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AZERBAIJANIS ASSUME LEAD IN STUDYING THEIR OWN IDENTITY

A Conversation with Dr. Chingiz Mammadov

May 26, 2008

Baku / Washington, DC

Until very recently, foreign scholars have dominated the discussion of the national identity of Azerbaijanis. Now, Azerbaijani scholars are taking the lead. One of them, Chingiz Mammadov, currently a research fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, shared his views on the process of nation-building in Azerbaijan with Azerbaijan in the World.

AIW: What is the main focus of your ongoing research?

Dr. Mammadov: My research is on the process of nation-building in Azerbaijan. While conducting it I examined major events and tendencies both in North Azerbaijan, which is now the Republic of Azerbaijan, and in South Azerbaijan, which is part of Iran. I was not trying to write a detailed history of Azerbaijan; this was not my intention and it would be well beyond of the scope of this research. My goal was rather to understand the major factors that defined Azerbaijani identity. I have looked to the dynamic of interplay between traditions and modernity, what lessons we can learn from it, what current processes are and what impact nation-building in Azerbaijan may have on the region.

AIW: What is the current state of the study of Azerbaijani national identity?

Mammadov: Until very recently, foreign scholars have been far more active in the discussion of the national identity of Azerbaijanis, a reflection of the Soviet period when opportunities for genuine socio-political research were limited. Among the works I have used for my research are those by Swietochowski, Altstadt, Shaffer, Gumilyov, and others. Many of these studies are extremely valuable, insofar as they serve as useful sources of information and provide an opportunity to reflect on them. However, our own perspective on our national identity, an "insider's view" if you like, can illuminate certain aspects of the issue that outsiders sometimes miss.

Let me give an example. After the defeat of the 1905-1907 revolution in Russia, Mohammed Emin Rasulzade moved to Tehran, where in 1909 he established, and for three years edited, the newspaper "Irane-Now," which is frequently referred to as the first modern newspaper in the history of Iran. In discussing this period in the Azerbaijani leader's life, Swietochowski (1985, p. 69) suggests that Rasulzade, "who one day was to become the standard-bearer of Azerbaijani nationalism, at this stage of his political life identified himself with the national cause of Persia," a move that he suggests underlines "how nebulous the distinction could be at the time between the two national loyalties."

As an Azerbaijani, I have read this fact differently. By that time, North Azerbaijan had already been more modernized and secularized than its South neighbor. However, the Russian revolution, which Azerbaijanis had had high expectation for, was defeated, while the constitutional movement in Iran was still intact. Now imagine a young and dynamic man – Rasulzade at that time was only 25 – full of aspirations, who finds himself in a country in which the Azeris were one of the two major ethnicities. In that situation, it would have been far from clear to him (or to anyone else!) which country – the Russian Empire or the Gajar state – would offer the greater opportunities for Azeris to develop their identity, culture and language. Consequently, Rasulzade's behavior reflects not any vagueness in self-definition but rather his search for a basis for action.

In general, outside authors have made a very important contribution to the development of pertinent scholarship on Azerbaijan. Now it is time for us to take the lead. A new nation begins when all major events, local and global, are conceived from its unique perspective; this is what I think makes a new nation. This unique position is a "historical-political" code of the nation. Though there are some valuable works by Azerbaijani scholars among which Jamil Hasanly's (2006) *At the Dawn of the Cold War* stands out, [1] Azerbaijan is still weak in that, and there is still much to be done in this direction.

AIW: Many who have written and talked about Azerbaijani identity have shifted among terms like Turk, Azeri Turk, Azeri and Azerbaijani in defining this identity. How do you see these discussions and where do you come out on them?

Mammadov: To address this question we need to understand, first, what constitutes a nation, and second, what would be the best way to define it in our case. Let me start with the former.

“Nation,” unlike ethnicity, is a political category. And for it, the main criterion is whether people consider themselves a nation or not. All other factors are still relevant, but of less importance.

In the Republic of Azerbaijan, the prevailing discourse is that the Azerbaijanis in the North and in the South form one nation, similar to what the dominant public opinion in the two Germanys was about during the Cold War, or the one in the two Koreas is in our days. Among Azerbaijanis in Iran, there is a broader spectrum of views. Many define themselves as Azerbaijanis only in an ethnic sense. Others, on the contrary, view their future together with the brethren in the North. At the same time, in the North more and more residents of the republic think that all citizens of Azerbaijan, regardless of their ethnicity, are Azerbaijanis, a conviction that has helped integrate Talyshes, Lezgins, ethnic Russians and others into Azerbaijani society.

