 306). The UK also had a negative role in the Karabakh issue from 1918 (November 17) -1919 when Acting Major General W. Thomson, then Acting General D. Shuttleworth presented the Artsakh Armenians with an ultimatum to be under the rule of Baku. But the population vehemently rejected it (Հայոց պատմություն, հ. IV, գիրք Ա, Երևան, 2010, էջ197-198). But we will not go “too far”. As a starting point of observations we will take the intensifying *Karabakh movement* risen on the eve of the dissolution of the USSR in 1988.

A. having regard to the recent public demonstrations in Soviet Armenia demanding that the Nagorno Karabakh region be reunited with the Republic of Armenia,

B. having regard to the historic status of the autonomous region of Nagorno Karabakh (80% of whose present population is Armenian) as part of Armenia, to the arbitrary inclusion of this area within the Azerbaijan SSR in 1923⁸ and to the massacre of Armenians in the Azerbaijani town of Sumgait in February 1988,

C. whereas the deteriorating political situation, which has led to anti Armenian pogroms in Sumgait and serious acts of violence in Baku, is in itself a threat to the safety of the Armenians living in Azerbaijan.

1. Condemns the violence employed against Armenian demonstrators in Azerbaijan;

2. Supports the demand of the Armenian minority for reunification with the Socialist Republic of Armenia;

3. Calls on the Supreme Soviet to study the compromise proposals from the Armenian delegates in Moscow suggesting that Nagorno Karabakh be temporarily governed by the central administration in Moscow, temporarily united to the Federation of Russia or temporarily placed under the authority of a “presidential regional government”;

4. Calls also upon the Soviet authorities to ensure the safety of the 500 000 Armenians currently living in Soviet Azerbaijan and to ensure that those found guilty of having incited or taken part in the pogroms against the Armenians are punished according to Soviet law;

5. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the Government of the Soviet Union”⁹.

On November 19, 1989 the United States Congress passed the unanimously approved Joint Resolution N 178 by the Senate and the House:

“101st CONGRESS 2d Session S. J. RES. 178 JOINT RESOLUTION

To express United States support for the aspirations of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh for a peaceful and fair settlement to the dispute.

Whereas the people of the United States have strong historical and cultural ties with the people of Armenia;

Whereas the 80 percent Armenian majority in the region of Nagorno-Karabakh has continually expressed its desire for self-determination and freedom;

⁸ On July 7, 1923 the “Autonomous Region of Nagorno-Karabakh” was established and in 1936 it was renamed the “Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region”.

⁹ [European Parliament] Resolution on the situation in Soviet Armenia [Joint resolution replacing Docs.B2-538 and 587/88] Joint resolution replacing Docs. B2-538 and 587/88 [Source: Official Journal of the European Communities No C 235/106, 12.9.88]

http://karabakhfacts.com/wp-content/uploads/1988/07/c_23519880912en00800163.pdf

Whereas the current status of the region of Nagorno-Karabakh is a matter of concern and contention for the people of the Armenian and Azerbaijani Soviet Republics;

Whereas the Soviet Government has termed the killings of Armenians on February 28-29, 1988, in Sumgait, Azerbaijan, "pogroms";

Whereas continued discrimination against Karabakh Armenians and the uncertainty about Nagorno-Karabakh have led to massive demonstrations and to unrest that is continuing to this day in this area;

Whereas the people and government of the Soviet Union initially responded to the outbreak of violence in Nagorno-Karabakh with the positive step of creating an interim Special Administrative Committee to stabilize the situation;

Whereas the Administrative Committee has proven ineffective because its mission has been undermined by a number of factors, including organized violence against Armenians, Jews, and other ethnic groups, and blockades of Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenia, and Georgia;

Whereas the three-month blockade, theft and damage of goods in transit to Armenia have crippled the work of Armenians, Soviets, Americans, and the entire international community in rebuilding after the tragic December 7, 1988 earthquake in Armenia;

Whereas the Government and people of the United States strengthened their commitment to Armenia by assisting in the immediate relief effort and the overall reconstruction of those areas affected by the earthquake;

Whereas the United States maintains its resolve to assist the Armenians as they rebuild from the earthquake; and

Whereas the United States supports the fundamental rights and the aspirations of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh for a peaceful and fair settlement to the dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, that it is the sense of the Congress that the United States should-

(1) continue to support and encourage the reconstruction effort in Armenia;

(2) urge Soviet President Gorbachev to restore order, immediately reestablish unrestricted economic and supply routes to the people of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, secure the physical safety of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh from attacks and continue a dialog with representatives of Nagorno-Karabakh regarding a peaceful settlement;

(3) promote in its bilateral discussions with the Soviet Union an equitable settlement to the dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh, which fairly reflects the views of the people of the region;

(4) urge in its bilateral discussions with the Soviet Union that an investigation of the violence against the people of Nagorno-Karabakh be conducted, and that those responsible for the killing and bloodshed be identified and prosecuted; and

(5) express the serious concern of the American people about the ongoing violence and unrest which interferes with international relief efforts.

SEC. 2. The Secretary of the Senate shall transmit a copy of this resolution to the Secretary of State.

Passed the Senate November 19 (legislative day, November 6), 1989¹⁰.

This Resolution bore an obvious seal of caution. The West was trying not to throw a shadow on Gorbachev, even if it was for outright criminal acts. This was even reflected in their attitude towards the Sumgait genocide. It seemed that "the official West", which did not lose the opportunity of speaking on behalf of democracy, had to consistently condemn the crime as, by the way, it was done by the progressive social forces throughout the world. But it was obvious that the Western state and political figures fell behind the public opinion in their countries. They were closely following the assessment that would give official Moscow to the Sumgait massacre, in order not to outpace it and not to give a more rigorous assessment. From this point of view the attitude of official Washington was characteristic. In the Resolution adopted by the US Congress on November 19, 1989, in support of Artsakh movement Washington vividly presented its attitude ("not to outpace Moscow") about the assessment of Sumgait crime. The first part of the preamble of the Resolution ("Whereas the Soviet Government has termed the killings of Armenians on February 28-29, 1988, in Sumgait, Azerbaijan, "pogroms") was more than a transparent record of the very caution. Official Washington left the political qualification of the crime at the disposal of Moscow¹¹ in order not to put Gorbachev at risk by more severe assessment. At that time there was no need to present Gorbachev as a leader with whose connivance was committed the genocidal crime in Sumgait¹².

Artsakh in the USSR disintegration project. Assigning new content to the inviolability of the borders of the Union republics.

The US Congress passed its Resolution only when the Kremlin had already expressed its view which was formulated in the TV programs devoted to the problem by the experts of the Centre in the following way: in order to remove the autonomous region from the Azerbaijan SSR to the Armenian SSR it was necessary to get the consent of Baku, because according to Article 78 of the Constitution (fundamental law)

¹⁰ [http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c101:S.J.RES.178.ES:](http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c101:S.J.RES.178.ES)

¹¹ And the latter by means of the General Secretary of the CPSU resolutely refused to describe the incident as genocide, despite the obvious fact that it could not get any other qualification.

¹² At that time the Armenian political circles in Stepanakert and Yerevan were inspired by the document adopted by the USA Congress in which on behalf of high democratic principles the latter gave hope to the Artsakh Armenians. But the Congress did not condemn the head of the country for not preventing the massacres of Armenians in Sumgait which he was obliged and could do.

of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics the territory of a Union Republic might not be altered without its consent. By the way, according to the laws adopted on the basis of the Constitution of the USSR, it also referred to the borders of the autonomous region¹³, as well as to the self determination of its state-legal status out of the USSR legal-political field (actually, in view of possibility of the dissolution of the country). Neither Baku nor any union supreme structure had any authority to change the boundaries of the autonomous region without its consent.

It seemed that the situation was presented on behalf of the law and according to the legal terminology. But such argumentation testified to the principal change in the behavior of the Center. Before that dozens of changes of the borders of republics and autonomous formations had been made without assigning serious legal sense to Article 78 of the USSR Constitution on the sovereignty of republics. Everything was determined by the Politburo of the CPSU whose decisions were obligatory also for the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. And there were nearly two dozen suchlike cases registered about the internal borders in the practice of the USSR¹⁴. But in case of Artsakh the Center laid down "real legal" content in Article 78 of the Constitution, when it had been known that there was no active connection between the Soviet Union's internal political life and the Constitution. It was obvious that by that step the Center made "legitimate" an illegal and, practically, unacceptable decision forced upon the Artsakh Armenians, thus closing the ways of reviewing it legally. In fact, the Center presented "inviolable" illegitimate borders of the Azerbaijan SSR. But such an approach did not refer only to the borders of the Azerbaijan SSR. It sounded as an approach to assign a new quality to the sovereignty of the Union republics and stimulated as their, as well as the centrifugal forces' activization.

During 1989 for the political agenda was prepared the law of the USSR "Concerning the procedure for secession of a Union republic from the USSR" which was passed on April 3, 1990¹⁵. And later on, in December 1990, the project of a new Union treaty appeared on the agenda in accordance with the same political line of the extension of real political sovereignty or the rise of self-government of republics initiated by M. Gorbachev.

It is important to note that the West, in different ways, but delicately, encouraged the steps of the CPSU General Secretary. At the same time the West with reserved accents supported the Karabakh movement. The formulations of the 178 Resolution adopted by the US Congress on 19 November, 1989 show how that they were put there with great caution. Congress urged the leaders of the USSR «over the dispute over

¹³ See in details: Манасян А., Карабахский конфликт. Ключевые понятия, Ереван, 2005, с. 6, 37.

¹⁴ For a list including 23 suchlike cases see: Статус Нагорного Карабаха в политико-правовых документах и материалах. Библиотека центра русско-армянских инициатив. Ереван, 1995, с. 93-96.

¹⁵ The law of the USSR "Concerning the procedure for secession of a union republic from the USSR" № 1409-1 dated April 3, 1990, Article 3. <http://sevkrimrus.narod.ru/ZAKON/1990.htm>. see also Ведомости СНД и ВС СССР, 1990, 15, с. 252.

Nagorno-Karabakh to promote an equitable settlement, which fairly reflects the views of the people of the region». The compilers of the document¹⁶, of course, instead of those words could recall the mandatory principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples according to the international law, because the expression reflected in the text actually called for respect for the right of self-determination of the people of the region. They could just formulate the call the way it was, but avoided to point out the principle of self-determination as a means of solving the problem. In 1989 this could be perceived by the overloaded with the like problems, multinational USSR, as a direct call to break up the country which at that time would not be appropriate. Not only the above mentioned 178th Resolution but also all the documents adopted by the Congress in 1988-1991 the analytical eye should not only look for delicacy, but also calculations and prudence.

The **political hypothesis** that has been put forward and grounded here is the following: already in **1988 the West was pursuing the realization of the program of dissolving the Soviet Union into Union Republics**, which, from now on, we shall call the **"Basic program"**.

We qualify it a political **hypothesis** only because numerous documents and facts related to that program have not been declassified or remain unrevealed. The proposition of our hypothesis leads on the one hand to events, political decisions and important documents of 1988-1991 and on the other hand to the disclosure of their interrelations and compatibility with the events that took place in the USSR.

It was not a secret that the formulation "disintegration according to the Soviet republics" would find its supporters in the capitals of the Union republics. So, it was not difficult to calculate that allotment the Union republics with actual sovereignty had a powerful charge of dissolving the USSR. Among possible ways it was the shortest, most efficient and, finally, the least costly way of dividing the Soviet Empire into parts.

Not a single case of the processes taking place in the USSR during 1988-1991 contradicts the offered hypothesis, they just directly confirm it.