As for the definition of our identity, it is worth mentioning that some people are afraid that by calling ourselves “Azeris,” we might give aid and comfort to Iranian chauvinists, who under Iran’s Pahlavi regime dreamed up the notion that Azeris in Iran were Turkified Aryans that had spoken Persian before Turkification occurred. I personally don’t have any concerns in this regard, as the theory of the Turkification of the Azeris in Iran is so absurd that there is no reason to worry about it. Let us also not forget that we ourselves were taught in similar ways in Soviet times when our history books were dominated by our Albanian and Midiyan past, while nothing was there about more recent history. But as your question suggests, it is clearly important that we come to some agreement on definitions so that we all know what we are referring to.

Another issue, one too large to discuss here, involves interaction between self-conscious elites who have tried to work these definitions out and the broader population whose members intuitively feel these identities.

Again, for myself, both “Azerbaijani” or “Azeri” are fine, as are the derivative terms for our national language. I simply do not see any significant difference between the two. “Azeri” is slightly shorter and convenient. However, let me emphasize that this is something that should be discussed and decided by society as a whole and not by one author or group.

AIW: Are the Azerbaijanis of Iran and the Azerbaijanis of the Republic of Azerbaijan then “one nation or not”?

Mammadov: As I’ve said earlier, a nation is a political category. As a consequence, it is far less important that a Russian-speaking Azerbaijani, or even ethnic Russian, in Baku knows more about Alexander Nevski and less about Sattar-Khan than does an Azeri-speaker in Tabriz. If both love Azerbaijan, if they share common beliefs and passions, then we are or at least can be one nation.

There have been significant differences in nation building between the North and the South. In the North, secular intellectuals have driven the process, while in the South enlightened clerics like Roshdiye, Sheikh Khiyabani, and to a lesser degree Grand Ayatollah Kazim Shariatmadari were actively involved. But with the religious revival in the North and the alleged crisis of religion as the state ideology in Iran, that divide may be bridged. But if that is to happen any time soon, such propitious historical developments should also be backed by purposive actions by the political elite of the two countries.

Obviously, nation building continues in this region, and the outcome of it depends on a large number of factors, involving both elite action and mass participation. Neither suffices to define the outcome of this process. If the elites try to go it alone, the mass public will feel excluded, but if there is no elite effort, then there will be no focus. To move forward, we need both.

Note

[1] Jamil Hasanly's (2006) *At the Dawn of the Cold War* not only stands out as a valuable source of information, but, far more importantly, presents a unique *Azerbaijani* perspective about the period, on which the scholarship has so far been dominated by American, Russian, and European studies.

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AZERBAIJANI COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND THE KARABAKH CONFLICT: FILLING IN THE BLANK SPOTS OF HISTORY

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The end of the Soviet system has allowed Azerbaijanis ever more confidently to turn to their own history and collective memory, both of which were seriously distorted by the communist authorities, and thus to continue the process of the recovery of their own past that began during the period of glasnost and perestroika, a time of enormous growth in the interest of people to their own history, a rethinking of well-known events and new attention to almost unknown and largely forgotten events which one might call "the blank spots" of history.

A similar process has been going on in all former Soviet republics, but what makes the situation in Azerbaijan unique is that up to now almost all of these "blank

spots" being filled in concern the complicated history of Armenian-Azerbaijani conflicts. And there are at least two, in many respects mutually reinforcing, reasons why there has continued to be no lessening in the interest of society in precisely these questions.

On the one hand, it was precisely during the Gorbachev period that Armenians demanded the transfer of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast of the Azerbaijan to the neighboring Armenian SSR even though Azerbaijanis have always viewed Karabakh as an inalienable part of their own cultural-historical inheritance. Not surprisingly, Armenian claims to the contrary sparked an interest in the history of this district and the region as a whole among Azerbaijanis.

And on the other, many historical events, with the closest causal connection with the Karabakh conflict, had to a large degree been forgotten or distorted in favor of the ideological requirements of the communist regime. In particular, the treatment of such themes as the history of the Caucasus of the 19th century, of the establishment of Soviet power in Azerbaijan or of the Armenian-Azerbaijani clashes of the beginning of the 20th century was so reduced or distorted as to constitute "blank spots" in the historical memory of the Azerbaijani people.

Consequently, it should come as no surprise that a book, published in Baku in 1990 and devoted to the history of Armenian-Azerbaijani conflicts of the beginning and end of the 20th century, bore the highly symbolic title *Blank Spots of History and Perestroika*. Many historical events of the 19th and early 20th century had been subject to a taboo in Soviet times and thus were kept out of the collective memory of Azerbaijanis. The result was that the outburst of Armenian expansionism and territorial claims against Azerbaijan at the end of the 20th century was something completely unexpected for a large part of Azerbaijani society and shocked many people.

Initially, the Armenian side turned out to be ideologically better prepared for the conflict: Thanks to the efforts of Armenian propagandists and assorted experts allied with them, Armenian explanations predominated. The Azerbaijani position on all this for a long time was not even heard not only because the Armenians were so ready with answers but also because the Azerbaijanis were to a large extent not prepared to express their own views with precision.

The reasons for that difference lie in the very different historical consciousnesses of the two peoples and, even more, in the differences between the nature of the collective memories of Armenians and Azerbaijanis.

French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1992), a founder of the academic study of collective memory, noted that individual memories in order to survive for any length of time must correspond to certain "social frameworks," within whose space they can be placed. From this flow two important consequences relevant to our story here. It can mean that these frameworks distort personal memories in a way that Lowenthal (2001, p. xiii) says leads to "the syndrome of false collective identity." Or it can, when these social frameworks are lacking, lead to a situation in which individual memories are condemned to disappear. The first variant is what has been the case for Armenian collective memory; the second, for the Azerbaijani.

The Armenian framework for a long time has been well-developed, and its narrative centers on the belief that Armenians are a people surrounded by enemies

who will triumph if they remain true to their faith and their people. Initially, these narratives were written for powerful clans but increasingly they reflected the views of the Armenian Church. And then with the rise of modern nationalism, the people or nation replaced the faith at the center, but the basic storyline remained unchanged, as Marc Ferro (2003) has shown in his study of the informal histories Armenians have passed down within their families.

The situation with regard to Azerbaijani collective memories has been entirely different, reflecting heroic tales and epic storytelling. These stories talk mostly about individual heroism or unrequited love rather than about the people as such. And consequently they do not contain many of the features most typical of what Smith (1995) calls "ethno-histories." That absence in turn puts many historical events at risk of being discarded as historical memory is formed, something that puts Azerbaijanis at a disadvantage.

Thus, for example, Azerbaijanis have practically forgotten as a nation the loss of territories like Zangezur and the experiences of conflicts they had with the Armenians in the first half of the 19th century. Indeed, it is worth noting, that if there did not exist historical texts and documents compiled by such Russian historians and political figures as Shavrov (1911), Griboyedov (1971), and Glinka (1831), Azerbaijanis now would find it even more difficult to reconstitute their historical memory.

These characteristic features of Azerbaijani collective memory, which have given birth to remarkable lacunae in their collective images about their past, gave great opportunities for all kinds of historical "innovations" and "constructions" which distorted the historical record in the last century. And thus it was no accident that in the Soviet period, Azerbaijani historiography was far more fabricated than were the historiographies of neighboring nationalities.

Since 1991, Azerbaijanis have made a valiant effort to overcome this past, and we can observe a qualitatively new level in the formation of an Azerbaijani collective memory, one that seeks to compensate for this past. And consequently, many things which were blank spaces only a few years ago are now at the center of discussions as the nation seeks to include them as an inalienable part of Azerbaijani collective memory and identity.

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AZERBAIJAN'S OTHER ETHNIC MINORITIES: BETWEEN POLITICS AND GEOPOLITICS

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In addition to the Armenians in the occupied territories, Azerbaijan has numerous other ethnic minorities, some of whom play important political and even geopolitical roles even though taken together they amount to less than 10 percent of the population. Most details about these communities, however, including even their exact numbers, remain matters of dispute. [1] And with rare exceptions, almost all the coverage they do receive has been tendentious, ranging from accusations, not in every case unfounded, of being tool of one or another foreign power to claims, not in every case true, that every member of these communities is entirely happy with everything about the situation inside Azerbaijan. Perhaps the most balanced independent assessment of the status of these groups came from the Council of Europe in July 2004. It noted that "Azerbaijan has made particularly commendable efforts in opening up the personal scope of the application of the Framework Convention to a wide range of minorities. In Azerbaijan, the importance of the protection and promotion of cultures of national minorities is recognized, and the long history of cultural diversity of the country is largely valued."

But at the same time, the Council continued, "the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and its consequences have considerably hampered efforts to implement the Framework Convention," and "despite certain positive legislative initiatives, there are a number of shortcomings in the legislation pertaining to the implementation of the Framework Convention. The 2002 Law on the State Language [for example] contains regrettable reductions in the legal guarantees relating to the protection of national minorities." [2]

Five of Azerbaijan's national minorities are especially important geopolitically either because they have sometimes enjoyed sponsorship from abroad and have acted in ways that undercut Azerbaijan's sovereignty – including the Talysh, the Lezgins, and the Kurds – or because their presence affects the way in which Azerbaijan defines itself regionally – the Russians – or because they help solidify ties to an important country abroad – the Tats. (Other smaller groups sometimes have mattered in one or another of these same three ways.) Below is an introduction to

these groups and to some of the more important websites that regularly provide information about them.

The Talysh. Forming at least one percent of Azerbaijan's population and numbering at least 80,000, the Talysh, who live in the southern portion of the country and speak a language related to Persian, are far and away the country's largest nationality. They are also the group that has presented the greatest challenge to the integrity of the state, and with the possible exception of the Kurds and the Lezgins, they are the ones who many in Baku believe are acting not to advance their own interests but rather to promote the interests of a foreign power, in this case Iran, the Russian Federation, or Armenia, acting on its own or on Moscow's behalf.