Those analysts and political figures, who accuse the CPSU General Secretary of consciously dismantling the Soviet Union, undoubtedly proceed from the presumption that **M. Gorbachev knew about it and acted according to that plan**. We are also inclined to that viewpoint, because of the very specific steps of the head of the country towards the Nagorno-Karabakh problem. It is important to note that his intention to divide the country into Union republics is vividly emphasized in the events around

¹⁶ "By the time the United States acting in favor of the population of Nagorno Karabakh was ultimately in the interests of the US government, which was primarily aimed at destruction of the Soviet Union from within. The adoption of such decisions on Karabakh in fact was the result of it: However, these arguments confirm that for the implementation of such a policy the United States had to be correctly informed not only about the present situation of Nagorno-Karabakh but also its past (Փաշայան Հ., Ղարաբաղյան հիմնախնդրի քաղաքական փաստաթղթերը ԼՂԻՄ կազմավորման և Ադր. ԽՍԽ կազմից դուրս բերման շրջանի փաստաթղթերում (1923-1989 թթ.), 21-րդ. ԴԱԸ, 4 (56), 2014, էջ 46-48).

Artsakh. But the issue also has another side. Could the General Secretary realize such a large-scale operation alone? There is no doubt that M. Gorbachev had ideological allies among the members of Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the CPSU who supported him in this question.

Another side of our hypothesis should also be underlined. And it is that the breakup of the USSR should be disguised under other programs and slogans. They could have a character of theoretical groundings of the Soviet socialism's democratization, as well as promising slogans of social and economic rise of the country. All the exhortations around the provisions of *publicity*, *reconstruction* and *acceleration* should perform their role in it.

Artsakh (Karabakh) in the USSR disintegration project. Karabakh confrontation as a tool for raising the sovereignty of republics.

Today we can already understand why the West had to support the Artsakh movement and M. Gorbachev's initiatives simultaneously. Artsakh fulfilled the role of the first charge to put the whole process into motion.

At first there were only promises and "pinky hopes" given to the leaders of the movement. But when on February 20, 1988 the Karabakh Soviet of People's Representatives in full accordance with the USSR Constitution passed a resolution for reunification of Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region (NKAR) with the Armenian SSR and sent a letter of request to the Centre, the latter immediately refused. It was followed by the Sumgait genocide (26-29 February, 1988) planned and organized by the Azerbaijani authorities. But all these anti-Armenian actions and brutalities did not stop the Artsakh movement.

The steps taken by the Centre obviously aimed at delaying and not solving the problem. The "Basic Program" was realized on the political background which was the result of different confrontations taking place not only around Artsakh but also in different parts of the USSR (Fergana, Novy Uzen etc.). The Karabakh issue was the most important among others, because it directly referred to the sovereignty of the republics.

The rejection of the Artsakh Armenians' demand on the "basis" of Article 78 of the Constitution by the Centre inevitably had to lead to giving real legal content to the "written on paper" sovereignty of the republics. It took the legislature two years to adopt the law on "resolution of issues connected with the secession of the Union republic from the USSR"¹⁷, which was the next step for implementation of the "Basic program".

Retroactive adoption of this law is sometimes presented as a step to prevent the collapse of the USSR. It is done on the ground as if the Union republics would not dare to secede from the Soviet Union because the law authorized the autonomous units and nations that compactly appeared in those union republics to decide for themselves the question of their status, after the withdrawal of the Union republic from the USSR. Autonomies were given the right to choose between three possible options - to

¹⁷ See, Ведомости Съездов народных депутатов СССР и Верховного Совета СССР, 1990, N 15.

secede from the Soviet Union along with the republic, stay in the USSR or to decide their own national-state status including the right of declaring themselves as independent states. It was the recognition of the self-determination right of peoples of autonomous formations or reaffirmation of already recognized right, enshrined in law. At first glance it seems that the republics having autonomies under their power really would not make a move to secede from the Soviet Union because of the threatening danger of their split. But subsequent events showed that the law was aimed at splitting the country into republics. A number of countries (for example, the Baltic republics, Armenia, Moldova) did not have autonomies and without hesitation could take the step of withdrawing from the Soviet Union, thus launching the process of its splitting¹⁸.

Just eight months after the law was adopted, in December, 1990 the head of the country introduced for discussion by legislative powers a proposal about restructuring of the Soviet Union in the form of a project of the new Union treaty. For the president the stir around the new Union treaty, as his opponents believed, in fact, was to keep the country in a new backdrop. Moreover, according to that not complicated plan the internal divisions of the Union republics the autonomies with their borders and quotas in supreme legislative organs would undergo no changes since any change could mix up all the calculations. According to M Gorbachev's opponents all the proposals about the restructuring of the USSR included in the agenda in 1991 were aimed at deepening the commotion of the country rather than helping it to come out of shock. It was the way of putting the "Basic program" into motion.

In 1991 the failure of the program could be linked with Nagorno-Karabakh, which persistently insisted on its withdrawal from Azerbaijani SSR and reunion with Soviet Armenia. Hence it becomes clear why the conclusions of the Commission of National policy and interethnic relations headed by Tarazevich made in the summer of 1989 underwent several transformations during the discussions in the Center. There was a suggestion that even if the NK Autonomous Region did not come out of the Azerbaijan SSR, so at least the "Special administrative status" which had been introduced on January 12, 1989 should be strengthened. But on November 28, 1989, the Center introduced to the Supreme Council the resolution project submitted for the elimination of the "Special administrative status", which was adopted.

In the spring of 1991 the country stepped into the phase of immediate realization of disintegration. M. Gorbachev put the renewed Union issue to referendum. It was not difficult to guess from the formulation of the question "Do you consider necessary the preservation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics as a renewed federation of equal sovereign republics in which the rights and freedom of an individual of any nationality will be fully guaranteed?" put to referendum that it cast doubt on the necessity of preserving the Soviet Union. The Baltic republics, Armenia, Georgia and Moldova boycotted the referendum displaying their determination to withdraw from the

¹⁸ As subsequent events showed, these republics demonstrated irreversible determination on independence in 1991.