One of the reasons that the Talysh have attracted so much attention was an event that took place 15 years ago. In the summer of 1993, activists proclaimed a Talysh-Mughan Autonomous Republic at a time when Azerbaijan itself was going through enormous political turmoil. Once Heydar Aliyev established his position in Baku, however, the Azerbaijani army was able to crush this movement, arrest its leaders, and effectively end this challenge to the state.

But a Talysh National Movement, operating through the print and especially the Internet media, continues to exist albeit with the much reduced goal of restoring territorial autonomy for that nation. Azerbaijani officials occasionally arrest journalists and others involved in promoting the idea of Talysh distinctiveness in order to make clear the limits of the permissible. And it continues to be supported by Russian and Armenian-backed websites like <http://khabal.info> and by some parts of the Iranian media. Indeed, whenever the Azerbaijani media increases its attention to ethnic Azerbaijanis in Iran, Iranian media invariably raise the issue of the status of the Talysh north of the border.

The Lezgins. The other largest ethnic minority in Azerbaijan, the Lezgins, who may number as many as three-quarters of a million (despite an official estimate of less than a 25 percent of that) present a far more complicated challenge because their community has many co-ethnics in Russia's Daghestan, two of their villages in the northern part of Azerbaijan were designated as enclaves in the past, and their national movement, based in Daghestan, has a long history and many supporters there as well as in Armenia. [3]

At least as early as 1965, the Lezgins called on Moscow to create a single Lezgin territory that would have combined land in the RSFSR and the Azerbaijan SSR. Moscow rejected the call and arrested the authors of the appeal. Then, in July 1990, Lezgins on both sides of the border created the Sadval (Unity) Movement to push for the same thing or even for independence, goals that neither the USSR nor the two successor states, the Russian Federation and Azerbaijan, were prepared to countenance.

Nonetheless, the Lezgins continue to advance demands, sometimes in Daghestan and sometimes in Azerbaijan, depending on political circumstances, and they too rely on Russian and Armenian-backed websites to promote their ideas. Most recently, for example, <http://khabal.info> has taken the lead in reporting about Sadval efforts to ensure that their rights as an ethnic community are protected, efforts that Daghestan has responded to by creating a commission and Azerbaijan by

using pro-Baku Lezgin group to denounce, convinced that standing behind the Sadval Movement is in the first instance Armenia.

The Kurds. Not surprisingly, the ethnic minority that generates the most concern in Baku is also the one about whom the least is known for certain and about whom there is the least agreement on such basic issues as numbers and location. That consists of the Kurds. In the 1920s, there were two Kurdish districts in Azerbaijan, one around Kalbajar and another around Lachin. In the first decade of Soviet power, there were several Kurdish autonomous districts, but these were suppressed by Stalin.

Little was heard of them until the outbreak of the war over Karabakh. Then, two things happened. On the one hand, many of the 150,000 Kurds who had been living in Azerbaijan fled; and on the other, several Armenian officials and activists proposed to Moscow that the conflict be resolved by re-establishing Kurdish districts, an idea that one expert who was involved in Moscow at the time reports was actively considered before being rejected. [4]

More recently, Azerbaijani media have reported that Armenia has invited Kurds from Iraq to resettle in the occupied territories, either to establish Yerevan's control there or to provoke Azerbaijan into taking military action in ways that might prove counterproductive. But no one in the Azerbaijani media appears to doubt that there are such Kurds and that they are tools of the Armenian government rather than a community working for its own interests. [5]

The Russians. Numbering no more than 150,000 and rapidly declining, the ethnic Russian community of Azerbaijan plays an entirely different role. On the one hand, it has not served as the lever against Baku that many nationalists in Moscow had assumed it would. But on the other, it constitutes a powerful support group for the continued role of the Russian language in Azerbaijani life. Were there no ethnic Russians in Azerbaijan, Azerbaijani identity almost certainly would have swung more in the direction of Turkey than it has; but because they are present, Azerbaijanis continue to view themselves at least in part as members of the post-Soviet world, both more secular and more Russian-centered than would otherwise be the case.

Thus, even though they do not represent a direct challenge to Azerbaijani sovereignty and are only rarely discussed in such terms, the Russians of Azerbaijan have played and are likely to continue to play a larger role in defining how Azerbaijanis see themselves, making this ethnic minority probably the most important one of all, albeit in ways that most Azerbaijanis accept rather than see as any kind of a threat. And it is entirely possible that the influence of this community could even grow in the future, if the number of Russians should begin to increase again as a result of Azerbaijan's rapidly growing economy and Moscow's interest in having a voice in Baku.

The Tats. While there are Christian and Muslim Tats, the Tats who play the most important geopolitical role in Azerbaijan are the Jewish ones. Although they number fewer than 10,000 in Azerbaijan at the present time, they are a key bridge between Azerbaijan and Israel to which many of them have emigrated. Indeed, both Israeli officials and members of the community routinely argue that the Tats give additional content to the warming security and economic relationship between the two countries, something few other ethnic communities are capable of – the Udi in

northwestern Azerbaijan and Georgia may be another – and one that is highly valued. [6]

As even this brief survey shows, the ethnic minorities of Azerbaijan currently play many roles, positive as well as negative, something that is often obscured by the lack of information and the tendentious coverage they and others offer about them.

Notes

[1] One 2007 estimate, drawing on UN figures, gives the following figures for some of the major minorities in Azerbaijan: 152,000 Armenians, 52,000 Avars, 17,000 Jewish Tatars, 199,000 Lezgins, 164,000 Russians, 84,000 Talysh, and 7,300 Udi. Available at: <http://www.joshuaproject.net/countries.php?rog3=AJ> (last accessed May 27, 2008). None of these figures is accepted by all.

[2] Council of Europe, "Resolution on the Implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities", July 13, 2004, available at: <http://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=761919&BackColorInternet=9999CC&BackColorIntranet=&BackColorLogged=FDC864> (last accessed May 27, 2008).

[3] For a discussion, see "Армения поддерживает Садвал", March 16, 2008, available at: <http://www.ethnoglobus.com/index.php?page=full&id=165> (last accessed May 27, 2008); Fuller, Liz, "Does Azerbaijan Face A New Irredentist Threat?", *RFE/RL*, May 15, 2008, available at: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2008/05/mil-080515-rferl01.htm> (last accessed May 27, 2008); and "О лезгинских 'анклавах' в Хачмасском районе", available at: http://khabal.info/?l=rus&act=inf_view&id=47971512675%55144%5541652 (last accessed May 27, 2008).

[4] "Курдестан в составе Армении", May 26, 2008, available at: <http://www.ethnoglobus.com/?page=full&id=267> (last accessed May 27, 2008).

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[6] "Горские евреи: залог Азербайджано-Израильской дружбы", May 28, 2008, available at: <http://www.ethnoglobus.com/?page=full&id=271> (last accessed May 29, 2008).

DIASPORA PLAYS KEY ROLE IN PROMOTING AZERBAIJAN-ISRAEL RELATIONS

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The Congress of Azerbaijanis in Israel was established on August 27, 2007 in the Rishon Le Zion in order to present in a professional and dignified way the national interests of Azerbaijan and Azerbaijanis to the people of Israel. Given the absence of an Azerbaijani diplomatic mission, the Congress has the challenge of doing more than many diaspora organizations, and its members believe that it can play a growing role in the rapidly expanding ties between our two countries.

After only nine months in operation, the Congress of Azerbaijanis of Israel is already playing a key role both in providing assistance to Azerbaijanis living in the Jewish state and in promoting closer ties between Azerbaijan and Israel. We work with members of the Knesset, the political establishment more generally, and Israel's business elite not only to familiarize them with the history and current situation of our homeland but also to contribute to the work toward a strategic partnership between our two countries.

Under the leadership of Alexander Shapiro Suliman, the congress has established an Azerbaijani Cultural Center in Israel, which plays a special role because Azerbaijan does not yet have an embassy there. The center works with Azerbaijanis and the descendants of Azerbaijanis who live in Israel to retain and develop their national language and traditions. Now, the center is working to create an Azerbaijani national library there.

Our congress brings together people from all walks of life, of all generations, and of all political views, a diversity which we believe is a source of strength, an advertisement if you will of the way in which Azerbaijan has been developing over the last 15 years and a reason that the congress has been able to play the role in Israeli society and government that it has.

One example of the effectiveness of the congress occurred in March this year. At that time, one Israeli party, Merez, sought to put the question of the "Armenian genocide" on the Knesset's agenda. The Congress of Azerbaijanis of Israel worked with other deputies, the government and the media to ensure that everyone involved knew the facts of the case and not just the tendentious position of the Armenians.

Leaders of the congress spoke with Israeli President Shimon Peres, Knesset speaker Daliya Itzik, and Prime Minister Ehud Olmert as well as other officials and media leaders, provided information to them about this issue, and secured Peres's acknowledgement that this is a subject for historians rather than for politicians.

In doing so, we worked closely with Turkey's ambassador to Israel, Namik Tan, who has frequently said that our congress represents the real lobby of the Turkic world in Israel. He has supported us in all our undertakings, including hosting our meeting on the 16th anniversary of the Khojali massacre. That meeting attracted a broad swath of Israel's business elite, the media, and the government, as well as many members of our organization.

Today there are swiftly developing strategic interactions in the political, economic and business spheres between Israel and Azerbaijan. It is my strong belief that in the very near future Azerbaijan will become the strong economic power of South Caucasus region. Azerbaijan and Israel have very many common strategic interests. And consequently, anything the Congress can do to help promote the

strategic partnership between our two countries is important not only for Azerbaijan but for Israel as well.