USSR (excluding Georgia the other countries had no national autonomous entities, which allowed them to avoid the dangers of the law adopted on April 3, 1990). The referendum on preserving the Soviet Union did not give the desired results for the "Basic program". The 76 percent of Soviet citizens having participated in the referendum voted in favor of preserving the Soviet Union. If the President of the USSR did not have another intention, then the results of the referendum would turn into the most powerful legal guarantee for the preservation of the USSR.

Artsakh (Karabakh) as the main obstacle of the "Basic program". Punitive "Operation Ring"

The main events aimed at destroying the USSR into republics took place in Nagorno Karabakh in 1991. This is about the brutally realized "Operation Ring"¹⁹. NKAR remained the number one factor in the failure of the "Basic Program" of dissolving the USSR in 1991. The question was not only associated with international resonance, that was acquired by the Artsakh (Karabagh) problem; there were also other circumstances, and the most important among them was the just joint decision of the Armenian SSR Supreme Council and the Artsakh National Council on the "Reunification of the Armenian SSR and the Mountainous Region of Karabakh" adopted on December 1, 1989²⁰. The Center was against the resolution, even though it was obvious that it was impossible legally to qualify the decision about *Reunification* as illegal. Two national state structures of the USSR with the well known right of self-determination had adopted a decision which fully corresponded to the international law on peoples free self-determination. It is no coincidence that after demonstrating its negative attitude toward the *joint decision* the Centre continued to induce the Armenian authorities to review it and to "restore the former constitutional order". These appeals and orders were direct evidence of the lawfulness and legitimacy of the decision.

It turned out that the most stubborn force resisting the "Basic program" was Nagorno-Karabakh which appeared in the centre of attention of international circles. That is why in 1991, when the process of disintegration of the USSR was close to its pitch, M. Gorbachev tried to eliminate the "Karabakh obstacle" punitively. And the problem was not confined only to the region. Shahumyan region adjacent to NKAR and Armenian villages of the Khanlar region (sub-district of Getashen) - territories of Central Mountainous Artsakh (Nagorno Karabakh) would also become main obstacles for the implementation of the "Basic program" in case of the disintegration of the USSR²¹,

¹⁹ In April-August, 1991, the Soviet Interior Ministry troops and OMON (Special Forces) violently realized the punitive-terrorist "Operation Ring" against the peaceful Armenian population and their defenders. Shahumyan region, Getashen and autonomous region's 24 villages were brutally emptied. S. Achikgyozyan, T. Krpeyan (National Hero of Armenia), M. Shahnazaryan, A. Karapetyan, V. Nazaryan, Zarzand (Hrach) Danielyan and their supporters died heroically.

²⁰ From the Sumgait massacres an image of a conflict was formed in the international public consciousness, where Stepanakert acted in the name of law and justice, whereas Baku acted in the name of violence and genocide.

²¹ On July 26, 1989, the People's extraordinary session of the Shahumyan region appeared to the Azerbaijan SSR Supreme Council to discuss and positively resolve the issue of including the region into NKAR. At the same time the

because they had already expressed their will to unite with the NKAR²². Any precedent would be unacceptable for the authors of that "program". The violent process of emptying Artsakh in 1991 became the only way to move forward according to the "Basic program" both for the Soviet Center and genocidal Azerbaijan supported by the former.

It is important to note that the "Operation Ring" implemented against Artsakh in 1991 does not get any other rational explanation out of the "Basic program". Punitive action had to start from the weakest point. These were the Armenian villages of the Khanlar region outside NKAR. The experience of previous years had already shown that the Azerbaijanis were unable to do it on their own. The Armenian self-defense groups fought selflessly because they were defending their Homeland, their ancestral lands and their homes. That is why "breaking all the rules," the head of the country placed the Soviet army forces at the disposal of the Azerbaijani side for emptying the Armenian villages of Getashen sub-region (Getashen, Manashid, Buzlukh)²³.

It is known that the Soviet army and Azerbaijani OMON used violence and cruelty for the deportation of the Armenian population of those villages in April and May, 1991²⁴. On July 4, 1991 M. Gorbachev inexplicably abolished the emergency state in Shahumyan region. Politicians, experts, journalists and observers were unaware of his intentions (there were published articles in the press criticizing that decision). Lifting the state of emergency actually meant that the OMON members dislocated in Azerbaijani villages could freely attack Armenian villages. In May 1991, "Operation Ring" expanded also to the south of NKAR, namely to Hadrut and Berdadzor sub-region of Shushi region²⁵.

session appealed to the USSR Supreme Council to take the solution of the problem as well as the security of the citizens under its control. Naturally, in both cases the answer was negative.

²² On January 14, 1991, the Azerbaijan SSR Supreme Council adopted a decision on the liquidation of the Shahumyan region and forcibly joining it to Kasum-Ismaïlov region (Geranboy, ancient Armenian Goran in northern Artsakh occupied by Azerbaijani aggressors). It was clear, however, for the people of Shahumyan that it was something written on paper that did not have any effect on their moods and with NKAR reunification decisiveness.

²³ The observers of the organization "Memorial" stated the participation of the Soviet army and interior troops in "Operation Ring" in the following way: "In general, they not only did not prevent the deportation of the inhabitants, but also helped the Azerbaijani OMON in carrying out forced deportations. There was a kind of division of "labor": the military blocked the village, and OMON acted in the village. (See, Мемориал: Хронология конфликта. http://www.memo.ru/hr/hotpoints/karabah/Getashen/chapter1.htm#_VPID_2)

²⁴ Here's how the events have been described by a witness, Russian writer Inessa Burkova: "May 6, 1991. Both the soldiers and OMON who returned to the village robbed, burnt the houses. Men taken as hostages were immediately beaten to death. A Russian captain tried to intercede. Azerbaijani OMON man cut: "You are paid - shut up!" He walked away, spitting. There was again firing from machine guns, rifles. The old men huddled - they were under fire. The dead fell down. Others crawling out of the houses, barely alive, waited for their death. A sick grandmother was killed in her bed. 50 years old Melsik Soghomonyan was killed. He was a driver. He frequently went to Khanlar - Getashen. He was known by many people. Some Azerbaijani-policeman cut him into pieces in bed with an ax". <http://sumgait.info/ring/seda-vermisheva/karabakh-deportation-6.htm>.