TOPCHIBASHEV AND THE IDEA OF A CAUCASUS FEDERATION

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The idea of a federation of Caucasus states arose even before several of them achieved a brief period of independence following the collapse of the Russian Empire. It continued to be discussed during that period, and it was the focus of particular attention by political figures in the various emigrations after Soviet forces occupied the region and extinguished for 80 years the aspirations for independence among the peoples there.

One of the leading advocates of a Caucasus Federation in all three periods was Ali Mardan bek Topchibashev, who played a leading role in the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic and, after going into emigration, devoted particular efforts to promoting the idea of a regional federation.

Already on the eve of the first world war, Topchibashev saw in the creation of such a confederation the most effective means of warding off efforts of the Russian Empire to sow the seeds of discord among the peoples of the Caucasus. And U.S. President Woodrow Wilson's 14 Points, one of which was that there "must be established a union of nations on the basis of special status in order to provide a mutual guarantee of political independence and territorial integrity of both large and small states", only provided an additional argument for Topchibashev's position.

As early as 1914, he called for the unification of all three Trans-Caucasus republics and the North Caucasus republics into a single unified entity. Such a confederal combination, he considered, could be established on the Swiss Union model; and the Trans-Caucasus Seim, which declared the independence of the Trans-Caucasus and which created a single system of administration, represented the first attempt at the realization of this idea.

The underlying slogan of that institution became Topchibashev's statement that "every community of people which has the right to an independent existence must offer others the possibility of enjoying the same right." To that end, he insisted, the Azerbaijan Republic, on its way to independence and prosperity, was prepared to support the independence of both the Armenians and the Georgians, as well as "the peoples of the North Caucasus which also were forming their own institute statehood." This idea became the capstone of his political activity.

After the establishment of Soviet power in Georgia in February 1921, and at the initiative of Topchibashev, the idea of creating a Caucasus Confederation of the republics of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia and the North Caucasus was discussed in the office of the representative of the ADR in Paris. The four then made a common declaration on July 10 to the Western allies. Composed by Topchibashev, it consisted

of 10 points, and explicitly called for the creation of "a political and economic union of the people of the Caucasus," the defense of their independence, the creation of democracy, and the resolution of all disputes by peaceful means.

Not all Azerbaijani leaders in emigration accepted this declaration. Khalil Khasmamedov, for example, called it a mere "proclamation." But all the same that this joint statement was one of the most successful joint actions of the Caucasus representatives because it attracted the attention of the European powers and after it was issued, the Allies did undertake several steps to provide moral and material support. French Prime Minister Aristide Briand, for example, assigned the French official responsible for liberated territories to consider what kind of support Paris might offer the émigré leaders of the Caucasus Federation in their national liberation struggle.

At a meeting on November 7, 1921, French officials said that they had prepared a package of measures for the government to consider. Topchibashev responded that "We are very grateful for the attention which you have shown to our declaration, and I want to direct your attention to the fact that although our countries are under the temporary occupation of Bolshevik forces and the Kemalists, the rule of the Bolsheviks is not based in any degree on the support of the population but only on the force of arms." Chkhenkeli, the chief of the Georgian delegation, added that their national parties and forms of administration were deeply democratic and pursued the goals and tasks of a mature democracy, while respecting private property and acknowledging the Caucasus' share of Russian debts and international obligations.

French Minister Louchet posed a number of questions concerning how France might assist the émigrés and their national movements at home, and the delegates promised that they would respond after discussing them with their specialists and experts. But already at that meeting, Topchibashev noted that 95 percent of so-called "Russian" oil that Europe received was in fact coming from Azerbaijan via the Baku-Grozny pipeline and that England had already recognized Azerbaijan's ownership of its own natural resources by purchasing oil directly from Azerbaijani government during the short period of its independence.

Two days after meeting the French, the representatives of the four Caucasus republics held a session in the offices of the Armenian delegation under the chairmanship of A. Khatisyan, at which Topchibashev represented Azerbaijan, Kanchelani the Georgian, and A. Chernoyev the North Caucasus Republic. They created four commissions to work out the details of cooperation with the French and other Allied governments.

Following this agreement to cooperate more closely, Topchibashev initiated talks with representatives of the anti-Bolshevik Russian White Movement. The French government promoted this idea of forming a common anti-Bolshevik front of Caucasus and Russian émigrés. And on July 7, 1921, representatives of the Caucasus states met with leaders of the White Movement, and the French Government. At that session, Topchibashev pointed out that Azerbaijan had been one of the initiators of a Caucasus Confederation, adding that Turkey at one time had approved this idea and requesting that the Allies stop putting pressure on Turkey.

Any further pressure of that kind, he suggested, would drive Turkey into the arms of the Bolsheviks, even though Bolshevik and Islamic morality were completely

contradictory things. This attempt to defend Turkey did not please the French government or the Armenian representatives. And Kerensky's ambassador in Paris Maklakov, after accusing the peoples of the Caucasus of ingratitude, shouted "Russia tomorrow will recover and again stand up!" and demonstratively left the hall.

The continuing series of popular uprisings in the Caucasus against Bolshevik rule drove the representatives of the four republics to more active and decisive measures. On September 23, 1924, in connection with the latest uprising of the Georgian government, the émigré representatives issued a declaration in which they said, "We will never cease to recognize the necessity for a close and fraternal union among the peoples of the Caucasus. This is entirely natural if one considers the centuries-long ties which arise from the experience of these peoples and the commonality of their interests. Our peoples will not cease our struggle for independence regardless of circumstances. These events put on the order of the day for our peoples to establish a political and economic unity."

Topchibashev devoted much of his efforts during this period to the unification of all émigré organizations into a single center. That was no easy task, since at any one time, there were often several émigré centers for each nationality, a situation that complicated talks among these nations and especially conversations between them, on the one hand, and the Western powers, on the other.

Topchibashev believed that the main center of the Caucasus diasporas in general and of the Azerbaijani in particular ought to be in Paris because of the importance of the French capital in international affairs. To that end, he entered into correspondence with M. E. Rasulzade about creating a single Azerbaijan National Center in Istanbul with Topchibashev as its representative in Paris. But this system broke down as various others tried to play a larger role, something that undercut Topchibashev's own activities.

Despite such conflicts – and they existed in the case of the emigrations of the other three republics as well – Topchibashev's authority with European governments continued to be high. In November 1927, for example, the Union of Oil Industrialists sent Rasulzade a letter stating that the union considered the delegation headed by Topchibashev to continue to be the only legal organ of the Azerbaijan Republic and thus the only one that the Union was prepared to deal with.

Inspired by such support and furious about the ways in which the Istanbul Azerbaijanis had worked to undercut him, Topchibashev fired off a letter in early 1928 saying among other things that "the group responsible for the current misfortune of the country instead of being brought before a court and the people, has created in [Istanbul] an organization under the title the Azerbaijan Provisional National Center, the goal of which is to act officially in the name of Azerbaijan. The peace conference delegation of the Azerbaijan Republic, being the only competent institution in the course of nine years, which despite all kinds of deprivations and obstacles has defended the interests of the people considers it to be its responsibility to report that the pretensions and rights awarded to itself by the above named organization are not recognized by the peace conference delegation or by other groups and activists."

This declaration shocked the emigration. Despite that, after much effort, Topchibashev was able to break down the resistance of the musavatists and achieve unification around a single body, a reflection of his authority as the most senior

official not only among the Azerbaijanis but also among the Caucasus political émigrés. And thus, the establishment of the Committee for an Independent Caucasus in 1928 was a historic achievement by Topchibashev.

Topchibashev's dream of maintaining Caucasus unity was largely shattered by the increasingly nationalist and separatist position of the Armenians. In April 1933, for example, Armenian political parties supported the idea of confederation but expressed their concerns that an independent Caucasus was threatened by the "Turkish factor" - a view none of the other three participants in such a confederation accepted. Armenians, however, started to ally themselves with Russian political émigrés, and some of their leaders published articles in Kerensky's *Dni* arguing that the other three were in effect supporting pan-Turanism and even pan-Islamism.

The three remaining advocates of a Caucasus Federation – Azerbaijan, Georgia, and the North Caucasus – on July 14, 1934, signed in Brussels the Caucasus Confederation Pact, which called for the closest possible cooperation as all the peoples strove to recover their independence while guaranteeing the full protection of the uniqueness of each of its component parts. The pact was signed by Rasulzade and Topchibashev for Azerbaijan, by M. Girei Sundi, Ibragim Chulik and Tausultan Shokman for the North Caucasus, and Zhordaniya and Chkhenkeli for Georgia.

It proved to be Topchibashev's last political act. On November 5, 1934, he died at the age of 72 after a long illness. At his funeral at Saint Cloux, speakers praised his services to the peoples of the Caucasus and to all the Muslim population of the former Russian Empire. They stressed that his dominant idea was the independence and unity of the Caucasus. "We must consider [him] the first patriot of the Caucasus," Georgia's Chkhenkeli said.

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A CHRONOLOGY OF AZERBAIJAN'S FOREIGN POLICY

I. Key Government Statements on Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy

President Ilham Aliyev speaking on the 90th anniversary of the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan says that outside pressure on Baku, including statements about supposed shortcomings in its democracy, will not affect Azerbaijan's policies (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/119471.html>).

President Ilham Aliyev says during a visit to Baku's Carpet Museum that "Armenia's policy of ethnic cleansing against the Azerbaijani people has brought great harm to our historical monuments" (www.day.az/news/politics/118236.html).