²⁵ In May-August of 1991 were emptied Armenian villages of the Hadrut region [Qaring, Banazur, Karmrakar, Saralanj, Arevshat, Karaglukh and border villages in the Shushi region - Yekhtsahogh and Hin (Old) Shen].

"Operation Ring" might put an end to the existence of the Armenian autonomous region, if Artsakh Armenians suffered from panic and massively abandoned their Homeland till August. But it did not happen. On the contrary, people would not leave their faith and they resisted the violence the way they could. There is one more fact worth being mentioned. The events taking place in Artsakh were in the center of attention of the free thinking intelligentsia of the Soviet Union and the world community. Many Russian intellectuals - parliamentarians, writers, journalists not only protected the rights of Artsakh Armenians to live on their ancestral land with their speeches and presentations on mass media, but also personally tried to prevent or protect the rights of the civilian population in the hottest places if necessary. Finally, there are many cases when Russian soldiers, disregarding the instructions given from above, assisted the Artsakh Armenians in different ways. These were the soldiers who acting according to their conscience were trying within the limits of their service's possibilities to soften the cruel nature of this policy. Many of them perceived and qualified the steps of the Center as anti-Russian and anti-state.

M. Gorbachev failed to eliminate the "Karabakh obstacle" until August 1991, when the referendum was to be held on the renewed union. But, there was no referendum scheduled for August 20.

"Deputy Foreign Minister of Armenia Shavarsh Kocharyan has commented on the 25th anniversary of the military operations of Azerbaijan against the civilians of Nagorno Karabakh, called "Operation Ring." The comment reads as follows, "25 years ago, on April 30, the launch of another state terrorism by Azerbaijan against the Armenian people was heralded. This was the elimination of the Armenian population in northern Artsakh and deprivation of their Motherland. This operation that has been approved by Azerbaijani authorities up till now has one legal assessment: crime against humanity. The atrocities committed in the sidelines of "Operation Ring" carried out by Azerbaijani militia with the participation of the Soviet Army have deserved adequate assesment by the international community: international human rights organizations, legislative bodies of the USA and the RF, and by relevant resolutions of the EU. Anyway, Azerbaijan did not decline its policy of racism and Armenophobia, the latest demonstration of which is the April aggression of Azerbaijan against Nagorno Karabakh and the atrocities accompanying it. Azerbaijan showed by its power politics adopted just from the beginning military rhetoric and brutality typical for terrorist organizations why self-determined Nagorno Karabakh Republic can never be part of Azerbaijan."²⁶

The August *Putsch* (Coup) in the context of the Soviet Union's collapse. The last efforts of the Center to eliminate the Artsakh (Karabakh) "obstacle".

On August 18, when the head was having a rest in Paros, a coup took place in Moscow. Till now the August Coup has not received clear political assessments. It is not clear why the senior figures who were concerned about saving the Soviet Union failed themselves the referendum of the salvation of the USSR. The only significant step of

²⁶ Armenia Deputy FM: Azerbaijan's anti-Armenianism shows why NKR can never be part of that country (29. April, 2016) <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/845694/armenia-deputy-fm-azerbaijan%E2%80%99s-anti-armenianism-shows-why-nkr-can-never-be-part-of-that-country.html>

the “putschists” was the failure of a referendum to save the Soviet Union. And so many other questions have been without answers in connection with the August Coup (*Putsch*) so far.

But all the questions get convincing and even complete answers in the context of the "Basic program" of the USSR collapse. From that point it becomes clear the overt sympathy of the Soviet leader for the Azerbaijani side which had implemented a genocidal act, particularly taking into consideration that Nagorno-Karabakh had not already been the main engine of the dismantling the country (without Karabakh the collapse of the USSR since the mid-1990s had become irreversible) and hampered the implementation of the program of splitting the country into republics the main goal of reconstruction. This was manifested not only in "Operation Ring" when the 23rd Division of the Soviet forces located in Gandzak (Kirovabad) was put at the disposal of the Azerbaijani authorities, but also after the August *Putsch*, when the union institutions had already been paralyzed. This time M. Gorbachev, in fact, having lost his competence and authority in governing the country did everything in order for Baku to get more weapons and ammunition for resolving the issue to its own benefit.

After the August Putsch in 1991 The USSR entered the final phase of dismantling. Returning from Paris to Moscow M. Gorbachev hastily put down his mandate of General Secretary of the CPSU on 24 August, and in November announced his decision about leaving the CPSU²⁷. On August 30, the Republic of Azerbaijan declared its independence.

Following the collapse of the USSR, the former Soviet nation-state entity known as the Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Region (NKAR) as well as the Shahumian region merged to form the Nagorno Karabakh Republic (NKR), with the capital city of Stepanakert. NKR declared its independence on September 2, 1991, in full compliance with the fundamental norms and principles of the international law²⁸.

On September 6, M. Gorbachev as the President of the country signed a document recognizing the independence of the Baltic republics.

The "Basic program" was fully revealed on December 16, 1991 when the European Council in the name of Ministers of the European Union adopted in the form of declaration a political decision on the recognition of the newly independent states within the borders of the former Soviet republics in the former Soviet territory. The document stipulated the general position of the countries of the European Union:

“In compliance with the European Council’s request, Ministers have assessed developments in Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union with a view to elaborating an approach regarding relations with new States.

²⁷ It was obvious that the reason for leaving the ranks of the CPSU was not the riot having taken place on the weekend in Moscow. Such a decision needs years or at least months.

²⁸ <http://www.nkr.am/en/history-and-current-realities/79/>

In this connection they have adopted the following guidelines on the formal recognition of new states in Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union:

“The Community and its member States confirm their attachment to the principles of the Helsinki Final Act and the Charter of Paris, in particular the principle of self-determination. They affirm their readiness to recognize, subject to the normal standards of international practice and the political realities in each case, those new States which, following the historic changes in the region, have constituted themselves on a democratic basis, have accepted the appropriate international obligations and have committed themselves in good faith to a peaceful process and to negotiations.

Therefore, they adopt a common position on the process of recognition of these new States, which requires:

- respect for the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations and the commitments subscribed to in the Final Act of Helsinki and in the Charter of Paris, especially with regard to the rule of law, democracy and human rights;

- guarantees for the rights of ethnic and national groups and minorities in accordance with the commitments subscribed to in the framework of the CSCE;

- respect for the inviolability of all frontiers which can only be changed by peaceful means and by common agreement;

- acceptance of all relevant commitments with regard to disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation as well as to security and regional stability;

- commitment to settle by agreement, including where appropriate by recourse to arbitration, all questions concerning State succession and regional disputes.

The Community and its member States will not recognize entities which are the result of aggression. They would take account of the effects of recognition on neighboring States.

The commitment to these principles opens the way to recognition by the Community and its member States and to the establishment of diplomatic relations. It could be laid down in agreements²⁹:

The expression “all frontiers” needs to be explained: The Declaration would not apply this emphasis if it meant only the borders of the Soviet Union Republics, the independence of which the European Union was going to recognize. Being aware that the borders of the republics and that of the current autonomies had often been established by controversial decisions and considering undesirable more conflicting agitation around territorial issues during the USSR collapse, for avoiding “new headaches” and ensuring the peaceful nature of the USSR disintegration, Europe in its Declaration underlined the inviolability of *all borders* taking into account not only the borders of the Union republics, but also the borders of all the national units, the so-

²⁹ 4a/21. Declaration of the Extraordinary European Political Cooperation Ministerial Meeting on the ‘Guidelines on the Recognition of New States in Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union’, Brussels, 16 December 1991. - European Foreign Policy /Key documents/, edited by Christopher Hill and Karen E. Smith, London and New York, 2000, p. 282.

called *internal borders* of republics. Undoubtedly the West has chosen the most optimal way to avoid complications and new conflicts.

Subsequent events showed that the West has conscientiously followed the principle adopted on December 16, 1991. This approach was demonstrated in a special persistence in the Karabakh conflict settlement process, which reflected in the language, key concepts and understandings that the West used for shaping diverted from the reality image, which today impedes searches of the problem's solution. Since 1992, when the conflict appeared to be under the auspices of the OSCE, the West connects the solution of the problem with the return of the seven regions "around Nagorno Karabakh" "occupied" by the Armenians to Azerbaijan. In such a wrong formulation, which passes from document to document, by saying *Nagorno Karabakh* the Western experts understand the former Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region. This "play" around the geographic and administrative-political names became a source of many misunderstandings. The Artsakh Armenians were "accused" of "occupying" territories "around Nagorno Karabakh", when it is obvious that the Artsakh Armenians did not leave the borders of the geographic Nagorno-Karabakh and did not occupy territories around it³⁰. They have gone beyond the borders of the former Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region and, as the result of the Artsakh Liberation War, liberated the territories (part of Artsakh) which according to the decision of the Caucasian Bureau of 1921 should make up part of the autonomous region.

According to the **CONSTITUTION OF THE NAGORNO KARABAKH REPUBLIC:**

"We, the people of Artsakh:

- filled with the spirit of freedom;
- realizing the dream of our ancestors and the natural right of people to lead a free and secure life in the Homeland and to create;
- showing a firm will to develop and defend the Republic of Nagorno Karabakh formed on September 2, 1991 on the basis of the right of self-determination and proclaimed independent by a referendum conducted on December 10, 1991;
- as a free, sovereign state of citizens with equal rights, where a human being, his life and security, rights and freedoms are of supreme value;
- affirming faithfulness to the principles of the Declaration of Independence of the Republic of the Nagorno Karabakh Republic adopted on January 06, 1992;
- recalling with gratitude the heroic struggle of our ancestors and present generations for the restoration of freedom, bowing to the memory of the perished in a war forced upon us;
- fulfilled with the power of unity of all Armenians of the world;
- reviving the historic traditions of statehood in Artsakh;

³⁰ Moreover, Azerbaijan itself continues to occupy northern territories of Artsakh and Nakhijevan.

- aspiring to establish good-neighborly relations with all peoples, first of all with our neighbors, on the basis of equality, mutual respect and peaceful co-existence;
- staying faithful to the just world order in conformity with universal values of the International law;
- recognizing our own responsibility for the fate of our historic Homeland before present and future generations;
- exercising our sovereign right,
for us, for generations to come and for those that will wish to live in Artsakh, adopt and proclaim this Constitution.

Article 1. The Nagorno Karabakh Republic, Artsakh, is a sovereign, democratic state based on social justice and the rule of law.

2. The Nagorno Karabakh Republic and Artsakh Republic designations are the same...

Article 142. Till the restoration of the state territorial integrity of the Nagorno Karabakh Republic and the adjustment of its borders public authority is exercised on the territory under factual jurisdiction of the Republic of Nagorno Karabakh”³¹.

The political decision adopted on 16 December, 1991 by the Council of Europe on behalf of the EU Ministers of Foreign Affairs was the unveiling of the disguised “Basic program” of the disintegration of the USSR, which existed at least since 1985-1986. It was a program for the implementation of which the General Secretary of the CPSU, at the same time the first and last President of the country did every possible thing.

As it is noted: “Liberated from the constraint to safeguard Gorbachev, President Bush used his Christmas address to the nation to announce the United States' recognition of all former Soviet republics. President Bush divided the new states into three categories: - first, the US recognized Russia and announced support for Russia's assumption of the USSR's seat as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council - second, the US recognized the independence of Ukraine, Armenia, Belarus and Kyrgyzstan and, in view of bilateral commitments made to the US, agreed to establish diplomatic relations with them and sponsor those not already members to membership of the United Nations - third, the US recognized as independent states the remaining six former Soviet republics - Moldova, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Georgia and Uzbekistan - but foreshadowed the establishment of diplomatic relations only 'when we are satisfied that they have made commitments to responsible security policies and democratic principles, as have the other states we recognized today (President Bush's televised address, 23 December 1991). In Nagorno-Karabakh the use of force has overtaken the issuing of statements and decrees as this predominantly Armenian enclave tries to break free of Azerbaijan. On 22 May 1992 the EC issued a statement, to 'condemn in particular as contrary to [CSCE] principles and commitments

³¹ <http://www.president.nkr.am/en/constitution/fullText>

any actions against territorial integrity or designed to achieve political goals by force (EC Press Statement, Brussels, 22 May 1992)”³².

Thus Azerbaijan has also been recognized within the borders of the former Az. SSR contrary to the fact that by Constitutional Act of the Azerbaijan Republic “On restoration of state independence of the Azerbaijan Republic” (Release date: 18.10.1991) [**Article 1.** Invasion, on 27-28 April, 1920, of 11th Army of RSFSR in Azerbaijan, annexation of the territory of Republic, overthrow of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic - subject of international law is regarded as occupation of independent Azerbaijan by Russia. **Article 2.** Azerbaijan Republic is a successor of the Azerbaijan Republic which existed from 28 May, 1918 to 28 April, 1920. **Article 3.** Treaty on formation of the USSR dated 30 December, 1922 is illegal from the moment of its signing, with regard to Azerbaijan...]³³ it resigned its right as the legal successor to the Azerbaijan SSR³⁴ and proclaimed itself as the legal successor to the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic which existed from 28 May, 1918 to 28 April, 1920 without actually approved or recognized frontiers³⁵.

The shadow of the "Basic Program" on the post-Soviet developments

The international community "inherited" a few conflict issues in post-Soviet territory, including the Artsakh (Karabakh) problem. The settlement of a conflict of an international armed confrontation character appeared under the OSCE auspices. The great powers have remained faithful to the main thesis of the "Basic Program" accepting the "territorial integrity" of the former Soviet republics (including Azerbaijan), as a precondition for the conflict resolution, and recognizing the Republic of Azerbaijan within the former Az.SSR borders. The fact that according to acting international treaties

³² Symposium: Recent Developments in the Practice of State Recognition - European Journal of International Law, Issue vol. 4, N 1, 1993, pp. 46, 62. <http://www.ejil.org/issue.php?issue=67>

³³ <http://legalacts.az/En/document/3/15146>

³⁴ Baku proclaimed refusal first with the declaration of independence on August 30, 1991, and then with the Constitutional act on the state independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan on October 18, 1991. “The Nagorno Karabakh Republic’s independence has nothing to do with the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan – the legal predecessor of the only independent Azerbaijani Republic of 1918-1920 never included Nagorno Karabakh” (Avetisyan A. and Nikoghosyan H., The Nagorno-Karabakh Republic: the first 20 years of de-facto independence, 2011 http://www.nkrusa.org/news/daily_news.php?id=2370).

³⁵ At the end of May, 1919 President Woodrow Wilson during his meeting with A. M. Topchibashev (Chairman of the Azerbaijan Republic’s delegation to the Paris Peace Conference), concluded: “The status of Azerbaijan could not be resolved until the perplexing Russian question had been settled” (Hovhannisian R.G., The Republic of Armenia, vol. I. The First Year, 1918-1919, London, 1971 p. 291). As notes Sh. Avakyan, “The Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan of 1918-1920 was never formally recognized by the international community, and by the League of Nations, in particular. The League not only refused to officially recognize the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan, but also its application for membership...” {“Frontier disputes with the neighbouring States did not permit of an exact definition of the boundaries of Azerbaijan” [League of Nations: An Extract from the Journal N17 of the First Assembly (Geneva 1920, page 139), see: Avakian Sh., Nagorno Karabagh Legal Aspects Fourth Edition Yerevan 2013, pp. 10-11, 39]}. The uncertainty of artificial Azerbaijan’s “state frontiers” was due to its aggressive policy, particularly, towards the Armenian territories.

Azerbaijan was the only one among the former Soviet republics not having the right to secede in the Az.SSR, was ignored³⁶. They also ignored the fact about the formation of the Republic of Nagorno Karabakh from the point of view of the international law as well as the fact that since 1989 the political, economic and administrative control of Baku has been actually missing in Nagorno Karabakh. Moreover, they ignored the statements of the West (which in 1988-1989 supported the Artsakh movement) about bringing the issue to a solution that will "truly reflect the views of the people of the Region". Finally, they ignored the fact of the genocide and deportation of Armenians committed by the Azerbaijani authorities in Eastern Transcaucasia³⁷.

In the case of settlement of the Karabakh problem, fundamental principle of the free self-determination of peoples artificially has been opposed to the principle of "territorial integrity" or has been equalized with it, although the former historically, logically and legally has priority over the latter.

It was clear that if Baku managed to break the resistance of Artsakh and continue the genocidal policies against the population of Nagorno Karabakh in 1991-1994, the West would not go beyond a few formal "condemning" statements. But it turned out that without the Soviet aid and direct participation in hostilities Baku not only failed to subdue NKR which had already declared its independence, but also suffered many defeats and was forced to sign the cease-fire protocol in Bishkek with Stepanakert and Yerevan. The Karabakh confrontation got an international armed conflict character, and its settlement, due to geopolitical interests in the region, appeared at the crossroads of global power centers. Since 1992 all the projects proposed to the parties of the conflict settlement have been under the shadow of the "Basic program".

The fact that the self-determination right of Artsakh people was recognized several times (and not only by Baku from the end of November and the beginning of December, 1920)³⁸, has been ignored. For the last time the right of the self-determination of Nagorno Karabakh was reaffirmed by the law "Concerning the procedure for secession of a Union republic from the USSR", on April 3, 1990.

The fact that no state by the name of "Azerbaijan" has come into existence in the region in accordance with the principle of self-determination of peoples, is ignored. The artificially-formed Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (which was founded by the Turkish troops led by Nuri pasha that invaded Transcaucasia), then Soviet Azerbaijan (which was founded by the Soviet Russia's XI Red Army, evading the principle of self-

³⁶ Манасян А., Карабахский конфликт. Ключевые понятия и хроника, с. 34-35.

³⁷ It seems that history repeated itself. Turkey instead of being punished for committing the Armenian Genocide (1915-1923) in Western Armenia, Cilician Armenia and other places had got land "gifts." The Treaty of Sevres was ignored, a "silence valve" was put on the topic of the Armenian Genocide. In the post-Soviet period the West has demonstrated the same approach to the genocide (continuation of the Turkish program of the Armenian Genocide) against the Armenians in the Eastern Transcaucasia organized and perpetrated by the criminal Azerbaijan's authorities.

³⁸ "Declaration of the Revolutionary Committee of the Azerbaijan SSR on Recognition of Nagorno Karabagh, Zanghezur and Nakhijevan as an integral part of the Armenian SSR" ("Կոմունիստ" թերթ, դեկտեմբերի 7, N2, 1920, Երևան).

determination) and the present-day Republic of Azerbaijan have not come into existence according to self-determination acts. Moreover, the present-day Republic of Azerbaijan's right of becoming a republic within the former Soviet Azerbaijan's "boundaries" has been limited, on the one hand, by the Kars treaty³⁹ and the forcible decision of the Caucasian Bureau (regarding Nagorno Karabakh)⁴⁰ and, on the other hand, by the perfection of the legal formulation of the proclamation of the NKR, which took place before the admission of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the UN in March, 1992. These facts also indicate that the principle of "territorial integrity" is not applicable for the Republic of Azerbaijan and its implementation in relation to the latter is wrong - historically and legally. On March 30, 2016 President of the Republic of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan delivered a speech and particularly said: "There are frequent speculations around the word "occupation" in the context of Karabakh conflict. Without entering into the realm of history, I have to make a small observation here. Those that use the word 'occupation' often forget that Karabakh was a victim of occupation herself for 70 years. To all those who consciously or unconsciously use the word "occupation", I would like to ask: but "what was Karabakh's annexation to Azerbaijan in 1921, thanks to Stalin if not occupation? After receiving this generous gift, Azerbaijan... created such unbearable conditions that the people of Nagorno Karabakh were the first to rise up immediately after the emergence of the first signs of weakening of centripetal Soviet power. Was it because of a happy life? The protests of 1988 were so powerful that the beginning of the collapse of the USSR is commonly associated with the Karabakh Movement. The initial occupation was the very cause of the conflict. Hence, Nagorno Karabakh has nothing to do with the notion of territorial integrity of the present-day Azerbaijan. Armenians had firsthand experience of Azerbaijan's policy of complete depopulation of Nagorno Karabakh from Armenians. There was indeed the bitter precedent of Nakhijevan - another region populated by Armenians. In addition to driving out the Armenian population, the precious cultural legacy of the Jugha cross-stones was barbarically destroyed in 2005. Not even a tiny piece, not even a crumb of that marvelous medieval treasure survived. The whole region has been cleansed of Armenians and all traces of Armenian culture. Anyone who nowadays views Nagorno Karabakh in the context of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity is implicitly endorsing the cruel Stalinist policy of *divide et impera*, a policy that inflicted deprivation and grief upon

³⁹ The ancient Armenian region of Nakhijevan by the Kars treaty was violently "transferred" to the Azerbaijan SSR not as a territory belonging to it, but under its "protection". In 1991 by the act of resigning its right as the legal successor to the Az.SSR Baku also lost its "claim" to having Nakhijevan as a territory under its "protection".

⁴⁰ The Armenian SSR Supreme Council according to the decision of February 13, 1990, recorded the illegal nature of the Caucasian Bureau's decision. The "theorists" of Azerbaijan often "criticize" the idea used by the Armenian authors about the legal solution of the problem by the Caucasian Bureau on July 4, 1921 and the illegal one on July 5. The Azerbaijani "theorists" claim that the same decision-making body cannot be treated as competent, on the one hand and incompetent, on the other hand. Moreover, reference is made as if at that time there were no other competent bodies. The Baku's "experts" ignore the following counterargument, that even if the Caucasian Bureau is treated as a body "competent" for such a decision, then we will be forced to reckon with the fact that the decision of July 4 was taken without infringing the regulations, whereas the next day, on July 5 there were serious violations of the regulations. In fact, it was not accepted, because it neither was discussed, nor voted.

millions of families. This logic is alive as we speak. It has reached the ridiculous point of not allowing foreign citizens with Armenian origin to enter into Azerbaijan. Regardless of whether Armenians are citizens of the United States, Russia, or any other state, they are banned from entering Azerbaijan. At the same time, they are promising to ensure the security of Armenians if Karabakh becomes a part of Azerbaijan. Why, on earth the people of Karabakh should believe this? We confronted a situation in which our neighbor's perception of negotiations is far from the modern understanding of this word...⁴¹.

Artsakh owing to the patriotic devoutness of the best sons and daughters of the Armenian people gave a crushing response to all the injustices and violences perpetrated by aggressive Azerbaijan and defeated the latter⁴² in the Artsakh Liberation War of 1991-1994.

***Translated from Armenian by
S. E. Chraghyan***

⁴¹ President of the Republic of Armenia Speech. John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University <http://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2016/03/30/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-speech-at-Harvard-university-speech/>).

⁴² The Armenian forces struck a powerful counterblow to aggressive Azerbaijan in the four-day war (April 1-4, 2016) as well.