II. Key Statements by Others about Azerbaijan

Ukrainian Ambassador to Baku Boris Klimchuk describes the role of Azerbaijan in GUAM (<http://www.zerkalo.az/rubric.php?id=33124&dd=30&mo=5&yr=2008>).

Nikolai Bordyuzha, the general secretary of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), says that if Azerbaijan were to become a member, that would strengthen collective security (www.day.az/news/politics/118441.html).

Aleksei Vlasov, general director of the Moscow Center for the Study of Social-Political Processes in the Post-Soviet Space, says in Baku that he is a "cautious pessimist" about the resolution of the Karabakh dispute (www.day.az/news/politics/119100.html).

Johannes Rau, a leading German expert on security issues, says that the European Union is especially concerned about the danger of renewed fighting over Karabakh because of the possible impact of such a development on the delivery of oil and gas to its member states (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/119187.html>).

III. A Chronology of Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy

31 May

Bulgarian Energy and Economics Minister Peter Dimitrov arrives in Baku.

30 May

President Ilham Aliyev receives U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Richard Boucher and Deputy Assistant Secretary of State David Merkel.

Amnesty International releases annual human rights report, including a section on Azerbaijan (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/119604.html>).

Azerbaijan participates in a working group in Dushanbe on the establishment of an information sharing pool among CIS countries.

29 May

President Ilham Aliyev begins two-day visit to Finland.

The U.S. announces a grant of \$700,000 to support the work of the GUAM secretariat.

U.S. Ambassador Ann Derse presents Hafiz Pashayev, deputy foreign minister and former Azerbaijani ambassador to Washington, with the first Hafiz Pashayev Prize for his contributions to U.S.-Azerbaijani relations.

U.S. Department of State releases annual human rights report, including a section on Azerbaijan (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/119576.html>).

Turkish Prime Minister Redzhap Erdogan visits Nakhchivan.

Czech parliamentary delegation arrives in Baku to discuss expanding scientific cooperation.

28 May

President Ilham Aliyev leads the nation in the commemoration of the 90th anniversary of the proclamation of the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan.

27 May

Azerbaijan's transportation minister leads a trade delegation to Leipzig, Germany.

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe points to a deterioration in human rights in Azerbaijan (<http://www.day.az/news/politics/119435.html>).

26 May

President Ilham Aliyev receives UAE Foreign Trade Minister Sheikh Liubna bin Halil al-Kasimi, who is in Baku to participate in the first UAE-Azerbaijan intergovernmental commission meeting.

President Ilham Aliyev receives incoming Finnish ambassador to Baku Petri Salo.

Azerbaijani Ambassador to Minsk Ali Nagiyev says that the crisis in relations between Azerbaijan and Armenia is useful "in the first instance" to Russia.

Deputy Foreign Minister Araz Azimov conducts political consultations with Czech officials in Prague.

Egyptian pharmacological industry delegation visits Baku.

German-Azerbaijan Forum takes place in Baku.

24 May

President Ilham Aliyev receives U.S. Congressmen Adam Schiff, Edilson Swarz, and Wayne Gilchrist.

23 May

President Ilham Aliyev meets in Kyiv with U.S. Special Representative for Energy Issues Bowden Gray and Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Matthew Bryza.

Prime Minister Artur Rasizade takes part in the council of CIS heads of government in Minsk.

22 May

Azerbaijan participates in the NATO Parliamentary Assembly in Berlin.

Azerbaijani Parliamentary delegation departs for Strasbourg.

21 May

President Ilham Aliyev begins two-day visit to Ukraine.

Prime Minister Artur Rasizade begins two-day visit to Turkey.

Sheikh ul-Islam Allahshukur Pashazade begins visit to France.

20 May

President Ilham Aliyev receives General Ibrahim Acigmes, chief of general staff of the Turkish gendarmerie.

Azerbaijan First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva takes part in a meeting of UNESCO's ambassadors of good will in Paris.

19 May

President Ilham Aliyev receives Turkmenistan President Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov at the start of his official visit to Baku.

President Ilham Aliyev receives Korean Prime Minister Han Sun Su.

President Ilham Aliyev receives the co-rapporteurs of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

At a two-day meeting of Caspian littoral states at which Azerbaijan was represented, the Russian Federation proposes the creation of a Kasfor, a security group to protect the sea.

Azerbaijan government delegation on social security visits Tehran for consultations.

18 May

Azerbaijanis mark the 16th anniversary of the occupation of Lachin by Armenian forces.

17 May

Andres Herkel and Evguenia Jivkova, the co-rapporteurs of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe for Azerbaijan, arrive in Baku.

16 May

President Ilham Aliyev receives former U.S. official and dean of the Kennedy School, Harvard Professor Joseph Nye.

Note to Readers

The editors of "Azerbaijan in the World" hope that you find it useful and encourage you to submit your comments and articles via email (adabiweekly@ada.edu.az). The materials it contains reflect the personal views of their authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan.