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## FROM THE EDITOR

The conflicts surrounding the safety and security of Artsakh date back more than a century. The search for solutions has been accompanied by negotiations and debate in the upper echelons of government, various referendums and popular movements, bloody clashes and military operations. The relative stability of the last three decades was broken in 2020 by the war of aggression initiated by the Republic of Azerbaijan. As a result of this conflict, a number of territories, including a part of the Nagorno-Karabagh Autonomous Region (Shushi and Hadrut), rich in tangible heritage and monuments of Armenian culture fell under the control of the Azerbaijani side.

The active military phase of the war ended with the announcement signed on 9 November 2020, but the aggression of the Azerbaijani side has not stopped. Azerbaijani encroachments have continued towards internationally recognized territory of the Republic of Armenia – a part of which now remains under illegal Azerbaijani occupation.

Both during and after the war, we have witnessed attempts at ethnic cleansing; a practice that highlights a dangerous resurgence of genocidal action. An alarm about a possible genocide was sounded by organizations such as Genocide Watch and the Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention. This alarm was raised once again during the September aggression unleashed by Azerbaijan against Armenia in 2022, which shows the continuation of the use of violence by Azerbaijan; violence which has manifested both through active military operations and the blockade of Artsakh by false “activists” who infringe on people’s rights to free movement and safe living conditions without disruption or harassment.

Official Azerbaijani propaganda, based on lies and falsehoods and accompanied by expressions of open racism and xenophobia, attempts to distort and appropriate Armenian cultural heritage. These efforts have continued to intensify in recent years, as have attempts to rewrite past realities and historical-legal evaluations of the issue.

After the outbreak of open warfare in 2020, a research group on the Repression of the Armenians of Artsakh, Nakhijevan and Azerbaijan was created at the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute. As of 2022, this research group has since grown into a department with a small number of dedicated employees. The target was set to objectively address the various aspects of the Artsakh issue and render it accessible in a wide variety of foreign languages. The publications presented within are among the first such steps.

We wish to thank the non-profit organization *reArmenia* and the *April* initiative together with all donors for supporting the promotion of our journal and contributing to this volume.

*Harutyun Marutyan*

*Director of the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute Foundation,  
Chief Editor of the International Journal of Armenian Genocide Studies*

# THE “KARABAGH-ARMENIA” THEME IN THE ICONOGRAPHY OF ARMENIAN IDENTITY (Based on Posters and Banners from the Karabagh Movement)

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## Abstract

The images and written formulas depicted on banners and posters are a vivid manifestation of national identity and tend to appear and reappear in abundant quantities in times of societal crises. In this sense, the iconography of the Karabagh Movement represents a rich and broad field of study. What is distinctive about the posters created during the Karabagh Movement is that a great majority did not simply proclaim the programmatic ideas of certain parties or political trends but rather expressed the people’s concerns, moods and wishes and their interpretations of events as they unfolded. The posters and banners of the Movement manifested in varying genres and revealed diversity in their content. They were the product of both Soviet and nationalist mentality.

The theme “Karabagh-Armenia” had many different manifestations in the iconography of the Karabagh Movement, such as quotations and the creation of posters using or based on “quote thinking”; unification of Karabagh with Armenia as a solution for the Karabagh issue; the theme of Mother Armenia and child-Karabagh; “Karabagh is ours”; manifestations of solidarity with the people of Karabagh; Karabagh and Armenia as one entity.

This article aims to present and analyse those banners and posters as manifestations of national identity.

**Keywords:** posters and banners, iconography, Karabagh Movement, national identity, Mother Armenia.

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## Introduction

The Karabagh Movement was indeed the first truly nationwide insurrection in terms of the range of mass protests that occurred in succession in various parts of the Soviet Union. With no precedent, the Movement's characteristics came into being spontaneously in a situation where powerful state machinery needed to be opposed. Parallel to this rapid succession of events, Armenian identity underwent significant changes – the demonstrators of April 1990 were vastly different from those of February 1988.

The images and written formulas depicted on banners and posters are a vivid manifestation of national identity and tend to appear and reappear in abundant quantities in times of societal crises. In this sense, the iconography of the Karabagh Movement represents a rich and broad field of study.

What is distinctive about the posters created during the Karabagh Movement is that a great majority did not simply proclaim the programmatic ideas of certain parties or political trends but rather expressed the people's concerns, moods and wishes and their interpretations of events as they unfolded. The posters and banners of the Movement manifested in varying genres and revealed diversity in their content. They were the product of both Soviet and nationalist mentality. In short, they were unmediated indicators of an unfettered, popular mentality of an iconographic nature. In the years of the Karabagh Movement, posters were mediators and tools in the relationships between individuals and authorities, and between society and state, which conveyed the perspectives of the people about society, their appeals to the authorities, as well as their evaluation of the latter. The posters were addresses not only to the authorities, but also to Armenians, to the people of Armenia, to Azerbaijan, to the wider citizenry of the vast Soviet state and, ultimately, to the world. In this way, the posters can be understood as a kind of soliloquy of the people, which they hoped would develop into dialogue.

The posters created in the years of the Karabagh Movement (1988–1990) are deeply rich material for study in terms of their significant quantity (we have been able to document and collect about 1000 posters from oral and written sources); their diverse content (about twenty thematic groups have been distinguished); and insofar as they express a wide but evidently specific range of mentalities.<sup>1</sup> In what follows, we focus only on one of the thematic groups under the conditional title “Karabagh-Armenia”.<sup>2</sup>

This theme broadly reflects the Movement members' understanding of their history, the idea of justice in that context, and people's right to self-determination, which fed the Movement throughout its life. Simultaneously, it is evident that, while tackling complex

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1 For the discussion of the issue see: Harutyun Marutyan, *Iconography of Armenian Identity. Volume 1: The Memory of Genocide and the Karabagh Movement*, Anthropology of Memory, 2 (Yerevan: Gitutyun, 2009), 4-7.

2 For a partial discussion of the issue, see: Harutyun Marutyan, Levon Abrahamian, «Հայ ինքնության պատկերագրությունը. քննության փորձ Ղարաբաղյան շարժման ցուցապատանների մի խմբի նյութերով» [Iconography of the Armenian Identity: Examination Attempt on the Materials of a Group of Karabagh Movement Posters]. *Hayats'q Yerevanits'*: *Hayagitakan. Razmavarakan yev azgayin hetazotut'yunneri hayakan kentron* 4 (1997): 55-68.



social phenomena, the creators of these posters often drew on a broader dimension of human relations (such as representations of mother and offspring, solidarity, the part and the whole, etc.) and cartographic thinking (such as representations of the contours of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabagh/NKAO maps). In addition, the posters’ creators tended to offer a “humanizing” perspective, allowing more intelligible and empathetic messaging.

## **Quotations and the Creation of Posters Using or Based on “Quote Thinking”**

To confer greater legitimacy for their oral and written statements, ordinary people tend to lean on quotations from famous people of the past: referring to pieces of writing or perspectives from persons considered wise or simply to the repository of popular wisdom. Therefore, the use of quotations is neither arbitrary nor, moreover, unique to Armenians. To present and justify one’s perspective using “quote thinking” is an approach that has been used since ancient times. However, during the years of Soviet power, societal life was saturated with – often obligatory – “quotation mania”.

In the early years, quotations were taken from the works of Marx and Engels, and later from Lenin too. From the 1930s to the 1950s, quotes were taken mostly from Stalin’s works and speeches as well as from those of leaders at lower levels. Thereafter, it was the turn of other leaders of the Communist Party and the Soviet state, including Nikita Khrushchev, Leonid Brezhnev and Mikhail Gorbachev. For seventy years, the newspaper *Pravda* served as a boundless source of quotes. In the introduction to any, more or less serious, piece of writing, it was obligatory to include quotes from at least the classics of Marxism; from the materials of the Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union; and/or from the regular plenary sessions of the Communist Party. It is possible that the publication of “aid” materials distributed in the tens of thousands had been intended to facilitate doing just that.<sup>3</sup>

During the years of the Karabagh Movement, the use of quotations was also recurrent, reflected not only in speeches and appeals but in posters as well. However, over the years of the Movement, quotes were used differently. For example, quotes from a text pursuing other objectives were cited to emphasize an entirely different idea, and there were several, likely deliberate, misquotations or artificial “quoting” strategies, too.<sup>4</sup>

In the very first days of the Karabagh Movement (20-21 February 1988), a banner appeared on the platform of the Opera Square, which quoted a sentence pronouncing

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3 See for instance Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Vladimir Lenin, *Կրոնի մասին* [On Religion] (Yerevan: Hayastan, 1977); Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Vladimir Lenin, *Պրոլետարիատի դիկտարատուայի մասին* [On Dictatorship of Proletariat] (Yerevan: Hayastan, 1981); Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Vladimir Lenin, *Կանանց հարցի մասին* [On the Woman Question] (Yerevan: Hayastan, 1983); Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Vladimir Lenin, *Բարոյականության և բարոյական դաստիարակության մասին* [On Morality and Moral Education] (Yerevan: Hayastan, 1989).

4 Marutyan, *Iconography of Armenian Identity*, 69-70.



Figure 1

Karabagh, Nakhijevan and Zangezur as part of Armenia. Further, the statement was attributed to Nariman Narimanov, head of the Revolutionary Committee of Soviet Azerbaijan. The banner read: “Карабах, Нахичевань и Зангезур были и остаются неотделимой частью Армении. Н. Нариманов. 2 декабря 1920, газ. Бакинский рабочий” [Karabagh, Nakhijevan and Zangezur have been and remain an integral part of Armenia: N. Narimanov, 2 December 1920, *Bakinskiy Rabochiy* newspaper] (Fig. 1).<sup>5</sup>

How, where, and with what precise phrasing was this statement made? This question has repeatedly been examined in Armenian and Azerbaijani historiography.<sup>6</sup> The

5 Taking into account the fact that the volume of the journal article is relatively limited, as well as the fact that the content of about six dozen photos is presented to some extent in the text of the article, the authors of the article decided to avoid making detailed explanations of the photographs and limit themselves only to the authors of the photos or, if they are not known, to the available sources noting. The author of the pictures no. 3-11, 13, 15, 16, 21-23, 31, 35-39, 42-44, 50, 51, 54, 55, 57 is Harutyun Marutyan, no. 2, 29, 49 – Levon Abrahamian, no. 32-34, 40 – Mayis Vardanyan, no. 14, 19, 20, 46 – Lyova Hambardzumyan, no. 24, 25, 45 – Valeri Petrosyan, no. 26, 27 – Rouben Mangasaryan, no. 52 – Vram Hakobyan. Pictures no. 1, 12, and 41 are stored in the “Artsakhian Movement” repository of the Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute (section 1, folder 103, pictures no. 1003, 1020, 1048), no. 17, 18 – are from the collection of Gagik Safaryan (section 1, folder 401, pictures no. 3107, 3097). Picture no. 30 is from the collection of Armen Shavarshi Sargsyan, pictures no. 47, 48, and 53 are taken from the Facebook page of the “Mayr Hayastan” museum, the sources for pictures no. 28 and 56 are mentioned in the appropriate references.

6 For the sourceological basis of the issue see: *К истории образования Нагорно-Карабахской автономной области Азербайджанской ССР. 1918-1925: Документы и материалы* [On the History of the Formation of the Nagorno-Karabagh Autonomous Region of the Azerbaijani SSR. 1918-1925: Documents and Materials], ed. D. P. Guliev (Baku: Azerneshr, 1989), 44-47; *Нагорный Карабах в 1918-1923 гг.: Сборник документов и*

issue has multiple historiographical nuances. In what follows, we briefly consider the matter of wording alone. The challenge is that this text does not exist in this precise formulation. According to Azerbaijani sources, upon learning about the establishment of Soviet power in Armenia, Azerbaijani leadership convened a session of the Central Committee (Politburo and Orgburo) of the Azerbaijani Communist (Bolshevik) party on 29 November 1920. The decision passed made mention of the transfer of Zangezur to Armenia and the provision of the right to self-determination to the mountainous part of Karabagh.<sup>7</sup> However, the issue of Nakhijevan was not discussed. On 30 November, the head of the Revolutionary Committee of Azerbaijan, Narimanov, and People’s Commissar of Foreign Affairs, Huseynov, sent a telegram to the Revolutionary Committee of Armenia, the content of which differed from that of the decision adopted at the previous day’s session. The telegram read, “From today, disputes over the borders between Armenia and Azerbaijan are declared liquidated. Nagorno-Karabagh, Zangezur and Nakhijevan are considered as part of the Armenian Socialist Republic” (published in the newspaper “Коммунист” [Communist] issued on 7 December 1920 in Yerevan).<sup>8</sup> In Narimanov’s speech at the Ceremonial Session of the Baku Council on 1 December, on the occasion of the Sovietization of Armenia, it was specifically stated: “The working peasantry of Nagorno-Karabagh is granted the full right to self-determination. All military operations within Zangezur are being suspended and troops of Soviet Azerbaijan are being withdrawn” (published in the newspaper “Коммунист” [Communist] of Baku on 2 December 1920. There is no mention of Nakhijevan in the speech).<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, in the official Declaration of the Azerbaijani Revolutionary Committee, the foregoing statement was formulated as follows: “[...] Territories of the Zangezur and Nakhijevan districts [uyezd] are an integral part of Soviet Armenia, and the working peasantry of Nagorno-Karabagh is granted the full right to self-determination. All military operations within Zangezur are being suspended, and troops of Soviet Azerbaijan are being withdrawn” (published in Baku’s *Communist* newspaper

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*материалов* [Nagorno-Karabagh in 1918-1923: Collection of Documents and Materials], ed. V. A. Mikaelyan (Yerevan: National Academy of Sciences, 1992), 600-608; *Нагорный Карабах в международном праве и мировой политике. Документы и комментарии* [Nagorno-Karabagh in International Law and World Politics. Documents and Commentary], Volume I, ed. Yuri Barsegov (Moscow: Krug, 2008), 599 (Document no. 630). For the discussion of the issue see: *Нагорный Карабах. Историческая справка* [Nagorno-Karabagh. Historical Reference], eds. G. A. Galoyan, K. S. Khudaverdyan (Yerevan: Academy of Sciences of ArmSSR, 1988), 23-30; Jamil Hasanly. “Вопрос о Нагорном Карабахе на Кавказском бюро ЦК РКП(б) в 1920-1923 годах” [The Question of Nagorno-Karabagh on the Caucasian Buro of the Central Committee of Russian Communist (Bolshevik) Party], *Kavkaz i globalizats’iya* 5, no. 1-2 (2011): 139-144.

7 *On the History of the Formation of the Nagorno-Karabagh*, 44.

8 “С сегодняшнего дня объявляются ликвидированными споры о границах между Арменией и Азербайджаном. Нагорный Карабах, Зангезур и Нахичеван считаются частью Армянской Социалистической Республики.” *Nagorno-Karabagh in 1918-1923*, 602 (Document no. 420); *Nagorno-Karabagh in International Law*, 601 (Document no. 632).

9 “[...] трудовому крестьянству Нагорного Карабаха предоставляется полное право самоопределения, все военные действия в пределах Зангезура приостанавливаются, а войска Советского Азербайджана выводятся.” *Nagorno-Karabagh in 1918-1923*, 604 (Document no. 423).

on 2 December 1920).<sup>10</sup> Our findings reveal the following inconsistencies between the sources and the quotation on the banner hung at Opera Square, (a) the words “have been and remain” [были и остаются] do not exist in the official texts, (b) the text of the telegram is signed by two people, not only Narimanov, and (c) in the archive collections for the place of publication dated 2 December, only the *Communist* newspaper of Baku is mentioned. Further, a publication on this issue in the *Bakinskiy Rabochiy* newspaper is dated 3 December 1920.

Consistent with the theme of “Quote Thinking”, a banner, displayed at a rally near the Presidium of the Academy of Sciences of Armenia on 7 May 1988, boasted the words: “Карабахский вопрос есть вопрос чести советских республик. Орджоникидзе” [The Karabagh issue is a point of honour for Soviet republics. Ordzhonikidze]. The statement draws on the words of Sergo (Gregory) Ordzhonikidze in June 1921, when the issue of territorial belonging of Nagorno-Karabagh was decided. At the time, Ordzhonikidze was the Chairman of the Caucasian Bureau of the Russian Communist (Bolshevik) Party’s (hereinafter, RC(b)P) Central Committee, created in April of 1920 (with Sergey Kirov as his deputy). It should be noted that the Caucasian Bureau was not a regional body governing the party organizations of the Caucasus region, but a regional responsible body of the RC(b)P centre. The Bureau’s activity was directed organizationally by the RC(b)P Central Committee and personally by the Chairman of Soviet Russia’s Council of People’s Commissars, the actual leader of the country – Vladimir Lenin.

The statement attributed to Ordzhonikidze was made on 27 June 1921 in a telephone (teletype) conversation between the Chairman of the Azerbaijani Council of People’s Commissars, Narimanov, and the People’s Commissar of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan, Huseynov. The person substituting Narimanov (named Shirvani) informed Huseynov that, on that very day, the senior leadership of Azerbaijan (the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party), had discussed the issue of Karabagh and, in fact, had decided to contest her transfer to Armenia, expressing their readiness to resign if the transfer were to proceed. Huseynov was likely responsible for informing Ordzhonikidze about this decision and was sure that the news “would be received very coldly”. It was on June 26, that Ordzhonikidze had explicitly said to Huseynov: “The Karabagh issue is a point of honour for Soviet republics, and it should be resolved precisely in this sense; so that this is the last time, i.e. in the form that I relayed to you yesterday.”<sup>11</sup> It should be noted that on the same day (June 26), in a telegram to Narimanov, Ordzhonikidze and Kirov had shared their opinion: “for the sake of resolving all disagreements/frictions once and

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10 “[...] территории Зангезурского и Нахичеванского уездов являются нераздельной частью Советской Армении, а трудовому крестьянству Нагорного Карабаха предоставляется полное право самоопределяться, все военные действия в пределах Зангезура приостанавливаются, а войска Советского Азербайджана выводятся.” *Нагорный Карабах в 1918-1923 гг.*, 601 (Document no. 419); *Nagorno-Karabagh in 1918-1923*, 599 (Document no. 630).

11 “[...] карабахский вопрос есть вопрос чести советских республик и его нужно решить именно в этом смысле, чтобы это было в последний раз, то есть в том виде, как я Вам передал вчера.” *Nagorno-Karabagh in 1918-1923*, 647 (Document no. 447).



of this concept gradually began to come to the fore in the Armenian reality, which also provided an opportunity to rely on Article 70 of the USSR Constitution.<sup>17</sup> Thus, the matter was reframed from being within the domain of the “willingness or unwillingness” of the country’s leadership to a constitutional domain.

It should also be noted that, before the decision on 20 February 1988, the actions of Nagorno-Karabagh Armenians (such as the posting of petitions with tens of thousands of signatures to the central authorities of the country, the departure of three delegations to Moscow, and the decisions of Executive Committees of Regional Councils of NKAO) were manifestations of the exercise of the right to self-determination by their very nature, albeit without a direct reference to this fundamental principle.<sup>18</sup>

Clearly, the highest authority among those who have spoken on the matter of Karabagh’s status should be Lenin. However, since Lenin’s attitude to this issue remains

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various levels dated 20 May 1988 to the Presidency of Azerbaijani, USSR and Armenian Supreme Councils and in those of the Bureau of the Regional Committee of Nagorno-Karabagh and the Executive Committee of the region dated 27 May 1988 to the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of the USSR. And only in the decision adopted by the extraordinary session of the Council of People’s Deputies 12th convocation of NKAO on June 21 the importance of the “Leninist principle of the self-determination of peoples” was emphasized twice. See for details Vahan Arutyunyan, *События в Нагорном Карабахе: Хроника. Часть I: Февраль 1988-январь 1989* [Events in Nagorno-Karabagh: Chronicle, Part I: February 1988 – January 1989] (Yerevan, 1990), 60-61, 85-101.

17 It can be assumed that many of the participants in the rallies would have had the awareness that Nagorno-Karabagh Armenians have achieved self-determination; however, this awareness did not entail the linking of the continuation of the constitutional struggle with the promotion and implementation of the constitutional principle of the “self-determination of peoples”. For the first time, the issue was voiced from such a perspective on 19 March 1988 in a leaflet of the organizational committee of the Karabagh Movement (renamed Armenian Committee of Karabagh Movement since the end of May 1988) under the title of “Our Political Principles” (author: Vazgen Manukyan). Point 2 of this eight-point document read: “The goal of the Movement is to achieve the satisfaction of the legitimate demand of the population of NKAO based on the principle of the self-determination of peoples and guided by the Soviet Constitution.” See Vazgen Manukyan, *Հայկական երազանքը գոյարևման փակուղում: Երպթների և հորվածների ժողովածու* [Armenian Dream in the Impasse of Survival. Collection of Speeches and Articles] (Yerevan: V.I.V. Aysor yev Vaghe, 2002), 5. Later the statement of the “self-determination of peoples” found its place in Levon Ter-Petrosyan’s speech about the proposed decisions to the Supreme Council of the Armenian SSR during the rally on 7 July 1988, in the decision adopted during the rally on 12 June (“respect the right of all Armenian people to national self-determination and reunite NKAO with the Armenian SSR”), then also in the draft decision to be adopted by the Supreme Council of the Armenian SSR published in the republican press on 14 June. See *ИБ* (Информационный бюллетень) [Information Bulletin] N 3 (1988): 7 (samizdat); *Հայրթյան պայքարը ԼՂԻՄ-ը Խորհրդային Հայաստանի հեղ պիակրերու հասար: Փաստաթղթերի և նյութերի ժողովածու* [The Struggle of the Armenians to Unite NKAO with Soviet Armenia. Collection of Documents and Materials], comps. Karen Khachatryan, Hrant Abrahamyan (Yerevan: n.p., 2011), 164; Ashot Sargsyan, *History of the Karabagh Movement 1988-1989*, 125-129.

18 Harutyun Marutyun, «Սահմանադրական պայքարը Հայաստանի անկախացման ճանապարհին. Սահմանադրության մասին պատկերացումները, ընկալումները, գնահատականները Ղարաբաղյան շարժման տարիներին», *Սահմանադրական մշակույթի արժեքանակն ակունքները հայ ժողովրդի հազարամյա պարեգրության ծալրերում* [“Constitutional Struggle on the Way to Armenia’s Independence: Perceptions, Apprehensions, and Assessments of the Constitution during the Years of the Karabagh Movement” in *The Axiological Roots of Constitutional Culture in the Millennial Annals of the Armenian People*], eds. Gagik Harutyunyan, Artak Movsisyan, Ter Ararat qahana Movsisyan (Etchmiadzin: Publishing House of Holy See of Etchmiadzin, 2020), 651.



Figure 2

unknown to this day, it has been elicited from Lenin’s expressions of a more general nature. To be specific, Lenin had written only about the “self-determination of peoples” without any specific explanations, which, by the way, is the precise reason for the diametrically opposed interpretations of Lenin’s national policy by the Armenians and Azerbaijanis. Nonetheless, a poster referencing Lenin’s attitude on the issue was circulated in the first half of June 1988 when, at the request of the people, it was decided to convene an extraordinary session of the Supreme Council of the Armenian SSR on the issue of NKAO “becoming a part of the Armenian SSR”. The poster featured the contour maps of the Armenian SSR and NKAO and claimed that «Վերամիավորումը լիովին համապատասխանում է լենինյան ազգային քաղաքականությանը» [Reunification fully complies with Lenin’s national policy] (Fig. 2). What is important in the poster’s statement is that activists of the Movement were indeed able to find a specific quote, which they believed related directly to the Karabagh issue as a manifestation of the right to self-determination (Fig. 3, 4). “Право на самоопределение... означает решение вопроса именно не центральным, парламентом, а парламентом, сеймом, референдумом отделиющегося меньшинства. Когда Норвегия отделялась в 1905 г. от Швеции, решала это одна Норвегия, которая вдвое меньше Швеции. В. И. Ленин, том 24, стр. 227” [“The right to self-determination... means resolving the matter by *not* the central parliament, but by the parliament, seim, a referendum of the *secessionist minority*. When



Figure 3

Norway separated (1905) from Sweden, the matter was resolved *solely* by Norway (which is twice as small as Sweden). V.I. Lenin, vol. 27, page 227”].<sup>19</sup>

19 The quote is from Lenin’s «О национальной программе РСДРП» [On National Program of RSDRP [Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party] article published in December of 1913. In the following two sentences of this article the abovementioned idea is reinforced as follows: “The right to self-determination”...means *such* a democratic system where not only would democracy exist in general, but especially there *could not be* an *non-democratic* solution to the issue of secession. ...The proletariat demands such a democracy that *will exclude* forceful retention of one of the nations within the borders of the state. For this reason, “in order not to violate the right to self-determination” we have to “vote *not* for secession,”... but vote to leave the solution of this issue to the separatist region.” See Vladimir Lenin, “О национальной программе РСДРП” в кн.: В. И. Ленин, *Полное собрание сочинений, т. 24* [On Nationalities Question of RSDRP in V. I. Lenin, *Full composition of writings, vol. 24*] (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo politicheskoy literaturi, 1973), 227. The part quoted in the text of the article was also used by the Chairman of the Writers’ Union of Armenia, deputy of the Supreme Council



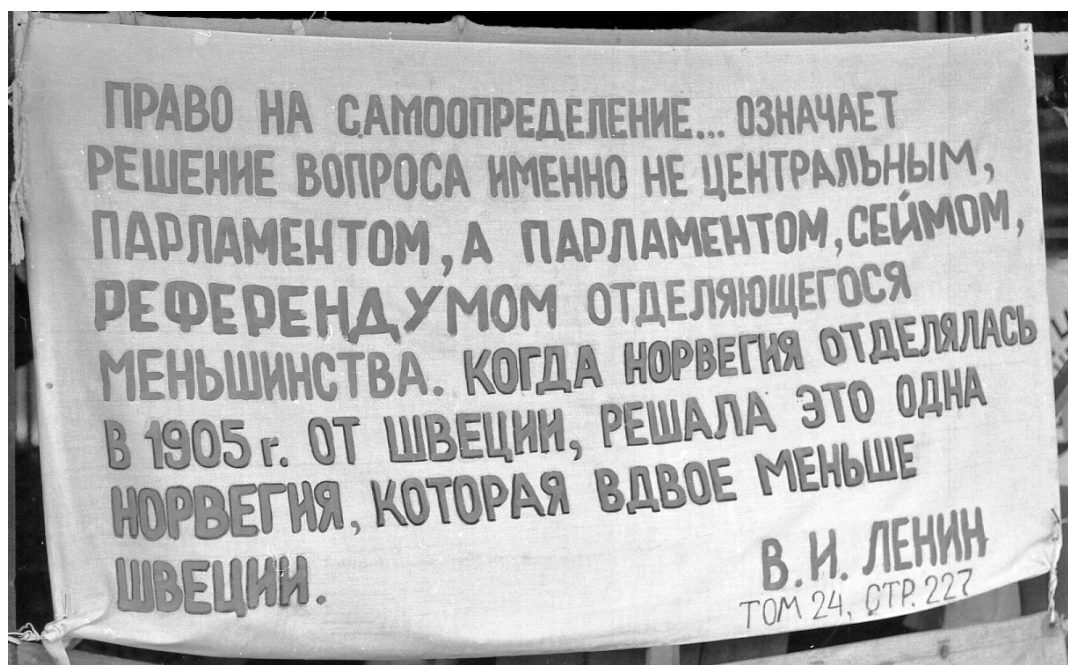


Figure 4

A compelling “Leninist saying” on the Karabagh issue was similarly developed during the last official Soviet demonstration on 7 November 1988. A large portrait of Lenin on a vehicle featuring the word “Academia” was complemented by a banner reading “Карабах – Армения: Один народ – одна республика” [Karabagh – Armenia: One nation – one republic] (Fig. 5). In those days, V. I. Lenin remained the most significant authority. In fact, in the background of Fig. 5, an official banner displays the cliché-formula “Long live Lenin’s great work.” Displaying the statement declaring Karabagh and Armenia as one nation combined was coming to be the “author” of that expression gaining even more value by being carried by the researchers of the Academy of Sciences of Armenia.

At the same demonstration on 7 November 1988, Lenin’s authority was invoked similarly when a teenager climbed atop the vehicle bearing Lenin’s image and his famous statement “Есть такая партия!”<sup>20</sup> [There is such a party!], unfurling the tricolour flag and thereby suggesting a new interpretation of the Leninist formula.<sup>21</sup>

of USSR Vardges Petrosyan in his 18 July 1988 speech at the session of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the USSR. See *Црджџ. Нагорный Карабах. Информационные материалы. Заседание Президиума Верховного Совета СССР от 18.07.88* [Artsakh. Nagorno-Karabagh. Informational Materials. The Session of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR of 18.07.88] (Vararakn-Yerevan, 1988), 11 (samizdat). The issue in a wider context is discussed in the following publication: Harutyun Marutyun, “Constitutional Struggle on the Way to Armenia’s Independence,” 643-680.

20 See for details: <https://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/ruwiki/915695>, accessed 08.11.2022.

21 Levon Abrahamian, Harutyun Marutyun, «Քաղաքական ելույթների պատկերագրական լեզվի շուրջ (Դարարադյան շարժման ցուցապատումների օրինակով)» *Հայ սրվիտարին նախընտրված հանրապետու-*



Figure 5

Other examples of “quote thinking” are evident on a banner reading «*Մեր գործը արդար է Մենք կհաղթենք*» [Our cause is just. We will win] from February 1988,<sup>22</sup> a poster featuring the contour maps of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabagh and the words «*Հավերժ միասին: Մեր գործն արդար է*» [Forever together. Our cause is just] from 18 November 1988 (Fig. 6, 7) and a banner reading «*Առաջ, հանուն արդար գործի*» [Onwards, for the just cause]. Although the writing on the poster bears no attribution, is not difficult to identify its source. The first part of the “quote” is a variation of the infamous front-office stock phrase signed into law, through which Soviet ideologues asserted the inviolability of friendship between different peoples. For instance, between Russians and Ukrainians (which stretches as far back as the 17th century under the military leadership of Bogdan Khmelnytsky) or between Russians and Bulgarians. And, of course, between all the peoples and nations of the USSR; as the lyrics of the USSR anthem suggest, “сплотила навеки Великая Русь” (“are forever united by Great Russia”). The second part of the “quote” (alongside the text of the February banner) is also well-known to many people from the history of the USSR. They are the final words of address to the nation by the People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Deputy Chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars of the USSR, Vyacheslav Molotov, on 22 June 1941, at 12 noon, on the occasion of the

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*Կլին VIII գիրական կոնֆերանս: Հնկոցումների թեզիսներ* [“On Iconographic Language of Political Speeches (Based on the Examples of the Posters of Karabagh Movement)” in *The 8th Republican Scientific Conference Dedicated to Armenian Art. Executive Summaries of Papers*], eds. G. Gyodakyan et al. (Yerevan: Gitutyun, 1997), 5-6.

22 See «*Մեր Մայր Հայաստանն ենք ուզում*» [We Want our Mother Armenia]: Rallies in Stepanakert and Yerevan, 25-26.02.1988, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WLT-Q3vT4aQ>, 12.36 minutes, accessed 08.11.2022.



Figure 6

invasion of Nazi Germany: “Наше дело правое, враг будет разбит, победа будет за нами!” [“Our cause is just. The enemy shall be defeated. Victory will be ours.”]. A slightly modified version was repeated by Joseph Stalin on 3 July 1941. This appeal was repeated frequently, both in the press and verbally, throughout the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945). As the Internet suggests, variations of individual sentences of the three-part appeal have been evident as early as the First World War and the Russian Civil War. The phrase “Наше дело правое” [“Our cause is just”] was even used by Vladimir Lenin in one of his works in 1903. This statement has become a catchphrase used at various levels of propaganda since at least the 1940s, including on the medals of victory in the Great



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10

Patriotic War: “Наше дело правое. Мы победили” [Our cause is just. We won]. The use of this wording in the posters and banners of the Karabagh Movement is thereby aligned with a righteous, patriotic war against fascist invaders.

The final part of the “Stalinist” phrase, “мы победим” [we will win], can also be interpreted beyond the surface, revealing deeper implications. Although the slogan in question – on the poster “Forever together. Our cause is just” is written in Armenian, it is certainly a product of Russian/Soviet thinking. As a result, this strategy to advocate for a righteous solution to the Karabagh issue relies on the “quotation” of cliché statements made by the very individual – Joseph Stalin – who, according to Armenian historiography,

has played a fatal role in settling the Karabagh issue. The phrase “Our cause is just” has maintained no less relevance since the 1990s, but the Armenian translation is typically used in another context – the word “just” in Armenian also means “unfaked” or “pure”.<sup>23</sup> In that sense, it is used in the word combination “just clarified butter”. Furthermore, the wording “Our cause is just” has been used for more than a quarter of a century by the

23 Stepan Malkhasiants, *Հայերն քաղաքական քառասուն, հարյուր 1* [Armenian Explanatory Dictionary, vol. 1] (Yerevan: Haypethrat, 1944), 257.

“Arznikat” dairy processing plant to promote its products,<sup>24</sup> i.e., on the labels of milk products and on vehicles for the transportation thereof.

Another banner, displayed in February 1988, includes the slogan “*Կարաբախ ձոլձեն ԲԻԽԻ Բ ԲՈՍԿԻՄԵ ԱՐՄ.ՑՑՓ*” [Karabagh should be in the Armenian SSR]. This is not merely an abstract meditation on the Karabagh issue, but rather a statement directly reflecting the decision passed on 20 February 1988 by the extraordinary Session of the Council of People’s Deputies 20th convocation of NKAO to appeal to the Supreme Councils of the Azerbaijani SSR and Armenian SSR to transfer NKAO from the Azerbaijani SSR to the Armenian SSR. This decision prompted people to take to the streets of Yerevan in defence of their Karabagh compatriots, thereby initiating the launch of the Karabagh Movement. Posters such as «*Արցախը անհապաղ վերամիավորել Հայաստանին*» [Reunite Artsakh with Armenia immediately]<sup>25</sup> (Fig. 8, 13), and «*Արցախը – Հայաստանին*» [Artsakh – to Armenia] (Fig. 9) (both displayed on 7 November 1988) clearly originate from the wording of the aforementioned decision, as well as the decision made by Armenia’s Parliament on the inclusion of NKAO in the Armenian SSR about four months later, on 15 June 1988. Drawing on the easily recognisable language of flags, the idea was further expressed via the inscription «*Ղարաբաղ*» [Karabagh] on the middle blue strip of the flag of the Armenian SSR (Fig. 10).

## “Unification” as a solution

A part of the aforementioned group of posters could be distinguished by a peculiar keyword contained therein – «*միացում*» [*miatsum*, unification]. For example, «*Միացումը մեր գլխավոր խնդիրն է*» [Unification is our main objective] (18 September 1988), «*Հայաստան – Արցախ – միացում*» [Armenia – Artsakh – unification] (early to mid-1988) (Fig. 11, 12), «*Արցախ միացում*» [Artsakh unification] (7 November 1988) (Fig. 13), «*Հայաստան Միացում Արցախ*» [Armenia Unification Artsakh] (7–8 November 1988) (Fig. 14), to list only a few. “Unification” was one of the most popular and polysemantic words in the rallies right from the start. First, it was a slogan itself, often chanted after the speeches dedicated to the reunification of Karabagh with Armenia. In fact, the word was more frequently used in Karabagh than in Armenia. Thus, while people in Yerevan typically protested by chanting «*Ղա-րա-բաղ*» [Ka-ra-bagh], people in Karabagh tended to use the slogan «*մի-ս-ցում*» [u-ni-fi-cation], although «*Հա-յաս-տան*» [Ar-me-nia] was common as well. Apparently, the “big country – small country” relationship was putting its stamp on the Karabagh-Armenia bond: unification is naturally a more significant notion for the “small” than for the “big”. The word «*միավորում*» [unification] appears even in official documents adopted by NKAO, while in similar

24 See for example [https://www.instagram.com/arzni\\_kat/](https://www.instagram.com/arzni_kat/), accessed 08.11.2022.

25 This same demand with a slightly different wording, «*Անհապաղ Արցախը վերամիավորել Հայաստանին*» [Reunite Artsakh with Armenia immediately] was among the demands of the hunger strike that started in mid-October 1988. See the photo: Harutyun Marutyan, *Iconography of Armenian Identity*, 77, figure 57.



Figure 11



Figure 12

decisions adopted by Armenia, the preferred expression is «կազմի մեջ մտնել» [entry to...]. It is noteworthy that the core, leading, an informal organization of the Movement was called «Գարաբաղ կոմիտե» [Karabagh Committee], while a key organization representing the Karabagh wing of the Movement assumed the name «Միացում» [Unification]. It is further interesting to observe the alteration of the context against which the concept of “unification” developed during the years of the Movement. It started (as already noted) as a means for restoring historical justice, later metamorphosing into a mechanism for exercising the right of peoples to self-determination. After the Sumgait massacres, the concept of “unification” evolved as a way to safeguard against future genocides. In this way, the very concept of unification was the only means to protect human rights because the notion of human rights was considered logistically unfeasible were NKAO to remain a part of Azerbaijan. Finally, around the summer of 1990, the concepts of unification and unity began to feed the reclamation programs of both different organizations and parties. The following are examples of such slogans: «Արցախյան պահանջարկիրությունը ազգի միասնության հիմքն է» [Reclaiming Artsakh is the basis for the unity of the nation], «Արցախի պահանջարկիրությունը հայ դասի անբաժանելի մասն է» [Reclaiming Artsakh is an integral part of the Armenian Cause], «Ով Արցախի հետը չէ և պահանջարկեր չէ՛ հայ չէ՛» [Who is not with Artsakh and does not reclaim it, is not an Armenian].

It is noteworthy that the slogan «միացում» [unification] very quickly acquired a relatively broad semantic spectrum. People started to chant it immediately after every speech touching upon this or that perspective of the concept of unification in general. Consequently, this was the slogan crowning speeches about the unanimity of the Armenian people scattered all over the world. A poster from 7 June 1988 stating, «Հայեր բոլոր երկրների, միացե՛ք» [Armenians of all countries, unite] (Fig. 15) built on the principle of the famous appeal of the Communist Party Manifesto. The speeches that called for the unity of the nation and its leadership worked similarly (compare, for example, the February 1988 poster with the same theme «Հայաստանի կառավարություն, միացե՛ք ժողովրդի ձայնին»<sup>26</sup> [Government of Armenia, join the voice of the people]). In the summer and autumn of 1988, the speeches of guests from the Baltic States were also accompanied by the chanting of «միացում» [unification]. This new aspect of the word “unification” was embodied in a colourful poster where the flags of the three Baltic republics and Armenia were united. The last recorded call for “unification” was made in the February 1992 rally dedicated to the four-year anniversary of the Karabagh Movement. This time the call for “unification” was directed to opposing parties and NGOs.

The word «միացում» [unification] also gave birth to the highly popular «Հայեր, միացե՛ք»<sup>27</sup> [Armenians, unite!] slogan, calling for the unification of Armenians as early

26 See «Ժամանակագրության շարունակությունը» [The Continuation of the Chronicle], *Hayastan: Hayastani azgayin ankakhut 'yun kusaksut 'yan pashtonat 'ert*, 25 October 1989, N 16, 12.

27 See for instance Levon Ter-Petrosyan, «Գարաբաղը մերն է և մերը կլինի» [Karabagh is and will be Ours], June 15, 1988, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1puEEjKDK4>, 0.001-0.020, accessed 08.11.2022.



Figure 13



Figure 14





Figure 15



Figure 16



*Figure 17*

as 1988. This slogan, without fail, has been voiced during all mass rallies and marches and represented a special rallying cry calling people to join the demonstrations. Thus, the word «միացում» [unification] was initially used in a narrow sense (unification of Artsakh with Armenia) and later in a broader sense (unification of all Armenians). Its logical conclusion manifests in a November 1988 poster: «Հայ ժողովրդի միասնությունը Արցախի հարցի լուծման գրավականն է» [The unity of the Armenian people is the pledge for addressing the issue of Artsakh] (Fig. 16).

## **Mother and child**

Apart from historical, political, legal and other justifications, the idea of “unification” – now with a gesture towards *reunification* – also operated on the basis of “popular evidence”. Here, the idea manifested in a variety of posters where a motif of mother and child were depicted as forcibly separated from each other and evoking a sense of longing to be reunited. The motif was often deployed through schematic solutions, and expressions of “cartographic thinking”.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup> The vision of “Armenia”, “Greater Armenia”, “Lost Homeland”, “Free, independent and united Armenia” has always excited the Armenians deprived of statehood for centuries, it has been in their thoughts, in their distant and proximate, real and unreal dreams. The Armenians, especially in Soviet times, appreciated the old, new and



Figure 18

The first expressions of this idea appeared already in the February 1988 rallies (February 20-26) on the platform of Opera Square, where two banners were displayed side-by-side, reading: «Դու էլ դառած կռվածադիկ իմ բալիկն ես սյ Ղարաբաղ» [An apple of discord You are my baby Karabagh] (Fig. 17), «Մայր Հայաստանը տառապած քեզ է սպասում գրկաբաց» [Mother-Armenia broken of heart is waiting for you with open arms] (Fig. 18).

The words on the first banner constitute the first line of Hovhannes Shiraz’s poem «Ղարաբաղի ողբը» [Lament of Karabagh]. Poetically describing the difficult situation of Karabagh-Artsakh’s Armenians, this verse was probably written in the 1950s but went unpublished until far later for obvious reasons, but it was well-liked and often learnt by heart by the people; it was one of the most frequently used poems during the rally on 24 April 1965.<sup>29</sup> The poem repeats the notion of Karabagh as the offspring (“baby”) of

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contemporary maps in Armenian and foreign languages representing Historical Armenia, or those having, for instance, “Armenia” or “Armenian Highland” written on the territory of the Ottoman Empire and later of Turkey. That is to say the iconographic solution of seeing Armenian lands united, unified as the maps were suggesting had always been appreciated. The issue is thoroughly discussed in the following publications: Harutyun Marutyan, «Քարտեզը որպես ինքնութեան խորհրդանիշ» [Maps as Symbols of Identity], *Handes Amsorya* 1-12 (2006): 443-478; Arutyun Marutyan, “Карты как символы национального движения в Армении” [Maps as Symbols of National Movement in Armenia] in *Mythical Landscapes Then And Now: The Mystification of Landscapes in Search for National Identity*, eds. Rūth Büttner and Judith Peltz (Yerevan: Antares, 2006), 229-250, 279-285.

<sup>29</sup> Samvel Muradyan, *Հովհաննես Ծիրազ. Բանաստեղծը, մարդը* [Hovhannes Shiraz: The Poet, Person],



Figure 19

Armenia several times, emphasizing that Karabagh was “an Armenian land since the beginning” which was now “captured”. The poem asks: “when will the Armenian hands raise up in fists like your mountains?” and assures that “we are one, body and soul, and not even death could do us part,” culminating in a prediction that Karabagh will become Armenian once again.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, it is no accident that a banner appeared in February 1988 with the inscription «Երևազդ կհրականասցնենք, Շիրազ» [We’ll make your dream come true, Shiraz] alongside a large picture of the poet, implicitly alluding to the idea expressed in “The Lament of Karabagh”. The second poster depicts a young mother with outstretched arms, ready to embrace the little boy running towards her against the backdrop of the double cones of Mount Ararat, which is the national symbol of Armenia. At the very top of the poster is a photo of the leader of the USSR, Mikhail Gorbachev (this will be expanded upon in the paragraphs to come).

The mother and child metaphor is also evident in the following four posters. The first features a fragment of Raphael’s “Sistine Madonna” – the Virgin Mary and Child – above a contour map of Armenia and Karabagh. A thick, black line separates the mother from the child, continuing down to separate Armenia from Karabagh. This poster, created by a professional artist, was exhibited at the Artist’s House in May 1988. In another poster with a similar approach (likely displayed on 7 November 1988), a person with a sword cuts up

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vol. 2 (Yerevan: YSU, 2015), 61; Ashot Ter-Minasyan, «Հովհաննես Շիրազի հայրենասիրական քնարի աշխարհայացքային շերտերը» [Worldview Layers of Hovhannes Shiraz’s Patriotic Lyre], *Banber Yerevani hamalsarani* 2 (2000): 42-55; Silva Khachatryan, «Հովհաննես Շիրազի քնարը՝ Արցախի ազատագրական շարժման զանգահար», *Արցախի պետական համալսարան: Գիտական ընթերցումներ: Ղարաբաղյան շարժման 30-րդ տարեդարձին նվիրված գիտաժողովի նյութեր* [“Hovhannes Shiraz’s Lyrics as the Call for the Artsakh Liberation Movement” in *Artsakh State University. Scientific Readings (Collection of Articles) Proceedings of the Conference on 30th Anniversary of Karabagh Movement*] (Stepanakert: Artsakh State University Press, 2018), 178-180.

30 Hovhannes Shiraz, «Ղարաբաղի ողբը» [The Lament of Karabagh], *Bagin* 9-12 (1990): 26-27.

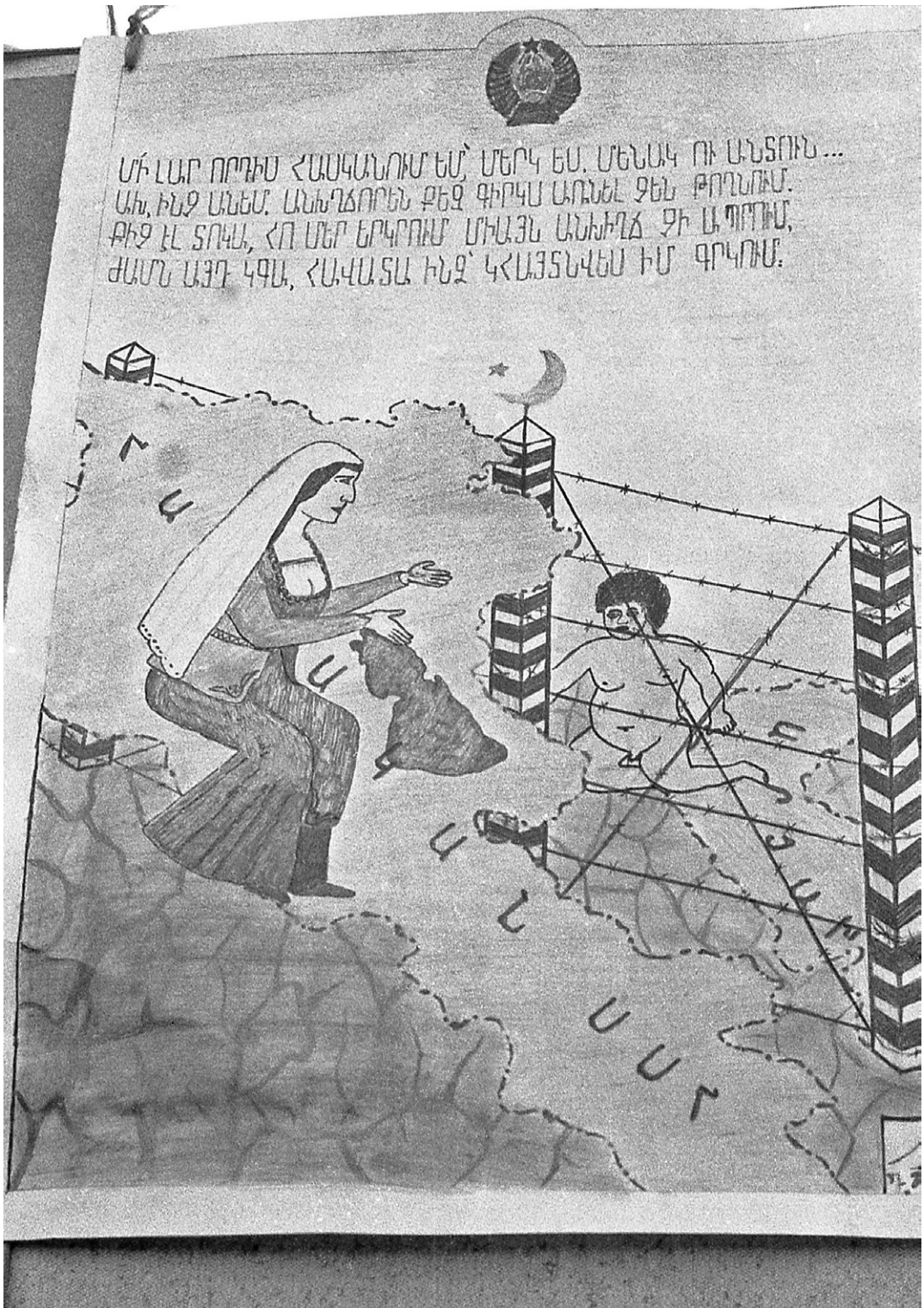


Figure 20

the road before a little child rushing from the territory of NKAO towards his mother, who reclines along the contour map of Armenia (Mother Armenia) (Fig. 19).

The third poster (Fig. 20) can, perhaps, be considered the most characteristic appearance of the “mother and child” motif. The poster appeared in Opera Square in the summer of 1988. Embedded in Primitivist principles, the poster features the mother in traditional Armenian costume in the territory of the Armenian SSR, where Yerevan should be. The child is pictured with outstretched arms in Nagorno-Karabagh territory (inscribed with “Artsakh”) and is separated from the mother figure and Armenia by a barbed wire fence. The “border” evoked by the fence is topped by a Muslim crescent and star, thus representing Azerbaijan.<sup>31</sup> At the top of the poster is the following quatrain, expressing the heartbreak of the situation: «Մի՛ լար որդիս հասկանում եմ մերկ ես, մենակ ու անտուն... Ախ, ինչ անեմ, անխղճորենք քեզ գիրկս առնել չեն թողնում, Քիչ էլ փրկես, հո մեր երկրում միայն անխղճ չի սպրում, Ժամն այդ կգա, հավայրս ինձ՝ կհայրնալես իմ գրկում» [Don't you cry, sonny boy, unclothed, alone and homeless that you are, What can I do? Deprived, so ruthlessly, of hugging you as I am A little longer you hang on there, 'tis not land for only the cruel Believe that soon will come the time, you will be back into my arms].

The fourth poster, created by an amateur artist, was held on 24 April 1990, the Day of Remembrance of the Genocide victims (Fig. 21). Again, the poster depicts a mother and child drawn to each other but separated. The mother's arms take the shape of the Armenian national tricolour flag, while the child is imaged in padlocked iron chains, again bearing the Muslim crescent and star. Notably, this is one of the rare cases where an image-based poster is accompanied by a separate banner explaining in words what is being depicted – «Շղթաներից ազատվելու համար հարկավոր է պայքարել» [One needs to fight to cast off one's chains]. If the earlier mother and child poster only depicted separation, the 1990 poster and accompanying banner show a means to overcome that separation. As in almost all traditional images of motherhood, the child on the poster is male. Even in posters that do not directly relate to the theme of motherhood, Artsakh is characteristically presented as a “wronged” teenage boy.

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31 The star and crescent are sometimes presented as symbols of Islam. However, it is known that the star and crescent were used as symbols at least 3,000 years prior to the formation of Islam. According to certain sources, in the fourth century B.C. these signs had become the symbol of Byzantium (later Constantinople, now Istanbul). When the Turks conquered the capital of the Byzantine Empire in 1453, they appropriated the banner and the symbol of the city, too. Moreover, as the Ottoman Empire had for centuries ruled the Islamic world, and had led numerous wars against Christian Europe, many have come to perceive the star and crescent as specifically Islamic symbols. Meanwhile, it is known that Islam has no historically created symbols: there is no mention of them in the Koran and there is no evidence of their link to the Prophet Mohammed, not to mention that according to the Muslim religion to use anything as a symbol of Allah is considered a sin. Thus, the star and crescent were symbols of the Ottoman Empire, and are to the present, at least as perceived by Armenian society, considered symbols of Turkish identity. Since the Azerbaijanis have been perceived by Armenians as Caucasian Turks, it is but natural that people, wishing to point out the ethnic identity of Turks/Azerbaijanis, have made use of none other than the star and crescent, which is also a handy means for the iconographic solution of the problem. See in detail, for example: <https://www.straightdope.com/21342797/why-are-the-star-and-crescent-symbols-of-islam>, <http://islam.about.com/library/weekly/aa060401a.htm>, accessed 08.11.2022.



Figure 21

Another poster (7 June 1988), following the theme of mother and child separation, reads “*Мать-Армения ждет свое дитя Арцах*” [Mother-Armenia is waiting for her child Artsakh] (Fig. 22): now a purely symbolic image. Here Armenia is represented by its universally recognized symbol, Mount Ararat, while Artsakh is represented by the sculpture of an elderly married couple, which has become its most recognizable image, especially during the Movement.

Also relating to this theme is the cover image of the October 1988 issue of the magazine “Garun” [spring]. The cover features a magnet on the contour map of Armenia, attracting a smaller magnet in the place where NKAO would be located where the map continues. In addition to the magnet motif, the mother and child theme manifests via a map of Armenia that resembles a silhouette of a woman’s head in profile with an elongated neck.

The latter motif is most vividly expressed in a “photo badge” issued in the summer of 1988 (Fig. 23).<sup>32</sup> The multiple photo prints of the 4x6.5 cm “badge” represent the anthropomorphized map of Armenia in miniature, depicted with eyes and hair. In the figure, Lake Sevan is featured as a hairpin and Yerevan is marked by a round earring made of precious stones. The woman gazes longingly at the map of NAKO, painted against the

<sup>32</sup> The “photo badge” kindly provided to the authors by our colleague Dr. Hripsime Pikichyan.



Figure 22

background of the flag of the Armenian SSR in an oval frame. The woman's head is also placed against a similar backdrop. In fact, in the upper corner of the badge, on the flag of the Armenian SSR, the artist Tsedrik Aslanyan also placed the symbol of agricultural and industrial workers – the hammer and sickle with a star. The writings at the top and the bottom of the photo badge read, «Միայն այդպես ենք հաղորդակցվում... մինչև երբ...» [This is the only way we communicate ... until when...?] and «Բանասկան մարդիկ, մի թողյալ չլինիք կորչի... Փրկե՛ք, վերադարձրե՛ք...» [Intelligent people, don't let it perish... Save it, bring it back!], respectively. This is the only poster known to us where there is a deliberate





Figure 23

cartographical rearrangement – NKAO is not placed to the right (as it is geographically),<sup>33</sup> but to the left so that the “woman-Armenia” is able to see it. Compellingly, the artist has inserted the map of NKAO into a gilded frame, perhaps trying to justify this topographical inaccuracy. The aesthetic strategy accompanies the inscription, which reads: “This is the only way we communicate.” In other words, we (Armenians) communicate as we would with a relative who is in a foreign country (the backdrop of the flag evidences this) and, therefore, in a commemorative photograph. The Soviet symbolism of the badge emphasizes the loyalty of the Armenians, that is, the reassurance highlighted many times that the demands of the Armenians are not anti-Soviet.

The heart-wrenching poetics of the inscriptions of the badge are juxtaposed with formulas playing on the theme of the separated mother and child, particularly highlighted during the first days of the February 1988 rallies: almost every speaker taking the floor fervently used the iconography of the mother and child.<sup>34</sup> Other versions read: “Мы ждем свое дитя Арцах” [We are waiting for our offspring, Artsakh], «Մայր Հայաստանը քեզ է կանչում, Ղարաբաղ» [Mother-Armenia calls you, Karabagh] or

33 The placement of the contour of the NKAO below the occipital part of Mother Armenia contour map-profile found on other posters matches with the well-known verbal formula «Ղարաբաղը Մայր-Հայաստանի մեջքն է» [Karabagh is the back of Mother-Armenia] and therefore it – the back, cannot be “broken”. This thesis is brought up more than once in support of the fact that Karabagh should remain Armenian.

34 Cf. the statement of one of the participants in Stepanakert rallies poet Gurgen Gabrielyan during an interview on 25 February 1988: “The claim of the people is very just, honest and moral. ... These people want to live with their people, like when a son wants to live with his mother and wants, so to speak, to get rid of his stepmother and come live with his birth mother. There is nothing bad here, there is nothing wicked here. There is no intent to disturb the relations of nations.” See «Մեր Մայր Հայաստանն ենք ուզում». հանրահավաքներ Ստեփանակերտում և Երևանում [“We Want our Mother Armenia”: rallies in Stepanakert and Yerevan], 25-26 February 1988, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WLT-Q3vT4aQ>, 0.22-1.32 min, accessed 08.11.2022. On Gurgen Gabrielyan see: Gayane Lalayan, «Գուրգեն Գաբրիելյանը և Արցախյան շարժումը» [Gurgen Gabrielyan and the Artsakh Movement], *Artsakhi petakan hamalsarani gitakan teghekagir, humanitar gitut’yunner* 1 (2015): 84-88.



Figure 24



Figure 25

«Մայր Հայաստանն է կանչում» [Mother-Armenia calls]<sup>35</sup> (all from February 1988). The last slogan is interesting in the sense that it is directly copied from the poster “Родина-мать зовет” [The Motherland calls], well-known from the very beginning of the Great Patriotic War. All the formulas are expressions of a mother pleading with her offspring, which is not surprising, as all these banners were created from the perspective of activists in Yerevan. At approximately the same time, in February, May and September 1988, similar posters were displayed in Stepanakert, but depicting the reverse: a homeless child calling for his mom – «Հարիւրադէր Մայր Հայաստան» [Mother Armenia to Karabagh] (Fig. 24), «Որք Հարիւրադէր մայր է ուզում» [Orphaned Karabagh wants a mother], “Мечта карабахцев – воссоединение с матерью-Арменией” [The dream of the people of Karabagh is reunification with Mother Armenia]. Here too are other slogans indirectly relating to the group under scrutiny – “Гарантия счастья наших детей – воссоединение НКАО с Арменией” [The pledge for our children’s happiness is the reunification of the NKAO with Armenia] (although the text refers to parents’ care for their children instead of mothers alone), “Наша цель – воссоединение с Матерью Арменией” [Our goal [is] reunification with Mother Armenia] (Askeran, Fig. 25). Indeed, in February 1988, in Yerevan, too, there appeared a banner showing contour maps of Armenia and NKAO and a heartbreaking image of Mother Armenia begging in the name of her child, Karabagh – «Մայրիկ, օգնիր, դժբախտության մեջ եմ» [Mother, help me, I am in trouble] (Fig. 26, 27). However, judging from the content, it could be assumed that the banner was created by Yerevan residents of Karabagh origin.<sup>36</sup> The situation seemed to repeat itself over three decades later when, during the 5 November 2022 rally of the “Hayastan” Alliance, a young boy holds a picture of a little girl with a poster representing child-Artsakh’s appeal to Mother Armenia «Եւ քո՛ զավակն եմ, Հայաստան» [I am your offspring, Armenia] taken a few days earlier on 30 October 2022, during a rally of many thousands in Stepanakert (Fig. 28).<sup>37</sup>

In the summer of 1988, the offered popular solutions to the Karabagh issue included another version, that Armenia should join Karabagh. And, immediately a poster with the corresponding content was created and recorded in July of 1988, «Արցախ[,] Մայր Հայաստանի սիրտն ու ձեռքը քեզ» [Artsakh, Mother Armenia’s heart and hand to you].<sup>38</sup>

The image of the mother caring for her children’s happiness turned out to feed the imagination not only of the creators of posters in Karabagh and Armenia but also of Mikhail Gorbachev himself. In his address “To the workers, nations of Azerbaijan and

35 See “The Continuation of the Chronicle.”

36 Export of slogans and poster ideas as a rule from Karabagh to Armenia was seen throughout the entire Movement. There was even an area in the Opera Square standing out with vividly pronounced Karabagh slogans; it was near the statue of Hovhannes Tumanyan, the usual gathering place of Karabagh people of Yerevan during the rallies.

37 «Մե՛ք ար ալ քո զավակն եմ, Հայաստան...» [We Also are Your Child, Armenia...], *Hairenik* (Boston), 8 November 2022.

38 The banner was captured in autumn of 2004, during the «Հեղափոխություն» [Revolution] TV program (hosted by Vahram Martirosyan).



*Figure 26*



*Figure 27*



*Figure 28*

Armenia” (26 February 1988) Gorbachev also referred to this image cited almost every day: “Ни одна мать не согласится с тем, чтобы ее детям угрожали национальные распри...” [No mother will acquiesce to her children being threatened with national strife...].<sup>39</sup> Interestingly, this cliché combined with the foregoing posters stirred up illusory hopes among some Armenians that Gorbachev, like the Armenians, also tended to see the

<sup>39</sup> *Գրական թերթ* [Grakan t’ert’], 4 March 1988, N 10 (2378).



Figure 29

image of a separated mother and child in the Karabagh problem. Apparently, the theme of parentage was so close to Gorbachev that later, in July 1988, he referred to it once again; this time in the defence of the punitive forces (“Это же наши дети...” [After all they are our children...]), against whom Armenians were trying to show resistance. This catchphrase immediately prompted the creation of a new series of posters.<sup>40</sup>

The touching, sometimes heart-breaking tenor of the posters featuring the mother and orphaned child acquire a tinge of demand in a banner reading «Ղարաքաղը Մայր-Հայաստանին» [Karabagh to Mother-Armenia].<sup>41</sup> It should be noted that, chronologically, the latter does not represent the evolution of the aforementioned group; it appeared at the same time as the other posters of the batch, during the February rallies of 1988. Factually, however, it constitutes their logical development, marking the transition from emotional ascertainment to demand. Generally, the analysis of the content of the posters shows that each point of the Movement is characterized by the simultaneous appearance of banners and posters indicative of its most diverse future and past phases. While the main thematic vector is created by the posters consistent with the period and constituting the overwhelming majority, there are exceptions (like, for instance, the aforementioned banner, which is the only one in the mass of February posters). In a similar banner that appeared in June–July 1988, there was also mention of the name of the region, making the claim: «Ղարաքաղը՝ Մայր Հայաստանին – Բյավառ» [Karabagh to Mother Armenia – Gavar] (Fig. 29).

40 For details, see Harutyun Marutyan, *Iconography of Armenian Identity*, 175-178 (Fig. 142, 144, 145).

41 “The Continuation of the Chronicle.”



Figure 30

Without a reference to the theme of motherhood, the demand “Karabagh to Mother-Armenia” evolved into “Artsakh to Armenia,” which has already been examined in the earlier discussion of the concept of “unification” in posters. A similar poster with a cartographic solution emerged in February 1988 (Fig. 30). The poster features the contour maps of the Armenian SSR and NKAO with «Հայաստան» [Armenia] written thereon, while the header reads «Ղարաբաղ-Արցախը Հայաստանից անբաժան» [Karabagh-Artsakh inseparable from Armenia]. Schematically, this notion is formulated in the demand of the first nationwide strike in early July of 1988 «Միացնել Արցախը Հայաստանին» [Unite Artsakh to Armenia] (Fig. 31).

In mid-October of 1988, along with the dramatic events taking place in Karabagh, the following intervention intended to demonstrate the spiritual unity of Armenia and Karabagh: Conservatory students, who had already been on strike for several days, created the contour maps of the Armenian SSR and NKAO and the word «Արցախ» [Artsakh] with candles, lighting them late in the evening (Fig. 32, 33, 34, 35). The images have a sacred quality as if addressed as a prayer for unification.

It should be noted that, in addition to sober and sombre demands, the theme of unification was also conveyed in joyful and festive ways, which is not surprising, if we take into consideration that mass rallies and demonstrations have a lot in common with carnival-type popular holidays.<sup>42</sup> Generally, many “high-level” slogans had their “low-

42 See for instance Levon Abrahamian, «Քստուր և կոսմոսը ժողովրդական երկրյաների կառուցվածքում.



Figure 31

level” analogues – even in the form of jokes. Thus, in February – March 1988, it was also commonplace to see the display of jokes about how people outside the Movement, such as *tsekhaviks* [ցեխավիկները],<sup>43</sup> suggested that the famous Black Sea resort cities like Sochi, Sukhumi should be claimed alongside or instead of Karabagh. And, an old woman requested that people also claim the capital of Medieval Armenia, Ani. Although anecdotal, such suggestions nevertheless indicate the fairly low level of people’s legal knowledge at the beginning of the Movement, but which developed rapidly as conflicts ensued.

### “Karabagh is ours”

An interesting group in the theme of “Karabagh-Armenia” are posters claiming that: «Արցախն աշխարհը մերն է» [The land of Artsakh is ours], «Հարարարդը մերն է» [Karabagh is ours] (Fig. 18).<sup>44</sup> This slogan enjoyed such popularity that it became

Ղարարարդյան շարժումը ազգագրագետի հայացքով» [Chaos and Cosmos in the Structure of People’s Movement: The Karabagh Movement from Ethnographer’s Point of View], *Mshakuyt’* 2-3 (1990): 14-21.

43 Translated from Russian “tsekhavik” literally means head of a workshop. In Soviet times, “tsekhaviks” were called people who being involved in industry sector used part of the profit from state production and also extracted raw materials in their own illegal production.

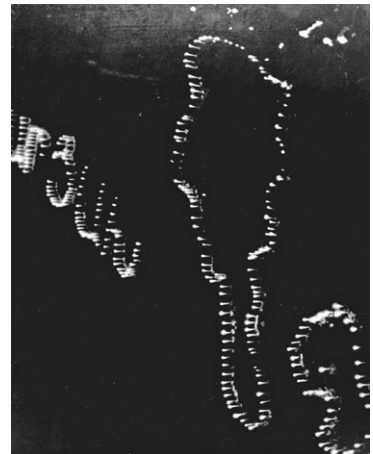
44 It is indicative that the leitmotif of Baku rallies held in response to those in Stepanakert and Yerevan was the same formula about Karabagh being “ours” as evidenced by for instance “*Карабах был и будет нашим!*”



*Figure 32*



*Figure 33*



*Figure 34*

an everyday formula almost immediately, serving as a base for the most unexpected manifestations of mass folk creativity. Thus, during the summer 1988 marches, one could hear the following, amusing play-on-words: one of the demonstrators would ask loudly

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[Karabagh was and will be ours] banner. See *Трагедия длиною в 2 года. Фотохроника событий* [The Tragedy Lasting for Two Years] (Baku: Azerneshr, 1990).





Figure 35

«Ղարաբաղը ո՞ւնն ա» [Whose is Karabagh?] and the crowd would answer «Մերն» [Ours!]. He would ask again, and the same polyphonic answer would follow. For the third time, the moderator of the “dialogue” would ask: «Թուրքերի ի՞նչն» [What y’say to Turks?] and «Մերն» [Motherf’ers begone!] would come the cheerful reply. In Armenian, the words “ours” and a dialectic version of “mother” are homonyms. The last part of the dialogue thus ends with a play on words involving the mothers of the Turks. Another example of popular creativity along the same theme is an inscription on a handmade tin disk (thanks to which three people could drink water at the same time) attached to a drinking fountain: «Հայեր, դիմացն, Ղարաբաղը մերն է» [Armenians, hold on, Karabagh is ours] (26 September 1989) (Fig. 36, 37).

Another sample of folklore, in the form of a nursery rhyme, displays the many contradictory aspects of this seemingly simple formula: «Ղարաբաղը մերն ա, Բայ թուրքերի ձեռն ա, Պապան գնաց ցուցի, Որ ապացուցի» [Karabagh is ours, Turks say “No, ours”, Papa went to rally, To prove the contrary]. According to the logic of this rhyme, “Karabagh is ours”, that is, she belongs to Armenians (*de facto*, historically, and ethnically), but, at the same time, she is not ours (*de jure*, according to the Soviet Constitution) and that is why the Armenians have rallied to address this contradiction. This nursery rhyme also shows that in their quest for “proof”, the Armenians are using peaceful demonstrations seeking a wise and just resolution from the Centre (Moscow/Kremlin).



Figure 36



Figure 37



Figure 38

The means of proving that Karabagh “is ours” once had varied nuances, from calls for forbearance («Հայեր, դիմացիք...» [Armenians, hold on...]) to outright (probably written by Hovhannes Shiraz) «Մի հող, որ թեկուզ երկինք համբարունս, Հայոց եղել է, Հայոց կմնա» [A land, even if it ascends to Heavens, have been and will remain Armenian forever] (Fig. 38), «Ղարաբաղը մերն է եղել, կա և կլինի» [Karabagh has been, is and



Figure 39

will be ours]<sup>45</sup> and «Դարաբաղը միայն Հայաստանին» [Karabagh only to Armenia] (Fig. 39). Iconographically, reunification was “fulfilled” in yet another February poster (Fig. 40). However, whereas in the aforementioned case, they simply painted the maps with the same colour, here, the necessity to literally fight for unification was indirectly highlighted the identity of the bearers of the poster. The poster, with a modest contour map of united Armenia and Karabagh as well as an inscription reading: «Արցախն էրև մերն էս» [Artsakh, you are ours], was accompanied by a banner boasting combat medals, and those who were awarded those medals; young Armenian men who had fought in Afghanistan and had combat experience. Their active involvement was intended to show

45 “The Continuation of the Chronicle.”



Figure 40

that Armenians are ready to take up arms and enter into combat for the liberation of Artsakh. This was directly articulated in another “explanatory” banner: «Աֆղանստանում ինչպե՞րն սացին սպարաբը կարարած հայ զինվորները քեզ հեղ են Ղարաբաղ» [Armenian soldiers who fulfilled their international duty in Afghanistan are with you, Karabagh] (Fig. 41). This readiness was further emphasised in a poster bearing General Andranik’s picture carried by the “Afghans”. Andranik was a fearless *hajduk*, a popular hero and a famous warlord under whose command Armenian warriors/combatants had successfully fought battles against the Turkish oppressors on several occasions.

There is an additional peculiarity of language arising from consideration of these posters and banners – the same poster/banner or a slogan used at various phases of the Movement can acquire different semantic nuances. Thus, the last (as well as the previous one) slogan appeared in February 1988 and, in the context of those days, meant a categorical statement within the general “Karabagh – Armenia” theme. However, the same slogan recorded in November of the same year expresses the widely discussed disagreement with placing NKAO under the territorial-administrative control of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR). In November, this slogan also expressed the rejection of a policy based on compromise in the resolution of the Karabagh problem, which was called for by the country’s leadership more than once without specific, constructive prescriptions. An immediate answer to those calls arose in



Figure 41

the posters appearing in the autumn of 1989: «Ոչ մի «կոմպրոմիս» Արցախի հարցում» [No “compromises” in the issue of Artsakh] (Fig. 42), «Կոմպրոմիսը» Արցախի նոր գերությունն է» [“Compromise” will be the new captivity of Artsakh] (Fig. 42). A specific example of disagreement with compromises could be the banner “Шуши армянам или никому” [Shushi to the Armenians or to no one] (Fig. 43). It appeared in November 1988 in response to rumours that top-level officials were considering the issue of transferring only the parts of NKAO where the Armenian population prevailed, and therefore, according to that option, Shushi would remain as part of Azerbaijan.

### “Solidarity” posters

The posters have another unique quality. Without resorting to laborious sociological research, one can use the posters to assess with sufficient confidence, not only the desires and demands of the participants of multi-thousand-person rallies but also about their social composition. For example, from February 1988 through the rest of the year, a host of “solidarity” banners emerged, pledging their support to the people of Artsakh at various levels: «Արցախ, Արտաշատը միշտ քեզ հետ է» [Artsakh, Artashat is always with you] (Fig. 44), «Մեսրոպ Մաշտոցը և Օշականը ձեզ հետ են» [Mesrop Mashtots and Oshakan are with you], «Բաղրամյանի անվան սովխոզը միանում

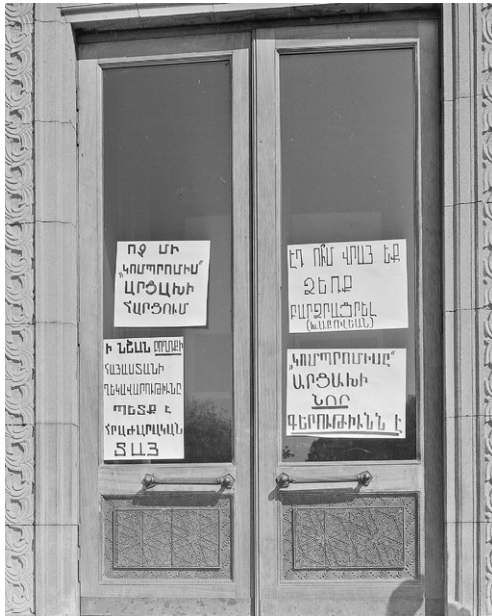


Figure 42

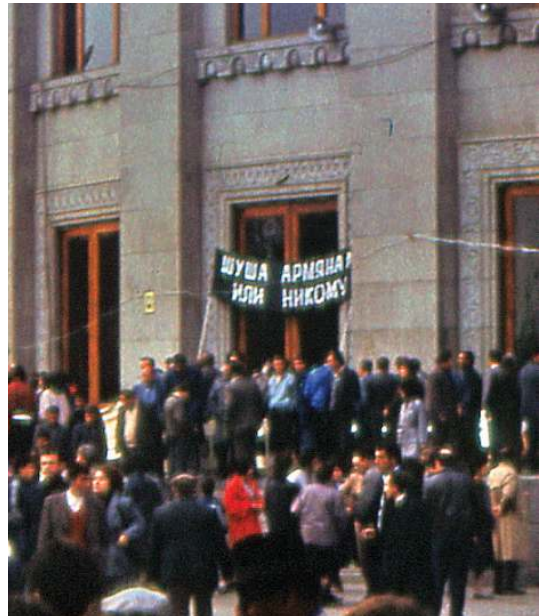


Figure 43

«Է ձեզ Ղարաբաղի հայեր» [Sovkhoz after Baghramian is joining you[,] Armenians of Karabagh], «Արարատը քեզ հետ է, Ղարաբաղ» [Ararat is with you, Karabagh], «Արովյանցիները քեզ հետ են, Ղարաբաղ» [Residents of Abovyan are with you, Karabagh] (Fig. 45), «Արցախ՝ Էջմիածինը քեզ հետ է» [Artsakh, Etchmiadzin is with you] (Fig. 46), «Կաբելագործները Արցախի հետ են» [Cable makers are with Artsakh], «Ռելեի աշխատողները ձեզ հետ են, դարաբաղցիներ» [Relay workers are with you, Armenians of Karabagh], «Արցախ, Հայաստանը քեզ հետ է. ԵրԳԻ» [Artsakh, Armenia is with you: YPI], «Ղարաբաղ, համալսարանը քեզ հետ է» [Karabagh, University is with you] (Fig. 47), «Արցախ, Կոնսերվատորիան քեզ հետ է» [Artsakh, Conservatory is with you], and similar assurances from individual faculties, colleges, schools, various facilities, various regions, cities and villages of Armenia, as well as individual centres of the Armenian Soviet Diaspora, such as «Ախալքալակի 70 հազար հայերը քեզ հետ են, Ղարաբաղ» [70 thousand Armenians of Akhalkalak are with you, Karabagh].<sup>46</sup> At the time, there were over a thousand students of the Armenian diaspora studying at various universities in Yerevan. On 23 February, around four dozen of these students studying at the Yerevan Medical Institute joined in a rally, bearing a banner

46 Artashat, Ararat, Abovyan, Etchmiadzin – names of regions and cities in Armenia; Mesrop Mashtots and Oshakan – Mesrop Mashtots is the creator of the Armenian alphabet (405 AD) and is buried in Oshakan village; Sovkhoz after Baghramian – a village in the Etchmiadzin region of Armenia; Cable makers, Relay workers – the workers of the Cable and Relay factories in Yerevan; YPI – Yerevan Polytechnic Institute (now the National Polytechnic University of Armenia); University – Yerevan State University; Conservatory – Yerevan State Conservatory after Komitas; Akhalkalak – a region in the south-west of the Republic of Georgia, populated exclusively by Armenians.



Figure 44

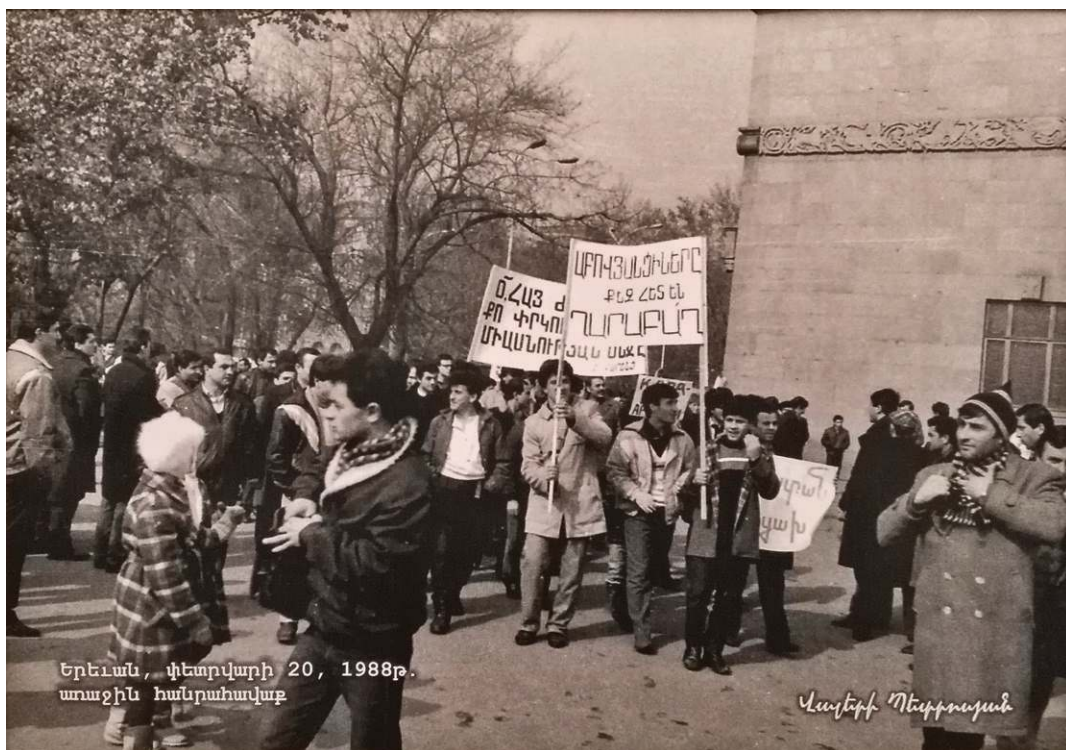


Figure 45



*Figure 46*



*Figure 47*





Figure 48

reading «Սփյուռքը ձեզ հետ է» [Diaspora [is] with you] (Fig. 48).<sup>47</sup> In short, there was complete geographical, social and age representation: here, there were workers and farmers, employees and students, including the pre-schooler Hakobik carrying his «Ղարաբաղ, չվախենաս, Հակոբիկը քեզ հետ է» [Karabagh, do not be afraid, Hakobik is with you] banner.<sup>48</sup>

### **“Карабах – Армения: Один народ – одна республика” [Karabagh – Armenia: One Nation – One Republic]**

Analysis of these posters also provides insight into the legislative principles that were being proposed as a solution to the Karabagh problem. For instance, in November 1988, when the addenda and amendments to the Constitution of the USSR were being discussed

47 This information was kindly provided by Gevorg Yazichyan, who then was a student of the Faculty of History of Yerevan State University, currently – a PhD in history. As reported by him the Diaspora demonstrators were mostly from Lebanon and Syria, their organizer, in the front of the photo, was Matheos Cholakyan, a junior student from Kesap by origin, a member of Armenian Popular Movement (Հայ ժողովրդային շարժում).

48 Zaven Kharatyan, «Արցախ, չվախենաս, Հակոբիկը քեզ հետ է» [Artsakh, don't be Afraid, Hakobik is with You], *Pioneer Kanch*, 25 October 1989, N 84.

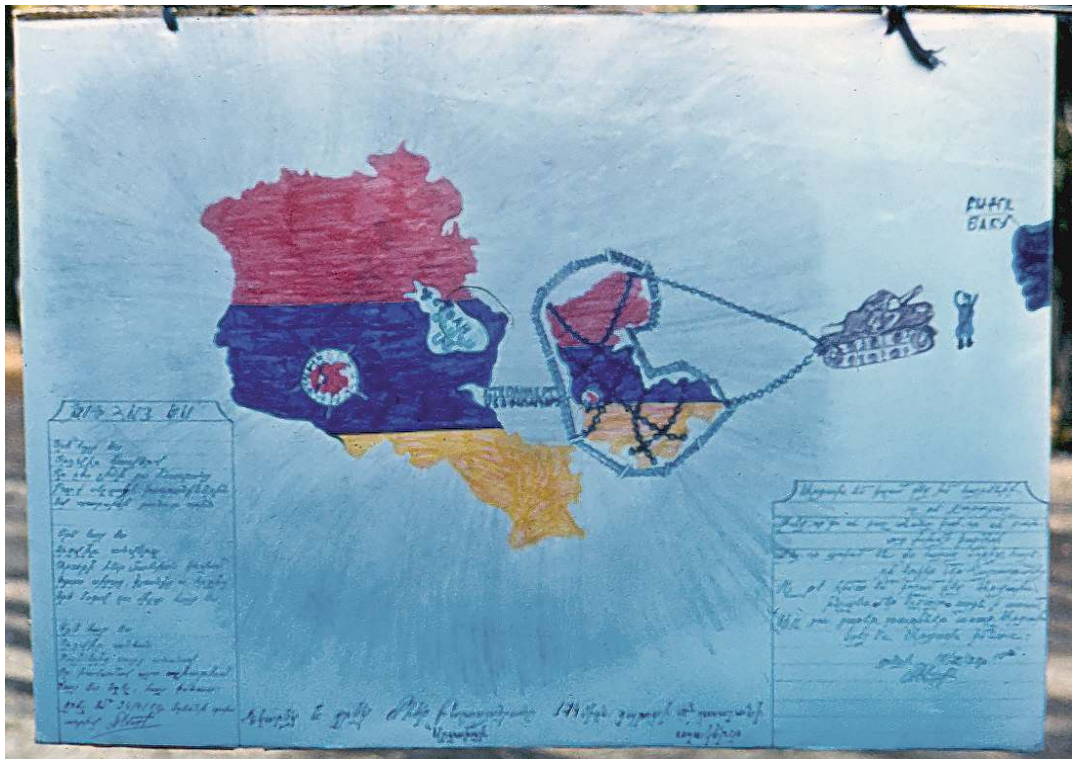


Figure 49

widely, the previously mentioned banner “Карабах – Армения: Один народ – одна республика” [Karabagh – Armenia: One nation – One Republic] appeared (Fig. 5). Here, in the very language of “law-making,” the main idea of the broader group of “Karabagh – Armenia” posters is being asserted.

Since the logic of this group of posters and banners suggests that Karabagh and Armenia are a natural entity, any attempt to “forcefully separate” NKAO is perceived as an act of violence. For instance, a poster (Fig. 49) displayed in mid-November 1988 features the maps of Armenia and NKAO painted in the three colours of the Armenian national flag. Karabagh is chained and being dragged away from Armenia into the depths of Azerbaijan by a Soviet tank. The author of the poster and accompanying patriotic poem was a 7th-grade student originally from Artsakh.

Another poster (June 1988) depicts the contour maps of the Armenian SSR and NKAO with “Armenia” and “Artsakh” inscribed thereon (Fig. 50). An arrow points from Artsakh to Armenia, perhaps hinting at the yearning of the Armenians of Artsakh for their Motherland. This yearning is being fought against by the *yataghan* (an image signifying the bearers of the *yataghan* culture), which in this case are the Azerbaijanians and Turks. They are fighting against that yearning through bloody massacres similar to those in Sumgait. However, countering *yataghan* is the Armenian sword. Along

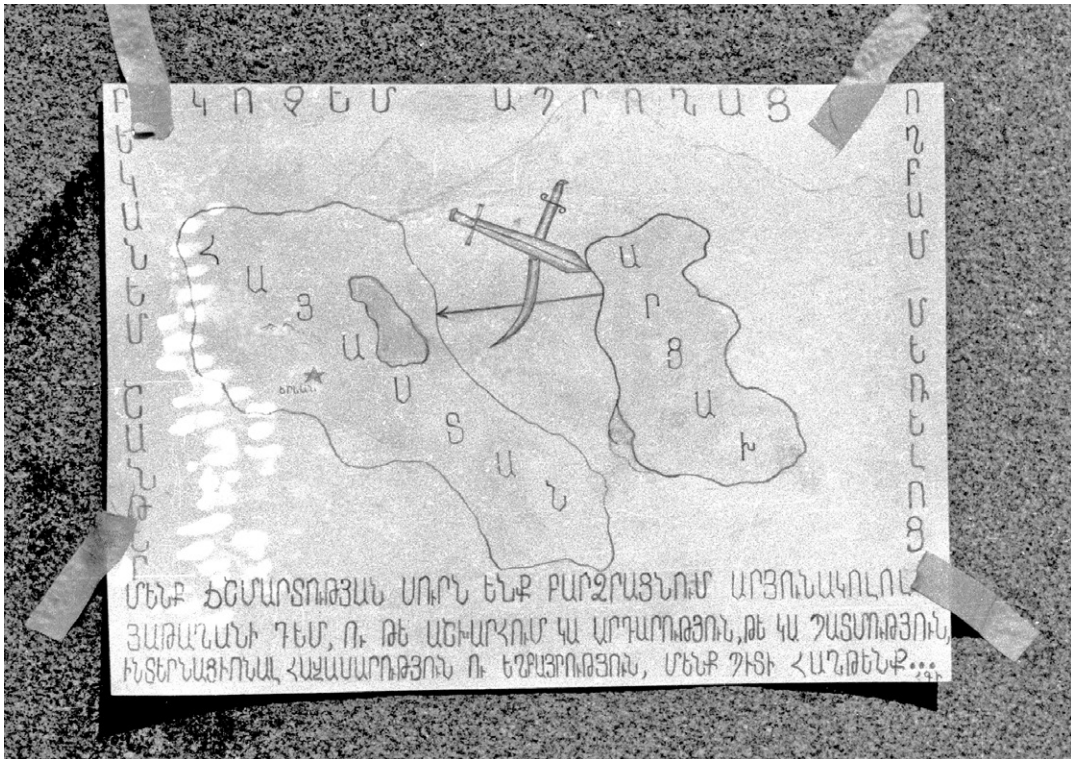


Figure 50

the edges of the poster runs the highly popular refrain from Paruyr Sevak’s poem, «Եռաձայն պատարագ» [Three-Voiced Liturgy], expanded by the poster’s creator to an entire programme statement: «Ողբում մեռելոց, բեկանեմ շանթեր, կոչեմ ապրողաց: Ըջմարտության սուրն ենք բարձրացնում արյունակոխ յաթաղանի դեմ, ու թե աշխարհում կա արդարություն, թե կա պարտություն, ինչպես և արդարություն, մենք պիտի հաղթենք...» [I’ll lament the dead, reverse lightning and call to the living. We are raising the sword of truth against the bloodstained *yataghan* and, if there is justice in the world, if there is history, international equality and brotherhood, then we will win...]. As the text of the poster expresses, the “sword of the truth” is the symbol of a bloodless struggle. The poetics of this text is noteworthy: it uses both emotionally charged and poetic words, like “bloodstained”, as well as revolutionary language. In fact, the text embodies sincere, patriotic pathos, including the line by Sevak at the beginning. The “weapons” used in the text of the poster, viz. “sword of truth”, “justice”, and “history”, once again indicate that notwithstanding abundant challenges the universal concepts of truth and justice, seasoned by the factors of history – historical truth, historical justice and historical memory – have been and remain the most important components of Armenian national identity.<sup>49</sup>

49 See Harutyun Marutyan, *Iconography of Armenian Identity*, 143-144.



Figure 51

A poster made in the summer of 1988 also depicts the conventions of this group of posters. The image depicts the removal of the piece Karabagh stuck on the point of a big knife from the watermelon-Armenia, reflecting the forcible separation of Karabagh from Armenia. Interestingly, there are further instances of culinary metaphors. One example features a bloody *yataghan* and a trident-a “fork” stuck on the map of Armenia. The accompanying inscription explains: «Եթե Ղարաբաղը պարտվի, այս վերջին պարտադրև կսկսի կհան» [If Karabagh defeated, this last morsel will also be devoured] (Fig. 51).

Again, the gesture towards the integrity of the whole and the part is widely spread, and it is no coincidence that the same theme, this time expressing the viewpoint of the Azerbaijani party verbally rather than iconographically, presents Azerbaijan in the form of a pie, wherefrom Armenians want to cut and remove the “delicious” piece-Karabagh. This was the comparison used by Azerbaijani scientists in their telegram to the President of the Academy of Sciences of Armenia Viktor Hambartsumyan on 29 February 1988.

## In Place of an Epilogue

As we have seen, the theme “Karabagh-Armenia” has undergone a transformation from a historically, morally, and legally justified request-demand to an affirmative statement that «Ղարաբաղը մերն է եղել, կսկսի կլինի» [Karabagh has been, is and will be ours]. And, if the last slogan refers to the famous mythological-poetic formula of eternity (comp. “Ленин жил, Ленин жив, Ленин будет жить” [Lenin lived, Lenin lives, Lenin will live forever]) to confirm the fact of Karabagh “being ours”, then in another slogan, «Ղարաբաղը մերն և ուրիշը» [Karabagh is ours and that’s it],<sup>50</sup> the same idea is expressed in a more categorical and “final” way. In our research, we saw another two

50 Comp. with the well-known formulas by the participant in Artsakh Liberation War, the Hero of Artsakh Leonid Azgaldyan’s «Սա Հայաստան է և վերջ» [This is Armenia and that’s all] and Armenia’s Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s «Արցախը Հայաստան է, և՛ վերջ» [Artsakh is Armenia and that’s all].



Figure 52



Figure 53

formulas based on the concept of an affirmative statement: «Մարիրիսի Հայաստանի Մի Էությունն է» [Karabagh Armenia is one entity] (February 1988) (Fig. 52) and “Арцах – неотъемлемая часть Армении” [Artsakh [is] an integral part of Armenia] (June 1988 and 7 November 1988) (Fig. 53, 54, 55).



Figure 54



Figure 55

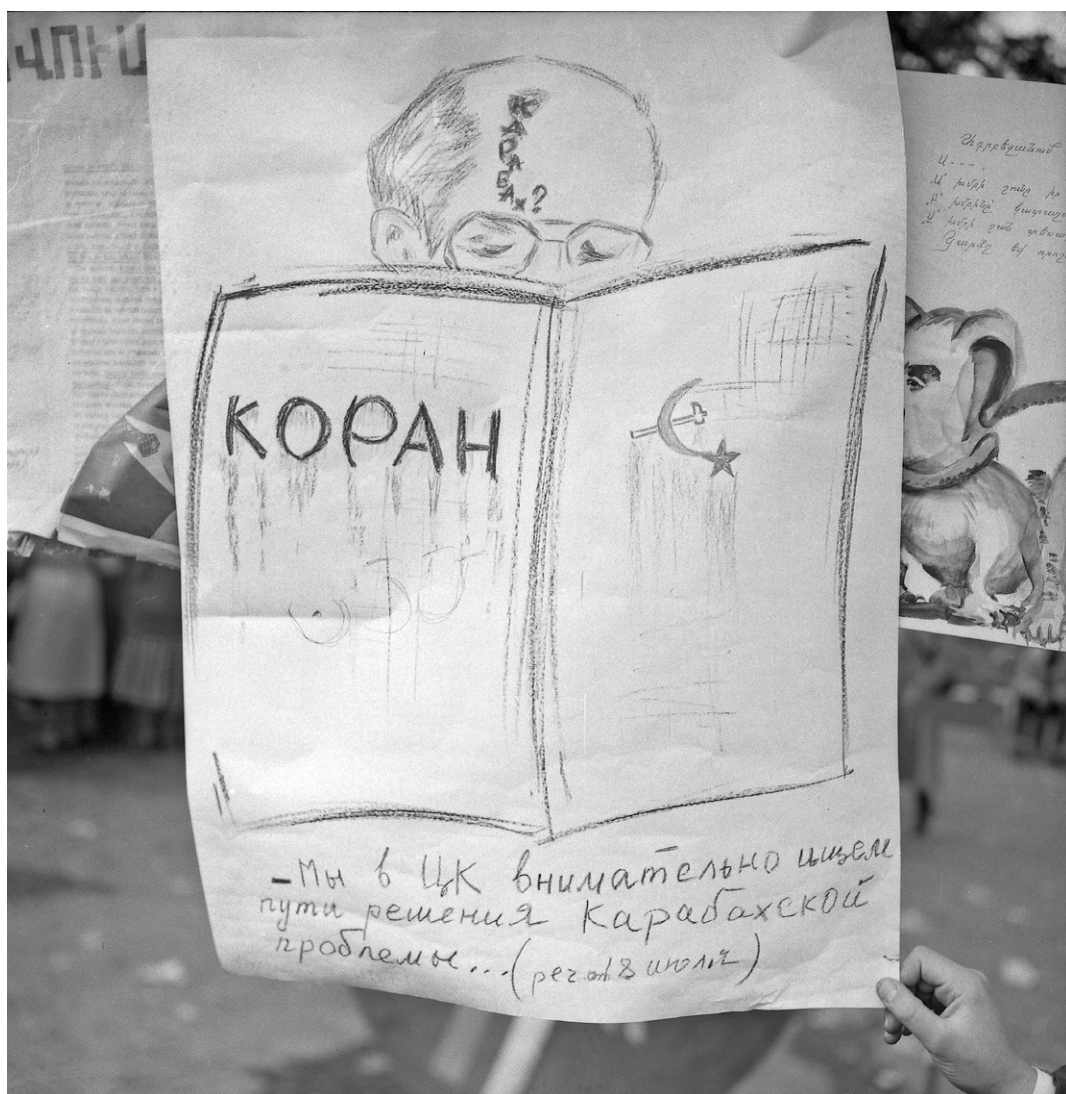


Figure 56

And yet, many posters, both in the past and in the present, have linked the solution of the Karabagh problem with the Centre, that is Moscow. Suffice it to recall multiple displays of Gorbachev’s image or words, such as in a poster from 24 November 1988,<sup>51</sup> where he is depicted intensely reading the Koran to find a solution to the Karabagh issue: “Мы в ЦК внимательно ищем пути решения карабахской проблемы...” [We in the Central Committee are carefully looking for ways to address the Karabagh problem]. In fact, the mark on his forehead is substituted with an inscription saying

<sup>51</sup> The same night saw a curfew introduced in Yerevan and a ban on all rallies.



Figure 57

“Karabax?” [Karabagh?] (Fig. 56). As indicated in the poster, these quotes are from his 18 July 1988 speech.<sup>52</sup> In a poster created in 1991 in France, the figure personifying Lenin and Gorbachev is pictured demolishing the border between Armenia and Karabagh with a hoe (Fig. 57), aiming to expand it further and separate the territories of the two fragments of the Armenian nation from one another.<sup>53</sup> This has also served as a base for oral folklore, accounting for the abundant use of words like “give” or “take, seize”. Thus, when in March of 1988 the Theatrical Square (where the first rallies were held only a month before) was surrounded by Soviet troops to disallow the rally planned for those days, a joke emerged reading «Դարարարար ուղեցիւր, հրապարակիւ

52 On that day, the session of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the USSR discussing the Karabagh issue was held, part of which, along with Mikhail Gorbachev’s speech, was broadcast on TV.

53 See *Azad* magazine edité par le club des Arméniens de Grenoble, 2e trimestre, 1991, 54, 11.





Figure 58

էլ *խլեցին*» [We craved Karabagh, they seized the square on top of that]. Another, prophetic joke surfaced about a man travelling to a Geography lesson at a school in the XXI century. The man sees the map of the USSR painted in one colour and asks, “What does this mean?” They answer that it is the map of Armenia. “And what is this?” the man points to a small dot in another colour. “That’s Karabagh” they answer, “we never got it back.”

At an exhibition in November 1989, the theme reached its logical development with one of the posters directly pointing at the forces keeping Armenia in the USSR. This was during the days of the Congress of the Pan-Armenian National Movement, which led the Karabagh Movement, and, as if in response to the speeches of the orators, one poster features Armenia and Karabagh in the colours of the tricolour Armenian national flag (not yet state insignia). Red and orange wings are juxtaposed with a blue background, wanting to fly away from the USSR, but are forcibly held back by the Russian *muzhik* (Fig. 58).

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# THE SUMGAI MASSACRES: CHARACTERISTICS AND DEFINITIONS

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## Abstract

This paper concerns one of the first displays of ethnic violence in the recent history of the USSR that took place in the city of Sumgait in the Azerbaijan SSR in February 1988 and was the start of violence of an anti-Armenian nature. It is a study of contemporary perceptions, definitions and terminology. Arising from this object, this paper examines the following questions:

- What were Armenian perceptions and characteristics of the Sumgait massacres and the factors that governed their conditions
- What definitions and perceptions were merited as a result of the Sumgait massacres by the Azerbaijan side
- How were the Sumgait massacres evaluated by the international public and the USSR leadership
- What were the definitions of the terms given to the Sumgait massacres and their characteristics.

Research has been carried out on the basis of specialist literature, archival materials, witness statements, contemporary periodical press etc. Descriptions, analyses, narrative analyses and comparative methods were also utilized in this study.

As a result of the research carried out, the conclusion was reached that the February 1988 massacres of the Armenian population of the Azerbaijani city of Sumgait by the participants, various political circles and structures, conditioned by several factors, merited different appraisals. On the Armenian side, they were immediately linked, in the collective Armenian consciousness, to the Armenian Genocide realized in the 20th century within the Ottoman Empire. The central authorities, arising out of Soviet national policy principles, interpreted the event as “mass unrest”. In its euphemistic definitions, the Azerbaijani side attempted to “neutralize” the ethnically based violence used against a part of the population. The “Armenian intrigue and treachery” theory, as a “legal” explanation of the violence, aims to justify the crimes committed and evade any responsibility for them. The international public saw the Sumgait massacres in an ethnic context, stressing the laudable, necessary measures taken by the central authorities to prevent and stop them.

**Keywords:** Artsakh issue, Sumgait, ethnic violence, genocide, massacre, slaughter, pogrom.

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## Introduction

One of the demonstrations of the Gorbachev policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost* in the national policies field was the re-opening of the basic Artsakh problem. The extraordinary session of the Nagorno (Mountainous) Karabagh Autonomous Region's Regional Soviet that took place on 20 February 1988, accepted the resolution that the region should be removed from the jurisdiction of the Azerbaijan SSR and placed under that of the Armenian SSR. It also requested that the Supreme Soviets of the Azerbaijan SSR and the Armenian SSR, achieve a favourable solution through the mediation of the USSR Supreme Soviet.<sup>1</sup> Several days later, on February 26, the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR, Mikhail Gorbachev, addressed the peoples of the Armenian SSR and Azerbaijan SSR and, reminding them of the basic principles of "Leninist national politics" called upon them to "show civilian maturity and patience, to return to normal life and work and to preserve public order."<sup>2</sup> The national policy, utilized by the Soviet central authorities for decades for the friendship, brotherhood and the united Soviet nationalities ideal, faced a serious challenge.

The increasing tensions in Armenian-Azerbaijani relations and anti-Armenian sentiment in Azerbaijan reached their summit on 27 and 28 February 1988 in the city of Sumgait, considered a symbol of the Soviet Union's internationalism. The national television broadcast on the evening of February 27 and the radio broadcast from Baku by Aleksander Katusev, the USSR chief military prosecutor, concerning the clash in Askeran<sup>3</sup> in which two Azerbaijanis were killed, both inflamed matters.<sup>4</sup> The thousands of people, mainly young Azerbaijanis, many of whom, according to Viktor Krivopuskov,<sup>5</sup> were already completely organized "with the permission of the managers of various establishments and enterprises,"<sup>6</sup> assembled in Lenin Square, Sumgait. The main theme

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1 *Sovetakan Gharabagh* (Stepanakert), 21 February 1988, 1.

2 Mikhail Gorbachev, «Դիմում Ադրբեջանի և Հայաստանի աշխատավորներին, ժողովուրդներին» [Appeal to the Workers and Peoples of Azerbaijan and Armenia], *Sovetakan Hayastan* (Yerevan), 27 February 1988, 1.

3 After the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabagh Autonomous Region's Regional Soviet, anti-Armenian sentiments intensified in Azerbaijan. On February 22, a crowd of Azerbaijanis surrounded the local Communist Party headquarters, demanding information about rumors of an Azerbaijani having been killed in Stepanakert. They were informed that no such incident had occurred, but refused to believe it. Dissatisfied with what they were told, thousands began marching toward Nagorno-Karabagh. The result was a clash in the Askeran region of Nagorno-Karabagh that left two Azerbaijanis dead, 50 Armenian villagers, and an unknown number of Azerbaijanis and police injured (Stuart J. Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001), 63).

4 At least one of the people who were killed by rifle fire in the clash near Askeran died at the hands of an Azerbaijani policeman. Aleksander Vasilevskiy, "Туча в горах" [Cloud in the Mountains], *Aurora* 10 (1988): 12.

5 He worked in the USSR Ministry of the Interior and was, in 1990-1991, the head of the urgent action group on its behalf in the Nagorno-Karabagh Autonomous Region. The written records he prepared and information he gleaned were collected in a separate work.

6 Viktor Krivopuskov, *Мятежный Карабах. Из дневника офицера МВД СССР* [Rebellious Karabagh. From the Diary of a USSR Interior Ministry officer] (Moscow: Golos-Press, 2007), 239.



of this rally was the demand made by the Nagorno-Karabagh Armenians to join the Armenian SSR. The “dreadful” stories told by “fugitives” from the Kapan<sup>7</sup> region of Armenia further incited the crowds, resulting in shouts of “*Death to Armenians*.”<sup>8</sup> Then crowd broke up into small groups that began to swarm about the center of town, seeking out Armenians.<sup>9</sup> By its nature and the way this all happened (killings, physical injuries inflicted, torture, burnings, chopping up of corpses and gang rape) and its aim, constituted one of the greatest crimes against humanity of the latter half of the 20th century.<sup>10</sup>

According to official data 32 people were killed as a result of the Sumgait massacres (26 Armenians and 6 Azerbaijanis),<sup>11</sup> over 400 people received wounds of various kinds, about 200 homes were invaded and looted, 50 cultural and other buildings were damaged as were more than 100 motor transport vehicles.<sup>12</sup> The organization of the legal procedures concerning the Sumgait massacres and their “impartiality” left

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7 Kapan region – an administrative-territorial unit of the Armenian SSR, located in the southeast of the Armenian SSR, bordering with the Azerbaijan SSR and the Nakhijevan ASSR of Azerbaijan. According to Azerbaijanis, the first refugees from the Kapan region appeared in Azerbaijan even before the Sumgait pogroms in 1987 and in January 1988 (Thomas de Waal, *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2003), 18-19). According to some other researchers, there was no violence against Azerbaijanis in Armenia at that time. The “refugees” were deliberately resettled in Azerbaijan in order to provoke the organization of massacres in the Azerbaijani city of Sumgait (For the discussion of the issue see: Valeriy Kiporenko, “Беспорядки в Баку проходили под теми же лозунгами, что и в Сумгаите” [Riots in Baku were held under the Same Slogans as in Sumgait], <https://www.panorama.am/ru/news/2011/01/13/analitika/1005171>; Konstantin Voevodskiy, “Перестройка в карабахском зеркале. Часть 2” [Perestroika in the Karabagh Mirror. Part 2], <https://nashasreda.ru/konstantin-voevodskij-perestrojka-v-karabaxskom-zerkale-chast-2/>; Zardusht Alizade, “Азербайджанская элита и массы в период распада СССР (Статья-мемуары о бурном времени)” [Azerbaijani Elite and Masses during the Collapse of the USSR (Article-Memoirs about the Turbulent Time)], [http://old.sakharov-center.ru/publications/azrus/az\\_0055.htm](http://old.sakharov-center.ru/publications/azrus/az_0055.htm), all of the above accessed 20.10.2021; Krivopuskov, *Rebellious Karabagh*, 187-188.

8 Krivopuskov, *Rebellious Karabagh*, 238.

9 de Waal, *Black Garden*, 34.

10 For the Sumgait massacres and their nature, organization and realisation, see, for example, Hrayr Ulubabyan, Suren Zolyan, Aghasi Arshakyan, *Сумгаит... Геноцид... Гласность?* [Sumgait... Genocide... Glasnost?] (Yerevan: Obshhestvo Znanie, 1989); Arsen Melik-Shahnazarov, *Нагорный Карабах: Факты против лжи* [Nagorno-Karabagh: Facts against Lies] (Moscow: Volshebnyj fonar, 2009); Igor Babanov, Konstantin Voevodskiy, *Карабахский кризис* [Karabagh Crisis] (St. Petersburg: 1992); *Сумгаитская трагедия в свидетельствах очевидцев*, Книга первая [Sumgait Tragedy in Eyewitness Accounts. Volume 1], ed. Samvel Shahmuradyan (Yerevan: Armyanskij Fond Kultury, 1989); *Сумгаитская трагедия в свидетельствах очевидцев*, Книга вторая [Sumgait Tragedy in Eyewitness Accounts. Volume 2] (Yerevan: Public Relations and Information Center of Staff of the President of the Republic of Armenia, 2015); *The Sumgait Syndrome. Anatomy of Racism in Azerbaijan* (Yerevan: MIA, 2012); *Сумгаит. Говорят свидетели-азербайджанцы* [The Sumgait: Azerbaijani Witnesses Speak Out] (Yerevan: Public Relations and Information Center of Staff of the President of the Republic of Armenia, 2018); Krivopuskov, *Rebellious Karabagh*; Kiporenko, “Riots in Baku” as well as Marina Grigoryan, “Sumgait, February 1988: A Crime with No Limitations,” *Asbarez*, 11 March 2011, <https://asbarez.com/sumgait-february-1988-a-crime-with-no-limitation/>, accessed 28.10.2021.

11 According to Viktor Krivopuskov, the driver of a military transport went mad as a result of it being set on fire and crashed it into the crowd, killing 6 Azerbaijanis. See Krivopuskov, *Rebellious Karabagh*, 241.

12 Следственные документы: Обвинительное заключение. По уголовному делу № 18/60232-08/ [Investigative Documents: Indictment. On Criminal Case No. 18/60232-08], [http://Karabagh.records.info/documents\\_investigation\\_obvinitelnoe-zaklyuchenie-ud-1860232-08.html](http://Karabagh.records.info/documents_investigation_obvinitelnoe-zaklyuchenie-ud-1860232-08.html), accessed 20.10.2021.

several questions unanswered, one of which was that of the actual numbers of killed and wounded. Apart from official figures, there is other information and data available.<sup>13</sup>

## **The Sumgait massacres: Armenian perceptions and characteristics**

The Sumgait massacres provoked a great reaction in Armenian reality. In the first instance they were linked to the 20th century Armenian Genocide that took place in the Ottoman Empire. This mentality was especially noticeable in popular perceptions. Its first expression occurred on 8 March 1988, when thousands of women (as well as men) marched in sorrow to the Armenian Genocide memorial complex at Tsitsernakaberd.<sup>14</sup> A khachkar (cross-stone) commemorating the memory of those who were killed in Sumgait was erected within the Armenian Genocide memorial complex on 24 April 1988.<sup>15</sup> The identification of the Armenian Genocide with the massacres in Sumgait also found expression on 8 March and 7 November 1988 and on 28 February 1989 and in the wording on the banners displayed on the sorrow marches that took place on those days, as well as in pictures, schematic depictions and on maps.<sup>16</sup> Among them were “События в Сумгаите – продолжение геноцида 1915 г.” [The Events in Sumgait are the Sequence of 1915 Genocide], “Нежелание признать геноцид 1915 г. привело к геноциду 1988 г.” [Reluctance to Acknowledge the 1915 Genocide Led to the Genocide of 1988], “Sumgait is the continuation of the Mets Yeghern<sup>17</sup>” and other similar statements on posters and banners. The people’s dissatisfaction with the progress of the judicial inquiries regarding the massacres was expressed by banners and posters stating, «Մունգայիթյան խեղճապիտակախրոթյուն» [The Clown Show of Sumgait], «Մոսկովյան դատախարությունը պղծում է հայ զոհերի հիշատակը» [The Moscow Lawsuit Desecrates the Memory of the Armenian Victims].<sup>18</sup> As Harutyun Marutyan pointed out, “The manifestations of popular comparison of the *Mets Yeghern* to the massacres in Sumgait were diverse: some were of a religious nature, while others were iconographic interpretations, and reflections through a simple listing of dates and toponyms.”<sup>19</sup>

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13 For detailed figures of the number of dead and wounded see Ulubabyan, Zolyan, Arshakyan, *Sumgait*, 55; Melik-Shahnazarov, *Nagorno-Karabagh*, 285; Krivopuskov, *Rebellious Karabagh*, 149; Hrayr Ulubabyan, “В Сумгаите погибло 32 человека. Ложь!” [32 People Died in Sumgait. False!], *Epokha* 4 (1990), [http://Karabagh.records.info/publication\\_articles\\_sumgait\\_lozh.html](http://Karabagh.records.info/publication_articles_sumgait_lozh.html), accessed 20.10.2021; Hrayr Ulubabyan, «Մունգայիթոն հայերի ցեղասպանության զոհերի թվի մասին» [About the Number of Armenian Genocide Victims in Sumgait], *Luyts* 163 (2011): 1-2; Mariam Avagyan, Hovik Avanesov, «Մունգայիթի և Բաքվի ցեղասպանությունների զոհերի թվի շուրջ» [About the Number of Victims of the Sumgait and Baku Genocides], 3 July 2020, <https://www.lragir.am/2020/03/07/524751/>, accessed 20.10.2021.

14 Harutyun Marutyan, *Iconography of Armenian Identity. Volume 1: The Memory of Genocide and the Karabagh Movement*, Anthropology of Memory 2 (Yerevan: Gitutyan, 2009), 94.

15 *Ibid.*, 96.

16 *Ibid.*, 98-101.

17 Mets Yeghern is the Armenian term for the Armenian Genocide.

18 Marutyan, *Iconography of Armenian Identity*, 120.

19 *Ibid.*, 274.

Witnesses of the crimes committed in Sumgait described what happened, in their testimonies, as genocide.<sup>20</sup> In one of the trial sessions on 21 October 1988, relating to the events in Sumgait, Karina Melkumyan, speaking on behalf of all those who had suffered, stated that “preparations were made and realized to commit genocide in Sumgait” and insisted that the crime had to be given due importance, so that truth could be revealed.<sup>21</sup>

It is also significant that in the perceptions of Armenians, Azerbaijan gradually became synonymous with the perpetrator of the 20th century Armenian Genocide – Ottoman Turkey – and its pan-Turanist political plans. The very similar political plans made by Turkey and Azerbaijan may have been expressed for the first time in 1987, in an address to Mikhail Gorbachev made by the Armenian Academy of Sciences.<sup>22</sup>

In various works, Armenian academic circles basically presented the Sumgait massacres as proof of genocide. The Sumgait massacres were described and analyzed in detail, classing those that took place between February 27 and 29 and their repercussions as dreadful events.<sup>23</sup> The analysis of the evidence produced by Armenian researchers allows the separation of the following basic theses.

1. The object of the Sumgait massacres was to prevent the growth of the Karabagh Movement and to block the implementation of the rights to self-determination by the Armenians of the region.

2. To separate the preliminary setting up and organizing of the subsequent events (the planned fanning of anti-Armenian sentiment, previously listing Armenians’ addresses, preparing cold weapons in factories in the city, eliminating traces of crimes by the local authorities, etc.)

3. To present the methods used to realize the massacres and the squads involved (the organizing and arming of special groups, as well as the distribution of anesthetics, antipsychotic drugs and alcohol among them, the plunder and looting of the Armenian population, the killing of Armenians, burning people alive and gang rape).

To demonstrate the genocidal nature of the Sumgait massacres, the Armenian academic circles were to refer to the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.<sup>24</sup> Quotations from the 4th article were used, which sets out the punishment for the crime of genocide, independent of the fact that the perpetrators were constitutionally responsible leaders, officials or specific people.<sup>25</sup> The 36th article of the USSR constitution, in which equal rights for all citizens of the USSR were enshrined, irrespective of national or racial affiliations, was also invoked.<sup>26</sup>

Armenian authors also alluded to part of the work “Права человека: Сборник международных документов” [Human Rights: A collection of International Documents]

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20 Ulubabyan, Zolyan, Arshakyan, *Sumgait*.

21 Armen Oganessian, “Водораздел” [Watershed], *Kommunist* (Yerevan), 2 November 1988, N 258.

22 Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds*, 55.

23 Ulubabyan, Zolyan, Arshakyan, *Sumgait*.

24 *Ibid.*, 44.

25 *Ibid.*, 45.

26 *Ibid.*, 44-45.

which referred to “quantitative standards” relating to genocide victims. It was especially stressed that “the quantitative standard for the crime of genocide is not definitive; genocide is the killing of several representatives of a national group if it had been perpetrated with the object of destroying it.”<sup>27</sup>

In their speeches, appearances and appeals, contemporary Armenian publicists, journalists, writers and cultural activists present the Sumgait massacres as having a genocidal nature.<sup>28</sup>

As far as official statements from the Armenian SSR are concerned, their first official explanation about the Sumgait massacres was given by Karen Demirchyan, the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Armenian Communist Party, on 29 February 1988, in an interview on Armenian television. He stated the fact that there had been clashes in Azerbaijan: “There were several incidents of uncontrolled hooligan unrest and violence fomented in the city of Sumgait on February 28.”<sup>29</sup> In those days, articles were published in the daily newspaper “Sovetakan Hayastan” concerning the “good examples” of the “brotherhood” of the Armenian and Azerbaijani peoples and about “socialist internationalism”.<sup>30</sup>

The legislative body of the Armenian SSR, the Supreme Soviet, in a stance that differed from that of the “Centre”, adopted a resolution on 15 June 1988, titled “Concerning the condemnation of the crimes committed in the city of Sumgait in the Azerbaijan SSR,” in which it condemned the crimes and expressed its condolences to the victims, their families and loved ones and sympathy for those who suffered losses.<sup>31</sup> The question of

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27 *Sumgait Tragedy in Eyewitness Accounts, Volume 1*, 7; *Права человека: Сборник международных документов* [Human Rights: A Collection of International Documents], ed. Lev Shestakov (Moscow: Moscow University Press, 1986), 12.

28 Aydin Morikyan, «Քարերը հավաքելու ժամանակը» [Time to Collect the Stones], *Avangard* (Yerevan), 11 November 1988, 3-4; Armen Oganesyanyan, *Watershed*; Suren Zolyan, Kim Balayan, “Сумгаит. Испытание гласности” [Sumgait. Test of Glasnost], National Archives of Armenia (hereinafter NAA), collection 1159, list 1, document 8, page 1-11; «Զորի Բալայանի բաց նամակը Գորբաչովին» [Zori Balayan’s Open Letter to Gorbachev], NAA, col. 1159, l. 6, doc. 74, p. 1; «Բաց նամակ Միլվա Կապուտիկյանից Ս. Ս. Ավերինցևին, Վ. Վ. Իվանովին, Վ. Ա. Կավերինին, Մ. Ա. Ուլյանովին, գիտության, մշակույթի և մամուլի բոլոր ազնիվ գործիչներին» [Open Letter from Silva Kaputikyan to S. S. Averintsev, V. V. Ivanov, V. A. Kaverin, M. A. Ulyanov, to All Honest Representatives of Science, Culture and Press] in Silva Kaputikyan, *Էջեր փակ գրքոցներից* [Pages from Closed Shelves] (Yerevan: Apolon, 1997), 301-321.

29 «Հայաստանի կոմկուսի Կենտկոմի առաջին քարտուղար Կ. Ս. Դեմիրճյանի ելույթը հայկական հեռուստատեսությամբ 1988 թ. փետրվարի 29-ին» [Speech by the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia K. S. Demirchyan on Armenian Television on 29 February 1988], *Sovetakan Hayastan*, 1 March 1988, 1.

30 See, for example, «Ուղևորություն Արարատի շրջան» [Trip to Ararat Region], «Ժողովուրդների բարեկամությունը մեր ուժի հիմքն է» [Friendship of Peoples is the Basis of Our Strength], «Բարեկամության կամուրջներ» [Bridges of Friendship], *Sovetakan Hayastan*, 2 March 1988, 1, 4; Baqil Aliev, Razmik Meliqjanyan, «Նույն ճանապարհի ընկերներ» [Friends on the Same Road], Manzara Sadikhova, «Եվ ամենակարևորը՝ սրտանց...» [And Most Importantly – from the Heart], *Sovetakan Hayastan*, 3 March 1988, 1; Jabar Guliev, «Մեկ սիրտ, մեկ նպատակ» [One Heart, One Goal], S. Esayan, «Հաշտ ու խաղաղ» [Peaceful and Tranquil], *Sovetakan Hayastan*, 4 March 1988, 1; S. Abdullaev, «Հաջողության գրավակները» [The Key to Success], S. Humbatov «Բարեկամության քվե» [Friendship Vote], *Sovetakan Hayastan*, 6 March 1988, 2.

31 «Հայկական ՍՍՀ Գերագույն Սովետի որոշումը Ադրբեջանական ՍՍՀ Սումգայիթ քաղաքում կատար-

the genocidal nature of the Sumgait massacres was officially raised in the 18 July 1988 session of the leadership of the USSR Supreme Soviet by Vardges Petrosyan, Chairman of the Armenian Writers' Union, who stated his opinion that genocide had been attempted in Sumgait.<sup>32</sup> The genocidal nature of the massacres in Sumgait was also referred to in the resolution made in the joint meeting of the Armenian SSR Supreme Soviet and the Nagorno (Mountainous) Karabagh Autonomous Region's National Council on 1 December 1989. The resolution described the massacres as a "genocidal act".<sup>33</sup>

Considering the Sumgait massacres as having a genocidal nature in Armenian circles was further established after the Baku massacres that took place in 1990. At that time Soviet Armenian newspapers were full of comparisons between the Sumgait and Baku massacres ("Because we didn't see where Sumgait was taking us," "An unpunished crime leads to a new one," "A second Sumgait or a new Baku?") with the basic emphasis that the Sumgait crime being left unpunished resulted in the Armenian population of Azerbaijan's capital city, Baku, suffering a new massacre.<sup>34</sup> For the Armenian side, the Sumgait massacres confirmed the impossibility of Nagorno (Mountainous) Karabagh and its Armenian people remaining within Azerbaijan's jurisdiction. It should be underlined that the Armenian's SSR's official discourses expressed these same thoughts in their announcements and speeches about Azerbaijan's anti-Armenian policies and were based on the latest incidents.<sup>35</sup>

Generalizing, the conclusion may be arrived at that the Armenian people's historic experience, memories and collective memory equated the Armenian Genocide that took place at the beginning of 20th century with the Sumgait massacres of 1988. The Armenian scientific and public mind with its arguments decided that the massacres were of a

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ված ճգնաժողովությունները դատապարտելու մասին» [Decree of the Supreme Soviet of the Armenian SSR on the Condemnation of Crimes Committed in the City of Sumgait of the Azerbaijani SSR], *Sovetakan Hayastan*, 16 June 1988, 2.

32 «ՍՍՀՄ Գերագույն Խորհրդի նախագահության նիստը» [The Session of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Council], *Grakan t'ert'* (Yerevan), 22 July 1988, 1.

33 «Հայկական ԽՍՀ Գերագույն խորհրդի և Լեռնային Ղարաբաղի Ազգային խորհրդի որոշումը «Լեռնային Ղարաբաղի ինքնավար մարզում իրադրությունը նորմալացնելու միջոցառումների մասին» ԽՍՀՄ Գերագույն խորհրդի 1989 թ. նոյեմբերի 28-ի որոշման մասին» [Decree of the Supreme Soviet of the Armenian SSR and the National Soviet of Nagorno-Karabagh "On Measures to Normalize the Situation in the Nagorno-Karabagh Autonomous Region," resolution of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR of 28 November 1989], <https://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?docid=3154>, accessed 20.10.2021.

34 See, for example, R. Aleqyan, «Չպատժված հանցանքը նոր հանցանք է ծնում» [Unpunished Crime Begets New Crime], A. Markosyan, «Որովհետև չտեսաք, թե ուր է տանում Սումգայիթը» [Because You Haven't Seen where Sumgait Leads], *Yerekoyan Yerevan* (Yerevan), 15 January 1990, 1; Ashot Nazaryan, «Դարձյալ Սումգայիթ» [Again Sumgait], *Yerekoyan Yerevan*, 16 January 1990, 1; Hakob Srabyan, Margar Menechyan, «Երկրորդ «Սումգայիթ» թե՛ նոր «Բաքու»» [Second "Sumgait" or New "Baku"?], *Khorhrdayin Hayastan* (Yerevan), 18 January 1990, 1.

35 "President Serzh Sargsyan's speech at the PACE January session," <https://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2018/01/24/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-speech-at-the-session-of-the-PACE/>, accessed 20.10.2021; "Statement by the Foreign Ministry of Armenia on the 33rd Anniversary of the Anti-Armenian Massacres in Sumgait," <https://www.mfa.am/en/interviews-articles-and-comments/2021/02/27/sumg/10816>, accessed 20.10.2021.

genocidal nature and fell within the terms of the 1948 Genocide Convention. The Sumgait massacres having a genocidal nature also found their formulation in official discourses, being articulated in the resolutions made by the Supreme Soviet of the Armenian SSR. Appraisals of the Sumgait massacres within the Armenian reality happened, not because of “orders made to the people from above,” but in accordance with public perceptions.

## **The Sumgait Armenian massacres: Azerbaijani characterizations and perceptions**

The official characteristics made on 16 March 1988, during a meeting of the Central Committee of the Azerbaijan Communist Party concerning the Sumgait massacres had special significance. The session examined the question of the “great deficiencies in the organizational works among the population of the city, the lack of political foresight and lack of activity by Communist party Sumgait city political committee’s bureau in the matter of preventing the lamentable events.”<sup>36</sup> In the resolution adopted concerning the Sumgait massacres, they were described as “lamentable events,” “acts of robbery carried out by criminal elements,” which ended with human victims. Similar “lamentable events” were considered to be “the result of the indifference and short-sightedness of the leadership of the Sumgait [Communist] party’s city committee with regard to the instruction given to workers and young people in party political idealism and internationalism.”<sup>37</sup> The person responsible was considered to be the First secretary of the Communist Party Sumgait city committee, Jahangir Muslimzade who, despite prior warnings, didn’t follow the instructions to return from vacation. Several people responsible for preventing or halting the Sumgait massacres were dismissed and given “strict reprimands”. Stressing internationalism and the ideals of friendship and the brotherhood of peoples, the resolution adopted and handed to the Central Committee of the Azerbaijan Communist Party included several recommendations and points to be carried out followed up.<sup>38</sup> Thus, the official discourse concerning the Sumgait massacres considered them to be the result of neglect and mistakes made in the area of Soviet national policy.

The Azerbaijani people’s perception was a belief in the “treachery” theory. Bill Keller was the first western journalist permitted to visit Sumgait after the Soviet authorities banned journalists from entering the city. He arrived there in August 1988, six months after the massacres and wrote that the massacres were “delicately” called the “February events”.<sup>39</sup> The writer noted that the majority of Azerbaijanis accepted that the Sumgait

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36 «Ադրբեջանի կոմկուսի կենտկոմում» [In the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan], *Sovetakan Hayastan*, 20 March 1988, 2.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

39 Bill Keller, “Riot’s Legacy of Distrust Quietly Stalks a Soviet City,” *The New York Times*, 31 August 1988, <https://www.nytimes.com/1988/08/31/world/riot-s-legacy-of-distrust-quietly-stalks-a-soviet-city.html>, accessed 20.10.2021.

massacres that occurred between February 27 and 29 were “deliberately organized by Armenian extremists to obtain world goodwill in the battle to discredit Azerbaijan.”<sup>40</sup> Despite the Azerbaijan prosecutor Ilias Ismailov saying, in an interview, that there was no proof of this,<sup>41</sup> over a period of time this Azerbaijani perception was “corrected” and presented as the “absolute truth”. This was pointed out in 1989 by David Remnick, the “Washington Post” reporter in Sumgait. It was obvious from his article that the point of view, according to which Sumgait massacres were an Armenian “plot” to present the Azerbaijanis as killers, had gained firm credibility among the Azerbaijanis.<sup>42</sup> According to them, Armenians who were fluent Azerbaijani speakers had collected Azerbaijanis who had escaped from Yerevan, given them drugs and distributed arms among them. When these ‘escapees’ had gone mad, they went from door to door to punish those Armenians who had not made donations the ‘Krunk’<sup>43</sup> committee.<sup>44</sup> As “proof” of their point of view, the Azerbaijanis referred to the distribution of photographs of the Sumgait massacres and to the swift construction<sup>45</sup> of the memorial<sup>46</sup> dedicated to the victims of the Sumgait massacres.

The first reaction to the Sumgait massacres made by Azerbaijani academic circles was by the historian and member of the Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences Ziya Buniatov who, in January 1989, in his article titled “Почему Сумгаит?” [Why Sumgait?]<sup>47</sup> insisted that the Sumgait massacres were planned and realized by the Armenians themselves.<sup>48</sup> This article by Buniatov started the tale that one of the people taking part in the massacre of Armenians, Eduard Grigoryan, who until then had only a minor role in the Azerbaijani “proofs”, later became the foundation stone of the “Armenian treachery” theory.<sup>49</sup>

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40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 David Remnick, “Hate Runs High in Soviet Union’s Most Explosive Ethnic Feud,” *The Washington Post*, 6 September 1989, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1989/09/06/hate-runs-high-in-soviet-unions-most-explosive-ethnic-feud/38ac827c-17a0-474c-9647-39189d0415ec/>, accessed 20.10.2021.

43 The public-political organization that was formed in Nagorno (Mountainous) Karabagh in March 1988 which, acting with the “Karabagh Committee” working in the Armenian SSR, organised the Karabagh Armenian struggle for self-determination, with the object of reuniting the region with the Armenian SSR.

44 Remnick, “Hate Runs High”.

45 A khachkar [cross-stone] (sculpted by Smbat Hakobyan) in memory of the victims of the Sumgait massacres was erected near the Armenian Genocide memorial on April 24, 1988.

46 Remnick, “Hate Runs High”.

47 Ziya Buniatov, “Почему Сумгаит? (Ситуационный анализ)”, *История Азербайджана по документам и публикациям*, под ред. Зия Буниатова [“Why Sumgait? (Situational Analysis)” in *History of Azerbaijan according to documents and publications*, ed. Ziya Buniatov] (Baku: Elm, 1990), 207-211. The article was first published in January 1989 edition of the Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences monthly journal “Известия Академии наук Азербайджанской ССР” [Proceedings of the Academy of Sciences of the Azerbaijan SSR].

48 Ibid., 210.

49 Eduard Grigoryan was an individual with a criminal past who was one of the hundreds of people who took part in the massacres, being remembered in only one criminal action. He was of mixed Armenian-Azerbaijani (or Russian) parentage, while his perception of himself was not as being Armenian. 82 of the people arrested were Azerbaijanis and one was Russian (de Waal, *Black Garden*, 43). A member of the investigators’ group of

Anyway, there also were exceptions in Azerbaijani public-intellectual circles. This especially refers to the well-known writer Dr. Chingiz Husseinov<sup>50</sup> and the secretary of the Azerbaijan Writers' Union, the writer Akram Aylisli. The latter, in a letter addressed to Sergey Baruzdin, the editor of the monthly journal “Дружба народов” [Friendship of Peoples] wrote about the negative essence of chauvinism and its effects. He further wrote that since his childhood he had faith in the representatives of other nationalities but, in his surroundings, did not find anyone who lived up to his human ideals.<sup>51</sup> He added, in his letter, that he felt hurt and ashamed about “the monstrous Sumgait events”.<sup>52</sup> It should also be noted that more than twenty years after the Sumgait events, Akram Aylisli attempted to promote the truth in the novel “Каменные сны” [Stone Dreams] published in 2012. He was pursued after it was published and his works were burnt in Ganja [Gandzak] and in his home village of Aylis. He was also forbidden to leave the country by its political leadership.<sup>53</sup>

Testimony was provided about the nature, organization and even about certain circles connected with the Sumgait massacres by people in important roles in the Popular Front in contemporary Azerbaijani political life.<sup>54</sup> This was especially true of Leyla Yunus in her work “Из советского лагеря в азербайджанскую тюрьму” [From a Soviet Camp to an Azerbaijani Prison] where, referring to the anti-Armenian violence, she emphasized the deliberate nature of the Ministry of the Interior's and government security committee's lack of activity.<sup>55</sup> She wrote:

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USSR Committee for State Security (KGB), Valeriy Kiporenko, personally interviewed him (Kiporenko, “Riots in Baku”), stating that Grigoryan was recorded as being an Azerbaijani and had a very negative attitude concerning Armenians. At present official Azerbaijani historiography is based on “Grigoryan's activities” to prove “traces left by Armenians” (see, for example, Ibrahim Mammadov, *Secrets of the Soviet Empire. The Sumgait Provocation against Azerbaijan. “The Grigoryan Case”* (Baku: Tahsil, 2014); Aslan Ismayilov, *Sumgait – Beginning of the Collapse of the USSR* (Baku: Çasıoğlu, 2011). For details of the Azerbaijani point of view see de Waal, *Black Garden*, 42-43; Marina Grigoryan, “‘Sumgait’: Ilham Aliyev Insults His Own Nation”, Part 1, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/996562/>, accessed 20.10.2021; Marina Grigoryan, “Sumgait – a Case of Azerbaijan's KGB,” part 2, [http://Karabagh.records.info/english\\_publication\\_articles\\_azerbaijans-kgb.html](http://Karabagh.records.info/english_publication_articles_azerbaijans-kgb.html), accessed 20.10.2021.

50 Oganesyanyan, “Watershed”.

51 Akram Aylisli, “Пока в нашем доме будет существовать любовь... Письмо С. А. Баруздину” [“As Long as There is Love in Our Home... Letter to S. A. Baruzdin”], *Druzhiba narodov* 3 (1989): 170-171.

52 Ibid.

53 Grigor Atanesyan, Magerram Zeynalov, “Как Азербайджан и Армения распространяют теории заговора о карабахском конфликте” [How Azerbaijan and Armenia are Spreading Conspiracy Theories about the Karabagh Conflict], <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-51549094>, accessed 20.10.2021.

54 A group of Azerbaijani intellectuals created a “Baku City Scholars' Club” in the summer of 1988, on which the “Popular Front Initiative Group” was based. This group, in November 1988, united with the “Var-leg” (Existence) nationalist intellectual group and became the “Azerbaijani Popular Front” political party. For details see Tatevik Hayrapetyan, ««Ադրբեյջանի Ժողովրդական ճակատ» կուսակցության ձևավորումը և գործունեությունը (1988-1990 թթ.)» [Formation and Activities of the “Azerbaijani Popular Front Party” (1988-1990)], *Arevelagitut'yan harts'er* 7 (2014): 140-144.

55 Leyla and Arif Yunus, *Из советского лагеря в азербайджанскую тюрьму* [From Soviet Camp to Azerbaijani Prison] (Wroclaw: Jan Nowak-Jeziorański College of Eastern Europe, 2018), 269-280.



Carefully analyzing the events in which those dreadful crimes were committed, one may understand that they were incited and organized by the USSR government security committee and certain forces in the CPSU Central Committee that were led by the country's law enforcement agencies. The massacres were, in some places, initiated by their appointees, the government security committee functionaries and representatives of Heydar Aliev's clan network.<sup>56</sup>

Another member of the Azerbaijani Popular Front, Zardusht Alizade recalled Khitir Aloyev in his memoirs, the person who articulated the slogan "Death to Armenians" in a public rally in Sumgait, after which the first groups of killers began to move against the previously determined addresses of the Armenian population of the city.<sup>57</sup> Khitir Aloyev later became the chairman of the Sumgait city's "New Azerbaijan" political party organization that Heydar Aliev created. He became deputy chairman of the city's executive authority in 1995. Alizade also mentioned his meeting, ten days after the massacres, with workers from the Sumgait aluminum factory, who testified to the fact that the mob had been led by unknown young men.<sup>58</sup> It should also be noted that Musayev who was, at the time of the Sumgait massacres, the secretary of the Baku city committee, stressed, in an interview with the journalist de Waal in 2000, that he had been forced to curtail his vacation and return to Baku as the city had a very tense atmosphere as "someone was provoking them, propaganda work was going on."<sup>59</sup>

It would not be superfluous to note that, at one of the trial sessions of Yavar Djafarov, who was accused of participation in the Sumgait massacres, his mother, E. Djafarova testified that the real organizers of the massacres had not been held responsible and that her son had been a blind tool in their hands.<sup>60</sup> She further declared that the people responsible were Heydar Aliev, Kyamran Baghirov and Jahangir Muslimzade.<sup>61</sup>

It is possible to say, by generalizing, that the characteristics and definitions of the Sumgait massacres from the Azerbaijani point of view, with certain exceptions, were euphemistic and designed to disguise the scope of the actual events and their nature. Official, popular and academic circles in Azerbaijan gradually settled on the "Armenian intrigue and treachery" theory. A similar stance was conditioned by two factors: on the one hand the use of the "intrigue" view, as an explanation of the violence, provided the opportunity for the Azerbaijanis to successfully utilize it in their internal and international communications; on the other, it absolved the criminals from responsibility for anti-Armenian violence and punishment. This is how the study of a number of important factors concerning the realization of criminal intentions and the organization of violence

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56 Ibid., 269.

57 Alizade, *Azerbaijani Elite and Masses*; Yunus, *From Soviet Camp*, 269-280.

58 Alizade, *Azerbaijani Elite and Masses*.

59 de Waal, *Black Garden*, 60.

60 *The Sumgait: Azerbaijani Witnesses Speak Out*, 48.

61 Ibid.

opened. The atmosphere of freedom from punishment was important in terms of the subsequent increase of anti-Armenian violence in Azerbaijan.

### **The USSR central authorities' responses and characteristics**

The USSR central authorities had their own approaches and characteristics regarding the Sumgait massacres. The first response by the official press organization, TASS (Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union), was issued on March 1. In a short statement it said that “Hooligan elements fomented unrest in the city of Sumgait on 28 February 1988. Violent incidents and atrocities took place.”<sup>62</sup>

The February 29 session of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was of great significance. Mikhail Gorbachev, referring to the Sumgait events, stressed the lack of action by the local police and said: “This means that this was deliberate and a reply to the Armenians, giving them a curt answer.”<sup>63</sup> The Soviet government leadership was looking for ways to overcome the reality that had been created. Gorbachev stressed the importance of “getting to grips” with the situation, noting “there were 14 deaths in just one night” and, with the news reaching Armenia, there might be a reaction from there, therefore “...Armenia must be restrained so a reaction doesn't take place.”<sup>64</sup> Aleksander Yakovlev, a member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union noted that, for feelings to subside, it was necessary to announce, as quickly as possible, that unlawful acts had taken place and that the criminals had been arrested.<sup>65</sup> Defence Minister of USSR Dmitriy Yazov suggested that military units be deployed in Sumgait to restore order.<sup>66</sup> Speaking about the stance that the central authorities had adopted, Gorbachev noted that these events could not be ignored in the relations between the two republics, as similar problems existed everywhere and, if they did not cease, civilian dissent would spread throughout the country.<sup>67</sup> It is no coincidence that the Sumgait massacres were presented to the USSR central authorities as actions instigated and carried out by certain – hooligan – elements and being “mass unrest”.<sup>68</sup> The position adopted by the USSR's highest leadership was conditioned by the events being presented as being of a similar nature in the minds of the Soviet public.<sup>69</sup>

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62 “Сообщение” [Message], *Izvestia* (Moscow), 1 March 1988, 2.

63 “Заседание Политбюро ЦК КПСС (29 февраля 1988 года)” [The Meeting of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the CPSU, 29 February 1988], <http://sumgait.info/sumgait/politburo-meeting-29-february-1988.htm>, accessed 20.10.2021.

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid.

67 Ibid.

68 “Обстановка в Сумгаите” [Situation in Sumgait], *Izvestia*, 6 March 1988, 3; V. Itkin, “Сумгаит: Прокуратура продолжает следствие” [Sumgait: Prosecutor's Office Continues Investigation], *Izvestia*, 20 August 1988, 4.

69 Yu. Arakelyan, Z. Kadymbekov, G. Ovcharenko, “Эмоции и разум. О событиях в Нагорном Карабахе и

The highest USSR authorities expressed themselves even more objectively about the Sumgait massacres on July 18th, 1988, during the meeting of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, when Vardges Petrosyan, the Chairman of the Union of Writers of Armenia, stated that “an attempt at genocide” had been made in Sumgait. Gorbachev immediately reacted:

Genocide is a plainly political, racist, organized act and is not of a spontaneous nature. The ferocious attacks in Sumgait, however, were carried out by the dregs of society. It has become obvious who they were. Genocide is the conscious destruction of any people or minority as a political act. Why are you trying to ascribe the crimes committed to the whole of Azerbaijan? What genocide are you talking about?<sup>70</sup>

In essence, the leader of the USSR had emphasized that, according to his perception, the violence was of a spontaneous nature and he rejected the description of the massacres by the Armenian side as genocide and basically negatively labeled the crimes committed as premeditated and organized acts. Gorbachev, at the same time, refuted the ethnic nature of the attacks on the Armenian population of Sumgait, ascribing them as being carried out the “dregs of Soviet society”. In this way, he removed the problem from the area of ethnic relationships and placed it in that of class relationships in Soviet society.

Official positions of a similar nature were adopted during the examination and subsequent trials relating to the Sumgait massacres. By the decision of the USSR prosecutors, the legal work concerned with the Sumgait massacres was split into 80 parts with the trials basically taking place in Azerbaijan, as well as in different parts of Russian Federation. 94 people were arrested, of whom about 80 were convicted, with one being condemned to death. In all the cases, the accused were prosecuted for “hooliganism”.<sup>71</sup>

It is important to note that apart from official discourses and, in opposition to them, there were condemnatory speeches made by progressive Soviet intellectuals. This was especially true in February 1989, on the first anniversary of the Sumgait massacres, when a group of intellectuals (L. Gozman, L. L. Batkin, G. Staravoytova, Y. Levada, V. Chalikova, M. Egorova and others) sent a letter, addressed to their “Armenian comrades” sharing the Armenian people’s anger, stating, that “the dreadful crimes – genocide – have not been examined and tried properly ...”<sup>72</sup> There were articles in the

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вокруг него” [Emotions and Reason. On the Events in Nagorno-Karabagh and Around It], *Pravda* (Moscow), 21 March 1988, 3 (Yu. Arakelyan resigned from being a “Pravda” correspondent after the article had been published with his signature under it without his knowledge); S. Dardykin, R. Lynev, “Встречи после митингов” [Meetings After the Rallies], *Izvestia*, 24 March 1988; A. Vasil’kov, G. Ovcharenko, “Подстрекатели: Ещё раз о событиях в Нагорном Карабахе и вокруг него” [Instigators: Once Again about the Events in Nagorno-Karabagh and Around It], *Pravda*, 4 April 1988, 3.

70 «ՍՍՀՄ Գերագույն Խորհրդի նախագահության նիստը» [The Session of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Council], *Grakan t’ert’*, 22 July 1988, 1.

71 Babanov, Voevodskiy, *Karabagh Crisis*, 12.

72 “Открытое письмо друзьям в Армении” [Open Letter to Friends in Armenia], NAA, col. 1159, l. 2, doc. 20. p. 1.

press that attempted, under Soviet censorship conditions, to publish the more or less correct descriptions of the Sumgait massacres or parts of them.<sup>73</sup>

It is of significance that the former president of the USSR, Mikhail Gorbachev, in his article titled “Perestroika and New Thinking: A Retrospective” published in August 2021, looking back on the basis of the Nagorno-Karabagh problem, confessed that the central authorities were sceptical, at first, of the scale and severity of the problem.<sup>74</sup> In his opinion, it was up to the Armenians and Azerbaijanis to reach an agreement, while the role of the Centre was “to help them normalize the situation and, in particular, solve the economic problems.”<sup>75</sup> This was, according to Gorbachev, the correct way to solve the problem, but the two countries were unable to create a dialogue. “The situation unraveled rapidly. In late February 1988, there was bloodshed in the Azerbaijani city of Sumgait. Troops had to be sent in to stop the massacre.”<sup>76</sup> Gorbachev thus confessed that the massacres of the Armenian population of Sumgait were only halted thanks to military means.<sup>77</sup> Gorbachev, however, did not mention that operations by the USSR military forces were significantly late, starting only after a portion of the Armenian population had been massacred.

Thus, the Soviet central authorities presented the Sumgait massacres as mass unrest, carried out by certain elements of the society. They did not differentiate between the group identities of the murderers and those massacred, without Azerbaijanis being shown as being the aggressors and Armenians the victims. This is explained by the fact that the official discourse was conditioned by Soviet national policy. For the central authorities, the most important thing was to swiftly disguise the Sumgait massacres, moderate their extent and nature and to prevent the spread of inter-national dissent. According to the assumptions made by the Centre, unanimously raising the importance and real nature of the Sumgait

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73 Vasilevskiy, *Cloud in the Mountains*; Viktor Loshak, “Сумгаит, месяц спустя” [Sumgait, a Month Later], *Moskovskie novosti* (Moscow), 17 April 1988, 13; Sergey Varuzdin, “Эмоции и факты” [Emotions and Facts], *Druzhiba narodov* (Moscow), N 3 (1989), 171-174.

74 Mikhail Gorbachev, *Perestroika and New Thinking: A Retrospective*, <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/perestroika-and-new-thinking>, accessed 20.10.2021.

75 Ibid.

76 Ibid.

77 The USSR Defence Ministry, to stop the anti-Armenian Sumgait massacres, deployed 3,000 USSR Interior Ministry soldiers to the city (Vladimir Gurov, “Вооруженные силы СССР в армяно-азербайджанском (Карабахском) вооружённом конфликте (1988-1991 гг.)” [Armed Forces of the USSR in the Armenian-Azerbaijani (Karabagh) Armed Conflict (1988-1991)], *Izvestia Samarskogo nauchnogo tsentra Rossiiskoi akademii nauk* 14, no. 3 (2012): 110). The 137th infantry regiment (commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel V. Khatskevich) was also brought to Sumgait, which was able to impose order in the city. However, the troops were initially ordered to remain neutral and not to use weapons, resulting in them not responding to cries for help (Ibid., 111). This resulted in the Azerbaijanis attacking soldiers of the regiment’s sub-units, causing 140 casualties (Ibid.) According to the information provided by Viktor Krivopuskov, the head of the operational examining group of the USSR Ministry of the Interior in Nagorno-Karabagh, 270 soldiers were injured during the clashes. (Krivopuskov, *Rebellious Karabagh*, 149). It was only on the evening of the February 28 that, after decisive action taken by the troops, the massacres ceased. The clash between the Sumgait murderers and the soldiers, as the number of wounded testified, meant that the massacres of the Armenian population that were taking place were only stopped with great difficulty and that, without the intervention of the military units, the massacres would have been much more extensive.

events would deepen the conflict between the Armenians and Azerbaijanis and sharpen inter-ethnic relations, creating serious threats concerning physical security, both in the many thousands-strong Armenian community in Azerbaijan and for the Azerbaijanis living in Armenia. No less important were the circumstances concerning the central authorities' responsibility. In the end, the crimes committed against the Armenian population of Sumgait had taken place during the time of Soviet rule and the central authorities were also responsible for its citizens' right to life and security. Thus, the means used by the highest Soviet leadership showed that it had not appreciated the nature of ethnic conflict, its possible repercussions and was found to be unready to stop resurgent violence.

### **The Sumgait massacres: international responses and characteristics**

The international press also reported on the Sumgait massacres. In the beginning, they just gave news of the events, presenting it as TASS-provided information from official sources.<sup>78</sup> There were unofficial reports and eyewitness accounts could be found in its pages too.<sup>79</sup> The writers of the articles concerning the events in Sumgait basically described them as “pogroms”, “ethnic violence” or “ethnic riots”.

The Sumgait massacres also received attention and were noted by the European Union parliament. This was especially true as shown in its resolution concerning the Armenian SSR of 7 July 1988, which took note of the worsening political situation (which resulted in Armenian massacres in the city of Sumgait), as well as very serious acts of violence in Baku. It called upon the Soviet authorities to ensure the safety of the 500,000 Armenians living in 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.<sup>80</sup>

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78 International press report cuttings related to the Karabagh Movement are held in the Armenian National Archives (NAA), col. 1159, l. 3, doc. 105. William J. Eaton, “Soviets Enforce Curfew after Ethnic Rioting,” *Los Angeles Times*, 2 March 1988; William J. Eaton, “Several Killed in Rioting in Azerbaijan, Soviets Say,” *Los Angeles Times*, 3 March 1988; Thom Shanker, “Violence Reported by Armenia’s Neighbour,” *Chicago Tribune*, 1 March 1988; Thom Shanker “Armenian Riots: Deaths Confirmed,” *Chicago Tribune*, 3 March 1988; Gary Lee, “TASS Reports New Violence in Azerbaijan,” *The Washington Post*, 1 March 1988; Garry Lee, “Rioters Draw Soviet Troops: Azerbaijani City Termed ‘Calm but Tense,’” *Washington Post*, 2 March 1988; Philip Taubman, “Soviets Report a Major Oil Centre in Azerbaijan is Shaken by Riots,” *The New York Times*, 1 March 1988; Felicity Barringer, “Soviet Armenians Mourn Their Dead,” *The New York Times*, 9 March 1988; Christopher Bobinski, “Soviet Troops Enforce Curfew in Riot City,” *Financial Times*, 2 March 1988; John-Thor Dahlburg, “‘Hooligans’ Spread Ethnic Turmoil in Soviet Azerbaijan,” *The Washington Times*, 1 March 1988; Robert Evans, “Troops Enforce Rare Soviet Curfew in Riot-Torn Ethnic City,” *The Washington Times*, 1 March 1988; Philip Taubman “Soviet Army Enforces Curfew in Riot-Torn Caspian Capital,” *The Fresno Bee*, 2 March 1988.

79 David Remnick, “Soviet Tanks, Troops Said to be at Site of Ethnic Violence: Witnesses Put Armenian Toll at 350 Dead,” *The Washington Post*, 12 March 1988; David Remnick, “Soviets Report 31 Killed in Ethnic Rioting,” *The Washington Post*, 4 March 1988; “Soviets Tell of ‘Pogroms’ by Rioters in Azerbaijan,” *The Washington Post*, 16 March 1988; Philip Taubman, “Soviet Reports Deaths of 31 in Azerbaijan Rioting,” *The New York Times*, 5 March 1988.

80 “Resolution on the Situation in Soviet Armenia, adopted on 7 July 1988,” <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:51988IP0538&qid=1631174857109>, accessed 20.10.2021.

The European Parliament also referred to the Sumgait massacres in its resolution of 18 January 1990 which, having regard to the massacres that were continuing in Baku, the attacks carried out in Shahumyan and Getashen areas and other circumstances, called upon the European Commission and Council to apply to the Soviet authorities with a view to ensuring "...that they guarantee real protection for the Armenian people living in Azerbaijan by sending forces to intervene."<sup>81</sup> The resolution also called to ensure that the circumstances surrounding the pogroms perpetrated against the Armenians, in particular in Sumgait and Kirovabad, are brought fully to light.<sup>82</sup>

The third time it was mentioned in the European Parliament was on 14 March 1991, in the resolution titled "On the Blockade of Armenia and the Human Rights Situation there." The resolution included the statement that the 300,000 Armenians who had escaped from the Azerbaijani city of Baku and the massacres in Sumgait were in a state of complete destitution and require urgent aid.<sup>83</sup>

As far as international public opinion was concerned, it is significant that the September 1990 edition of the monthly journal "New York Review of Books" published the letter-address regarding the Armenian massacres that had taken place within the USSR. This initiative had been made by the Helsinki Treaty Watchdog Committee of France and intellectuals from the College International de Philosophie.<sup>84</sup> The letter had been signed by 133 famous scientists and advocates from Europe, Canada and the USA. The authors stressed that the repeated pogroms carried out against the Armenian people in Azerbaijan and their nature, racist ideology used by the perpetrators of these crimes as justification, forced them to think that they were not just accidents or spontaneous outbursts, but a "consistent practice – if not official policy in Soviet Azerbaijan."<sup>85</sup> The letter ended with an appeal to the international community and Soviet authorities to condemn the anti-Armenian pogroms.<sup>86</sup>

Thus, the international press, organizations and public-intellectual activists basically used the terms "pogrom" and "massacre" with regard to the Sumgait massacres. Their critical responses, in the first instance, stressed and gave importance to the ethnic nature of the violence, its nationalistic basis and its continuation in Armenian-inhabited areas in Azerbaijan. They also underlined the necessity of halting anti-Armenian violence and holding those responsible for it to account.

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81 "Resolution on the Situation in Armenia, adopted on 18 January 1990," <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:C:1990:038:FULL&from=EN>, accessed 20.10.2021.

82 Ibid.

83 "Resolution on the Blockade of Armenia and the Human Rights Situation There, adopted on 14 March 1991," [https://eurlex.europa.eu/legalcontent/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:JOC\\_1991\\_106\\_R\\_0102\\_01&qid=1547723161105&from=EN](https://eurlex.europa.eu/legalcontent/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:JOC_1991_106_R_0102_01&qid=1547723161105&from=EN), accessed 20.10.2021.

84 Jacques Derrida, Isaiah Berlin et al., "An Open Letter on Anti-Armenian Pogroms in the Soviet Union," *The New York Review*, Vol. 37, 27 September 1990, <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1990/09/27/an-open-letter-on-anti-armenian-pogroms-in-the-sov/>, accessed 20.10.2021.

85 Ibid.

86 Ibid.

## The genocidal terms used for the Sumgait massacres and their content

Several terms used to describe the Sumgait massacres, as appear in this study, are based on several immediate perceptions and characteristics of the events themselves. They are “genocide”, “pogrom” (massacre) and “slaughter”.

Genocide, in international law and specialist literature, is defined as the premeditated destruction of people because they belong to a specific race, religion, ethnic or other group. The primary source for this is Rafael Lemkin’s work published in 1944 titled “Axis Rule in Occupied Europe.” This is the signpost to the definition of the term genocide for its examination in the context of international law. Lemkin defines genocide as the destruction of a nation or ethnic group.<sup>87</sup> He explained that, although the term “genocide” describes, in itself, the annihilation of a group, it does not necessarily mean the immediate destruction. In Lemkin’s opinion, genocide rather means the aim of eliminating a group through coordinated plans directed at the essential foundations of its existence.<sup>88</sup> Thus, Lemkin’s definition is wider than simple physical destruction. He includes groups’ culture, language, national feelings, political and social institutions and economic existence. Genocide is directed against national group as an entity, and the actions involved are directed against individuals, not in their individual capacity, but as members of a group.<sup>89</sup>

Although there are other definitions of the term “genocide,”<sup>90</sup> all international legal bodies condemn such crimes in accordance with the Convention. The form of the Genocide convention has, on many occasions, resulted in theoretical discussions and disputes. For a crime to be described as genocide, it is vital to establish the specific intent of eliminating a group (*dolus specialis*). It is this intent, in the opinion of many researchers and theoreticians, which defines genocide.<sup>91</sup> This means that the criminal commits a crime definitely striving to either totally or partially annihilate a given group. There are two most important, specific things connected with an intent to commit genocide: firstly, that it is almost impossible to obtain persuasive proof of the intent and, secondly, that the intent may be either explicit or implicit.<sup>92</sup>

The next important thing concerning the definition and content of the term genocide is linked to the expression “in whole or in part”. Those studying the subject are basically in agreement that a group’s “destruction” usually has to include physical liquidation, generally in the form of mass killing.<sup>93</sup> The expression “in part” is often used for complete clarity to denote the slaughter of a “substantial” part of a group. However, some lawyers (among

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87 Raphael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe. Laws of Occupation, Analysis of Government, Proposals for Redress* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1944), 79.

88 Ibid.

89 Ibid.

90 Adam Jones, *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction: Second Edition* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 16-20.

91 Ibid., 37.

92 Kurt Jonassohn, Frank Chalk, “A Typology of Genocide and Some Implications for the Human Rights Agenda,” in *Genocide and the Modern Age: Etiology and Case Studies of Mass Death*, eds. Isidor Wallimann, Michael Dobkowski (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1987), 4-5.

93 Jones, *Genocide*, 24.

whom are William Schabas and Chile Eboe-Osuji) consider the restriction on the definition of the term “genocide” as dangerous with regard to the mass killings of a “substantial” number of a group, taking the convention’s aim of “preventing” it into account.<sup>94</sup> According to the opinion of another lawyer, David Alonzo-Maizlish, the “quantitative criterion” of genocide contradicts the object of the definition of the convention and it aims.<sup>95</sup> In this case, the characteristics and perceptions of genocide are of even greater importance, not because of some numerical threshold when mass killings become genocide but more often, because of the plans to commit it. In essence, the number of victims is important as evidence of the intent, not as a prerequisite to the formation of intent itself.<sup>96</sup>

As far as the term pogrom (massacre) is concerned, it originated from the Russian word “рѳом” (meaning thunder, thunderbolt or lightning) and the “но” prefix (meaning method or target). The literal translation of the term means “sudden ethnic eruption [of flame] against a specific target.”<sup>97</sup> This definition of ethnic violence is basically utilized to describe the anti-Jewish massacres that took place in Russia in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.<sup>98</sup>

Turning to the term’s content, it is important to note that researchers do not have, in this connection, any final formulations. Thus, Paul Brass considers a pogrom as attacks made, with the involvement of the state and/or its agents, on the individuals of ethnic, racial or other groups and their property.<sup>99</sup> He considers the involvement of the government as pivotal, to differentiate them from massacres taking place during riots.<sup>100</sup> Werner Bergmann, however, stresses that the term “government control” originates, in the context of the anti-Jewish massacres, from a historically inaccurate judgment, therefore a pogrom must be viewed as a form of spontaneous riot.<sup>101</sup> According to Bergmann, pogroms organized at a low level differ from terrorism, massacre and genocide. At the same time, he states that the analytical separations of ethnic violence are not easy to apply to any given incident, because pogroms often take place in the context of international or civil wars or genocide and vigilante groups may organize pogroms in such a way that they develop into massacres.<sup>102</sup>

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94 *Ibid.*, 24-25.

95 David Alonzo-Maizlish, “In Whole or in Part: Group Rights, the Intent Element of Genocide, and the ‘Quantitative Criterion,’” *New York University Law Review* 77 (2002): 1375.

96 *Ibid.*, 1383-1384, also William A. Schabas, “Was Genocide Committed in Bosnia and Herzegovina? First Judgments of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia,” *Fordham International Law Journal* 25, no. 1 (2001): 40-47.

97 Henry Abramsmon, *A Prayer for the Government: Ukrainians and Jews in Revolutionary Times, 1917-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 109.

98 *Ibid.*, 354.

99 Paul R. Brass, “Introduction: Discourses of Ethnicity, Communalism, and Violence,” in *Riots and Pogroms*, ed. Paul R. Brass (London: Macmillan Press, 1996), 33.

100 *Ibid.*, 26.

101 Werner Bergmann, “Pogroms,” in *International Handbook of Violence Research*, eds. Wilhelm Heitmeyer, John Hagan (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003), 352.

102 *Ibid.*, 354.



In any event, most researchers, when they use the term “pogrom”, accept that a state or certain of its officials participated in them, or at least refused to act to prevent or stop imminent massacres.<sup>103</sup> The significant points for characterizing massacres (pogroms) are, basically:

- The fomenting of massacres by governmental, political party, military or senior law-abiding officials or their lack of activity during them
- To stir mobs up and involvement in massacres
- The gradual reduction of the massacres after they reached their peak
- The low organizational level of the massacres.

A number of researchers underlined the genocidal nature of the massacres, considering them to be genocidal massacres. Thus, the famous genocide scholar, Leo Kuper, considered that the annihilation of a section of a group, such as the wiping out of whole villages, to be genocidal massacres.<sup>104</sup> Israel Charny determined genocidal massacre as being small-scale mass killing.<sup>105</sup> Definitions of a similar nature, in his opinion, allow many pogroms, mass executions and mass murders to be described in this way. Although they are no less tragic for the victims, the number of dead is relatively small compared to the events of genocide.<sup>106</sup> Schabas also writes that examples of genocidal massacres may be pogroms and mass executions.<sup>107</sup> In Paul Mojzes’ opinion, “a more accurate meaning of pogrom is genocidal massacre, that is, a semi-spontaneous mob attack, an outburst by a more dominant ethnic or religious group over a minority.”<sup>108</sup>

Genocide scholar Vahagn Dadrian views massacres as a conception of “retributive genocide”. In his opinion, this kind of genocide is limited to being localized ferocious attacks, “as a form of meting out punishment to a segment of minority, challenging or threatening the dominant group.”<sup>109</sup> The author maintains that it has a function of warning and (or) intimidating potential challenges and of deterring a recurrence of trouble.<sup>110</sup> The previously mentioned conception best expresses the origin of the Sumgait massacres. The Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabagh began its struggle for self-determination and reunion with their historic homeland, Armenia in 1988. By this, the Armenian population

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103 Brass, “Introduction,” 33; John K. Roth, “Pogrom,” in *A Dictionary of Jewish-Christian Relations*, ed. Edward Kessler, Neil Wenborn (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 346; Avraham Greenbaum, “Bibliographical Essay,” in *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, ed. John D. Klier, Shlomo Lambroza (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 373.

104 Leo Kuper, *Genocide: Its Political Use in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), 10.

105 Israel W. Charny, “Toward a Generic Definition of Genocide,” in *Genocide: Conceptual and Historical Dimensions*, ed. George J. Andreopoulos (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1997), 77.

106 Ibid.

107 William A. Schabas, *Genocide in International Law: The Crimes of Crimes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 240.

108 Paul Mojzes, *Balkan Genocides: Holocaust and Ethnic Cleansing in the Twentieth Century* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2011), 5.

109 Vahagn Dadrian, “A Typology of Genocide,” *International Review of Modern Sociology* 5 (1975): 207.

110 Ibid.

of the whole of Azerbaijan, as a minority, became a target group for Azerbaijani government's repressive policies and the use of violence. In response to the re-opening of the Artsakh problem, the Azerbaijani side used "punitive" measures, organizing the massacre of the Sumgait Armenian population, thus terrifying the Armenians and attempting to preclude the future expansion of the movement.

Turning to the term "massacre" it should be noted that it has a French origin.<sup>111</sup> The researcher Mark Levene stresses the one-sided nature of massacres. In his opinion, massacres happen when at least, at the given moment, people who cannot defend themselves are killed by another group that has the physical means and power with which to carry out killings without physical danger to itself.<sup>112</sup>

Speaking about the 1894-1896 Abdul-Hamid massacres, Robert Melson defines massacre as the deliberate killing of significantly large numbers of relatively defenseless people by political actors.<sup>113</sup> In his opinion, genocide and massacre differ by the nature of their aims and scope. According to this researcher, massacres are utilized by governments as a form of intimidation, not to extirpate, but to change the behaviour or status of certain communal groups.<sup>114</sup>

As can be seen, there are quite a few theoretical approaches to the terms "pogrom" and "massacre". They have no legal form and, in essence, are part of other international crimes (genocide, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity).

Finally, turning to definitions, it must be underlined that the genocide scholar Israel Charny has warned about the pointless "definitions struggle", which occasionally simply eliminates the extent of this or that event, importance and its great human tragedy.<sup>115</sup> It is thought, in this sense, the main problem for researchers should not be the precise classification and definition of this or that kind of terror, but the progress of the development of terror, the reasons for its advance and the revelation of its consequences.

## Conclusion

Thus, the Sumgait massacres have been characterized as follows:

- The Armenian side has defined and characterized the Sumgait massacres as a genocidal act, linking them to the Armenian Genocide inflicted by the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the 20th century. It also stresses the importance of their being organized and of an ethnic nature.

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111 Mark Levene "Introduction," in *The Massacre in History*, eds. Mark Levene and Roberts Penny (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 9.

112 Ibid., 5.

113 Robert Melson, "A Theoretical Inquiry into the Armenian massacres of 1894-1896," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 24, no. 3 (1982): 482.

114 Ibid., 483-484.

115 Israel Charny, "The Psychological Satisfaction of Denials of the Holocaust or Other Genocides by Non-Extremists or Bigots, and Even by Known Scholars," *Idea: A Journal of Social Issues* 6, no. 1 (2001): 1-16, <https://www.ideajournal.com/articles.php?id=27>, accessed 27.10.2021.

- It is noticeable that the Azerbaijani side euphemistically defines the Sumgait massacres as “the February events”. The notion of “Armenian intrigue and treachery” was put into circulation, which as a “lawful” explanation, had the aim of justifying the crimes that were committed and passing the blame onto the victim.
- The USSR central authorities avoided emphasising the group identity of the victims, describing the events as “disorders” and “hooligan acts” taking care, looking to the future, not to stir up inter-ethnic problems, not just in Armenian-Azerbaijani relations, but throughout the entire country.
- The international press, organizations and the public were not impeded by such interests and accepted formulas and, in condemnatory statements, called the Sumgait massacres “massacres”, underlining the biased, ethnic nature of the anti-Armenian violence in Azerbaijan.

It may be seen, comparing perceptions of the Sumgait massacres, that the Armenian and international evaluations contain certain generalizations. The emphasis, in both instances, is placed on the one-sided, ethnic nature of the violence, the separation of its prevention and the question of the security of the Armenian population of Azerbaijan, through appropriate methods and political evaluation. Against this approach, characteristics made by the USSR central authorities and Azerbaijani side separated them using euphemisms, with the aim of minimizing the scale of the massacres, their essence and their consequences.

The Sumgait massacres became an immutable point in the antagonism of Armenian/Artsakh – Azerbaijan. The Armenian side perceives the Sumgait massacres in the context of the genocide of the Armenian people. The Azerbaijani side used the theory of “Armenian intrigue and treachery” to justify the violence and to evade responsibility. It is obvious that only when the Azerbaijani side acknowledged the crime and restored justice will there be a prospect for any arrangement.

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# AZERBAIJAN'S POLICY OF FORCED CULTURAL APPROPRIATION AFTER THE SECOND ARTSAKH WAR: THE CASE OF DADIVANK MONASTERY

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## Abstract

The article presents the methods of the continuing forced appropriation of Armenian cultural monuments in Artsakh by the Republic of Azerbaijan's functionaries after the Second Artsakh War.<sup>1</sup> The "Albanisation" of Armenian cultural monuments in Mountainous Karabagh in the scientific field began in the 1950s, when it was imperative to reinforce the Azerbaijani people's cultural identity, based on the foundations laid between 1920 and 1930 and to try to make all the peoples living in the Southern Caucasus equally indigenous to the region. One of the "victims" of the "Albanisation" of the cultural heritage of the Armenians of Mountainous Karabagh is the monastic complex of Dadivank, located in the Karvachar area of the Shahumyan region. Passing under Azerbaijani jurisdiction in November 2020, it was presented to the international community as part of the historic-cultural heritage of the descendants of the Caucasian Albanians, which should be under the jurisdiction of Udis and Azerbaijanis. With this aim in view, the Azerbaijani leadership instituted the policy of forced appropriation and alienation of Armenian heritage from the Armenian culture through various means, which will be shown in detail below.

This article will also demonstrate how the theory of "Albanisation" began and developed in Azerbaijani SSR historiography and what "scientific bases" were – and are – being brought forward during the Soviet and post-Soviet eras by historians to present Dadivank as Albanian. It will also reveal the directions Azerbaijan is following for the appropriation of Armenian cultural legacy, rebranding it as Albanian, and foisting this theory on the international public.

**Keywords:** Artsakh<sup>2</sup>, Dadivank Monastery, cultural heritage, Albanisation, Azerbaijan.

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1 Also called the 44 Day War.

2 The original, Armenian name for Mountainous (Nagorno)-Karabagh is "Artsakh".

## Introduction

Raphael Lemkin, who coined the term Genocide and participated in the formation of the UN Convention on the Preventing and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948), initially used, in the 1933 Madrid conference, the term “an act of vandalism” before the term “cultural genocide” was used. He noted that by that act, the perpetrator showed his destructive spirit, the opposite face of human culture and progress.<sup>3</sup> According to Lemkin “...The ban on cultural genocide must only be directed against the policies designed to assimilate a group into a larger society, but only drastic methods used to aid in the rapid and complete disappearance of the cultural, moral and religious life of a group of human beings.”<sup>4</sup>

Researchers, working in this direction in the following decades, brought forward different approaches to the term “cultural genocide”. Two approaches may be determined: the first, to use cultural genocide as a means or method of eliminating a group and, second, to use cultural genocide as a process of making a group disappear.

According to Dr. Sylvia Maus, former scientific coordinator of the UNESCO Chair in International Relations at Technical University of Dresden, the elimination of cultural sites, churches and cross-stones may be regarded as part of the means of realising genocide, if there is a special intent for the elimination of the group. In the wider context, if the destruction of Armenian heritage does take place, it is possible that there will be a long, durable process, the aim of which would be to eradicate the Armenian people’s identity in Mountainous Karabagh and minimize its historical roots and cultural diversity. From that point of view, the destruction of the Armenian cultural heritage that has taken place in Nakhijevan<sup>5</sup> has an important role in understanding the wider picture. Therefore, future wide-scale destruction will, in itself, be cultural genocide. In this sense, the Nakhijevan example is a cautionary tool and reminds the international community to focus its attention on Mountainous Karabagh.<sup>6</sup>

The Republic of Azerbaijan, perhaps even from the Soviet era, adopted two approaches toward the Christian monuments in Mountainous Karabagh: their destruction or the forced appropriation. There are several interpretations of the latter. Forced appropriation may be used for various things that form parts of cultural heritage: starting with the kinds of dishes, dress and music, to holy places and historic-cultural monuments. Generally speaking, forced cultural appropriation is used when the subject culture is that

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3 Raphael Lemkin, “Acts Constituting a General (Transnational) Danger Considered as Offences Against the Law of Nations,” *Additional explications to the Special Report presented to the 5th Conference for the Unification of Penal Law in Madrid (14-20 October 1933)*, at <http://www.preventgenocide.org/lemkin/madrid1933-english.htm>, accessed 05.03.2022.

4 Barry Sautman, *Cultural Genocide and Asian State Peripheries* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 5-6.

5 Simon Maghakyan and Sarah Pickman, “A Regime Conceals Its Erasure of Indigenous Armenian Culture,” *Hyperallergic*, 18.02.2019, <https://hyperallergic.com/482353/a-regime-conceals-its-erasure-of-indigenous-armenian-culture/>, accessed 11.12.2021.

6 Sylvia Maus, “A Violent Effort to Rewrite History? Destruction of Religious Sites in Nagorno-Karabagh and the Concept of Cultural Genocide,” *Völkerrechtsblog*, 19 April 2021, [https://intr2dok.vifa-recht.de/receive/mir\\_mods\\_00010644](https://intr2dok.vifa-recht.de/receive/mir_mods_00010644), accessed 05.03.2022.

of a minority or is, in any way, inferior to that of the appropriating culture in its social, political, economic or military state, or when a more powerful culture “attacks” that of a weak neighbour or when there are other problems, such as ethnic or racial enmity between the two groups.<sup>7</sup> Forced appropriation is directed at creating or strengthening an identity. One of the ways of establishing identity is to take other peoples’ history as one’s own.<sup>8</sup> The motivation for forced cultural appropriation is, in the first instance, to gain predominance or governance. Robert Nelson, professor of art history, notes that “In every cultural appropriation there are those who act and those who are acted upon, and for those whose memories and cultural identities are manipulated by academic, economic or political appropriations, the consequences can be disquieting or painful.”<sup>9</sup>

The heritage studies scholar David Lowenthal, referring to the reasons for choosing specific aspects of the past, insists that the public changes or alters the past because it often needs or wants more than it has. Lowenthal is certain that most people exaggerate their cultural ancientness or hide its relative recentness. They therefore create new, more apposite histories.<sup>10</sup> The British historian John Tosh notes that while social groups need records of past experiences, it is also imperative for them that they have a history of the past which either explains or justifies their present, often for historical accuracy. He observes that “Memories are modified to suit particular situations or circumstances and do not always correlate with historical truths. These histories can become distorted and permeated (often deliberately) with inaccuracies and myths during the selection process.”<sup>11</sup>

And cultural geographer Donald Mitchell notes that “Societies justify current attitudes and future aspirations by linking them to past traditions which helps bond and unify factionalism.”<sup>12</sup>

The medieval Albanian Christian state<sup>13</sup> is known as being an area within the present

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7 Mahmoud Hawari, “The Citadel of Jerusalem: A Case Study in the Cultural Appropriation of Archaeology in Palestine,” *Present Pasts* 2, no. 1 (2010): 89, <http://dx.doi.org/10.5334/pp.25>.

8 Kathleen Ashley and Veronique Plesch, “The Cultural Processes of ‘Appropriation,’” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 32, no. 1 (2002): 6.

9 *Critical Terms for Art History*, eds. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 127, quoted in Ashley and Plesch, “The Cultural Processes of ‘Appropriation,’” 3.

10 David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), cited in Sara McDowell, “Heritage, Memory and Identity,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Heritage and Identity*, eds. Brian Graham and Peter Howard (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2008), 42.

11 John Tosh, *In Pursuit of History* (London: Longman Press, 1991), quoted in McDowell, “Heritage, Memory and Identity,” 42-43.

12 Donald Mitchell, *Cultural Geography: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), cited in McDowell, “Heritage, Memory and Identity,” 43.

13 The Albanian tribes (according to Strabo – 26) lived north of Kura River, reaching as far as the River Alazan, on the shores of the Caspian Sea between the Caucasus Mountains and the Derbend Pass. The Albanians were, to the west, neighbours of Iberia (Georgia); to the north Sarmatia; to the south with Armenia Maior and, on various occasions, to the south-east with Marastan Minor (Atrpatakan). For details see, for example, Aleksan Hakobyan, *Албания-Алуанк в греко-латинских и древнеармянских источниках* [Albania-Aluank in the Greek-Latin and Old-Armenian Sources] (Yerevan: AN Armianskoï SSR, 1987), 20-36; Enaetollah Reza, *Ազրբայջանի և Առանի (Միլլիսուկանի Արևմտիս)* [Azerbaijan and Arran (Caucasian Albania)], trans. Yervand Papazyan (Yerevan:

Republic of Azerbaijan, before the nomadic Turkish-speaking people appeared. In any event, some Azerbaijani researchers accept an extreme, materialistic version of Azerbaijan culture, according to which they either reject the presence of non-Turkish culture in their country or consider the whole of it to be Turkish speaking. The others consider present-day Azerbaijanis to be an amalgamation of the Albanians and their Turkish forefathers.<sup>14</sup> The launch of the Azerbaijan's policy of forced cultural appropriation began during Soviet times, when the first problem put before Azerbaijani historians was to formulate national self-awareness for the ethnic Azerbaijani group, which would inculcate a "feeling of historicalness into the understanding of the word 'motherland'".<sup>15</sup>

According to the USSR constitution of 5 December 1936, Azerbaijan became a fully-fledged Soviet socialist republic, its people being named "Azerbaijanis". It was imperative that the latter had its own history, allowing it to be "separate" from the Turks, so as not to be considered to be a base for pan-Turkism and from Shia Iran to escape the accusation of being pan-Islamist. At the same time, the Azerbaijanis needed to receive the status of an indigenous people in accordance with the Soviet concept, which required proof to finally free itself from being labeled as people that have arrived from elsewhere.

One of the first steps taken was the teaching of Azerbaijan history at the Azerbaijan State University (now Baku State University) in the faculty of History during 1940-1941. Until then, the first version of Azerbaijani history was published in 1939 in the form of a textbook envisaged for the school pupils of the 8th and 9th grades in the Azerbaijani SSR. In the book, there was no "proper" place given to the Medes in the development of the statehood of Azerbaijanis, while the theory of Albanians was almost ignored. Speaking about the local people, however, only the name "Azerbaijani" was used for them for all historical eras.<sup>16</sup> The second attempt at writing a history of Azerbaijan was made in 1945-1946 when, apart from representing the Medes as ancestors of the Azerbaijanis, the Caucasian Albanians were also added.<sup>17</sup> There was no mention, however, of their language and literature.<sup>18</sup>

Azerbaijani scholars gradually included Mountainous Karabagh in the Caucasian Albanian polity to reinforce their territorial claims to the former. Articles and books were

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Pyunik, 1994), 86. The geographer Strabo praised, in the first century BC, the beauty of the 26 tribes living in Caucasian Albania; he describes their simple and patriarchal way of living, noting that they couldn't count to more than one hundred, "but that they comprised both light and armoured infantry and cavalry in time of war, like the Armenians." See Strabo, *Օրսար աղբյուրները հայերի մասին* [Foreign Sources about Armenians], trans. Hrachya Acharyan (Yerevan: YSU, 1940), 33.

14 Philip Kohl, Gocha Tsetskhladze, *Nationalism, Politics, and the Practice of Archaeology in the Caucasus*, eds. Philip L. Kohl and Clare P. Fawcett (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 153.

15 Victor Shnirelman, *Войны памяти: мифы, идентичность и политика в Закавказье* [Wars of Memory: Myths, Identity and Politics in Transcaucasia] (Moscow: Akademkniga, 2003), 38.

16 Ibid., 133-134.

17 The descendants of the Caucasian Albanian tribes are considered to be the Udis, Lezgis and about ten minor peoples speaking the Lezgi language (the Tsakhurs, Tabasarantsis, Rutuls, Aguls etc.).

18 Shnirelman, *Wars of Memory*, 138.

published<sup>19</sup> which attempted to construct Azerbaijani cultural identity using that of the Caucasian Albanians, in other words through the appropriation of that of the Armenians. The notion of being the heirs of the Albanians solved several questions. Firstly, the Azerbaijanis thus gained an acceptable status as an indigenous people; secondly, they secured their pretensions, through forgery, to the Mountainous Karabagh territory they coveted, as well as becoming the owners of Armenian Christian culture.

This article presents about one of the Armenian historical-cultural treasures – Dadivank monastery – which was a target for forged Azerbaijani historiography and the subject of the policy of forced appropriation.

## The History of Dadivank

The monastic complex of Dadivank (Fig. 1, 2) is located in the Shahumyan region of the Republic of Artsakh (Fig. 3, 4) (after the signature of the declaration of 9th November 2020, it was redesignated as being in the Kelbajar region of the Republic of Azerbaijan), about half a kilometer north of the left bank of the Tartar River. According to medieval Armenian sources, it was named after one of Thaddeus' disciples, Dad, who was murdered for preaching Christianity in the first century, and the monastery was built around his tomb.<sup>20</sup>

According to various sources, it was also occasionally known as the Monastery of the Apostles, while Armenian author of the 12th-13th century Mkhitar Gosh called it “Arakeladir”.<sup>21</sup> It is possible that the first church built on the supposed location of the tomb was constructed after the acceptance of Christianity in the 4th century.<sup>22</sup> The monastery initially appears in bibliographical sources in the 9th century, such as Movses Dashkhurantsi's (Kaghankatvatsi) work “History of Albania”.<sup>23</sup> The feudal lords of the

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19 The Azerbaijani scholar Ziya Buniatov noted, in his 1959 article titled “New Material on the Location of the Fortress Sheki” that Sheki mentioned in the Arab and Armenian sources is the Shaki, located in the Sisian province of Armenia, not the one near the town of Sheki (now Nukhi) in the Republic of Azerbaijan. Buniatov's conclusion is that in the 9th century, the Arran border (including Shaki in the province of Syunik) extended as far as Sevan, thus not only Karabagh, but also the region to the west – in other words Soviet Armenia – was included in it. His second article about Shaki had already prepared the soil to present Azerbaijan as being the heir of the ancient Albania, which included Mountainous Karabagh. The author periodically published articles concerning Caucasian Albania, creating a new field of study for Azerbaijani scholars. The Soviet authorities did not intervene in any way to all this, as Buniatov never talked about pan-Islamic or pan-Turkic ideals and didn't base his work on Islamic or Turkic ethnicity. His works were really about Caucasian Albania, so accorded with Soviet standards, providing him with the opportunity to probe deeper and maneuver into this subject. For details, see, for example, Sara Crombach, “Ziia Buniatov and the Invention of an Azerbaijani Past” (PhD Thesis – Amsterdam School for Regional, Transnational and European Studies (ARTES), 2019.

20 Samvel Ayvazyan, *Դատի վանքի վերակառուցումը 1997-2011 թթթ.* [The Restoration of the Monastery of Dad, 1997-2011] (Yerevan: RAA, 2015), 6.

21 Arakeladir, an Armenian word, meaning – established by the apostle.

22 Samvel Karapetyan, *Հայ մշակույթի հուշարձանները Խորհրդային Ադրբեյջանին բռնակցված շրջաններում* [The Armenian Cultural Monuments in the Regions Annexed to Soviet Azerbaijan] (Yerevan: Gitutyun, 1999), 82.

23 Movses Kaghankatvatsi, *Պարսկաստանի Աղվանից աշխարհի* [History of Albania], trans. V. D. Arakelyan, ed. A. A. Abrahamyan (Yerevan: Hayastan, 1969), 266.



*Figure 1. Dadivank Monastery in Artsakh (Source: Personal Archive of the Author, 13 Nov. 2020)*



*Figure 2. Dadivank Monastery in Artsakh (Source: Research On Armenian Architecture Archive)*



monastery and the surrounding area at that time were the indigenous Aranshahik dynasty,<sup>24</sup> in the person of Aternerseh, his father Sahl and their forefathers and descendants. The monastery suffered great calamities during literate medieval times due to the Seljuk incursions, as did other cultural centres. Mkhitar Gosh, in his “Chronicle”, recalls the Chol’s ferocious military leader, who repeatedly ravaged the Khachen region<sup>25</sup> to establish Seljuks<sup>26</sup> power and once burned down all the defenceless villages in the province, as well as Dadivank monastery, in 1143.<sup>27</sup>

There was a probable increase in activity in the rebuilding of the monastery in the second half of the 12th century. Many cross-stones have reached us from that time, the majority of which were set up in the name of representatives of the descendants of the Aranshahiks, the Haterk branch of the family of the lords of Khachen, proving that Dadivank was their region’s preclacy. In 1182, Prince of Princes and Curopalate Hassan the Great, son of Vakhtang, erected one cross-stone (Fig. 5), which recounted the wars he waged against the Seljuks, the castles under his control, his sons and the spiritual life he led in the monastery.<sup>28</sup>

The construction of Dadivank’s main church was completed in 1214 by the widowed Lady Arzu (Arzu Khatun), daughter of Prince of Princes Kurt and wife of the deceased Vakhtang, Lord of Haterk, son of Hassan the Great. The researcher Mesrop Magistros noted that Dadivank surpassed the later catholicossal seat of Gandzasar,<sup>29</sup> as it had several churches, chapels and many secondary monastic buildings with inscriptions in Armenian (Fig. 6, 7). It is therefore possible to infer that the monastery was a very popular holy site with many pilgrimages taking place there.<sup>30</sup>

The monastery bell tower, built in 1260, was presented with a new bell in 1314 by Sarkis, son of Prince Vahram Dopyants. The abbot of the monastery Rev. Atanas erected two magnificent cross-stones in 1283 (Fig. 8) which were, later, moved inside the bell tower.<sup>31</sup> Construction activities gained impetus during that time and secular buildings were also built.

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24 Aranshahik dynasty – local Armenian dynasty who ruled in Artsakh and Utik regions of Armenia Maior from 428 and had spread their power on Caucasian Albania as well.

25 Khachen region was one of the regions of Artsakh. Khachen principality was founded in 9th century, which included the northern and western parts of Artsakh. Due to its leader Sahl Smbatyan, Khachen’s borders extended to Lake Sevan (Republic of Armenia, Gegharkunik region). For details, see, for example, Vahram Balayan, *Արցախի պատմությունը, հնադարից մինչև մեր օրերը* [History of Artsakh from Antiquity to the Present Day] (Yerevan: Amaras, 2002), 106-109.

26 Turkic tribes, who invaded southeastern Asia in the 11th century and founded their empire.

27 Bagrat Ulubabyan, «Դադի կամ Խուտա մանուկ» [Dadi or Khuta Monastery] *Echmiadzin* 6-7 (1971): 63-64.

28 Avvazyan, *The Restoration of the Monastery of Dad*, 8.

29 The spiritual authority of the Gandzasar Catholicate (called also “Albanian/Aghvanits Catholicate) extended over Proper Albania (*Bun Aghvanq* in Armenian), Artsakh and Utik regions of Armenia Maior, and was a diocese subordinate to the Armenian Catholicate. The center of Gandzasar Catholicate was Partav city, then Kapaghak, etc. and from the 4th century the Gandzasar monastery.

30 Mesrop Magistros, *Հայկական երեք մեծ վանքերի Տաթևի, Հաղարծնի և Դադի եկեղեցիները և վանասրահները* [The Churches and Monastic Buildings of the Three Great Armenian Monasteries of Tatev, Haghartsin and Dad] (Jerusalem: Srbot Hakobeants, 1938), 84.

31 Avvazyan, *The Restoration of the Monastery of Dad*, 11.



Figure 3. Historical Religious Monuments of Artsakh (Source: Research On Armenian Architecture Archive)

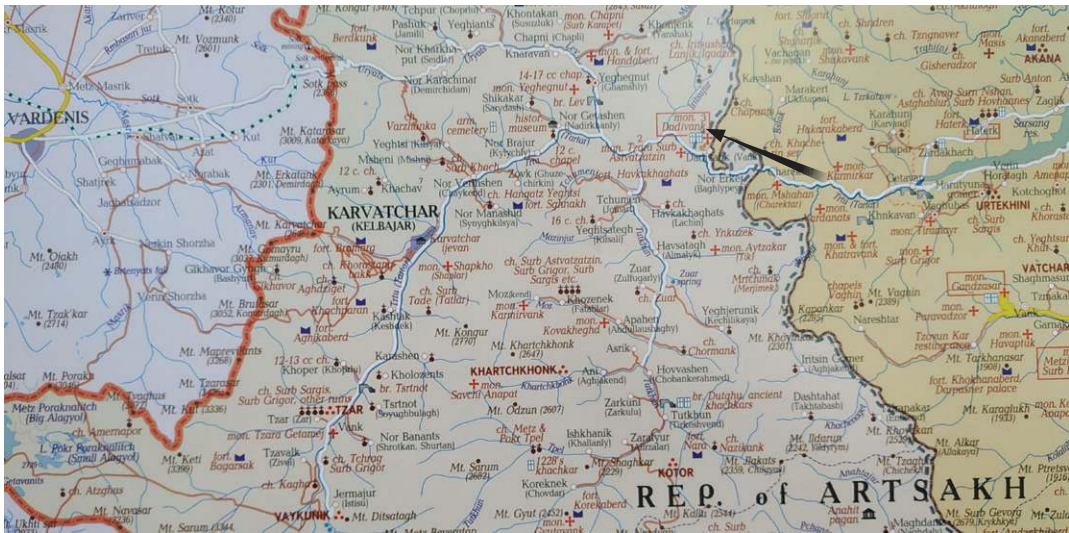


Figure 4. Dadivank Monastery, Artsakh (Source: Collage LLC, 2021. Author: Grigor Beglaryan)

The monastery gained significant landholdings during the following centuries which included areas now in the Karvachar (presently under occupation of the Republic of Azerbaijan), Vardenis (Republic of Armenia) and Martakert regions (Artsakh). There were no monks or functionaries, however, in the monastery from the end of the 18th to the beginning of the 19th centuries. The villages belonging to the monastery were completely denuded of inhabitants at the end of the 18th century as a result of Agha Mahmed's<sup>32</sup> incursion and the plague and famine that followed it. This was followed by the settlement in the area of Kurds of the Qolani tribe that arrived from the khanate of Yerevan.<sup>33</sup> Other Kurdish tribes also settled in the region during the following decades, as well as ayurums [tribe in the Caucasus].<sup>34</sup> Metropolitan (Bishop) Baghdasar Hasan-Jalalyan<sup>35</sup> made attempts, after the khanate of Karabagh became part of Russia in 1813, to recover lands owned by the monastery. During his prelate, at his suggestion and with the intercession of the Catholicos of All Armenians Nerses V,<sup>36</sup> viceroy of the Caucasus Mikhail Vorontsov

32 Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar, founder of Qajar dynasty of Iran, ruling from 1789-1797.

33 As a result of Turkish-Persian wars in 16-18th centuries, Eastern Armenia was passed to Iran. Yerevan khanate was established in Afsharid Iran in the 18th century, covered approximately 7,500 square miles, consisted of 15 mahals and was governed by various khans. The khanate existed until 1828 when it passed to Russian Empire, as a result of Russo-Persian war.

34 Karapetyan, *The Armenian Cultural Monuments*, 83.

35 Baghdasar Hasan-Jalalyan (1775-1854), Reverend at Gandzak's St. Hovhannes Church in 1798. In 1808 Reverend Baghdasar goes to Karabagh, Gandzasar, on the instructions of Sargis, the Catholicos of Aghvanq/Gandzasar. On November 13, 1830, Catholicos of All Armenians Ephraim grants Baghdasar the rank of Metropolitan, after which Baghdasar Hasan-Jalalyan takes over the leadership of Gandzasar Diocese.

36 Nerses V of Ashtarak (1770 – 13 February 1857). Catholicos of All Armenians 1843-1857. He served as prelate of the diocese of Georgia 1811-1830, then of the diocese of Bessarabia and Nor Nakhijevan from 1830 until his election as Catholicos in 1843.



*Figure 5. The two deliberately cut parts of Dadivank's khachkar (1182), which were established by Hasan Vakhtangyan (Source: Personal Archive of the Author, 13 Nov. 2020)*

arranged to have an investigation carried out and land with an area of 196,438 dessiatins [a dessiatin is equal to 1.09 hectare] was returned to the monastery. However, over time, some of it became disputed, and the monastery's ownership of some areas shrank.<sup>37</sup>

One of the problems was that it was difficult to get the tribes that had settled on the land to pay the 10% tithe for utilizing the monastery's land; the monastery's income therefore declined. According to a report dated 15th August 1909, the prelate of the diocese of Karabagh noted that:

The Armenian Diocese of Karabagh includes the whole of the Shushi, Jevanshir, Caryagino (Jebrayil), Nukhi and Aresh districts, parts of those of Gandzak and Zangezur, the town of Lankaran [Lenkoran] and the northern part of Zakatala. There are, in the whole of the diocese, 26,364 families, including 101,143 males and 88,857 females, a total of 190,000 people... The diocese of Karabagh has 221 churches and 9 monasteries, six of which are in use and three abandoned. The churches are generally bereft of any capital, while their yearly income is so little that they cannot even take care of the smallest expenses.

As for the land:

...the monastery of Khota [Dadivank] owns 45,997 dessiatins of land... This remained in the hands of the government for three years, then, when it was handed back in September 1906, the Turkish-Armenian clashes<sup>38</sup> had already started and no one was able to enter the lands inhabited by the Turks and Kurds, remained without governor being in charge.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Karapetyan, *The Armenian Cultural Monuments*, 84.

<sup>38</sup> Armenian-Tatar (at that time present Azerbaijanis did not have an ethnonym and were called Caucasian Tatars, Turks and so on) clashes occurred in 1905-1906 during the first Russian revolution. The clashes erupted in Baku, then spread in Yerevan, Nakhijevan, Yelizavetpol and Tiflis. Both sides experienced losses.

<sup>39</sup> National Archives of Armenia (NAA), collection 57, list 2, document 1851, page 2.



Figure 6. The Armenian inscription of 1224 on the western facade of the [Katoghike] Church of Dadivank Monastery (Source: Personal Archive of the Author, 13 Nov. 2020)



Figure 7. Armenian inscriptions (13th century) of the [Katoghike] Church of Dadivank Monastery (Source: Personal Archive of the Author, 13 Nov. 2020)

A letter was sent to the department of the printing house of the Mother See of Echmiadzin, dated 23 October 1912 and addressed to Catholicos Gevorg V,<sup>40</sup> requesting that he orders copies of the necessary church books to be sent to the Armenian population of the land belonging to the monastery of Khota which was under Echmiatsin's jurisdiction.<sup>41</sup>

Around 1910, Levon Mikayel Ter-Avetisyan was appointed as a land factor of the monastery-owned land, which improved the situation. In 1917, despite the animosity of the Turks and Kurds, he was able to recapture numerous summer pastures and other lands belonging to Dadivank monastery. However, with the establishment of Soviet rule in 1920, the monastery's lands were confiscated.<sup>42</sup> The monastery complex, having been

40 Gevorg V Surenyants (1847-1930), Catholicos of All Armenians 1911-1930. Bishop of Artsakh and assistant prelate in Aleksandropol (now Gyumri) in 1878 and in Yerevan in 1881. Appointed prelate and bishop of Astrakhan, Russia in 1886 and of Georgia in 1894.

41 NAA, col. 57, l. 2, doc. 1911, p. 5.

42 Karapetyan, *The Armenian Cultural Monuments*, 83-85.



*Figure 8. The two khachkars (1283) of the Bell Tower of Dadivank (Source: Research On Armenian Architecture Archive)*

forcibly annexed to Soviet Azerbaijan from 1920 until 1990, fell into a dilapidated state and gradually became ruined.

It had, until just before the first Artsakh war, been turned into a house and barn and used as such by a large Kurdish family. They had lit fires in the church itself to keep warm and, as a result, the walls were covered in soot. When rebuilding and restoration work began and the soot was cleaned off, marvelous frescos were revealed.<sup>43</sup>

Rev. Hovhannes Hovhannisyan, spiritual leader of the Karvachar region and abbot of Dadivank notes:

This was the reason why the Azerbaijanis didn't notice the frescos and, in the 1990s, during the Karabagh war for independence, didn't destroy them. When the Karvachar region and Dadivank were liberated on 3rd April 1993 and I was still abbot of Gandzasar, I was among the first to set foot inside the monastery. Entering it, I saw there was excreta everywhere, the walls were covered in soot and only about 8-10% of the frescos<sup>44</sup> could be seen.<sup>45</sup>

Rebuilding work began in 1997, alongside comprehensive research, which included historical, architectural and archaeological studies and cleaning activities.<sup>46</sup>

## Directions of Forced Appropriation (“Albanisation”) of Dadivank

### *The Origin of its Name*

Forgeries concerning Dadivank monastery begin with the origin of its name. For example, the Soviet Azerbaijani historian Davud Akhundov, in his Russian-language book titled “Azerbaijan’s ancient and medieval architecture” presents the name Dadivank as actually being Khashavank-Khotavank, explaining the origin of its name in the following way: “There were, living in the Artsakh-Khachen region, Caucasian Albanians, among whom were Udi people, whose language included the word ‘khash’ which had two meanings. One was moon and light, the other brightness.”<sup>47</sup>

The author noted that, according to Strabo, there were devotees of Helios, Zeus and Selene in Caucasian Albania. It apparently then followed that the most ancient site of worship was linked to that of unlimited light, in other words to the deities of Mithras and

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43 One of the frescoes depicts Jesus, who delivers the Gospel to Nicholas the Wonderworker. The Mother of God and Archangel Michael are also depicted. And the martyrdom of Stepanos by stoning is depicted on the northern façade. See Karapetyan, *The Armenian Cultural Monuments*, 124.

44 Dadivank’s frescoes were restored thanks to specialists Ara Zaryan and Christine Lamoureux from Italy.

45 «Դադիվանք. ինչպես ադրբեջանաբնակ բուրդը «փրկեց» Արցախի վանքի որմնանկարները» [Dadivank: How a Kurd Living in Azerbaijan “Saved” the Murals of the Artsakh Monastery], Armenian Sputnik, 19.09.2017, <https://armeniasputnik.am/karabah/20170918/8700975/arcax-dadivanq-ter-hovhannes-vorm-nankar.html>, accessed 25.02.2022.

46 Avvazyan, *The Restoration of the Monastery of Dad*, 18.

47 Davud Akhundov, *Архитектура древнего и ранне-средневекового Азербайджана* [Architecture of Ancient and Early-Medieval Azerbaijan] (Baku: Azerneshr, 1986), 195-196.

the moon. So, the place was called Khashavank, based on the Udi word 'khash'. This name, over a long period of time changed, becoming Khoshavank, Khotavank, Khatavank etc.<sup>48</sup> Another "esteemed" name was suggested by Doctor of Architecture, Professor Gyulchokhra Mamedova who noted that there is a simpler explanation: "Khuda" meaning God and "vanik" meaning place, thus making Khudavank to mean "God's house".<sup>49</sup>

Azerbaijani scholars thus even falsified the monastery's name attempting, in every way, to "Albanise" the Armenian monastic complex, hiding the name's real origin which was the preacher Dadi's name.

### *Christianity and Armenisation*

According to Azerbaijani historiography, it must be completely accepted that Christianity was firmly entrenched within the borders of the "Albanian-Azerbaijani" state. According to Azerbaijani side, the "Albanian-Azerbaijani" Christian church existed for a very long time (until 1836)<sup>50</sup> as one of the most ancient churches, not only in that region, but in the whole of the Christian world. In the words of Azerbaijani historians, Christian evangelists and their students spread from Jerusalem and Assyria from the 1st to the 2nd centuries to "Albania-Azerbaijan" and created the first Christian communities there. It was noted that, within the Republic of Azerbaijan's territories, Christian churches built during the 18th and 19th centuries were constructed on the foundations of ancient "Albanian-Azerbaijani" ones. Thus, from the middle of the 7th century, as a result of the Arab invasions, the people living on the plains of the region accepted Islam, while those living in the mountains preserved their Christian faith.<sup>51</sup>

According to Azerbaijani historiography, the population of Mountainous Karabagh was Albanians and their transition to Armenian Apostolic Church's creed and Armenisation was a long process, which is displayed as follows.

- The indigenous people of Karabagh, like those of northern Azerbaijan (Albania) apparently were Albanian tribes;
- Christianity spread, at the beginning of the 4th century, through certain areas of Albania, including Mountainous Karabagh;
- During the Arab occupation in the 7th to 9th centuries, Islam spread, but the Albanians who lived in the mountainous regions of Karabagh remained Christian;
- Armenian Apostolic Church missionaries, emigrating to the Southern Caucasus, began to convert the indigenous population to the Armenian Church then to make them into Armenians;

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48 Ibid.

49 Gyulchokhra Mamedova, "Албанские памятники Тертерского ущелья" [Albanian Monuments of Terter Gorge], *Zodchestvo* 4-5, nos. 28-29 (2007): 60.

50 Indeed, in 1836, Tsarist Russia dissolved the Albanian/Gandzasar Catholicate, but even before that, the name of the Catholicate "Albanian/Aghvanits" had an abstract character, and only ethnic Armenians carried out spiritual activities in the Catholicate.

51 Yunis Hüseyinov, *Qarabağ* [Karabagh] (Baku: Afpoliqraf, 2018), 144.



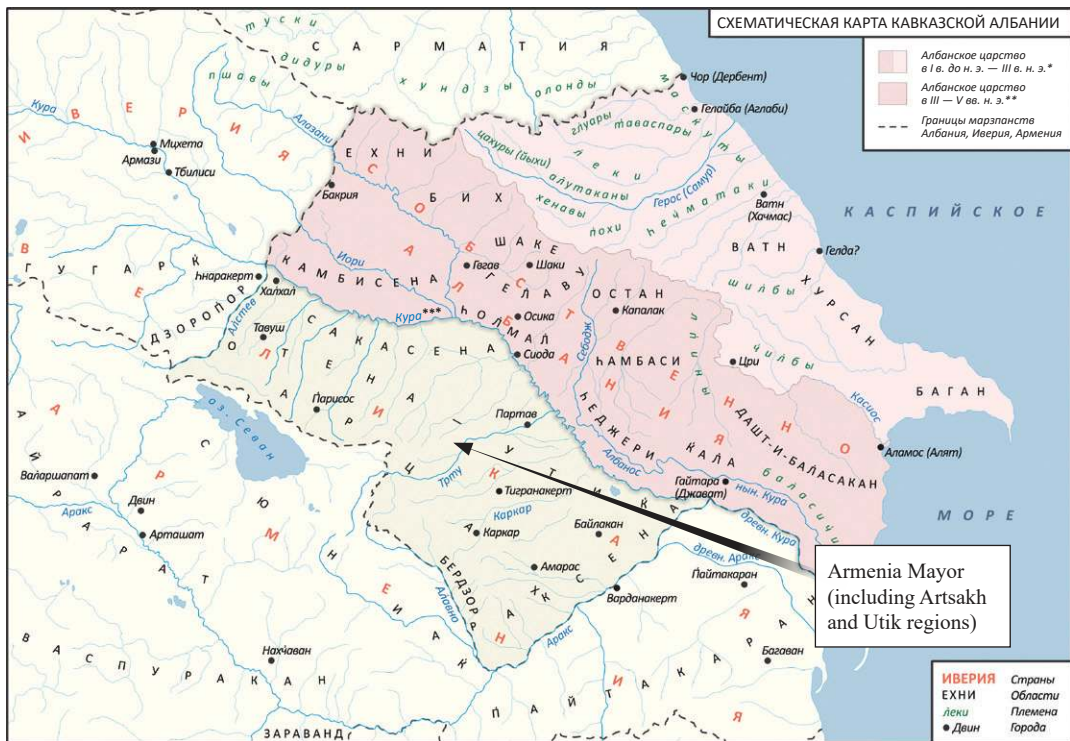


Figure 9. Caucasian Albania and Armenian Artsakh and Utik regions (Source: Personal Archive of Dr. Aleksan Hakobyan)

- \* Albanian Kingdom I BC- III AD
- \*\* Albanian Kingdom III AD-V AD
- \*\*\* Kura River

- The Christian population of the Karabagh highlands called themselves Albanians in a letter sent to Peter the Great, proving that they did not think of themselves as Armenians until the beginning of the 18th century.<sup>52</sup>

This is how Azerbaijani scholars now present the people of Artsakh as having Caucasian Albanian origins, something that bears no relation to the truth. The truth is that at the beginning of the 5th century, in 428, the Persian state created a satrapy<sup>53</sup> of which the Proper Albania,<sup>54</sup> Armenian Utik<sup>55</sup> and Artsakh regions were a part, with the catch-all name of Albania (Fig. 9). This name, in the following centuries, was used in different sources for the above-mentioned Armenian regions, while the real Caucasian Albania, which was a divided area made up of different tribes, was denied from a unified

52 Yagub Mahmudov, Karim Shukurov, *Qarabağ: Real tarix, faktlar, sənədlər* [Garabagh: Real History, Facts, Documents] (Baku: Tehsil, 2005), 34.

53 A province governed by a satrap, who had considerable autonomy.

54 Caucasian or Proper Albania was located in the left bank of the Kur River, while Armenian Utik and Artsakh provinces were located of the right bank of the river.

55 Utik, 12th province of Armenia Maior. Presently is a part of Armenia and Azerbaijan.

government and had various names: Lpnik, Baghasakan and Land of Mazquts. As the various satrapies were divided from each other and the Catholicossate in central Armenia was not able to completely oversee the religious dioceses of Artsakh and Utik, the Armenian Church's Catholicossate of Caucasian Albania became firmly established (the diocese had been established as a bishopric by St. Gregory the Illuminator at the beginning of the 4th century) and preserved the spiritual life of the Armenian people of the region.

The centre of the Albanian Catholicossate moved, in 551 or 552, from the left bank of Kura River to the right, the newly constructed seat of the satrapy Partav and Abas, the bishop of the province of Metsarank (Metsirank), was ordained as its spiritual leader. The clerics that followed him were consecrated by the Armenian church's Mother See.<sup>56</sup> Thus the Christian people of the satrapy of Caucasian Albania or Arran were subject to the Albanian church, which was under the jurisdiction of the Armenian Catholicossate and social and cultural development progressed in a united way. But in the 6th century, when Albania's spiritual and administrative centres moved to Partav, an ethnically Armenian area of the Kura River, the region's Christian population's development mainly continued based on Armenian written culture, while the Caucasian Albanian alphabet created by Mesrop Mashtots and the Albanian archimandrite Benyamin only enjoyed limited development.

During the period of Arab rule, in the century when Islam was being spread, the part of the Albanian people that remained Christian coalesced into a single ethnos, the self-named "Udi" people. The majority that had converted to Islam became a people that called themselves "Lezgis".<sup>57</sup> At that time, however, the Azerbaijani ethnic group did not really exist.

The "Catholicossate of Caucasian Albania" was, at various periods of the Middle Ages, subject to the Catholicos of All Armenians of Echmiadzin and received confirmation of its pastoral letters from him. Despite retaining the historic name "Albania" as a traditionally acceptable name, the Catholicossate and the whole diocese never ascribed an ethnic content to it and retained it solely to delineate the diocese's area. As for the population of the region, various Georgian, Perso-Turkish, Russian, and western European sources note that during the 17th-18th centuries the population of Karabagh was a homogeneous ethnically Armenian people. Some changes to the ethnic composition of the population of Karabagh began in the middle of the 16th century, when certain Turkish and Kurdish tribes were resettled in the area by the Safavids and for whom "the patriotism of Iranians or Azerbaijanis" were foreign (Ilia Petrushevski), thus, they didn't form one ethnic group or polity.<sup>58</sup>

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56 See, for example, Bagrat Ulubabyan, *Արցախի պատմությունը սկզբից մինչև մեր օրերը* [The History of Artsakh from the Beginning to the Present Days] (Yerevan: M. Varandian, 1994), 36-37.

57 Aleksan Hakobyan, *Արքայատոհմերն ու իշխանատոհմերը Բուն Աղվանքում և Հայոց Արևելից Կողմանքում սնտրիկից մինչև ԺԳ դար* [The Royal and Princery Houses of Proper Albania and Eastern Regions of Armenia from Antiquity to the 13th Century] (Yerevan: Gitutyun, 2020), 5-6.

58 Artashes Shahnazaryan, «Գիտական նստաշրջան՝ նվիրված Կովկասյան Աղվանքի պատմության և մշակույթի խնդիրներին» [Scientific Session Dedicated to the Problems of the History and Culture of the Caucasian Albania], *Lraber hasarakakan gitutyunneri* 7 (1988): 100-101.

### *Cross-stones and Inscriptions*

Armenian cross-stones are also targets for Azerbaijani forgery. This is especially true of the abovementioned Davud Akhundov, who has created a new term “khachdash”<sup>59</sup> (stone-cross) and then added differences with the Albanian khachdash (stone-khach), the Islamic “bashdash”<sup>60</sup> (bash-stone) and the Armenian “khachkar”<sup>61</sup> (cross-stone), noting that although they were different from one another externally, they were the same in terms of content with their universal models (the celestial, earth and underground spheres). He wrote, “...But if there is a tree of life shown on the khachdash (stone-khach), the picture of the cross disappears in the decorative forms, often splitting up into several small crosses, which differentiates them from those that are Armenian.”<sup>62</sup> He then adds that “...There are two interesting Albanian cross-stones in “Khashavank” on which, as godly symbols of Ahura-Mithras, are entwined with Christian symbols, which may only be seen in Caucasian Albanian architecture.”<sup>63</sup>

The Azerbaijani authors Davud and Murad Akhundovs, at the beginning presented their “new entries” at the 4th International symposium of Georgian art held in Tbilisi in 1983. Their paper was titled “The cultural symbols and the image of the world reflected on the temples and shrines of Caucasian Albania.” This was subjected to a critical appraisal by Dr. Anatoly Yakobson, who pointed out the incorrect depictions made by the Akhundovs concerning Albanian history, their false, manufactured Mithras-devotion symbolism which, however, seemed to have no effect on the Azerbaijani historians and on those who continued their “work”.<sup>64</sup>

Two years later, in an All-Union archaeology congress held in Baku in 1985, Akhundov, in his paper,<sup>65</sup> tried to demonstrate that carved stone crosses apparently found in Azerbaijan were Albanian and were the cultural heritage of a pre-Islamic Christian state located in eastern Transcaucasia. The paper presented by an apparently innocent young Azerbaijani was actually a political insinuation, with all the known cross-stones throughout Azerbaijan, including those in Mountainous Karabagh and Nakhijevan, being seen as Albanian and the latter as the Azerbaijanis’ ancestors. The Armenian archaeologists, despairing, threatened to leave the congress, protests were even made by Russian scholars from Leningrad (St. Petersburg), who protested at the manifestly political

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59 “Khach” is in Armenian – cross, while “dash” is in Azerbaijani – stone.

60 “Bash” is in Azerbaijani – head, while “dash” is in Azerbaijani – stone.

61 “Khach” is in Armenian – cross, and “kar” is in Armenian – stone.

62 Akhundov, *Architecture of Ancient and Early-Medieval Azerbaijan*, 203-204.

63 Ibid., 207.

64 Babken Arakelyan, Artsruni Sahakyan, «Խաչքարերը հակազիտական խեղաթյուրումների առարկա» [Cross-stones as Object of Unscientific Distortions], *Lraber hasarakakan gituyunneri* 7 (1986): 41.

65 Davud Akhundov, “Отличительные черты и символические особенности стел Кавказской Албании,” *Всесоюзная археологическая конференция “Достижения советской археологии в XI пятилетке”* [“Distinctive Features and Symbolic Features of the Steles of Caucasian Albania,” in *All-Union Archaeological Conference “Achievements of Soviet Archeology in the XI Five-Year Plan”*], eds. V. Shilov, J. Khalilov (Baku: Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the AzSSR (1985): 77-78.

nature of this attempt of cultural appropriation.<sup>66</sup> In reply to the Akhundovs' falsehoods, Armenian scholars noted that, in the general cultural study, it had long been established that, in many human cultures, beginning with our earliest farming ancestors, a universal model had appeared, comprising three parts, of which the most widespread and expressed was the universal tree. "The three-part edifice, thus, is not a national phenomenon, but a phenomenon of human thinking in general."<sup>67</sup>

In the scientific session with the theme of "Issues of Caucasian Albanian history and culture" held on 30 June 1988, cultural studies scholar Hamlet Petrosyan, in his paper titled "Artsakh's medieval monuments," referring to the question of ethno-cultural belonging of the khachkars of Artsakh, noted, "At the time when cross-stones were being developed, there was a particular denationalising and pro-Islamic movement in Artsakh, which could not lead to the appearance of khachkars, nor to the appearance of even their distant counterparts."<sup>68</sup>

The architect Murad Hasratyan also noted that Rashid Geyushev, Davud Akhundov and those who continued their work, contrary to historical facts, lithographic information and architectural features, declared the monasteries and churches of Artsakh and their depictive carvings and frescos, to be Albanian, trying intentionally alienate from Armenian culture.<sup>69</sup>

Azerbaijani scholars are, presently, adding that no Armenian cross-stones or inscriptions had been found in Karabagh until 1992, that there was no evidence that there have been any Armenian churches in the region and that Armenian churches had only begun to be constructed in the 1970s.<sup>70</sup>

These new "discoveries" made by Azerbaijani scholars produce real amazement as, in the Karabagh region, hundreds of Armenian churches and monasteries exist, noted and documented not just by Armenian researchers, but also by foreign scholars, who presented, clearly, their ancient history and that they are Armenian.<sup>71</sup> Nothing was ever mentioned about them being Albanian before the Soviet era, when Azerbaijani scholars decided to appropriate Mountainous Karabagh and its culture. Azerbaijani researchers also blame Armenians that manuscripts found in Caucasian Albanian churches had been translated by

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66 Kohl and Tsetskhladze, "Nationalism, politics," 154.

67 Arakelyan, Sahakyan, "Cross-stones as Object of Unscientific Distortions," 41.

68 Shahnazaryan, "Scientific Session," 99-100.

69 Ibid., 99.

70 Faig Ismayilov, *Historical and Cultural Monuments in the Occupied Territories of Azerbaijan: Damage and Loss* (Baku: Elm ve tehsil, 2016), 63-64.

71 See, for example, Anatoly Yakobson, "Из истории армянского средневекового зодчества (Гандзасарский монастырь XIII в.)" [From the History of Armenian Medieval Architecture (Gandzasar Monastery of the 13th century)], *Lraber hasarakakan gitutyunneri* 12 (1977): 59-76; Lidia Durnovo, *Очерки изобразительного искусства средневековой Армении* [Essays on the Fine Arts of Medieval Armenia] (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1979); Jean-Michel Thierry, Murad Hasratyan, "Dadivank' en Arc'ax," *Revue des Etudes Arméniennes* 16 (1982): 259-287; Murad Hasratyan, Jean-Michel Thierry, "Le Couvent de Ganjasar," *Revue des Etudes Arméniennes* 15 (1981): 289-316.

Armenians into Armenian, and then burnt the originals and changed the inscriptions of the churches too. Such churches are, apparently those of "...the architectural complex of the monastery of Khudavank built in the 13th century in Kelbajar, the Urek temple [actually Horeka – H.M.] in Talish<sup>72</sup>, Amaras<sup>73</sup> etc."<sup>74</sup>

Thus, Azerbaijani researchers reproach the Armenians with the very thing they are doing with government patronage. It is important to recall that in the church at Nizh (Fig. 10),<sup>75</sup> which really was Albanian, its Armenian inscriptions were erased (Fig. 11, 12), using the pretence of rebuilding it, leading to the foreign ambassadors to Azerbaijan refusing to attend its reopening in 2004. The Norwegian Ambassador of the time, Steinar Gil, basing his words on the previous attempt [the destruction of the cross-stones in Julfa/Jugha] (Fig. 13, 14) said "I am worried because Azerbaijan has a sad reputation related to Armenian religious monuments," testifying that all the Armenian monasteries and churches are being completely Albanised, without considering their construction dates.<sup>76</sup>

The Azerbaijanis also insist that several names inscribed on the walls of Dadivank monastery, such as Arzu Khatun, Tursun, Seyti, Hasan, Avag, Shams, Altun, Aghbuh, Garagoz etc., should be considered to be one of the most accurate evidence of their ethnic origins – Turkic identity. "Direct relations to Azerbaijan's Muslim architecture are clearly felt as well in numerous stone-carving decorations of the site," an Azerbaijani author wrote.<sup>77</sup> But the answer to this question is very clear. The non-Armenian and non-Christian names that were used throughout Artsakh and the other regions of Armenia were "imported" from outside – from Iran and, later, via the Arab khalifate – through the influence of foreign cultural environments. Practically all the lay individuals who were active in those times have been so named, but it must be stressed that those same rulers' (for example the ruling family of Upper Khachen) spiritual brothers never ever forsook their Armenian names, and succeeded each other, such as Hovhannes and Krikor.<sup>78</sup> The history of Artsakh clearly shows that the princes who were christened with foreign names were actually very patriotic and increasingly defended the Armenians of the region against foreign conquerors and were the founders of many churches and monasteries, preserving the Christian faith in Artsakh.

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72 Talish is a village in Martakert province of Artsakh, presently under the occupation of Azerbaijan.

73 Amaras monastery is located in Martuni province of Artsakh, was founded in the 4th century by Gregory the Illuminator. In the 5th century Mesrop Mashtots, the founder of the Armenian alphabet, opened the first school of Artsakh in Amaras.

74 Ismayilov, *Historical and Cultural Monuments*, 13.

75 Gabala region, Republic of Azerbaijan.

76 Thomas de Vaal, "Perspectives, Now Comes a Karabagh War Over Cultural Heritage," *Eurasianet*, 16.11.2020, <https://eurasianet.org/perspectives-now-comes-a-Karabagh-war-over-cultural-heritage>, accessed 15.11.2021.

77 Qarabağ- İrsimizin Əbədi Yaddaşı [Karabagh – The Eternal Memory of our Heritage] (Baku: Rəqəmli dövr, 2008), 162.

78 Ulubabayan, *The History of Artsakh*, 70-71.



**Steinar Gil**

21 November 2020 at 19:19 · 🌐

Azerbaijan's First Deputy Minister of Culture Anar Karimov has produced a video of the St. Elisaeus church in Nij (see link below). This church was built in 1823 and belonged to the Albanian Eparchy of the Armenian Apostolic Church. The church was restored in the beginning of this century with the financial assistance of the Norwegian Humanitarian Enterprise. In December 2004, before the restoration was finished, Armenian inscriptions on the tympanum and on tombstones outside the church were erased. The third picture below was taken by me after the erasure. At a later stage a cross was placed on the tympanum. The authorities were informed about the erasure of the inscriptions, but nobody has been brought to account for this vandalism. [https://twitter.com/Anar\\_Karim/status/132948405940089603?s=20](https://twitter.com/Anar_Karim/status/132948405940089603?s=20)



Figure 10

Figure 10. The reaction of the Ambassador of Norway in Azerbaijan (2002-2006) Steinar Gil, regarding Armenian inscriptions of St. Elyseus Church in Nij [Nizh], Gabala (Azerbaijan)

Figure 11. St. Elysaesus Church in Nij, Gabala (Azerbaijan), Armenian Inscriptions were erased after “Restoration” by Azerbaijan in 2004 (Source: Armenian National Commission for UNESCO)

Figure 12. St. Elysaesus Church in Nij, Gabala (Azerbaijan), Armenian inscriptions were erased after “Restoration” by Azerbaijan in 2004 (Source: Armenian National Commission for UNESCO)



**Anar Karimov** 🇦🇿

@Anar\_Karim

In the framework of our project “Let’s get to know our Christian heritage” we present 19th century Albanian-Udi Church of Saint Elyseus in Nij, Gabala. Renovated in 2004 the church is used by local small Udi community

Traduire le Tweet



3633 vues

21:57 · 19 11 20 · Twitter for iPhone

Figure 11



Nij village, Qabala (Kutkashe) region, Azerbaijan. St. Yeghishe (Elisha) Church and two inscriptions carved on its southern entrance tympanum in commemoration of its thorough restoration carried out by the efforts of Priest Astvatzatur Jodaniants in the 1840s (Photo of 1985). The inscriptions were completely scraped away during restoration work in the early 2000s.

Figure 12

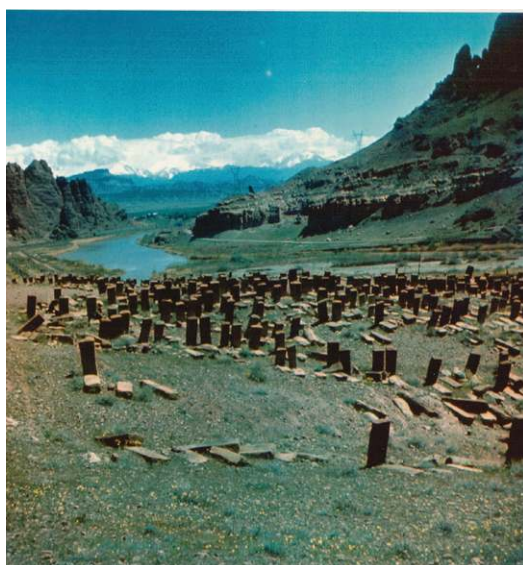


Figure 13. Armenian Medieval Gravestones in Jughha, Nakhijevan (Azerbaijan) (Source: Argam Ayvazyan Digital Archive)



Figure 14. Azerbaijani Soldiers Destroying Armenian Gravestones in Jughha, Nakhijevan in 2005 (Source: Argam Ayvazyan Digital Archive)

### *The Appropriation of Armenian Historians and Literature*

An Azerbaijani author Farida Mamedova, in her book titled “Caucasian Albania and the Albanians” published in 2005 states, in the very first paragraph:

The Azerbaijani people were formed from three powerful ethno-cultural groups: Caucasian (Albanian), Persian (Medes, Kurds, Talish and Tats) and Turkish. The Azerbaijani and Daghestani peoples are the descendants of the Albanians, being the heirs of three powerful ethno-cultural groups, with a rich Albanian culture, which is reflected in material and spiritual culture, from the earliest days to the most recent times. The creation of the sovereign Republic of Azerbaijan provided the opportunity to return to one of its roots – its Albanian origin – and the Albanian studies to be passed to its real heirs and owners.<sup>79</sup>

Azerbaijani historians, in this way, leaving aside their own history and taking that of other nations, present themselves as the heirs of one of the ancient peoples, the Caucasian Albanians. It is necessary, once more, to remind Azerbaijani historians that the Azerbaijani identity was created during the Soviet years, within the Azerbaijani SSR, legitimizing it at the expense of Media, Atropatene, Caucasian Albania and historic

<sup>79</sup> Farida Mamedova, *Кавказская Албания и Албаны* [Caucasian Albania and Albanians] (Baku: Tsentr Issledovaniy Kavkazskoi Albanii, 2005), 3-4.

regions of Armenia – Utik, Artsakh and Nakhichevan, falsifying or appropriating their history and culture.<sup>80</sup>

The Turkish speaking Muslim people that lived in the Eastern Caucasus until the 1930s, were known as Muslims, Caucasian Tatars, Caucasian Turks and other similar names and it was only in the 1939 census that the ethnic name “Azerbaijanian” began to be used.<sup>81</sup> Concerning the name “The Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan,” created in 1918, the name was taken from the Iranian province of Atropatene<sup>82</sup>, in future to demand territory from Iran as well. The famous Russian oriental scholar Vasily Bartol’d, in one of his lectures delivered in November-December 1924 in the Faculty of Oriental Studies of the Azerbaijan State University noted, “To the territory that is now known as the Republic of Azerbaijan, previously known as Arran (Caucasian Albania) – was given the name Azerbaijan, thinking that, when the new state is created, Persian [territory Atropatene] and the new Azerbaijan would become one state.”<sup>83</sup>

Therefore, he notes, when talking about Azerbaijan, confusion arises and the question emerges as to which Azerbaijan we mean.

Farida Mamedova’s second falsehood is that she presents the 9th-10th century Armenian historian Movses Kaghankatvatsi (Dashkhurantsi) as being Caucasian Albanian. She states that the Armenian church apparently appropriated the manuscript of his “History of Albania” and subjected it to major changes, translating it into classical Armenian, aiming to take ownership of Albania’s history, literature and culture, then to spread this version and copies of it. The same accusation is levelled at the 7th century Armenian poet Davtak Qertogh, with regard to his elegy on the death of Javanshir, prince of Albania, which was, apparently, written in the Albanian alphabet of 19 letters [19 letters of 52] but, through false translation had become Armenian, with its 36 letters.<sup>84</sup> There is no logic in this as, if it had been written as an acrostic text, why did Davtak chose only

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80 Hamlet Petrosyan, “Ethnocide in Artsakh: The Mechanisms of Azerbaijan’s Usurpation of Indigenous Armenian Cultural Heritage,” in *Cultural Heritage: Experience & Perspectives in International Context. ROCHEMP 1st Annual International Conference. 23-24, January, 2020*, ed. Ani Avagyan (Yerevan: National Gallery of Armenia, 2020), 79.

81 Tamara Vardanyan, «Արրբեջանցիներ. ինքնության փնտրությունը հետխորհրդային շրջանում» [Azerbaijanis: The Search for Identity in The Post-Soviet Period], *21-rd Dar* 3 (2013): 75.

82 “Azerbaijan – or Adherbaijan – land of fire; (in Pahlavi Aturpatkan, in Armenian Aderpadekan), the most north western province and the richest trading and manufacturing province of Persia, bordering to the south by Persian Kurdistan (Ardalan) and Irak-Adjemi (Media), in the west by Turkish Kurdistan and Turkish Armenia, in the north by Russian Armenia (South Caucasus) from which it is separated by the [River] Arax and to the east by the Russian region of Talish and the Persian Province of Gilan by the Caspian Sea.” *Russian Encyclopaedic Dictionary* (Saint Petersburg: Brockhaus & Efron, 1890), Vol. 1, 212, cited in Rouben Galichian, *Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkey: Addressing Paradoxes of Culture Geography and History* (Yerevan: Zangak, 2019), 22-23.

83 Vasily Bartol’d, *Сочинения. Том 2. Часть 1. Общие работы по истории Средней Азии, Работы по истории Кавказа и Восточной Европы* [Writings. Vol. 2, Part 1. General Works on the History of Central Asia, Works on the History of the Caucasus and Eastern Europe] (Moscow: Izdatelstvo vostochnoj literature, 1963), 703.

84 Mamedova, *Caucasian Albania and Albanians*, 738.



19 characters of the Albanian alphabet, rather than the full 52? Even Azerbaijani scholars don't have a common opinion on this issue, as, before Farida Mamedova's statement, Ziya Buniatov had presented Davtak's elegy as being written on the basis of using all 52 letters of the Albanian alphabet and had accused the Armenians of changing it to suit the Armenian 36 letter alphabet. Armenian scholars have, long since, provided a definitive answer to this.<sup>85</sup>

The works of the medieval Armenian historians Mkhitar Gosh, Hetum and Kirakos Gandzaketsi have been treated in the same way. On this occasion, concerning so-called "Albanian literature" of the 12th-13th centuries, Dr. Prof. Paruyr Muradyan noted that this is an obvious sham, as the Albanian people had ceased to be an ethnic entity a very long time before, while Artsakh had never been populated by ethnic tribes collectively known as "Albanians". Mkhitar Gosh, Kirakos Gandzaketsi and the other medieval Armenian historians had only ever created works in the Armenian language and for the benefit of Armenians and have written about their ethnic origins and the culture they belonged to in their own works.<sup>86</sup>

Under the guaranty of the editing-publishing council of the Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan in 1986, the "ELM" publishing house in Baku published Farida Mamedova's monograph "Политическая история и историческая география Кавказской Албании (III в. до н. э. – VIII в. н. э.)" [Political history and historical geography of Caucasian Albania (III century BC – VIII century AD)], which was defended as a second PhD. The book's editor was Member of Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan Ziya Buniatov. The book contained completely distorted facts and anti-scientific analysis, which provoked protests from scientific circles of Armenia. In the six maps of the monograph, Farida Mamedova extended the Caucasian Albanian borders from Derbend to the Araxes valley and as far as half of Lake Sevan. This was, according to Albert Musheghyan, a senior researcher of the Institute of Literature of the National Academy of Sciences of Armenia, nothing more than a copy of the map of "United Azerbaijan" published in the second volume of "Encyclopedia of Islam" (between pages 112 and 113) in Istanbul in 1944. This was followed by the official reply sent to Dr. Musheghyan by Andrey Nikolayevich Sakharov, deputy director of the Institute of History of the USSR of the Academy of Sciences of USSR. Its content is so informative that I considered presenting it here:

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85 If Davtak was an Albanian poet and his acrostic poem had been written in Albanian, then why was it composed on the basis of the 36 letters of the Armenian alphabet and not using the 52 letters of Albanian, when the letters of the latter were arranged in a different order? Again, if it had been written in Albanian, then the order of the letters would have been in accordance with that alphabet, not in that of the Armenian. Is it also possible to accurately translate an acrostic poem from one language to the other, retaining the same letter order? For more details see Asatur Mnatsakanyan, Paruyr Sevak, "По поводу книги З. Буниатова 'Азербайджан в VII-IX вв.'" [About the Book of Ziya Buniatova "Azerbaijan in VII-IX centuries"], *Patmabanasirakan handes* 1 (1967): 183.

86 Shahnazaryan, "Scientific Session," 99.

F. Mamedova, in the abovementioned book, has taken it upon herself to research all aspects of Caucasian Albanian medieval history, but her aim and means resulted in distinct contradictions, as the author has dealt with materials, on which she has only superficial knowledge. This refers to both historic geography and those maps which you invite examination of in your letter. Apart from that, she has ignored sufficiently well-researched facts, by which the overwhelming majority of Soviet oriental scholars (K. V. Trever, S. T. Eremyan, A. P. Novoseltsev and others) had the opportunity to confirm that a united Albanian nation did not exist. The right-bank [of the River Kura] part of the population was Armenized at least in the 5th century, the other part, as shown by A. P. Novoseltsev, V. T. Pashuto, L. V. Cherepnin in the book “The ways to develop feudalism” (Moscow, 1972), spoke different languages. The name “Albanians” was collective for that ethnic population. The descendants of certain tribes living on the left bank of the river, the Udis, Khinalughs, and others, live in Azerbaijan and Georgia to this day.

It should be noted that, in the book by the three famous Soviet historians, the influx of ethnically Turkish tribes was, until the 11th century, insignificant. From the time of the creation of the Albanian satrapy – the 5th century – the term “Albanians” was not an ethnic name, but a political one, meaning the inhabitants of that satrapy subject to the Albanian church’s jurisdiction. Ignoring those proofs that are well known to experts, forces F. Mamedova to extend her conclusions concerning the people living on the left bank of Kura River to include those living on the right bank, leading her to make unfortunate errors.

The alphabet created by Mesrop Mashtots for the Albanians (before 428 AD) was, obviously, for one of the Albanian tribes. Nevertheless, no written Albanian monument has reached us.<sup>87</sup> As for the cultural environment of the right bank – [it] was Armenian, and the works produced there were written in Armenian. The term “Albania” is historical-geographic one.

Instead of these real proofs, F. Mamedova’s book describes a fictitious Caucasian Albania (of the 11th-13th centuries) with its culture. In reality the culture wasn’t Albanian but Armenian and those bearing it were Armenians living on the right bank of the Kura River. It is for that reason that it is so ludicrous that one of the greatest Armenian cultural figures, the writer, theologian, and jurist Mkhitar Gosh, the author of the “Datastanagirk” (Book of Law) as well as, to the same extent, his students, are made out to be “Albanian”.

F. Mamedova declares, without any basis whatsoever, that the well-known historian Kirakos Gandzaketsi, author of “The History of the Armenians,” as well as other 11th-13th century representatives of Armenian culture to be “Albanians”. F. Mamedova’s book contains a few errors of other types as well. She detaches Nakhchavan<sup>88</sup> and Goghtn from

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87 It was only in 1996 that two Georgian palimpsest manuscripts with an Albanian text on their lower layers were found in the monastery of St. Catherine on Mt. Sinai. Zaza Aleksidze, “Preliminary Account on the Identification and Deciphering of the Caucasian Albanian Manuscript Discovered on Mount Sinai,” <https://armazi.uni-frankfurt.de/sinai/prelacc.htm>, accessed 12.03.2022.

88 Nakhchavan is the name used by Azeris for Nakhijevan.

Vaspurakan<sup>89</sup> and attaches those provinces to Syunik, then removes Syunik from Armenia and gives it to Albania. F. Mamedova's efforts to arbitrarily interpret the cultural heritage of the Armenian people and the invention of the non-existent Albanian culture of the 11th-13th centuries force us to be highly critical of her book, which does not contribute to the mutual understanding of the historians and the societies of the two Transcaucasian republics, Armenia and Azerbaijan.<sup>90</sup>

It should also be noted that a map of Azerbaijani architectural monuments was published in 1980 in Moscow, prepared by Azerbaijani experts. Of the 101 monuments on the map, only two were represented as being Christian churches of the early Middle Ages, which, however, were located in north-west of Azerbaijan, close to the border with Georgia. But in Mountainous Karabagh and the areas around it even the monastery of Gandzasar was missing. In other words, historic Azerbaijan was portrayed to tourists as a purely Muslim country, despite the fact that Azerbaijani scholars have spent decades attempting to trace the origins of Azerbaijanis back to Christian Albanians.<sup>91</sup>

## **The Tools Used by Azerbaijan for the Forced Appropriation of Armenian Dadivank After the Second Artsakh War**

The Azerbaijani historiography gained new traction after the Second Artsakh War (September-November 2020), to the theory of "Albanisation" of Nagorno-Karabagh's Armenian heritage, when Azerbaijan took control of territories containing a large number of Armenian historical and cultural monuments, bringing Armenians new fears of the cultural genocide already implemented by the Republic of Azerbaijan.

The Azerbaijani government, after the end of the war, quickly announced several medieval churches – among them Dadivank – as being Albanian. To reinforce their position, they requested assistance from the Orthodox churches in Turkey, Syria, Egypt, Israel and the Ukraine.<sup>92</sup> The President of Azerbaijan also announced their intention to remove Armenian inscriptions from the churches' walls which, apparently, were bogus and to "reinstate" their former appearance.<sup>93</sup>

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89 Vaspurakan was the 8th province of Armenia Maior, which included Nakhijevan and Goghtn provinces as well. Presently it is divided between Turkey, Iran and Azerbaijan.

90 «Պաշտոնական պատասխան» [Official Response], *Գրական թերթ* [Grakan t'ert'], N 88 (2849), 14 August 1987, 4.

91 Shnirelman, *Wars of Memory*, 209-210.

92 Javid Agha, "Perspectives. Who were the Caucasian Albanians?" *Eurasianet*, 07.06.2021, <https://eurasianet.org/perspectives-who-were-the-caucasian-albanians>, accessed 05.03.2022.

93 President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev's Address to the Nation, 25.11.2020, <https://mincom.gov.az/en/view/news/1066/president-of-azerbaijan-ilham-aliyev-addressed-the-nation>, accessed 15.03.2022. Qədim Alban məbədinə saxta tarix [A Fake History in an Ancient Albanian Temple], 16.03.2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R4nsAN1yOoc>, accessed 07.05. 2022.

Thus, from November 2020 onwards, the Azerbaijani side began the practical implementation round of “Albanisation” of the Armenian historic-cultural monuments, which today take many forms. Four of these forms will be analysed below: propaganda in social media, making Azerbaijan’s Udi minority a part of Azerbaijan’s frauds, scientific activities and cultural events.

### *Propaganda in Social Media*

During and after the 44-day Artsakh war, Armenian and Azerbaijani social media such as Facebook, Twitter and Telegram were very active, due to which news was swiftly available to many foreign social media users. Anar Karimov, the Minister of Culture of the Republic of Azerbaijan, tweeted on 11 November 2020, shortly after the Armenia-Azerbaijan-Russia statement<sup>94</sup>, that, “Khudavang monastery is one of the best testimonies of ancient Caucasian Albania civilization. Built in 9-13th century by wife of Albanian prince Vakhtang in Kalbajar region of Azerbaijan, this complex is composed of Church of Arzu Khatun, Church of Hasan, basilica and 2 chapels.”<sup>95</sup>

Thousands of users, ranging from government officials to scholars and radio program producers, shared this and other similar tweets with the hashtag #Xudavəng alongside accusations of “Armenian forgeries”.

After the war, from 17 November 2020, pictures were circulated on social media by Azerbaijani users, which claimed that Azerbaijani soldiers discovered a place where Armenian cross-stones were being manufactured and then set up in various places of Karabagh.<sup>96</sup> It soon became obvious that the cross-stones shown were those at the Sevan monastery,<sup>97</sup> which had simply “become” victims of false Azerbaijani news. All this proves that Azerbaijani officials and ordinary social media users have inserted their historians’ forgeries into the internet, continuing the distortion of history and trying to gain some sort of advantage on different social platforms. Apart from that, the State Service for the Protection, Development and Restoration of Cultural Heritage attached to the Ministry of Culture of Azerbaijan, has created a website ([heritage.gov.az](http://heritage.gov.az)), which apparently presents to the international public “Armenian vandalism” toward Azerbaijani monuments of Karabagh. Books about the “Azerbaijani cultural heritage” in Mountainous Karabagh are published periodically, while Azerbaijan’s Minister of Culture states that all this is done for information warfare in order to present the “truth” to the public.<sup>98</sup>

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94 Statement of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia and the President of the Russian Federation, 10 November 2020, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/64384>, accessed 10.04.2022.

95 Azerbaijan’s Minister of Culture Anar Karimov’s Official Twitter Account, 11 November 2020, [https://twitter.com/Anar\\_Karim/status/1326437397270310912](https://twitter.com/Anar_Karim/status/1326437397270310912), accessed 15.05.2022.

96 Twitter Account of Gulmammad Mammadov, 17 November 2020, <https://mobile.twitter.com/gulmammad/status/1328735592428023810>, accessed 12.03.2022.

97 Azerbaijani Social Media Spreads Story of Khachkar Forgeries, The Aragats Foundation, 28 November 2020, <https://www.aragatsfound.org/post/azerbaijani-social-media-spreads-story-of-khachkar-forgeries>, accessed 05.03.2022.

98 Hayastan Martirosyan, «Էթնոցիդ. Արցախի մշակութային ժառանգությունը՝ ադրբեջանական վան-

### *Input by the Udi Minority*

The Udi minority living in Azerbaijan is one of the real descendants of the Caucasian Albanian tribes, living mainly in Nizh (Gabala region) and Vardashen (Oghuz region) villages. The Udis population in Azerbaijan has halved in the eighties of the 20th century. Before that, they also lived in Sultan Nukhi and Jourlu, they were Turkish-speaking, but Christian and Udi ethnic self-consciously. Currently, they have left the last two villages. In Azerbaijan, the Udis have no public institutions to raise their concerns. Udis have, in recent years, begun to transform their historic past, which linked them to Armenian culture. All this has happened because the Azerbaijani authorities, from 1988 onwards, have subjected them to harassment to force the Udis to accept that they are part of the Azerbaijani ethnos.<sup>99</sup>

For example, the Udi community website stresses that Azerbaijan, since independence, has apparently given the Udis an important place and repaired the Udi churches as the “Udis are one of the roots of Azerbaijan ethnic identity.”<sup>100</sup> The Azerbaijani authorities, under the guise of presenting themselves as a multi-cultural and tolerant country,<sup>101</sup> have also begun to “take notice” of national minorities living in the country. It began with the creation of the so-called “Udi church” in 2003-2004, which had to form the basis of the restoration of the “Albanian” church. The first step taken towards the “reconstruction of the Albanian Church of Azerbaijan” took place on 10 April 2003, when the Albanian-Udi Christian community was registered at the State Committee for Work with Religious Organizations.<sup>102</sup> Azerbaijan demonstrated, on the one hand, that it apparently respects its national minorities, their religious rights and, on the other, through the utilisation of the Udi minority, attempts to impose spiritual authority in the occupied areas of Mountainous Karabagh.

It is obvious today how the Azerbaijanis use the Udi people, demanding, in their name, the restoration of Udi rights towards Armenian churches. The leading figures of the Udi

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ղալիզմի թիրախ» [Ethnocide. Cultural Heritage of Artsakh-Target of Azerbaijani Vandalism], *Armenian Genocide Museum-Institute*, 24 August 2022, <http://www.genocide-museum.am/arm/24.08.22.php?fbclid=I-wAR0vM8rmni7lNxDp16bK9JbJJKtQdqNtTgyR5A6VA7QBAYqumYBRqHPeMeE>, accessed 30.08.2022.

99 Hranush Kharatyan, «Ուդիների ողիսակալը 18-20 դդ. (Պատմություն, էթնիկ գոյատևում, ինքնահաստատում)», *Հայոց Մեծ Խնձու 90, հորիզոնների ժողովածու* [“The Odyssey of the Udis in the 18th-20th Centuries (History, Ethnic Survival, Self-Assertion?)”, in *Hayots Mets Yeghern 90, Collection of Articles*] (Yerevan: YSU, 2005), 119.

100 Албано-Удинская Христианская Община [Albanian-Udin Christian Community], 13.11.2013, <https://udi.az/articles/0200.html>, accessed 10.11.2021.

101 Benoit Filou, in his article titled “Multiculturalism in Azerbaijan” concludes: “The implicit superiority of Azerbaijani ethnicity appears clear and minorities tend to assimilate themselves to this dominant model, mostly for pragmatic reasons. The multicultural policy followed by Azerbaijan paradoxically goes together with a deeper assimilation of minorities. Multiculturalism is highlighted, when necessary, to leave room for Turkic solidarity or even Islamic solidarity when necessary.” Article is published by the Baku Research Institute, 06.07.2021, <https://bakuresearchinstitute.org/en/multiculturalism-in-azerbaijan/>, accessed 05.04.2022.

102 Grigory Auvazyuan, “Удины и Албанская Церковь Азербайджана” [Udis and the Albanian Church of Azerbaijan], *21-й Век* 3 (2016): 60.

community play a major role in the implementation of this policy. It was perhaps during the war, on 16 October 2020 that the leader of the Albanian-Udi Christian community and chairman of the Bible Association in Azerbaijan, Robert Mobili said, in one of his interviews, that they were assisting the Azerbaijan army, that vandalism was the policy of Armenians, while churches were being repaired in Azerbaijan.<sup>103</sup>

Representatives of “Azerbaijan’s Albanian-Udi Christian community” visited, on 4 December 2020, according to their statement, the Dadivank monastery complex that had been “liberated from the Armenians in the Kelbajar region.”

As the newspaper “Azerbaijan” noted “The Udis, who had become more prosperous in Azerbaijan over the years, impatiently awaited the opportunity to bow in Albanian temples and churches, among which was Khudaveng.”<sup>104</sup>

After the ceremonies were over, Robert Mobili noted that “the temple not only architecturally, but also historically belonged to the Albanian church, while the forgeries perpetrated by the Armenians were obvious.”<sup>105</sup>

During the same period, Rafik Danakari, the deputy leader of the Udi community, was appointed as a preacher in the Dadivank monastery. Community leaders periodically visit Dadivank from December onwards, performing ceremonies which are organised or sponsored by various Azerbaijani organisations such as the “Promotion of Moral Values” foundation.<sup>106</sup> Armenian pilgrims and clergymen were also allowed to visit the monastery, but their access to monastery were forbidden on 7 February 2021.

At present there are six Armenian clergymen in the monastery, but their periodic replacement by others, as well as pilgrimages, have been forbidden by the Azerbaijani side, using various excuses starting with pandemic and including the flooding of the River Tartar. The goal of all of this is, of course, to rid the monastery of Armenian pastors, secure the places of Udi clergymen in the church, and “clear” Dadivank monastery of Armenian traces.

The above-mentioned Udi representatives are also included in anti-Armenian “scientific” propaganda. There was a scientific seminar held in Baku State University on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2021, titled “The falsification of Albanian temples in Karabagh by the Armenians according to the mineral-geological composition of the construction materials used.” A paper was presented by Robert Mobili, a senior researcher at Baku State University’s geology and geophysical scientific research laboratory.<sup>107</sup>

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103 Robert Mobili, “Vandalism is Armenian State Strategy,” *Report.az*, 16.10.2020, <https://report.az/en/Karabagh/chairman-of-azerbaijan-s-albanian-udi-christian-community-robert-mobilisaid/>, accessed 11.03.2022.

104 Vətən Müharibəsi Şəhidlərinin Əziz Xatirəsi Dağlar Qoynunda Yerləşən Monastırda Ehtiramla Yad Olunub,” *Azərbaycan* [To the Memory of the Martyrs of the Patriotic War was Honored in the Monastery Located in the Heart of the Mountains, Azerbaijan], 06 December 2020, <http://anl.az/down/meqale/azerbaycan/2020/dekabr/730852.htm>, accessed 10.11.2021.

105 Ibid.

106 “Albanian-Udi Religious Community of Azerbaijan Visits Khudavang Monastery,” *Azernews*, 5 May 2021, <https://www.azernews.az/nation/178639.html>, accessed 10.03.2022.

107 “Azərbaycan Respublikası Alban-Udi-Xristian İcmasının Sədri, BDU-Nun Kompleks Geoloji və Geofiziki

The “Azerbaijan’s Albanian-Udi Christian religious community” declaration of 8 February 2022, in which they called themselves adherents of the “Albanian Apostolic Church,” stated:

We, the successors of the Azerbaijani Albanian-Udi religious community of the Albanian Apostolic Church, appreciate and support the consistent measures taken during the last year in the liberated areas... in the direction of the protection and restoration of the temples of the Albanian heritage... and we also express our willingness to cooperate with the Armenian Apostolic Church... for peace and humanity.<sup>108</sup>

It is interesting to see what kind of cooperation with the Armenian Apostolic Church they envisage. If it is about becoming one of its dioceses, the Armenian Church’s charter<sup>109</sup> precludes that possibility. Even the foundation of the Albanian-Udi Church in Mountainous Karabagh cannot be considered to be legal and acceptable, nor can it be possible to perform any spiritual activity in accordance with the rules laid down in the diocesan charter published by the Armenian Apostolic Church in 2009.<sup>110</sup>

Article 1.2 states that a diocese is an inseparable part of the Armenian Apostolic Church, whose centre is the Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin.

Article 1.3 states that a diocese is governed in accordance with Armenian Apostolic Church laws and holy tradition, the orders placed by the Catholicos of All Armenians, the given country’s laws and the diocesan constitution.

Article 1.4 states that a diocese is established by a pastoral letter [*kondak* in Armenian] from the Catholicos.

Article 1.5 states that the rules laid down in Articles 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4 are not subject to change.<sup>111</sup>

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Tədqiqatlar Elmi-Tədqiqat Laboratoriyasının Böyük Elmi İşçisi Robert Mobili ‘Qarabağdakı Alban Məbədlərinin Ermənilər Tərəfindən Saxtalaşdırılmasının Tikinti Materialları və Bağlayıcıların Mineraloji-Geokimyəvi Tərkibinə Görə Əsaslandırılması’ Mövzusunda Məruzə Edib” [Chairman Of The Albanian-Udi-Christian Community Of The Republic Of Azerbaijan, Robert Mobili, A Senior Researcher at the Complex Geological and Geophysical Research Laboratory of BSU, Gave a Report on “The Falsification of Albanian Temples in Karabagh by the Armenians According to the Mineral-Geological Composition of the Construction Materials Used”], Udi.az, 5 March 2021, <https://udi.az/news/0585.html>, accessed 05.04.2022.

108 Azərbaycan Alban-Udi Xristian Dini İcması Azad Olunmuş Ərazilərdəki Alban Məbədləri ilə Bağlı Bəyanat Yayıb [The Albanian-Udi Christian Religious Community of Azerbaijan Issued a Statement Regarding the Albanian Temples in the Liberated Territories], Azərbaycan Respublikası Dini Qurumlarla İş Üzrə Dövlət Komitəsi [State Committee on Work with Religious Organizations of the Republic of Azerbaijan], 08.02.2022, <https://scwra.gov.az/az/view/news/10383/azerbaycan-alban-udi-xristian-dini-icmasi-azad-olunmush-erazile-rdeki-alban-mebedleri-ile-bagli-beyanat-yayib>, accessed 10.08.2022.

109 Guide of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church’s Diocesan Charter, <https://kronadaran.am/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Հայաստանյայց-Առաքելական-Սուրբ-եկեղեցու-թեմական-կանոնադրություն.pdf>, accessed 12.12.2021.

110 The Diocese of Artsakh Belongs to the Armenian Apostolic Church.

111 Charter, 38.

It is obvious from the articles quoted above that no diocese belonging to the Armenian Apostolic Church may separate itself from it or, moreover, cannot declare itself an individual diocese, in this case becoming Albanian-Udi, without the confirmation of the Armenian Apostolic Church. Thus, even the de facto Udi community's spiritual activity in Artsakh religious sites is illegal and cannot be accepted by international religious communities.

### *Scientific Activities*

The next tool of forced appropriation by Azerbaijan is the scientific or scholarly method. A meeting of the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences took place on 25 November 2020, where a decision was made to found a “Scientific Centre for Albanian Studies.” The director of the academy, Ramiz Mehdiyev stated, during the meeting, that the centre's aim was to “reveal those historic proofs that demonstrate that the Albanian monuments, which the Armenians wish to appropriate, belong to us.”<sup>112</sup> He also mentioned the opening of the “Artsakh's spiritual and cultural heritage study office” in Echmiadzin, and that the National Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan, the country's major scientific centre, should take serious steps concerning it.<sup>113</sup>

Furthermore, many international conferences are held in Azerbaijani scientific centres where they try to involve foreign researchers as well. Among these was the international conference held in the International Multicultural Centre in Baku on 26 May 2021 titled “Caucasian Albania: history, religion and architecture,” attended by researchers from nine countries – Germany, Norway, France, Italy, Turkey, Russia, Lithuania, Georgia and Azerbaijan. In the plenary session of the conference, the importance of the enlargement of co-operation between foreign and Azerbaijani scientists and researchers was stressed. Foreign and local experts were called upon to assist in the design of events aimed at studying the history of Caucasian Albania and to provide various assistance in this field.<sup>114</sup>

Azerbaijani historians, in various conferences “explain” Armenians' activities towards Armenian monuments. For example, when Rev. Hovhannes, the abbot of Dadivank monastery and spiritual leader of the Karvachar region, declared that the church's bells and cross-stones (khachkars) were being taken to the Mother See of Holy Echmiadzin to save them from Azerbaijani vandalism,<sup>115</sup> Azerbaijani researchers reported, in a paper

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112 Javid Agha, “Perspectives. Who were the Caucasian Albanians?” *Eurasianet*, 07.06.2021, <https://eurasianet.org/perspectives-who-were-the-caucasian-albanians>, accessed 05.03.2022.

113 “Akademiya Ciddi Addımlar Atmalı, Erməni Saxtakarlıqları ilə Dolu “Faktların” Qarşısını Alınması İstiqamətində Tədqiqatları Gücləndirməlidir” – Akademik Ramiz Mehdiyev [Academy Must Take Serious Steps, Strengthen Research in the Direction of Prevention of “Facts” Full of Armenian Forgeries – Academician Ramiz Mehdiyev], *Azərbaycan Milli Elmlər Akademiyası* [National Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan], 25 November 2020, <https://science.gov.az/az/news/open/15174>, accessed 05.03.2022.

114 “Qafqaz Albaniyası: Tarix, Din Və Memarlıq” Adli Beynəlxalq Elmi Konfrans Keçirilib, *Azərbaycan Milli Elmlər Akademiyası, Tarix İnstitutu* [“Caucasus Albania: History, Religion and Architecture” International Scientific Conference Held, National Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan, Institute of History], 27 May 2021, <http://tarixinstitutu.az/news/view/327>, accessed 05.03.2022.

115 “Տեր Հովհաննեսը Դադիվանքի խաչքարերը, խաչ ու զանգերը Հայաստան է բերում” [Rev.



that following the 44-day war, Armenians relocated Dadivank's fake khachkars and slabs with fake inscriptions solely to prevent the untruth of them from being discovered later.<sup>116</sup> According to the paper's author, Armenians auctioned off Dadivank's khachkars, after the 44-day war, in order to clear up the traces of their crime, which has nothing to do with reality.<sup>117</sup> It was noted that Armenian researchers and the clergy had not, previously, made any mention of any of Dadivank's belltower's cross-stones and that, in general, no cross-stones had ever been discovered there during the Soviet era,<sup>118</sup> without considering the fact that not only Armenian researchers,<sup>119</sup> but also Soviet Azerbaijani researchers<sup>120</sup> had, for a long time, confirmed their existence in their works.

Books about Armenian culture continued to be published in Azerbaijan after the 44-day Artsakh war, continuing the chain of forgeries. The Heydar Aliyev Foundation, especially, which had its own unique input in financing of anti-Armenian projects, prepared a series of books titled "Cultural Heritage of Karabagh," which was presented to the public on 15 November 2021. The set comprised five publications concerning Mountainous Karabagh's literature, music, architecture, art and carpet making. The volume concerning architecture presented Mountainous Karabagh's architectural monuments, with pictures and graphical drawings,<sup>121</sup> including those well known to us. Reports were also prepared and presented to international organisations. Thus, Center for Analysis of International Relations (AIR) in Azerbaijan prepared a report, in July 2021, titled "The appropriation of Azerbaijan's cultural and historical heritage by Armenia." It presented the "apparent looting of museums and cultural places in Karabagh by Armenians, illegal archaeological excavations as well as the "Armenianisation" of Azerbaijani monuments and their forced appropriation."<sup>122</sup>

The international journal *IRS Heritage* also took an increasingly active part in all this and, after the war, published books and articles concerning the Second Artsakh War and Artsakh's culture.<sup>123</sup> The journal was produced in 17 languages, which greatly facilitated the swift circulation of Azerbaijan's false theses in international circles.

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Hovhannes Brings Dadivank Khachkars, Crosses and Bells to Armenia], *Artsakh Irtavakan*, 11 November 2020, <https://artsakh.news/am/news/194425>, accessed 28.02.2022.

116 Telman Ibrahimov, "Khachkars of Dadivank Monastery or... "FINITA EST COMOEDIA," [https://www.academia.edu/44744763/KHACHKARS\\_OF\\_DADIVANK\\_MONASTERY\\_or\\_FINITA\\_EST\\_COMOEDIA\\_](https://www.academia.edu/44744763/KHACHKARS_OF_DADIVANK_MONASTERY_or_FINITA_EST_COMOEDIA_), accessed 28.02.2022.

117 Ibid., 3.

118 Ibid..

119 Magistros, *The Churches and Monastic Buildings*, 88-89; Ulubabyan, "Dadi or Khuta Monastery," 69.

120 Akhundov, *Architecture of Ancient and Early-Medieval Azerbaijan*, 206-207.

121 "A Collection of Publications 'Cultural Heritage of Karabagh,'" Heydar Aliyev Foundation, June 2021, <https://heydar-aliyev-foundation.org/en/content/view/96/5069/A-collection-of-publications-%E2%80%9CCultural-heritage-of-Karabagh%E2%80%9D->, accessed 05.04. 2022.

122 "Armenia's Appropriation of the Azerbaijani Cultural and Historic Heritage," *Analyses Center of International Relations*, 13 July 2021, <https://aircenter.az/uploads/files/Cultural%20Appropriation.pdf>.

123 IRS Heritage, <https://irs-az.com/journal-archive>, accessed 05.04.2022.

### *Cultural Methods Used*

Two days after the outbreak of the 44-day war, the Ministry of Culture of Azerbaijan began to publish articles about Armenian monuments in Karabagh, seen from its own point of view, with their history and photographs on its official website on 29th September 2020.<sup>124</sup> Since February 2021, the Ministry began monitoring the cultural sites in the occupied areas of Mountainous Karabagh. This was in line with the written order promulgated by the President of Azerbaijan, which stated "...its aim is to initially find and protect historical-cultural monuments in the liberated areas. Not only have Muslim holy places been vandalised by Armenians but also Christian historical-religious monuments. Many Caucasian Albanian temples, among which is Khudavang and Gyanjasar [Gandzasar] monasteries in the Kelbajar region, have been subjected to barbaric treatment."<sup>125</sup>

The Ministry of Culture of Azerbaijan has also realised the program called "Let's get to know our Christian heritage." The newspaper "Azerbaijan" notes "Within the framework of the program, short videos about the temples, churches and sanctuaries belonging to the Christian faith and protected by the state in the territory of Azerbaijan are presented."<sup>126</sup>

The global campaign "Peace for Culture" took place in the Mugham International Centre on 23 June 2021, where Anar Karimov, the Minister of Culture of Azerbaijan said that the goal of the campaign was the preservation of cultural heritage through peace, the strengthening of international peace, as well as the role of peace in the development of culture. Regarding the methods used, Miguel Angel Moratinos, High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), noted that to this Azerbaijani initiative, which has the goal to find mechanisms and tools to respond to today's reality and issues, he responded immediately.<sup>127</sup> The campaign invited diplomats, media representatives, scholars as well as foreign government and international organisations' political, cultural and public representatives to the "liberated" areas of Azerbaijan to raise their voices in the name of peace.<sup>128</sup>

It should be noted that this organisation was created in 2005 by Kofi Annan, the former Secretary General of the UN, co-sponsored by the governments of Turkey and Spain. According to Vasif Eyvazzade, the Chief of Staff of the Ministry of Culture of Azerbaijan,

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124 Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Azerbaijan, <http://mct.gov.az/en/common-news/>, accessed 23.02.2022.

125 "Azerbaijani Culture Ministry Begins Monitoring Monuments in Liberated Lands," *Azernews*, 19 February 2021, [https://www.azernews.az/news.php?news\\_id=176387&cat=culture](https://www.azernews.az/news.php?news_id=176387&cat=culture), accessed 25.02.2022.

126 "Mədəniyyət Nazirliyi 'Xristian İrsimizi Tanıyaq Layihəsini Təqdim Edir,'" [Ministry of Culture "Introducing the Let's Get to Know Our Christian Heritage Project"] *Azərbaycan qəzəti* [Azerbaijan Newspaper], 19 November 2020, 7.

127 "Presentation of 'Peace for Culture' Global Campaign Held," *APA News*, 23 June 2021, <https://apa.az/en/xeber/culture-policy/presentation-of-peace-for-culture-global-campaign-held-photo-352409>, accessed 01.05.2022.

128 "Azerbaijan Sends Appeal to UNESCO," *Azernews*, 24 June 2021, <https://www.azernews.az/culture/180526.html>, accessed 15.02.2022.

there was an aim to also present the above-mentioned campaign at the UN headquarters.<sup>129</sup> The Azerbaijani side, to achieve their political aims also utilises Azerbaijani youth, as well as different youth groups and organisations which periodically held meetings with Azerbaijan's government officials. One was "The Eurasian Regional Center of the Islamic Cooperation Youth Forum (ICYF-ERC)"<sup>130</sup> some of whose members – both foreign and Azerbaijani – visited the territories that were apparently "liberated" by Azerbaijan. The above-mentioned forum organised a "Karabagh – the cultural heart of Azerbaijan" international competition, which had 15 contestants from 13 countries: Turkey, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Iran, Kyrgyzstan, USA, Estonia, Brazil, Poland, Algeria, Tunisia and so forth. It was noted that the competition was actively circulated on social media by over 20,000 users from more than 30 countries. The project was realised under the title of "Karabagh is Azerbaijan," the aim of which was to inform the international public that "Karabagh is an integral part of Azerbaijani culture and history." Five of the victors were taken on a visit to Karabagh.<sup>131</sup> It should be noted that several of the competitors, without regard to the fact that they held other countries' citizenships, were actually ethnic Azerbaijanis, meaning that despite the great propaganda efforts made by Azerbaijan, those efforts were not very successful among foreign youth circles.

The Azerbaijani side on an official level also takes part in the cultural events held abroad. The Ambassador of Azerbaijan to Italy, as well as the head of the Cultural Heritage Protection, Development and Restoration Service attached to the Ministry of Culture of Azerbaijan and others have participated in the international event called "Reconstruction Week – 2021" held in different cities of Italy from 30 August to 4 September 2021. At the event, the Azerbaijani side presented the "Armenian vandalism in the liberated territories" with videos, noting that the return of Azerbaijani refugees to those territories will begin with the revival of historical monuments.<sup>132</sup>

The three-day conference entitled "Great Return: Cultural Revival" was organized in November 2021, by the "State Service for the Protection, Development and Restoration of Cultural Heritage" of the Ministry of Culture of Azerbaijan, where foreign ambassadors, diplomats, state figures and leaders of the organizations were also present. At that time US Ambassador to Azerbaijan Earle Litzenberger announced that they were happy to support Azerbaijan, which was opening a new page in the history of preserving its culture.<sup>133</sup>

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129 "Peace for Culture Campaign might be Presented at UN Headquarters," *Azernews*, 6 Aug 2021, <https://www.azernews.az/culture/181967.html>, accessed 07.04.2022.

130 Young people from the countries that were members of the Islamic Cooperation Youth Forum (ICYF-ERC).

131 Youth from the United States, Estonia, Tunisia, Malaysia and Pakistan will travel to Karabagh, Islamic Cooperation Youth Forum Eurasian Regional Center, <https://icyf-erc.org/press-releases/youth-from-the-united-states-estonia-tunisia-malaysia-and-pakistan-will-travel-to-Karabagh/>, accessed 10.08.2022.

132 Azerbaijan Ministry of Culture's official website, <http://mct.gov.az/az/umumi-xeberler/13697>, accessed 10.08.2022.

133 "One of the Positive Impressions of Azerbaijan is its Respect For Different Cultures – US Ambassador," *Azernews*, 25 November 2021, <https://menafn.com/1103248039/One-of-positive-impressions-of-Azerbaijan-is-its-respect-for-different-cultures-US-ambassador&source=138>, accessed 01.04.2022.

Apart from that, one of the Azerbaijani news agencies spread the news that a group of experts studying Caucasian Albanian history and architecture had been formed “to remove traces left by Armenians on Albanian religious temples.” This was announced in Ganja [Gandzak] by Anar Karimov. The latter noted that representatives of state institutions are also represented in the group. Members of the group have already conducted checks in the territories “liberated” by Azerbaijan.<sup>134</sup> A few days later, the Ministry of Culture of Azerbaijan announced that “Azerbaijan has always respected its historical and cultural heritage, regardless of their religious and ethnic origin.” It also included a reference to the 1954 Hague Convention concerning the protection of cultural values.<sup>135</sup> It is interesting that Azerbaijan itself presented the fact that it was desecrating and changing Armenian churches, yet referred to the Hague Convention; but it must be reminded that the first thesis of the 3rd point of the article 9 (concerning the protection of cultural values in occupied territories) of the Second Protocol (26 March 1999) of that same Convention forbids “any alteration to, or change of use of, cultural property which is intended to conceal or destroy cultural, historical or scientific evidence.”<sup>136</sup> Meanwhile, the Azerbaijani side is moving in the path of breaking the same Convention’s provisions. Targeting the symbols of the Christian heritage of Artsakh-Armenians and disrupting Christian ritual’s actual traditions, Azerbaijan, despite being a member, went against the protocols of the conventions on the Preservation of Cultural Diversity (2001)<sup>137</sup> and the Protection and the Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005).<sup>138</sup> Such a policy is a discriminatory attitude, which also violates the freedom of thought, conscience, religion, and the right to value the heritage created as a result of this freedom in the way one wants, as stipulated in the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”<sup>139</sup> It should be noted that all this is happening when UN International Court of Justice on 7 December 2021 within the framework of the Armenia v. Azerbaijan and Azerbaijan v. Armenia court cases under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, published decisions on applying emergency measures presented by Armenia and Azerbaijan, one of which

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134 “Ermənilərin Saxtalaşdırdıqları Alban Dini Məbədlərinin Bərpası Üçün İşçi Qrup Yaradılıb”, Report İnformasiya Agentliyi [“A Working Group was Created for the Restoration of Albanian Religious Temples, which were Falsified by Armenians,” Report Information Agency], *Report.az*, 03.02.2022, <https://report.az/medeniyyet-siyaseti/alban-dini-mebedlerinin-berpasi-ucun-isci-grup-yaradilib/>, accessed 05.03.2022.

135 Statement by the Ministry for Culture of the Republic of Azerbaijan, <http://www.mct.gov.az/en/common-news/14102>, accessed 05.03.2022.

136 Second Protocol to the Hague Convention of 1954 for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, The Hague, 26 March 1999, accessed 07.02.2022.

137 UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, adopted by the 31st session of the General Conference of UNESCO, Paris, 02.11.2001, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000127160>, accessed 07.02.2022.

138 Basic texts of the 2005 Convention on the Protection and the Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, 2013 edition, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000225383>, accessed 07.02.2022.

139 «Ուղիսկան քարոզչություն Մատաղիսի Սուրբ Եղիշե եկեղեցում» [Religious Preaching in St. Yeghishe Church of Mataghis], Monument Watch, 17.07.2022, <https://bit.ly/3CBzWVK>, accessed 20.08.2022.

referred to the Armenian cultural heritage.<sup>140</sup> The decision obliged Azerbaijan to “take all necessary measures to prevent and punish acts of vandalism and desecration directed against Armenian cultural heritage, including churches and other places of worship, monuments, landmarks, cemeteries and artifacts.” It is therefore obvious that despite the efforts made by international organisations and the UN International Court of Justice, Azerbaijan not only is not carrying out its obligations, but also develops new plans for the alienation and appropriation of Armenian monuments from Artsakh-Armenians.

## Conclusion

The article has demonstrated the process of the forced appropriation (Albanisation) of the Armenian monastic complex of Dadivank in Mountainous Karabagh carried out by Azerbaijan through different methods. Starting from the previous century and “Albanising” Armenian names, cross-stones and inscriptions, medieval Armenian historians and literature, after the Second Artsakh war, the practical phase of their appropriation began. For the latter, it can be identified four directions: propaganda in social media, the inclusion of the Udi minority in the process, scientific activities and cultural events. Propaganda on social media in Azerbaijan at present is carried out at the state level: websites are created to spread theses of the Azerbaijani side and promote false information about Armenian churches and monuments. All this does not leave aside the Azerbaijani youth, who are provided with state financial resources in order to carry out activities in this direction, perhaps also for the dissemination of Azerbaijani theses to foreign youth. In spite of the fact that Azerbaijan makes great efforts in this direction, it should be stressed that despite active propaganda carried out by Azerbaijani social media users, results cannot be considered to be very good, considering that those materials are basically being shared by ethnic Azerbaijanis. As for the Azerbaijani cultural competitions, the participants from different states are mostly ethnic Azerbaijanis, who have citizenship of foreign countries, thus the impact of these competitions on foreigners cannot be overestimated.

Regarding “utilisation” of the leadership of the Udi minority by the authorities of Azerbaijan, the community, in general, has no other option than to subject itself to the authorities, taking into account the authoritarian regime operating in Azerbaijan. The leaders of the Udi community are just a tool for the Azerbaijani authorities, by which the national minority of Azerbaijan is served to their interests under the name of minority integration. The Udi leaders are pushed forward in every direction to spread anti-Armenian propaganda, and considering the fact that the Udis are one of the descendants of the Caucasian Albanians, most of whom are Christians, it is easier to carry out the “Albanisation” of Armenian cultural monuments through the latter. Regardless of

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140 International Court of Justice, Application of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (*Armenia v. Azerbaijan*), 07.12.2021, <https://www.icj-cij.org/en/case/180>, accessed 07.02.2022.

historical distortions and efforts to establish the Albanian-Udi Church in Nagorno-Karabagh, it will never be legal without the approval of the Armenian Apostolic Church, because the ancient Albanian Church has always been subordinate to the Armenian Apostolic Church and cannot function independently of it.

The conferences and events organised by Azerbaijani researchers concerning the “Albanisation” of Armenian monuments gained fresh impetus after the Second Artsakh war. Scientific conferences on this topic are regularly organized, where foreign scientists are invited and urged to join the advancement of the theory of “Albanisation”. In Azerbaijan, after the war, books, articles, and series are published with even greater frequency and enthusiasm, presenting the entire cultural heritage of Artsakh as Azerbaijani.

Within the framework of cultural policy, after the Second Artsakh war, the Azerbaijani side does not miss the opportunity to invite diplomatic representations and provide false information at cultural state events held in Azerbaijan and the occupied territories of Artsakh. During the events, naturally, “Armenian vandalism” is demonstrated, while Azerbaijan is presented as the restorer and recreator of cultural monuments.

Despite the fact that various international structures are examining the situation created around the Armenian monuments of Artsakh, there is no positive movement on the part of Azerbaijan to not defile, destroy or usurp the Armenian historical and cultural legacy. Azerbaijan continues to violate its obligations stipulated by international conventions, in particular, the provisions of the 1954 Hague Convention concerning the protection of cultural property in the event of war conflict and its Second Protocol, the 2001 Convention on the Preservation of Cultural Diversity and the 2005 Convention on the Protection and the Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, as well as the verdicts handed down by UN International Court of Justice within the framework of the *On the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* on 7 December 2021 regarding *Armenia vs. Azerbaijan* and *Azerbaijan vs. Armenia* court cases, by which Azerbaijan assumed a number of obligations related to the protection of Armenian cultural heritage.

Thus, if the Azerbaijani misrepresentation of the history of Armenian monuments was carried out solely through propaganda during 1991-2020, then practical measures began after November 2020, discreetly witnessed by the international community.

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# ISLAMIC SOLIDARITY ON SALE: THE NAGORNO-KARABAGH CONFLICT IN THE CONTEXT OF AZERBAIJAN'S NATION BRANDING ENDEAVOURS

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## Abstract

To reach their political goals, countries try to craft an image acceptable to the international community as reliable allies standing for similar values. Since its independence, Azerbaijan has been actively working on its branding as a country that bridges the West and the Islamic world. To do this, Azerbaijan creates its image as a secular, multicultural state and a leading state among Islamic countries with a firm support of Islamic solidarity. Positioning Azerbaijan as an advocate of Islamic solidarity, Ilham Aliyev then embarks on the next step of his plan to demand the Islamic world's solidarity about the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict. Thus, nation branding in the case of Azerbaijan is not only about creating an image of a possible investment place or touristic destination; official Baku "sells" its solidarity pursuing the political goal of getting the support of Islamic countries against Armenia.

**Keywords:** nation branding, Nagorno-Karabagh, Azerbaijan, Islamic solidarity.

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## Introduction

Countries in the modern world strive to project-specific images that will make them desirable partners, investment hubs, tourist destinations, and political allies. This branding is how a country's image can be created or changed, monitored, evaluated, and actively managed to improve its reputation with its target audience.

After the independence, and especially since 2003 when Ilham Aliyev succeeded his father in the post of Azerbaijan's president,<sup>1</sup> his country has put considerable efforts into the nation branding endeavours. Through various channels, Azerbaijan sought to create an image of a country as a bridge between East and West;<sup>2</sup> the first democracy in the Islamic world<sup>3</sup>, the victim of injustice of Armenian aggression that successfully found enough strength to overcome the problem.<sup>4</sup> The multi-ethnic character of Azerbaijani society gives the country yet another tool to connect state branding with "multicultural" image-making. Azerbaijan seeks to make multiculturalism, multi-ethnicity, and interreligious harmony trademarks of Azerbaijani society.

The branding of Azerbaijan and the place of the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict in that we traced mainly in the speeches of Ilham Aliyev addressed to international audiences. Thus, the primary source of analysis in this paper are Ilham Aliyev's speeches published on the official webpage of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan. These speeches Ilham Aliyev delivered during his two-decade-long reign, i.e., from his inauguration in 2003<sup>5</sup> to 2022.

This paper considers issues related to the image of Azerbaijan created by Ilham Aliyev and the connection of the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict in that nation branding process. We argue that nation-branding of Azerbaijan is highly related to the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict. Whenever Aliyev stresses Azerbaijan as a desirable partner and loyal, friendly state, he makes the next step forward, describing Armenia as an unreliable and even an adversary state. By branding Azerbaijan as a multicultural state and by stressing the Islamic solidarity of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev seeks to create an image of a desired ally for the Islamic-majority countries.

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1 Ilham Aliyev was elected president of Azerbaijan as a result of controversial election which was accompanied by "numerous instances of violent and excessive use of force by police, a pattern of intimidation against opposition supporters, journalists and others, which overshadowed the political atmosphere; the conditions for campaigning by governing party candidates and opposition candidates were manifestly unequal." "International election observation mission Presidential Election, Republic of Azerbaijan – 15 October 2003, Statement of preliminary findings and conclusion," <https://www.oscepa.org/ru/dokumenty/election-observation/election-observation-statements/azerbaijan/statements-3/1377-2003-presidential/file>, accessed 01.03.2022.

2 "Opening speech by Ilham Aliyev at the trilateral meeting of Azerbaijani, Iranian and Russian presidents – 8 August 2016," <https://president.az/en/articles/view/20843>, accessed 12.03.2022.

3 "Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the official reception on the occasion of the Republic Day – 27 May, 2016," <https://en.president.az/articles/19986>; "Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the opening of 5th News Agencies World Congress – 16 November, 2016," <https://en.president.az/articles/21720>, accessed 11.04.2022.

4 This idea can be traced in nearly every speech by Aliyev.

5 "Speech in the Inauguration Ceremony by Ilham Aliyev, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan – October 31, 2003," <https://lib.aliyev-heritage.org/en/2773818.html>, accessed 11.04.2022.

The article has three main parts. The first one describes the theoretical bases on which the rest of the article operates. It represents the nation branding through which we analyse Ilham Aliyev's speeches. It also connects these phenomena with the case of the Azerbaijani nation branding activities in front of the Islamic audience and its aspirations to get support in the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict. The second section investigates the state of Islam in Azerbaijan. Here after a brief historical survey, we demonstrate how the state controls religious activities and use them whenever the need arises. The third part discusses the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict in the context of understanding Islamic solidarity by Ilham Aliyev.

## **Nation branding and the case of Azerbaijan**

In his *Brand New Justice* Simon Anholt writes:

Countries behave, in many ways, just like brands. They are perceived – rightly or wrongly – in certain ways by large groups of people at home and abroad; they are associated with certain qualities and characteristics. Those perceptions can have a significant impact on the way that overseas consumers view their products, and the way they behave towards those countries in sports, politics, trade and cultural matters; it will affect their propensity to visit or relocate or invest there; their willingness to partner with such countries in international affairs; and whether they are more likely to interpret the actions and behaviours of those countries in a positive or a negative light. In short, the image of a country determines the way the world sees it and treats it. This image may be entirely accurate and fully justified, but it is more likely to be at least partly untrue and unfair, based on a whole mess of misunderstandings, prejudices, cultural differences and half-forgotten events from history.<sup>6</sup>

Göran Bolin Per Ståhlberg defines nation branding as “the phenomenon by which governments engage in self-conscious activities aimed at producing a certain image of the nation state.”<sup>7</sup> This image is important in various spheres. Around two decades ago, Peter van Ham noted that

...crafting a brand is not only economically desirable, it has considerable political and strategic implications, affecting even the dynamic of NATO and EU enlargement. The traditional diplomacy of yesteryear is disappearing. To do their jobs well in the future,

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6 Simon Anholt, *Brand New Justice: The Upside of Global Branding* (Oxford: Butterworth Heinemann, 2003), 109.

7 Göran Bolin, Per Ståhlberg, “Between Community and Commodity: Nationalism and Nation Branding” in *Communicating the Nation: National Topographies of Global Media Landscapes*, eds. Anna Roosvall, Inka Salovaara- Moring (Gothenburg Nordicom: University of Gothenburg, 2010), 79-101.

politicians will have to train themselves in brand asset management. Their tasks will be a finding a brand niche for their state, engaging in competitive marketing.<sup>8</sup>

In this nation branding process, diplomacy plays a central role. Mark Leonard stresses the role of public diplomacy; however, Azerbaijan's case demonstrates that traditional diplomacy can also play that role. In general, there are a group of impacts that diplomacy can achieve in the process of nation branding. Among these impacts, one can mention a) creating positive perceptions of the country by the targeted group, b) strengthening ties, c) raising attractiveness as a destination for tourism, and c) obtaining investments.<sup>9</sup> However, in the case of Azerbaijan, there is an additional impact as well – getting support against Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict.

In this theoretical research frame, we will discuss the nation branding of Azerbaijan in front of the Islamic audience. As it was discussed above, branding is a cumulative and complex effort that requires countries to implement consistency and stability to achieve the desired image in the minds of their target audiences. Azerbaijan embarked upon a number of nation branding initiatives, which aim to improve the national image, enhance its economic profile, and, more importantly, to receive support in the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict. The main goal was to change the image of Azerbaijan from a backward post-Soviet country to a bridge between the civilisations. Thus, the main tactics, as will be seen below, are branding Azerbaijan as a multi-ethnic and multi-religious state and stressing, on the one hand, its solidarity with the Islamic world, on the other hand, making it pioneer of democracy in the Islamic world projecting a developed and strong country to pacify both East and West. However, as they can be traced in the speeches by Aliyev, this service has its price – supporting Azerbaijan in the context of the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict.

## **Islam, Azerbaijan, and Islamic Azerbaijan**

Before focusing on the speeches addressed to the Islamic audiences, we would give a brief historical background of Azerbaijani Islam, given that a significant part of its 10 million population is Muslim. Furthermore, despite the positioning of Azerbaijan as a secular state, Islam is one of the essential markers of Azerbaijani identity, for the target audiences of Aliyev which is the framework of this research for Islamic-majority countries.

A significant part of the Azerbaijani population constitutes Muslim Turks (91,6%). Most of the minorities are also mainly Muslims (Lezgins – 2%, Talish – 1,3%, Avars – 0.6%, Meskhetian Turks – 0.4%, Tatars – 0.3%, Tats – 0.3%). These are the official data, in reality, the number of minorities is much higher, as both representatives of these

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8 Peter van Ham, "The Rise of the Brand State: The Postmodern Politics of Image and reputation," *Foreign Affairs* 80, no. 5 (2001): 2-6.

9 Mark Leonard, Catherine Stead and Conrad Smewing, *Public Diplomacy* (London: The Foreign Policy Center, 2002), 9-10.

minorities and researchers claim. Approximately 65% of Muslims are Shia (mainly Twelvers<sup>10</sup>), and 35% are Sunni.<sup>11</sup> The survey from 2013 by the CRRC demonstrates that “When asked about the importance of religion in their daily lives, however, a remarkable 80% of Azerbaijanis indicated that religion played a ‘very’ or ‘rather’ important role in their lives, while less than 20% stated that religion was ‘not very’ or ‘not at all’ important.”<sup>12</sup> It also should be noted that the same survey demonstrates that the “Azerbaijanis’ active (i.e. institutionalised) religiosity as measured by mosque attendance and fasting is quite low.”<sup>13</sup> This picture is the result of historical unrests that impacted the overall demography of the region and their perception of religions.<sup>14</sup> “Although

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10 The term Twelver refers to its adherents’ belief in twelve divinely ordained Imams. They also believe that the last Imam, Imam al-Mahdi, lives in Occultation and will reappear. See, Haider Najam Iftikhar, *Shi’i Islam: An Introduction* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

11 Altay Goyushov, “Azerbaijan,” in *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe 13*, ed. Stephanie Mussig, Egdunas Raciū (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 68.

12 “Islam in Azerbaijan: A Sectarian Approach to Measuring Religiosity,” <http://crrc-caucasus.blogspot.com/2013/10/islam-in-azerbaijan-sectarian-approach.html>, accessed 18.05.2022.

13 Ibid.

14 The territories of modern-day Azerbaijan faced Islam in the mid of the 7th century when as a result of the Early Muslim conquests the Caucasus became a part of the Umayyad Caliphate (661–750). It is not our goal to go deep into the historical circumstances of the transformation of the image of Islam in Azerbaijan. Thus, here we will provide a very brief summary and bibliography for further investigation.

During the Abbasid Caliphate (750–1258), however, this large-scale Arab state was fragmented and lost its former power. In the 11th century, the region came under the rule of the Seljuks. The immigration of Turkic tribes from Central Asia changes both the ethnic and religious features of the region. The Seljuk-Turks accepted Islam, starting to follow the Hanafi religious and legal school.

During the reign of Safavid Iran, the Shia Twelver Islam gradually spread in this region, which currently has a dominant position among the Muslims of the territories of today’s Azerbaijan. During this period, the territories of Azerbaijan appear between the Sunni Ottoman Empire and the Shiite Safavid Iran, which has a corresponding effect on the religious image and later should play a role in Azerbaijani political environment.

With the expansion of the Russian Empire to the Caucasus, Sunni Islam expanded its influence. The Naqshbandi Sufi brotherhood began to play a major role among the Muslims here. In 1870s the Tsarist government established separate governing institutions for the Shi’a and the Sunni. This phase was, in general, the institutionalisation of Islam in the Russian Empire.

Late imperial era was overlapped with the rise of nationalistic feelings among the people of the Caucasus. Unlike Armenians and Georgians who had their culturally and religiously grounded identity, the Muslim people of the Caucasus had a road to cross in search of identity. At the beginning the dominant identity marker of the Muslims of the modern day Azerbaijan was Turkic and only during several next decades the invention of Azerbaijani identity occurred. The establishment of the first republics in the South Caucasus, the conflicts between the ethnic groups and in some sense the complicated relations between the Ottomans and the Muslims of the Caucasus contributed to the formation of that identity where the religion continued to play a central role. In the last decades of the existence of the Russian Empire, the reform movement gained great popularity among the Muslim population, one of the essential elements of its speech was the criticism of the traditional education system. This also had its impact on the development of the secular intelligentsia. Jo Van Steenberg, *A History of the Islamic World 600-1800: Empire Dynastic Formations and Heterogeneities in Pre-Modern Islamic West-Asia* (Abingdon Oxon: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2020); Andrew Peacock, *Early Seljuq History: A New Interpretation* (New York: Routledge, 2013); Peter Golden, *An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples: Ethnogenesis and State-Formation in Medieval and Early Modern Eurasia and the Middle East* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1992); Vladimir Bobrovnikov, “Islam in the Russian Empire” in *The Cambridge History of Russia*, ed. Dominic Lieven (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 202-24; Svante Cornell, *Azerbaijan Since Independence* (New York: M. E. Sharpe Armonk, 2011), 15-30.

dissemination of Islamic belief in the territories of current day Azerbaijan started in the middle of the 7th century A.D., formation of religious and ethnic identities here has always been a dynamic and complex process, which has gone through numerous changes over the course of a long, rich history, ultimately laying the foundations for the current situation.”<sup>15</sup>

During the Soviet years, the position of Islam in Azerbaijan began to weaken. In the USSR, religion was considered the *opium of the people* (*Opium des Volkes*), as Karl Marx coined it, and a phenomenon hindering the construction of communism. In the pre-revolutionary period, there were about 3,000 mosques in the territory of Azerbaijan, and already in 1933, that number was reduced to 17. However, in the years of *perestroika* (the 1980s) and especially in the post-Soviet period, Azerbaijan experienced a great religious awakening. A large number of new mosques were built, old ones were reopened, and dozens of religious organisations were registered. This will help Azerbaijan to join the family of Muslim-majority countries, to use these relations in diplomacy, and serve these relations its interests despite the stress of being a secular state.<sup>16</sup>

Paralleled to the establishment of the secular state, Azerbaijan also started positioning itself as a Muslim country. In 1993, Kurban Bayram began to be celebrated in Azerbaijan, and the Qur'an was translated into Azerbaijani. This growth of religious feelings impacts the foreign policy of Azerbaijan as well, for Azerbaijan positioned itself as a part of the Islamic world.<sup>17</sup> However, Azerbaijani leadership navigates between the Shia and the Sunni Islamic world. The regime's support brings Islam under the state's supervision.<sup>18</sup> The rest of the religious activities are being repressed by the Azerbaijani authorities. For example, the Islamic Party of Azerbaijan, founded in 1991 and registered in 1992, was closed in 1995 because this organization was accused of mixing religion and politics during municipal elections and receiving foreign funding from Iran. A year later, four members of this party were arrested on charges of anti-state activities and sentenced to several years in prison.

The Sunni-Shia divide has also become an essential part of the foreign power politics. The Islamic Republic of Iran, the Republic of Turkey, and the countries of the Middle East are actively trying to create spheres of influence in this direction. Especially active is Iran, which has been trying to neutralise Azerbaijani nationalism which targets Azerbaijani-speaking Iranians as well. Previously, this policy was carried out openly in Nakhijevan and the Apsheron region. For religious propaganda, Iran uses its mullahs and pro-Iranian mosques in the south of Azerbaijan and areas like Nardaran, one of the most religious places in the country or “a bastion of devout

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15 Altay Goyushov, “Islam in Azerbaijan (Historical Background),” *Caucasus Analytical Digest* 44 (2012): 2-4.

16 The article 7 of the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan (adopted on 12 of November 1995) describes Azerbaijan as a secular country.

17 Altay Goyushov, “Azerbaijan,” in *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe 11*, ed. Oliver Scharbrodt (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

18 Vahram Ter-Matevosyan, Nelli Minasyan, “Praying Under Restrictions: Islam, Identity and Social Change in Azerbaijan,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 69, no. 5 (2017): 819-837.

Shia Muslims” as Eldar Mamedov put it.<sup>19</sup>

In the 1990s, when Heydar Aliyev banned the propaganda of Iranian mullahs, Iran changed its policy. It began to carry out the propaganda through pro-Iranian Azerbaijani mullahs, very often at cultural and public events. Due to these changes, Iran maintains its influence in the south of Azerbaijan, significantly exceeding the number of mosques in other regions. In this case, it is also important to emphasise that the mentioned southern regions are the homeland of Talish and Tat peoples.<sup>20</sup> Tehran also finances Azerbaijanis who want to study Shia theology.

Much like Iran, other Islamic countries also try to use Islam as a soft power tool in Azerbaijan. While Turkey and Iran influence the spread of politicized Sunni and Shia Islam in Azerbaijan, Saudi Arabia spreads influences of Salafi Sunni Islam. The number of Sunnis in Azerbaijan, however, is increasing. In addition to Azerbaijanis, the Sunni population is also made up of national minorities, which mainly live in the northern region near the North Caucasus. These peoples were primarily divided into two parts after the collapse of the USSR – one part remained in the Russian Federation, and the other in Azerbaijan. Lezgis, Avars, Rutuls, Tsakhurs, etc. belong to their rank.

In Azerbaijan, Aliyev’s regime fully controls the country’s religious life, banning everything that is not in line with the state-backed variation of Islam. The state control extends to both mosques and Islamic educational institutions. Significantly, the case of the Baku Islamic University case vividly demonstrates the state’s control over the religion rather than the freedom and harmony about which Aliyev loves to talk. The Baku Islamic University, under the Religious Administration of Caucasian Muslims, has been operating for 20 years. University has Islamic Studies and Sharia faculties. Seeking to reduce the role of any authority, including the religious authority such as Shaykh al-Islam, Aliyev set out to close the university and established a similar institute but now under his complete control. Several representatives of the Azerbaijani government expressed their displeasure regarding the quality of education at this university. This was a signal that profound changes are expected. Already in 2018 that change happened. By order of the President of Azerbaijan, the Institute of Theology of Azerbaijan, which was already under government control, was opened.

On the other hand, Baku Islamic University announced that it will not accept new students and will only operate until the current students graduate. Moreover, the Faculty of Theology of Baku State University also joined the new institute. Through the Foundation for the Preservation of Moral Values, Azerbaijan spends a lot of money to control religious education. These actions naturally left their mark on the relationship

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19 Eldar Mamedov, “Azerbaijan: Examining the Source of Discontent in Nardaran,” *Eurasianet*, 8 December 2015, <https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijan-examining-the-source-of-discontent-in-nardaran>; Mike Runey, “Azerbaijan’s Nardaran affair,” *Open Democracy*, 24 August 2016, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/nardaran-affair/>, accessed 25.05.2022.

20 Garnik Asatrian, Habib Borjian, “Talish and the Talishis (The State of Research),” *Iran & the Caucasus* 9, no. 1 (2005): 43–72.

between Sheikh al-Islam Allahshukur Pashazadeh and the Azerbaijani leadership since the Baku Islamic University was essentially under the latter's control, while the new institute was not.

Since the state seeks to control the religious organization of the country, these organizations become the continuation of state politics in the case of the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict. Since the early 1990s, more or less independent and oppositional religious Islamic organizations have been proponents of war with Armenia and frequently criticised the Government for not launching the war against Armenia.<sup>21</sup> This perhaps can be considered a political step that is not about the war but against the Aliyev regime. However, the situation gradually changed in recent years, and state-backed organizations also started expressing support for the war. For instance, Haji Shahin Hasanli<sup>22</sup> – a Shi'i preacher and a representative of the Sheikh al-Islam in a district of the capital Baku – articulated the significance of vengeance and the certainty of a future war with Armenia.<sup>23</sup> This gradual turn demonstrates how the state discourse is disseminated through religious organizations.

Azerbaijan tries to keep its political field away from Islamization and uses Islam only to reach its goals, such as support of the Islamic countries in the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict. To do this, Azerbaijan joined the branding bandwagon of states trying to sell itself as a bridge between the East and West where it can use its Islamic and secular identities in a single package. While branding Azerbaijan as a religiously harmonious, multicultural, and secular country, Ilham Aliyev stresses Azerbaijani Islamic solidarity in his speeches, linking it with the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict as a sphere where his audience should help him. This is especially obvious in his speeches in the Islamic audiences, where he demands the same solidarity toward Azerbaijan to fight Armenia. The following paragraphs of the paper will investigate these branding steps deeper.

## Aliyev's Discourse on Islamic Solidarity

In January 2017, Azerbaijani president Ilham Aliyev signed an order declaring the year 2017 a Year of Islamic Solidarity.<sup>24</sup> "The Order says Azerbaijan was one of

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21 Altay Goyushov, "Azerbaijan," in *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe 13*, eds. Stephanie Mussig and Egdunas Raciūnas (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 56.

22 Haji Shahin Hasanli, "On 8 November 2022 Haji Shahin Hasanli was awarded with an honorary decree by the Ministry of Defense" Facebook, 8 November 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=674700967351527&set=a.256363962518565>.

23 Hacı Şahin Həsənli, "Şəhidlərimizin intiqamı alınmalıdır," [Our Martyrs must be Avenged] *Day.az*, <https://news.day.az/azerinews/1096612.html>, accessed 01.07.2022.

24 "President Ilham Aliyev declares 2017 Year of Islamic Solidarity," *Azər Tac*, 10 January 2017, [https://azertag.az/en/xeber/President\\_Ilham\\_Aliyev\\_declares\\_2017\\_Year\\_of\\_Islamic\\_Solidarity-1025354](https://azertag.az/en/xeber/President_Ilham_Aliyev_declares_2017_Year_of_Islamic_Solidarity-1025354); "Meeting on declaration of 2017 'Year of Islamic Solidarity' held by Cabinet of Ministers in Baku," *AzVision*, 14 January 2017, <https://en.azvision.az/news/56584/meeting-on-declaration-of-2017-year-of-islamic-solidarity-held-by-cabinet-of-ministers-in-baku-.html>, accessed 10.08.2022.

the main centers of Islamic Civilization for many centuries. The country played an important role in spreading out the religion of Islam and reestablishing the Islamic Renaissance.”<sup>25</sup> Throughout that year and after that, Aliyev will often mention the idea of Islamic Solidarity in many of his speeches, making it a special tool for the Azerbaijani nation branding campaign.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, our research demonstrates that this idea was a key component in getting the support of Muslim-majority countries in the conflict over Nagorno-Karabagh. This link we will discuss in the next paragraphs of this research.

One of the key audiences for Aliyev’s foreign speeches is the so-called Islamic World, which largely consists of the Organization for Islamic Cooperation members. Here, Aliyev’s speeches are mainly dedicated to Azerbaijan’s *Islamic solidarity*.<sup>27</sup> This idea of Islamic solidarity, however, is a melting pot. In his speeches, Aliyev tries to accumulate all the things needed for Azerbaijan in this dimension, representing it as a part of Islamic Solidarity. According to Ilham Aliyev, Islamic Solidarity is based on shared values, and unity among the Muslim world, which also means addressing similar issues on an international platform. Notably, in one of his speeches Aliyev said: “The people of Azerbaijan have preserved their national and spiritual values over the centuries. Islamic values are an integral part of our national and spiritual values. The tranquillity and mutual understanding observed in the religious sphere in our country, the unity among Muslims, and the regulation of interreligious relations at a high level – all these are factors strengthening our country today.”<sup>28</sup>

In parallel with the so-called spiritual enrichment of the term Islamic Solidarity, in 2010, there was an idea of mixing it with the financial and economic systems.<sup>29</sup> In

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25 “President Ilham Aliyev signed Order on Declaration of 2017 Year of Islamic Solidarity,” *Azər Tac*, 10 January 2017, [https://azertag.az/en/xeber/President\\_Ilham\\_Aliyev\\_signed\\_Order\\_on\\_Declaration\\_of\\_2017\\_Year\\_of\\_Islamic\\_Solidarity-1025501](https://azertag.az/en/xeber/President_Ilham_Aliyev_signed_Order_on_Declaration_of_2017_Year_of_Islamic_Solidarity-1025501), accessed 10.08.2022.

26 “Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the First Summit on Science and Technology of Organization of Islamic Cooperation in Astana – 10 September 2017,” <https://president.az/en/articles/view/25189>; “Speech by Ilham Aliyev at Receptions of Ambassadors and Heads of Diplomatic Missions of Muslim Countries in Azerbaijan – 13 June 2017,” <https://president.az/en/articles/view/24398>; “Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the Conference on OIC Emergency Summit on Jerusalem – 13 December 2017,” <https://president.az/en/articles/view/26561>; “Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the reception of the heads of diplomatic missions and international organizations of Muslim countries in Azerbaijan on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan – 08 June 2016,” <https://president.az/en/articles/view/20241>; “Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the Opening of the 12th Session of ISESCO General Conference – 26 November 2015,” <https://president.az/en/articles/view/17313>, accessed 31.03.2022.

27 The article “Position of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation on Nagorno-Karabagh conflict” by Araks Pashayan discusses activities and resolutions of this organization in detail. Araks Pashayan, «Իսլամական Համագործակցություն կազմակերպության դիրքորոշումը Արցախյան հակամարտության հարցում» [Position of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation on Nagorno-Karabagh Conflict] *Merdzavor ev Mijin Arevelki Erkrner ev Zhoghovurdner* 33, no. 2 (2020): 181-205.

28 “Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the Opening Ceremony of the Conference on 2017- Year of Islamic Solidarity: Interfaith and Intercultural Dialogue – 21 December 2017,” <https://president.az/en/articles/view/26557>, accessed 01.08.2022.

29 “Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the Opening Ceremony of the 35th Annual Meeting of Islamic Development Bank Group – 23 June 2010,” <https://president.az/en/articles/view/269>, accessed 10.08.2022.



the 35th Annual Meeting of the Islamic Development Bank Group, the economic and financial development are highlighted as a basis for Azerbaijan's progress and strengthening of its regional and international cooperation potential, including the energy sphere (oil and gas projects). During the speech, the Azerbaijani president mentioned the support of the organization, and its assistance during the difficult years for the country. Earlier in 2009, the year of "Baku – the capital of Islamic culture-2009,"<sup>30</sup> there was an idea formulated as "unification of Muslim world" that was probably developed into Islamic Solidarity through the Azerbaijani authorities' lens, giving the open space for further discussions. The role of mutual trade and in addition to other economic and political cooperation was pointed as a factor strengthening Islamic solidarity, giving some foundation for the discussion on the unity of Muslim countries as a part of Islamic solidarity.

Nevertheless, in many cases, this Islamic Solidarity is limited by cultural events. For instance, the Islamic Solidarity Games, organized by Azerbaijan, became another platform where Aliyev was putting some extra emphasis on emotional ties.<sup>31</sup> Every event is demonstrated as a manifestation of these ideas, and this is nothing but a product-based branding of the country as a platform where Azerbaijan represents itself in the light that serves political ambitions of Aliyev.

While declaring the importance of "unity among Muslims" Aliyev's Azerbaijan is at the same time quite pragmatic in his actions. It does not tie itself with activities that can harm the non-Islamic affairs of the country. This is especially true about Azerbaijan's relations with Israel, which is a sensitive issue for Iran and Palestine. The links between Israel and Azerbaijan were established on 7 April 1992 and the next year, 1993, Israel opened its embassy in Baku. Azerbaijan, however, did not open its embassy in Israel. The reasons preventing opening of that mission in Israel, indeed, were its closeness to Iran and its membership in OIC.

Nevertheless, since the relations between Azerbaijan and Israel are pragmatic and based on mutual benefits, Israel demonstrated an understanding of this circumstance. At the same time, the two countries pursued multi-level cooperation in the spheres such as security, military procurement, and energy.<sup>32</sup> Especially, the military and security spheres occupy the lion's share of these bilateral relations.<sup>33</sup>

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30 "Speech by President Ilham Aliyev at the Official Opening of the 'Baku – Capital of Islamic CulTure-2009' Year of Culture – 18 February 2009," [http://archive.president.az/articles.php?item\\_id=2010051111125939&sec\\_id=11](http://archive.president.az/articles.php?item_id=2010051111125939&sec_id=11), accessed 10.08.2022.

31 "Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the reception of the heads of diplomatic missions and international organizations of Muslim countries in Azerbaijan on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan – 08 June, 2016," <https://president.az/en/articles/view/20241>; "Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the first session of 13th Summit of Organization of Islamic Cooperation in Istanbul – 14 April, 2016," <https://president.az/en/articles/view/19728>; "Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the First Summit on Science and Technology of Organization of Islamic Cooperation in Astana," <https://president.az/en/articles/view/25189>, accessed 26.08.2022.

32 Alexander Murinson, "The Ties between Israel and Azerbaijan," *Mideast Security and Policy Studies* 110 (2014): 14-19.

33 *Ibid.*, 21-26.

This situation changed after the 2020 War in Nagorno-Karabagh and skyrocketing tensions between Azerbaijan and Iran in 2022. On 18 November 2022 Baku made a historic decision to open Azerbaijan's embassy in the Israeli capital of Tel Aviv.<sup>34</sup> As Vasif Huseynov writes, "until now, Azerbaijan had refused to reciprocate the opening of an Israeli embassy in Baku (29 August 1993), most assuredly so as not to alienate the other Muslim countries in the region and to ensure their support in the ongoing Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict."<sup>35</sup> Azerbaijan's discourse on Islamic solidarity especially developed in the speeches at the OIC platforms, was pursuing a goal "to ensure their support" in the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict rather than unite Muslims or preserve Islamic values.

While demonstrating Azerbaijan as a part of the Islamic world, Aliyev also tries to show its superiority among other Islamic countries. Aliyev seeks to demonstrate that Azerbaijan is a pioneer among the Muslim countries. For instance, whenever he speaks about the First Republic of Azerbaijan, he mentions that this republic was the first democratic republic in the Muslim world.<sup>36</sup> Besides this notion, he also finds other cases to stress the role of Azerbaijan in the Islamic world. For example, he mentions the visit of the Pope or the relations with the Vatican as something that makes Azerbaijan a leader among Muslim countries.<sup>37</sup>

## **The price of solidarity: the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict in the Azerbaijani agenda of the Islamic World**

This nation branding itself as a leading member of the Islamic world, stands with the other members of the "Islamic family" and pursues political goals, among which the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict is the key one. Aliyev uses a large audience of Islamic-majority countries to present his attitude toward the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict. Here he is incredibly successful given that Armenia is not represented in this arena. Thus, it is one of the audiences where Azerbaijan's picture exists without a balancing Armenian one. Here, we will discuss Ilham Aliyev's speeches mainly addressed to Islamic-majority audiences.

One of the key audiences, as it was mentioned, is the Organization of Islamic

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34 Samira Abdullayeva, "Azerbaijani Parliament approves opening of embassies of Azerbaijan in Israel, Albania and Kenya," *Report News Agency*, <https://report.az/en/milli-majlis/milli-majlis-approves-opening-of-embassies-of-azerbaijan-in-israel-albania-and-kenya/>, accessed 18.11.2022.

35 Vasif Huseynov, "In Unprecedented Move, Baku Opens Embassy in Tel Aviv Publication," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 19 no. 178, <https://jamestown.org/program/in-unprecedented-move-baku-opens-embassy-in-tel-aviv/>, accessed 08.09.2022.

36 "Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the official reception on the occasion of the Republic Day – 27 May, 2016," "Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the opening of 5th News Agencies World Congress – 16 November, 2016."

37 "Speech by Ilham Aliyev in front of representatives of the general public at the Heydar Aliyev Center – 2 October, 2016," <https://en.president.az/articles/21268>; "Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the Iftar ceremony on the occasion of holy month of Ramadan – 20 June, 2017," <https://en.president.az/articles/24399>, accessed 08.08.2022.

Cooperation.<sup>38</sup> Azerbaijan has been a member of the organization since 1992. Since then, the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict has become one of the actively discussed topics of the organization. Azerbaijan, financing and hosting many activities of the organization, such as the Islamic Solidarity Games, secured the acceptance of several anti-Armenian resolutions.<sup>39</sup> Given that Armenia has no representative in the organization, Azerbaijan has no opposition here and Azerbaijan fully manipulates its discourse.

In his speeches at the OIC meetings, Ilham Aliyev highlights Azerbaijan as a part of the Islamic world and as a bridge between the Islamic East and the West. Nevertheless, this organization's impact is spreading beyond its borders as well since Azerbaijan coordinates its steps against Armenia in other places. For example, many Islamic countries support Azerbaijan in the UN. Ilham Aliyev mentions this in his speeches:

Cooperation with Muslim countries is one of the priorities of our foreign policy. I emphasized this while talking about foreign policy priorities at the official reception dedicated to the Republic Day. At the same time, we successfully cooperate and always support each other in international organizations. Whenever issues related to Azerbaijan are discussed in the UN, we feel the support of Muslim countries. For our part, we always support Muslim countries in the United Nations. During the summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in Istanbul in April, we demonstrated this solidarity once again. As you know, the summit adopted a very serious document related to the Armenia-Azerbaijan Nagorno-Karabagh conflict.<sup>40</sup>

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38 Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) is the second largest organization after the United Nations with a membership of 57 states spread over four continents. The Organization is the collective voice of the Muslim world. It endeavors to safeguard and protect the interests of the Muslim world in the spirit of promoting international peace and harmony among various people of the world. The Organization was established upon a decision of the historical summit which took place in Rabat, Kingdom of Morocco on 12th Rajab 1389 Hijra (25 September 1969) following the criminal arson of Al-Aqsa Mosque in occupied Jerusalem. In 1970, the first ever meeting of Islamic Conference of Foreign Minister (ICFM) was held in Jeddah which decided to establish a permanent secretariat in Jeddah headed by the organization's secretary general. Amb. Hissein Brahim Taha is the 12th Secretary General who assumed the office in November 2021. The OIC Charter was adopted by the 3rd ICFM session held in 1972. The Charter laid down the objectives and principles of the organization and fundamental purposes to strengthen the solidarity and cooperation among the Member States. Over the last 40 years, the membership has grown from its founding members of 30 to 57 states. "History of Organization of Islamic Cooperation", Organization of Islamic Cooperation," [https://www.oic-oci.org/page/?p\\_id=52&p\\_ref=26&lan=en](https://www.oic-oci.org/page/?p_id=52&p_ref=26&lan=en), accessed 08.05.2022.

39 "Final Communiqué of the 7th Session of The Islamic Summit Conference Casablanca, Morocco (13-15 December 1994)," <https://www.oic-oci.org/docdown/?docID=4320&refID=1212>; "Final Communiqué of the 8th Session of The Islamic Summit Conference Tehran, Iran (9-11 December 1997)," <http://ww1.oic-oci.org/english/conf/is/8th-is-summits.htm#FINAL%20%20COMMUNIQUE>; "Final Communiqué of the 9th Session of The Islamic Summit Conference Doha, Qatar (12-13 November 2000)," [http://ww1.oic-oci.org/english/conf/is/9/9th-is-sum-final\\_communique.htm](http://ww1.oic-oci.org/english/conf/is/9/9th-is-sum-final_communique.htm); "Resolution no.21/9-P(IS) on the aggression of the Republic of Armenia against the Republic of Azerbaijan," Resolution on Political Affairs adopted by the twenty-ninth session of the Islamic conference of foreign ministers, 25-27 June 2002, <https://www.oic-oci.org/docdown/?docID=4283&refID=1182>, accessed 01.09.2022.

40 "Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the reception of the heads of diplomatic missions and international organizations of Muslim countries in Azerbaijan on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan – 8 June 2016," <https://president.az/en/articles/view/20241>, accessed 08.09.2022.

In front of this audience, Aliyev uses vocabulary entirely understandable to them and stresses the spheres where the goals of Azerbaijan and the OIC overlap. In particular, fighting islamophobia, dialogue with the rest of the world, and preserving the Islamic heritage are the main narratives Aliyev supports. In all these cases, Aliyev makes a two-step move. First, he highlights the role of Azerbaijan in the Islamic world. Then he jumps to the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict demanding or appreciating solidarity from the other members of the OIC.<sup>41</sup>

Azerbaijan considers cooperation with Islamic countries a priority. In recent years, Baku has hosted about 10 summits of ministers of foreign affairs, culture, tourism, education, and labour of OIC member countries. I highly appreciate the activity of the OIC in terms of mutual support and solidarity. Islamophobia today is one of the most serious threats in the world. We strongly condemn this trend. Islam is actually a religion of peace, mercy, tolerance and justice. The identification of Islam with terrorism is an erroneous and biased approach. It is Muslim countries that suffer from terrorism the most.

Dear participants of the Summit! I would like to draw your attention to the Armenian-Azerbaijani Nagorno-Karabagh conflict. For more than 20 years, Armenia has pursued an aggressive policy against Azerbaijan. As a result of this policy, 20 percent of Azerbaijan's territory, including Nagorno-Karabagh and seven adjacent districts, has been occupied. A policy of ethnic cleansing has been carried out on these lands. More than a million of our compatriots have become refugees and internally displaced persons. Armenia has committed the Khojaly genocide. The international community and international organizations recognize the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and are in favour of a fair settlement of the conflict in accordance with international law. The UN Security Council has adopted four resolutions in connection with the conflict. These resolutions demand an immediate and unconditional withdrawal of the Armenian forces from Azerbaijani lands. Similar decisions and resolutions have been adopted by the Non-Aligned Movement, the OSCE, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and other organizations. I would like to once again express my sincere appreciation to the OIC for its fair resolution supporting a settlement of the Armenian-Azerbaijani Nagorno-Karabagh conflict within the framework of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. However, aggressive Armenia ignores these resolutions and regularly resorts to armed provocations to disrupt the process of negotiations. One of them was carried out in early April. As a result of an armed attack, Azerbaijani soldiers and civilians were killed. The OIC has decided to establish a contact group at the level of Foreign Ministers to deal with Armenia's aggression against Azerbaijan. Thank you for this decision.<sup>42</sup>

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41 "Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the first session of 13th Summit of Organization of Islamic Cooperation in Istanbul -14 April 2016," <https://en.president.az/articles/19728>; "Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the first Summit on Science and Technology of Organization of Islamic Cooperation in Astana – 10 September 2017," <https://president.az/en/articles/view/25189>, accessed 12.07.2022.

42 "Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the first session of 13th Summit of Organization of Islamic Cooperation in Istanbul -14 April 2016."

When talking to the other organization members, he mainly appreciates their actions to help Azerbaijan against Armenia. However, when he is talking to the Azerbaijani audiences about the role of Muslim countries, he starts stating that since Azerbaijan is a part of the Muslim world, they *have* to show solidarity. In this case, Aliyev presents Muslim mosques as not only Azerbaijani heritage but Islamic in general. For example, in one of his speeches in front of the families of war victims, Aliyev accuses leaders of Muslim countries who visit Armenia, saying, “What kind of contacts can there be with Armenia, which is responsible for the destruction of Muslim mosques? ... We say openly that solidarity should be not in words, but in deeds.”<sup>43</sup> Aliyev here stresses the price of Islamic solidarity that he has in his mind, which is nothing else but the subject of political trade. The same lexicon is followed in other speeches addressed to this inner audience.<sup>44</sup>

Unlike these speeches, phrasing completely differs when he talks to an Islamic audience outside Azerbaijan. Indeed, he does not say anything critical to the Muslim leaders visits to Armenia. Here, he stresses that Armenia *cannot be a friend*, and rather Muslim countries *should not be friend* Armenia.<sup>45</sup> For example, he states, “Muslims of the world should know that Armenia, which has destroyed our sacred mosques, cannot be a friend of Muslim countries.”<sup>46</sup> Another example from the speech by Aliyev at the 7th Summit of Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States: “Armenia is trying to establish close cooperation with Muslim countries. However, having destroyed mosques sacred to Muslims around the world, Armenia cannot be a friend of Muslim countries. The vandalism against our religion shows the Islamophobic essence of Armenia.”<sup>47</sup>

Aliyev positions himself as a strong leader who can talk to other state heads demanding solidarity. With this *macho* image, he mobilizes masculinity as a resource in statecraft. These speeches demonstrate that Aliyev sells Azerbaijani Islamic solidarity. He first positions Azerbaijan as a leading member of the “Islamic family of countries,” describing Azerbaijan as a most reliable ally and a road to development and strength. After that, he raises the question of the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict and vividly demands support in that conflict in return for Azerbaijan’s Islamic solidarity.

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43 “Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the ceremony to give out apartments and cars to families of martyrs and war disabled -21 July 2020,” <https://en.president.az/articles/39951>, accessed 08.08.2022.

44 “Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the ceremony to mark 100th anniversary of Baku State University – 26 November 2019,” <https://en.president.az/articles/34985>, accessed 10.08.2022.

45 In his speeches, Ilham Aliyev periodically dehumanize Armenians in his speeches. More see, Naira Sahakyan, “The rhetorical face of enmity: The Nagorno-Karabagh conflict and the dehumanization of Armenians in the speeches by Ilham Aliyev,” *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2022.2153402>.

46 “Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the Conference on OIC emergency summit on Jerusalem.”

47 “Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the 7th Summit of Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States – 15 October 2019,” <https://en.president.az/articles/34458>, accessed 11.09.2022.

## Conclusion

Nations work to make an image that will be acknowledged within the world community as a reliable partner maintaining the same beliefs to attain their political targets. Since 1991, Azerbaijan has made a concerted exertion to position itself as a multicultural country that serves as a crossroad between the West and the Islamic world. To do this, Azerbaijan develops a picture of itself as a country that is an advocate of Islamic solidarity. Coming back to the words of Simon Anholt, it becomes evident during the Azerbaijani nation branding Aliyev crafts an image that is “at least partly untrue and unfair, based on a whole mess of misunderstandings, prejudices, cultural differences, and half-forgotten events from history.”<sup>48</sup>

While crafting Azerbaijan’s image, Aliyev tries to emphasize his country as an example of multiculturalism where the inter-religious dialogue succeeded. For this purpose, the Azerbaijani president actively uses religion-related platforms to a) present itself as a multi-religious country with strong support of Islamic solidarity and b) highlights its leading role among the Muslim countries. This dual nature, in understanding Aliyev, is a key to making Azerbaijan a needed connecting link between Islamic countries and the rest of the world. “We want interreligious dialogue to strengthen in the Muslim world, in Europe, and throughout the world in general.”<sup>49</sup>

While examining the nation branding in Azerbaijan, we identified the discourse of Islamic solidarity as a vital component of that brand. The link between this nation branding component and the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict looks significant. When Aliyev positions Azerbaijan as a leading country in the Islamic world and brands it as a state with solid Islamic solidarity, the next step is demanding support from those Islamic countries in the Nagorno-Karabagh conflict. This idea is a key in the speeches by Ilham Aliyev addressed to Islamic-majority audiences, where he describes Azerbaijan as a member of the Islamic community and a defender and preserver of Islamic cultural heritage. At the same time, by posing Azerbaijan between the Islamic East and the West, Aliyev nominates Azerbaijan as a connecting link and essentially offers its services. However, the following paragraphs of his speech usually demonstrate the price for that service – the support of the Islamic world in the conflict against Armenia for Nagorno-Karabagh. That support Aliyev seeks to obtain political isolation of Armenia and resolutions condemning Armenia as an aggressor state.

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48 Anholt, *Brand New Justice*, 109.

49 “Speech by Ilham Aliyev at the Opening Ceremony of the Conference on 2017 – Year of Islamic Solidarity: Interfaith and Intercultural Dialogue.”

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# THE ARTSAKH ISSUE IN ITS HISTORICAL-LEGAL DEVELOPMENT

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## Abstract

Artsakh or Karabagh is an integral part of historic Armenia. Felling under the rule of various conquerors throughout history, Artsakh remained Armenian, sometimes possessing also a semi-independent status. The legal history of the Artsakh dispute can be traced back to the 1813 Treaty of Gulistan, when Persia ceded sovereignty of Artsakh to the Russian Empire. After the collapse of the Russian Empire, during 1918-1920 Artsakh was disputed by the Republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan, because of the administrative policy of the former Russian Empire to unite the national territories into mixed administrative unites.

After being incorporated into the Soviet Union, again because of the same administrative police, the Armenian populated Artsakh was incorporated into Soviet Azerbaijan as an autonomous district (marz). Utilizing Article 3 of the “Law on Procedure for Resolving Questions Connected with a Union Republic’s Secession from the USSR,” which provides right to the people of autonomous republics and autonomous formations to independently decide their future state-legal status, on 2 September, 1991, a joint session of the People’s Deputies of the Nagorno-Karabagh Autonomous Region and Shahumyan regional councils, declared the establishment of the Nagorno-Karabagh Republic (NKR). This move was followed by a referendum, where 99,9% voted for independence of NKR.

After this vote until now, Azerbaijan tries to seize Artsakh by force, which is contrary to international law.

This article aims to study the status of Artsakh in the context of the above historical-legal developments. It clearly demonstrates that the right of people of Artsakh to independence is undisputable. The article will also present the false dilemma of the concepts of territorial integrity and self-determination and will argue for the use of remedial secession in the case of Artsakh.

**Keywords:** external self-determination, territorial integrity, remedial secession, ethnic cleansing, racial hatred.

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## Introduction

Without going deep into history, it should be mentioned that Artsakh (Karabagh) is an integral part of historic Armenia.<sup>1</sup> It was the 10th province of the ancient Armenian Kingdom. Felling under the rule of various conquerors throughout the history, Artsakh remained Armenian, sometimes possessing also a semi-independent status (Karabagh Melikdom). Before being ceded to Russia Karabagh Khanate was an administrative unit within Persia.

The legal history of the Artsakh dispute can be traced back to the 1813 Treaty of Gulistan. Under this treaty, that ended the First Russian-Persian War, Persia ceded sovereignty of the Artsakh along with the other North Eastern provinces of Armenia to the Russian Empire. By 1826 Treaty of Turkmenchai, the remaining territories of Eastern Armenia and Persian occupied Georgia were likewise ceded to Russia. Under Russian jurisdiction and policy of divide and rule, the province of Nakhijevan formed part of the administrative region of Yerevan, whilst Artsakh and Zangezour were at first part of the Caspian district, but later, by the administrative reform of 1840, were incorporated into the new Elisavetpol district.<sup>2</sup>

WWI and the Bolshevik Revolution created a new political-historical situation in Transcaucasia. On 15 November 1917, the Bolshevik government adopted a Declaration on the Rights of the Peoples of Russia declaring also the right of secession and formation of independent states from the territory of the Russian Empire. In November 1917, the first government of an independent Transcaucasia (Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan) was created – the Transcaucasia Committee and the Transcaucasia Commissariat (Seim). On 22 April 1918, the latter declared the Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic, which, however, did not live long. On 26 May 1918, Georgia declared its independence, which was followed by the declarations of independence of Azerbaijan and Armenia.

There were a lot of territorial claims and conflicts during nearly 2-3 years of existence of these short-lived republics. By the subsequent sovietization and incorporation of the three republics into the Soviet Union resulted in the new forced status for Nagorno-Karabagh – that is its autonomous status within the Soviet Azerbaijan.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 that resulted in the transformation of the world political map also gave rise to many territorial and statehood problems for former Soviet territories. The Nagorno-Karabagh (Mountainous Karabakh) or Artsakh conflict is one of such examples.

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1 For more on the history of Artsakh see e.g. Levon Chorbajian, Patrick Donabedian and Claude Mutafian, *The Caucasian Knot: The History and Geopolitics of Nagorno-Karabagh* (London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1994); Ohannes Geukjian, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in the South Caucasus: Nagorno-Karabakh and the Legacy of Soviet Nationalities Policy* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

2 Michael Croissant, *The Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict: Causes and Implications* (London: Praeger, 1998), 12–13.

Exercising its right to self-determination based on Soviet law, on 2 September 1991 Nagorno-Karabagh adopted the declaration on the “Independence of Nagorno-Karabagh”, which was later confirmed by referendum. However, the Supreme Council of the newly independent Azerbaijan Republic adopted a declaration stating that the independence of Azerbaijan dated back to 1918-1920. Thus, Azerbaijan became the successor to the Azerbaijani Democratic Republic (hereinafter ADR) that existed between 28 May 1918 and 27 April 1920. On 18 October 1991, based on the abovementioned declaration, the Azerbaijani Republic adopted a constitutional act on withdrawal from the USSR, which defined the existence of the Soviet authority in Azerbaijan from 1920-1991 as an annexation, occupation and forced shift of legal authorities.<sup>3</sup> By denying the legal heritage of 1920-1991, the Azerbaijani Republic abandons all the political and legal decisions made in the period of 27 April 1920 and 18 October 1991, including the decision to transfer Nagorno-Karabagh to Azerbaijan.

The aim of this article is to study the status of Artsakh during 1918-1920, the declaration of independence of Artsakh in 1991, as well as present a brief overview of the concepts of territorial integrity and self-determination (internal and external), while considering also the concept of remedial succession.

## **Legal Status of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabagh) in 1918-1920**

The status of Nagorno-Karabagh in 1918-1920, as well as the stance of the international community and international institutions, clearly demonstrates that the land was never under the authority of Azerbaijani Democratic Republic.

WWI and the Bolshevik Revolution created a new political-historical situation in Transcaucasia. On 15 November 1917, the Bolshevik government adopted a Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia, which among other provisions declared the right of secession and the formation of independent states from the territory of the Russian Empire.<sup>4</sup> Taking advantage of this in sync with the establishment of Transcaucasia republics, the First Congress of Armenians of Nagorno-Karabagh declared the region a separate administrative unit on 22 July 1918.<sup>5</sup> From 1918 to 1920 the legislative governance of Nagorno-Karabagh was carried out by the local Armenian Congress, which

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3 Concerning the issue of succession, the international community accepts that the Baltic States could not be considered as successors of the USSR, because they were annexed in an unlawful manner. According to the same logic, any change that occurred during the Soviet period is not applicable to the current Azerbaijani Republic, because the latter considers the Soviet dominance unlawful, referring to it as an occupation of Azerbaijani territory. Hubert Beemelmans, “State Succession in International Law: Remarks on Recent Theory and State Praxis,” *Boston University International Law Journal* 15, no. 1 (1997): 71.

4 Aleksandar Pavkovic, Peter Radan, *Creating New States: Theory and Practice of Secession* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 19.

5 Yeghishe Ishkhanian, *Լեռնային Ղարաբաղը 1917-1920* [Mountainous (Nagorno) Karabagh in 1917-1920] (Yerevan: Hayastan, 1999) 81-83.

refused to comply with the English-forced supervision of the Azerbaijani Democratic Republic and demanded to wait until the final solution of the issue at the Paris Peace Conference.<sup>6</sup>

The international community also considered the region as a disputed territory in 1918-1920. So, the Supreme Council of Allied states when de facto recognizing the governments of the Republic of Armenia and Azerbaijani Democratic Republic, clearly mentioned that *the recognition did not imply the final definition of the borders and that the issue should be solved via the mutual agreement of the neighboring states.*<sup>7</sup>

Later this was confirmed in Article 92 of the Treaty of Sevres which stated:

The frontiers between Armenia and Azerbaijan and Georgia respectively will be determined by direct agreement between the States concerned.

If in either case the States concerned have failed to determine the frontier by agreement at the date of the decision referred to in Article 89, the frontier line in question will be determined by the Principal Allied Powers, who will also provide for its being traced on the spot.<sup>8</sup>

The legal stance of the international community on the status of Nagorno-Karabagh was also expressed in the context of membership of Armenia and Azerbaijan to the League of Nations.<sup>9</sup> According to its founders, the League of Nations was intended to become a legal platform to confirm and give a legal effect to the existence of states and the relations between them.<sup>10</sup> The Transcaucasia republics sought recognition by the international community as an important element in consolidating their statehood and security and the membership to the League of Nations was perceived as a solution.

In regard to the application submitted by Azerbaijan, the Secretary-General stated that the territory of the Republic, which occupied a superficial area of 40,000 sq. miles, had never formerly constituted a state. Rather, it had been part of Mongol or Persian territories and, since 1813, was incorporated into the Russian Empire. The report also noted that the name Azerbaijan chosen for the new republic was the same as that of a neighboring

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6 More on these see Grigor Hovhannisyanyan, *Սովետական իշխանության հաստատումը Արցախյան Ղարաբաղում* [Establishment of Soviet Rule in Nagorno-Karabagh] (Yerevan: YSU Publishing House, 1971); Alik Gharibyan, *Արցախյան Ղարաբաղի հիմնախնդիրը 1918-1920 և Մեծ Բրիտանիան* [The Issue of Mountainous Karabagh and the United Kingdom] (Yerevan: YSU Publishing House, 2012).

7 Karapet Izmirlian, *Հայ ժողովրդի քաղաքական ճակատագիրը սնցյալին և ներկային (քննական փնտթյուն)* [Political Destiny of the Armenian Nation in the Past and Present (Analytical Essay)] (Beirut: Sevan, 1964), 202.

8 The Treaty of Sèvres, 1920 (The Treaty of Peace Between The Allied And Associated Powers And Turkey Signed At Sèvres August 10, 1920), <https://www.dipublico.org/100760/the-treaty-of-sevres-1920-the-treaty-of-peace-between-the-allied-and-associated-powers-and-turkey-signed-at-sevres-august-10-1920/>, accessed 14.02.2021.

9 See the detailed discussion of the issue in Edita Gzoyan “Nagorno-Karabakh in the Context of Admitting Armenia and Azerbaijan to the League of Nations,” *The Armenian Review* 55 no. 3-4 (2017): 19-39.

10 *The League of Nations Starts, an outline by its organizers* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1920), 134-135.

Persian province.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, the Secretary-General identified two legal issues: “Whether the declaration of independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan in May 1918 and the recognition accorded by the Allied Powers in January 1920 was sufficient to constitute Azerbaijan *de jure* a “full self-governing State”? and if the Assembly established the status of Azerbaijan as a “fully self-governing state”, whether the delegation which made the application possessed the necessary authority to represent the legitimate government of the country to make this application and whether that government could undertake international obligations and give guarantees required by membership?”<sup>12</sup>

The overall attitude of the report was clearly negative. When the Assembly of the League first convened in November 1920, the questions of membership of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia were referred to the third sub-committee of the Fifth Committee.<sup>13</sup>

The sub-committee report on Azerbaijan was again unfavorable. It stated that the application was made by the government that had been forced to evacuate the capital and to take refuge to Ganja since 27 April 1920, while the Bolshevik government took the power in Baku.<sup>14</sup> The report mentioned also Azerbaijani territorial disputes with neighboring Armenia and Georgia. With Armenia the point of struggle was over Nagorno-Karabakh, Zangezour, and Nakhijevan; with Georgia it was over the region of Zaqatala.<sup>15</sup> The sub-committee stated that despite some agreements concluded between the neighbors, they were not far-reaching and the issue of stable state boundaries was deemed highly questionable.<sup>16</sup>

The report on Armenia was openly positive, although the sub-committee seemed not to absolutely answer all questions. It indicated that although Armenia’s frontiers were not fixed definitively, Article 89 of the Treaty of Sèvres provided for their arbitration and the territory of the republic could greatly expanded.<sup>17</sup> The report also mentioned that Armenia was *de facto* recognized by Allies, while the Argentina and U.S. both recognized Armenia *de jure*.<sup>18</sup> It should be noted that there was no mention of territorial disputes with

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11 League of Nations Archives at United Nations Office at Geneva (hereinafter UNOG), Admission of Azerbaijan to the League of Nation, Memorandum by Secretary General. Sec. 28, Dos. 8466, doc. 8466.

12 Ibid.

13 Andre Mandelstam, *La Societe de nations e le puisanse devan le problem Armenien* (Beirut: Association Libanaise des universitaires Armeniens, 1970), 95–96.

14 UNOG, *The records of the First Assembly Plenary Meetings* (Geneva: League of Nations, 1921), 664-665.

15 Jeremy Smith, *The Bolsheviks and the National Questions 1917-1923* (London: Macmillan Press, 1999), 56-65; Harun Yilmaz, “An Unexpected Peace: Azerbaijani-Georgian Relations, 1918-1920,” *Revolutionary Russia* 22, no. 1 (2009): 41.

16 UNOG, *The records of the First Assembly Plenary Meetings*, 664-665.

17 According to the article “Turkey and Armenia as well as the other High Contracting Parties agree to submit to the arbitration of the President of the United States of America the question of the frontier to be fixed between Turkey and Armenia in the vilayets of Erzerum, Trebizond, Van and Bitlis, and to accept his decision thereupon, as well as any stipulations he may prescribe as to access for Armenia to the sea, and as to the demilitarization of any portion of Turkish territory adjacent to the said frontier.”

18 UNOG, Admission of New Members to the League of Nations. Armenia. Report presented by the 5th Committee to the Assembly. 20/4/39, Section 2, dossier 8350, doc. 3421.



neighboring states in case of Armenia, and also – Georgia.<sup>19</sup>

The sub-committee's reports on the memberships of Armenia and Azerbaijan were discussed by the Fifth Committee on 1 December 1920. Regarding the admission of Azerbaijan, the Committee adopted the following resolution:

Azerbaijan. The Committee decided that though the request of Azerbaijan to be admitted was in order, it was difficult to ascertain the exact limits of the territory within which the Government of Azerbaijan exercised its authority. Frontier disputes with the neighboring States did not permit of an exact definition of the boundaries of Azerbaijan. The Committee decided that the provisions of the Covenant did not allow of the admission of Azerbaijan to the League under present circumstances.<sup>20</sup>

Thus the League of Nations not only confirmed the disputed status of Nagorno-Karabagh but based its rejection of Azerbaijan's membership also on this very argument.

## **Legal Status of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabagh) in Soviet and Post-Soviet Era**

On 29 November 1920, the Revolutionary Committee of Armenia declared the sovietization of Armenia. The next day, the Soviet Government of Azerbaijan adopted a Declaration on recognition of Nagorno-Karabagh, Zangezour and Nakhijevan as part of Soviet Armenia.<sup>21</sup> The following statements and declarations also indicate that Soviet Azerbaijan recognizes Artsakh's self-determination, in this case, unity with Soviet Armenia.<sup>22</sup> By the Decree of 15 June 1921, the Central Committee of Communist Party of Armenia declared Nagorno-Karabagh as an inseparable part of the Armenian SSR. Thus, Nagorno-Karabagh was not part of the Azerbaijan SSR, neither during the sovietization of Azerbaijan, nor after the establishment of the Soviet power in Armenia, while Baku recognized Artsakh as Armenian.

Soon, however, the Azerbaijani SSR insisted on examining the Nagorno-Karabagh issue at the Plenary Session of the Caucasian Bureau (Kavbureau) of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist (Bolshevik) Party, which happen on 4 July 1921. The Committee, also ruled to “include Nagorno-Karabagh in the Armenian SSR, and

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19 For more on the membership issue see Edita Gzoyan, “The Admission of the Caucasus States to the League of Nations: the Role of Soviet Russia,” *Caucasus Survey* 6, no. 1 (2018): 1-17.

20 UNOG, *An Extract from the Journal N17 of the First Assembly* (Geneva: League of Nations, 1920), 139.

21 Newspaper “Коммунист” [Communist] (Yerevan), 1 December 1920, N 1, cited in Shahen Avakian, *Nagorno-Karabakh: Legal Aspects* (Moscow: MIA Publishers), 13, 66 and also *Нагорный Карабах в международном праве и мировой политике. Документы и комментарии. Том 1* [Nagorny Karabagh in International Law and World Politics. Documents and Commentary. Volume 1], ed. and comp., author of Forward and Commentary Yuri Barsegov (Moscow: Krug, 2018), 601.

22 *Ibid.*, 600-605.

to conduct a plebiscite only in Nagorno-Karabagh.”<sup>23</sup> However, the next day a new decision dictated by Moscow was drafted, stating that a) in order to establish national peace between Muslims and Armenians and economic ties between Upper and Lower Karabaghs, Nagorno-Karabagh should be left in the Azerbaijan SSR, with wide regional autonomy and Shushi as its administrative center; b) instruct the Central Committee of Azerbaijan Communist party to determine the boundaries of the autonomous region and submit for approval to the Caucasian Bureau of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist (Bolshevik) Party; c) instruct the Presidium of the Caucasus Bureau of the Central Committee to talk with the Central Committee of Armenian Communist Party and the Central Committee of Azerbaijani Communist Party about the candidate for the emergency committee of Nagorno-Karabagh; while d) the scope of the autonomy of Nagorno-Karabagh to be determined by the Central Committee of Azerbaijan Communist Party and submitted for approval by the Caucasian Bureau of the Central Committee of Russian Communist (Bolshevik) Party.<sup>24</sup> Decision of 5 July 1921, however, is illegal, as it was neither discussed nor voted upon, as Moscow’s representative Josef Stalin did not get the approval of the majority of the members of the Plenary Session.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, again Russia’s divide-and-rule strategy was implemented, by leaving Zangezur to the Armenia and transferring Nakhijevan to Azerbaijan, while granting Artsakh an autonomous status within Azerbaijan. According to Hratch Chilingirian, this aimed at also pleasing Turkey (the Bolsheviks wanted to proliferate the revolution into Turkey and other Muslim inhabited territories), thus they weakened Armenia and strengthened Turkey’s ethnic kin, the Azeris. “It was a way of implanting troublesome and dissident populations within minority republics and pitting ethnic groups against each other, thereby undermining the possibility of minority nationalities working together against the central government.”<sup>26</sup>

Further, on 7 July 1923, the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Republic<sup>27</sup> created the Nagorno-Karabagh oblast. The northern Shahumyan district and western territories were made part of Azerbaijan, thus isolating Artsakh and making it an enclave surrounded by its former counties.<sup>28</sup>

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23 Ibid., 638-639.

24 Ibid., 639.

25 Avakian, *Nagorno-Karabakh*, 14.

26 Hratch Tchilingirian, “Nagorno-Karabagh: Transition and the Elite,” *Central Asian Survey* 18, no. 4 (1999): 435-461, <https://oxbridgepartners.com/hratch/index.php/publications/journal-articles/58-nagorno-karabakh-transition-and-the-elite>, accessed 16.05.2022.

27 The Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (Transcaucasian SFSR or TSFSR) was created on 12 March 1922 and comprised Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. The TSFSR was one of the four republics to sign the Treaty on the Creation of the USSR establishing the Soviet Union in 1922. The TSFSR was dissolved by the 1936 Soviet Constitution and its constituent republics became separate republics of the Soviet Union. See *USSR, Sixty Years of the Union, 1922-1982* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1982), 259.

28 Arman Sarvarian, “The Artsakh Question: An Analysis of Territorial Dispute Resolution in International Law,” *Melbourne Journal of International Law* 9, no. 1 (2008): 196.

The Armenians of Artsakh never adapted to this situation, however their complains about the increasing economic, social and cultural difficulties in the enclave remain unheard.<sup>29</sup> In one such instance, in 1965 “Letter of the Thirteen”, leading Artsakh Armenian intellectuals complained of economic, political, cultural and social discrimination, discrepancies and unfair development measures against the Artsakh Armenians. They stressed the importance to transfer Artsakh to Armenian SSR to avoid Nakhijevan destiny.<sup>30</sup> These appeals were, however, denied referring to Article 78 of the Soviet Constitution, which prohibited any changes of a Soviet Republic’s territory without its consent.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, during the Soviet period, Armenians of Karabagh continued to struggle against the forcefully conferred status of Artsakh and despite the totalitarian soviet regime and the fears associated with it, they raised their voice against the unjust status.

During Gorbachev’s *glasnost* and *perestroika* in the 1980s, the Artsakh issue entered a new phase. Protests of the Artsakh Armenians to be unified with Soviet Armenia and demonstrations of unity in Yerevan escalated into violence and war.

On 2 September 1991, a joint session of the People’s Deputies of the Nagorno-Karabagh Autonomous Region and Shahumyan regional councils, declared the establishment of the Nagorno-Karabagh Republic (NKR), which was followed by a referendum. This was in full conformity with the USSR Constitution and the Law on Secession.

According to Article 3 of the “Law on Procedure for Resolving Questions Connected with a Union Republic’s Secession from the USSR” (Supreme Council of the USSR, 3 April 1990, N 1409-I):

In a Union republic that includes within its structure autonomous republics, autonomous oblasts, or autonomous okrugs, the referendum is held separately for each autonomous formation. The people of autonomous republics and autonomous formations retain the right to decide independently the question of remaining within the USSR or within the seceding Union republic, and also to raise the question of their own state-legal status.<sup>32</sup>

According to USSR Constitution of 1977 “An Autonomous Oblast is a constituent part of a Union Republic or Territory” (Article 86), while Article 87 stipulates that “[...]”

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29 For a more detailed analysis about the situation during the Soviet period, see Ronald Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 132–138.

30 Tchilingirian, “Nagorno-Karabagh,” 441-442.

31 Sarvarian, “The Artsakh Question,” 197.

32 Закон СССР от 3 апреля 1990 г. N 1409-I “О порядке решения вопросов, связанных с выходом союзной республики из СССР” [“Law on Procedure for Resolving Questions Connected with a Union Republic’s Secession from the USSR” (Supreme Council of the USSR, 3 April 1990, N 1409-I)], at <https://base.garant.ru/6335629/>, accessed 20.05.2021.

The Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic includes the Nagorno-Karabagh Autonomous Oblast (Region).<sup>33</sup>

Thus, based on the Law of Secession from the USSR, Nagorno-Karabagh as an autonomous oblast declared its independence. Again, based on the law, the referendum of independence was held on 10 December 1991. The percentage of voters was 82.2% of the total number of voters. The question posed during the referendum was “Do you agree that the proclaimed Nagorno-Karabagh Republic be a sovereign state, independently determining the forms of its cooperation with other states and communities?” The answer of 99,9% of the voters was “Yes”. It should be mentioned that the referendum was monitored by more than 40 international observers and was assessed as fair and democratic.<sup>34</sup>

On 18 October 1991, the Supreme Council of Azerbaijan adopted a Declaration of Independence that was affirmed by a nationwide referendum on 25 December 1991. Thus, the Declaration of Independence of Azerbaijan and the subsequent referendum were carried out later, after Artsakh has lawfully implemented the procedure of succession and declaration of independence. Consequently, it was not within the Republic of Azerbaijan when the latter was formed.

To avoid the consequences of the declaration of Artsakh independence, the Supreme Council of Azerbaijan adopted a declaration that its independence dated to 1918-1920. Thus, Azerbaijan became the successor to the Azerbaijani Democratic Republic that existed between 28 May 1918 and 27 April 1920. On 18 October 1991, based on the abovementioned declaration, the Azerbaijani Republic adopted a Constitutional Act on withdrawal from the USSR. It defined the existence of the Soviet authority in Azerbaijan from 1920-1991 as an “annexation by the Soviet Russia”, an occupation of Azerbaijani territory and a forced shift of legal authorities of the country.<sup>35</sup> On 23 November 1991, Azerbaijan abolished the autonomy of Karabagh, which was declared unconstitutional by the USSR Constitutional Oversight Committee.<sup>36</sup>

However, as was demonstrated in the beginning of the article Artsakh was not within the territory of the Azerbaijani Democratic Republic during its existence.

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33 Chapter 11 of the Constitution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic “The Autonomous Region (Oblast) and Autonomous Area (Okrug),” see Constitution (Fundamental Law) of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, adopted at the Seventh (Special) Session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, Ninth Convocation on 7 October 1977 (Moscow: Novosti Press Agency Publishing House, 1982), 47.

34 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Artsakh, <http://www.nkr.am/en/independence-referendum-in-karabakh>, accessed 05.06.2021.

35 Constitutional Act of the Azerbaijan Republic, <https://cis-legislation.com/document.fwx?rgn=2889>, accessed 11.05.2022.

36 Avakian, *Nagorno-Karabakh*, 15.

## **Empty Discrepancy or False Dilemma: Territorial integrity vs. Self-determination**

The two international law principles that are constantly used within the Artsakh case – self-determination and territorial integrity – will briefly touch upon these two concepts.

Territorial integrity and self-determination of nations are two principles of the international law, which raise a lot of debates because of a supposed contradiction. Territorial integrity refers to the protection of an independent state's territory from aggression of other states, while self-determination is defined as a right of nations to freely decide their sovereignty and political status without external compulsion or outside interference.<sup>37</sup> Thus, territorial integrity is closely connected with a basic order in interstate relations among sovereign independent states, while self-determination is a fundamental human right and refers to the relations between an independent state and a people.

### *The principle of territorial integrity*

The birth of the modern approach to the principle of territorial integrity (*uti possidetis*) dates back to 1648 Peace of Westphalia. The territory of the state was considered to be the main factor, determining the security and wealth of the state. The principle was included in Article 10 of the League of Nations Covenant, by which the members of the League “undertake to respect and preserve as against external aggression the territorial integrity and existing political independence of all Members of the League.” After WWI the principle was stated in several declarations and treaties. The importance of this principle is very great in interstate relations – to protect the state territory against foreign aggression. It is based on the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of states and achieving and maintaining international security and stability in the world through establishing status quo.<sup>38</sup>

This principle was formulated in the Charter of the UN, prohibiting the threat or use of force against the territorial sovereignty of states and its political independence.<sup>39</sup> Among the documents that speak about the concept is the 1960 UN Declaration that states: “any attempt aimed at the partial or total disruption of the national unity or territorial integrity of a country is incompatible with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the UN.”<sup>40</sup> In the 1970 declaration of International Law principles the territorial integrity was not wholly mentioned, but its several parts were explained. The 1975 Helsinki Final Act

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37 Malcolm Nathan Shaw, *International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 443-445; Iñigo Urrutia Libarona, “Territorial Integrity and Self-Determination: The Approach of the International Court of Justice in the Advisory Opinion on Kosovo,” *Revista d'estudis autonòmics i federals* 16 (2012): 109-110.

38 For more on this see Vita Gudelevičiūtė, “Does the Principle of Self-Determination Prevail over the Principle of Territorial Integrity?” *International Journal of Baltic Law* 2, no. 2 (2005): 50-54; Jure Vidmar, “Territorial Integrity and the Law of Statehood,” *The George Washington International Law Review* 44 (2012): 697-747.

39 United Nations Charter, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter>, accessed 05.06.2021.

40 Ibid.

implies that frontiers can only be changed, in accordance with the International Law, by peaceful means and agreements.

### *Self-determination*

The roots of the self-determination concept go back to the political ideas of Aristotle, later John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau.<sup>41</sup> The core philosophical meaning of the principle was that every human being has a right to control his/her own destiny. The concept was also included in Marxist doctrine as a right of working class to liberate from capitalism.<sup>42</sup> The further development of the idea brought to its political implications after WWI. The advocates of the principle in its political aspect, as paradoxical as it sounds, were Vladimir Lenin and Woodrow Wilson. Although not explicitly the concept of self-determination is connected with the American president Woodrow Wilson and his famous *Fourteen Points*, the phrase cannot be found in the document or his speeches and writings of the time.<sup>43</sup> The Soviet leader Vladimir Lenin was another advocate of the principle and was arguing not for “the self-determination of peoples and nations in general, but the self-determination of the proletariat as it existed within every nationality.”<sup>44</sup>

The traces of the concept can be found in the United States Declaration of Independence (1776), which states the natural right of individuals to choose their own form of government. Interestingly, the declaration mentions “... when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security. Such has been the patient sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the necessity which constrains them to alter their former Systems of Government.”<sup>45</sup> Another mention of the idea is in the Joint Declaration of the US president and UK prime minister of 14 August 1941 – the Atlantic Charter.<sup>46</sup> Point second of the Charter mentions the territorial changes that should be only in accord with the freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned, while the parties

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41 Richard Ryan, Frank Martela, “Eudaimonia as a Way of Living: Connecting Aristotle with Self-Determination Theory,” in *Handbook of Eudaimonic Well-Being. International Handbooks of Quality-of-Life*, ed. Joar Vittersø (New York: Springer, 2016), 109-122; Michael Wehmeyer, Karrie Shogren, Todd Little, Shane Lopez, “Introduction to the Self-Determination Construct,” in *Development of Self-Determination through the Life-Course*, eds. Michael Wehmeyer, Karrie Shogren, Todd Little, Shane Lopez (New York: Springer, 2017), 3-16.

42 Rainer Forst, “Noumenal Alienation: Rousseau, Kant and Marx on the Dialectics of Self-Determination,” *Kantian Review* 22, no. 4 (2017): 523-551.

43 For more on this see Trigve Throntveit, “The Fable of the Fourteen Points: Woodrow Wilson and National Self-Determination,” *Diplomatic History* 35, no. 3 (2011): 445-481.

44 Rudolf Mark, “National Self-Determination, as Understood by Lenin and the Bolsheviks,” *Lithuanian Historical Studies* 13, no. 1 (2008): 21-39.

45 *Declaration of Independence: A Transcription*, <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>. Accessed 08.11.2022.

46 The Atlantic Charter was a statement that set out American and British goals for the world after the end of WWII.

announce to “respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live; and they wish to see sovereign rights and self-government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them.”<sup>47</sup>

The term self-determination of people is mentioned officially in the Charter of the United Nations (in Article 1, paragraph 2 and Article 55).<sup>48</sup> It is also formulated in the UN General Assembly Resolutions, International Covenants on human rights, as well as in other documents. Every year, since 1980, the General Assembly of the UN has adopted a resolution on the right of self-determination.<sup>49</sup> The right of self-determination has also been recognized in other international and regional human rights instruments such as Part VII of the Helsinki Final Act 1975 and Article 20 of the African Charter of Human and Peoples’ Rights, as well as the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Territories and Peoples, etc.

Within the concept, there are internal and external self-determination. While the internal self-determination is about the status inside the boundaries of the existing state, the external self-determination is about secession and thus changes of boundaries and territorial integrity.

## **Epilogue: Remedial Secession**

According to modern international law the right to self-determination did not involve necessarily a right to independence, but rather the recognition of “every right accorded to minorities under international convention as well as national and international guarantees consistent with the principles of international law” in other words: internal self-determination.<sup>50</sup> The UN 1970 *Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Co-Operation among States* underlines that territorial integrity is defended only when the state performs its obligations to provide a “government representing the whole people belonging to a territory without distinction as to race, creed or color.”<sup>51</sup> Once the latter guarantee fails, the people shall have the right to self-determination, even if it lends itself to secession.

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47 Atlantic Charter, <https://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/atlantic.asp>, accessed 08.11.2022.

48 Article 1: “The purposes of the United Nations are: ...2. To develop friendly relations among nations based on the respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace.” Article 55 points out the objectives the UN shall promote “with a view to the creation of conditions of stability and well-being which are necessary for peaceful and friendly relations among nations, based on the respect for the principles of equal rights and self-determination.”

49 Antonio Cassese, *International Law* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 10-12.

50 Bernhard Knoll-Tudor and Daniel Mueller, “At Daggers Drawn: International Legal Issues Surrounding the Conflict in and around Nagorno-Karabakh,” *Blog of the European Journal of International Law*, 17 November 2020.

51 Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation among States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/202170>.

Further, the right to secession does not arise in each case of oppression or discrimination; the oppression and discrimination must cross a certain threshold that threatens the survival of the group.<sup>52</sup> Secession as a response to gross human rights violations has been termed as remedial secession – “secession accomplished in an attempt to remediate an ongoing situation.”<sup>53</sup>

Not going deep into the analysis of remedial secession, it should be noted that state and judicial practice demonstrates the existence of the right to remedial secession conditioned upon some requirements. The most important case related to secession is the Quebec case. In its decision (1998) the Supreme Court of Canada indicated that when “a definable group is denied meaningful access to the government to pursue their political, economic, social and cultural development they are entitled to a right to external self-determination.”<sup>54</sup> Although the Court also asserted that, a right to unilateral secession arises only in the extreme cases and under very carefully defined circumstances. In other words, if internal self-determination (regarding democratic values, culture, language, economy, stability, security etc.) is not met, the people have the legitimate right to external self-determination as a last resort.

This approach of the Canadian Court, however, was not new in international law. The seeds of remedial secession and its requirements have been planted in a famous Aaland Islands Case.<sup>55</sup> Here the International Committee of Jurists “articulated the following requirements for justifiable secession when the parent state opposes it: 1) those wishing to secede were “a people”; 2) they were subject to serious violations of human rights at the hands of the parent state; and 3) no other remedies were available to them.”<sup>56</sup>

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52 Antonio Cassese, *Self-Determination of Peoples: A Legal Reappraisal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 119-120; Joshua Castellino, *International Law and Self-Determination – The Interplay of the Politics of Territorial Possession with Formulations of Post-Colonial ‘National’ Identity* (The Hague, Boston, London: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2000).

53 For more on the concept see e.g. Steven R. Fisher, “Towards ‘Never Again’: Searching for a Right to Remedial Secession under Extant International Law,” *Buffalo Human Rights Law Review* 22, no. 261 (2016): 261-296; Simone van den Driest, *Remedial Secession. A Right to External Self-Determination as a Remedy to Serious Injustice?* Human Rights Research Series 61 (Cambridge: Intersentia, 2013); Jure Vidmar, “Remedial Secession in International Law,” *St Antony’s International Review* 6, no. 1 (2010): 37-56.

54 Lina Laurinavičiūtė and Laurynas Biekša, “The Relevance of Remedial Secession in the Post-Soviet ‘Frozen Conflicts,’” *International Comparative Jurisprudence* 1 no. 1 (2015): 66-75.

55 The Aaland Islands dispute was one of the first arbitration cases considered by the League of Nations. The Council of the League of Nations entrusted the International Committee of Jurists with the task of giving an advisory opinion on the legal aspects of the Aaland Islands question. Aaland’s population had demanded self-determination and the transfer of sovereignty of the island from Finland to Sweden. Although the Jurists ruled against self-determination, international guarantees were given to allow the population to pursue its own culture and relieve the threat of forced assimilation by Finland.

56 Aaron Kreuter, “Self-Determination, Sovereignty, and the Failure of States: Somaliland and the Case for Justified Secession,” *Minnesota Journal of International Law* 19, no. 2 (2010): 370.



Another important judicial case was connected with the Declaration of Independence of Kosovo.<sup>57</sup> Again, without going deep into the legal analysis, it should be mentioned that the International Court of Justice, in essence, accepted the legality of secession. Moreover, in a separate opinion presented by some judges in a case when a group is subjected to systematic repression, crimes against humanity, persecution, discrimination or tyranny by its parent state, people are entitled to external self-determination. Another important implication connected with the case is that in the *opinio juris* presented by the states, 17 out of 43 recognized or did not reject the existence of the right to remedial secession.<sup>58</sup>

The fact that the population of Bangladesh (East Pakistan) was subjected to an excessive violence and genocide was another crucial moment for recognizing the legitimacy of Bangladesh declaration of independence in 1971 by the international community.<sup>59</sup>

Given the violent history of the conflict, persistent persecutions, massacres and discrimination against the Armenians of Artsakh, more recently the 2020 war and the violence against the civilians, persistent eradication of Armenian cultural heritage in order to erase any trace of Armenian presence and the rhetoric from Baku,<sup>60</sup> the threat of ethnic cleansing and even genocide is very real and imminent. The provisional verdict by the ICJ on 7 December 2021 is quite indicative of the long list of flagrant human rights violations committed by Azerbaijan against the Armenian population of Artsakh.<sup>61</sup> Thus, even if considering the Artsakh issue within the self-determination territorial integrity dilemma, a remedial secession of Artsakh from an autocratic, totalitarian Azerbaijan is not only in full conformity with international law, both explicitly and normatively, but it is also the only viable solution to avoid the ethnic cleansing or a new genocide against the indigenous Armenian population.

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57 For more on the issue see Accordance with international law of the unilateral declaration of independence in respect of Kosovo. Overview of the Case, <https://www.icj-cij.org/en/case/141>. Accessed 23.07.2021.

58 Laurinavičiūtė and Biekša, “The Relevance of Remedial Secession,” 66-75.

59 George Jain Abhimanyu, “Bangladesh and the Right of Remedial Secession,” in *Research Handbook on Secession*, eds. Jure Vidmar, Sarah McGibbon and Lea Raible (Northampton, Massachusetts: Edward Elgar 2022), 321-330.

60 For more on this see Naira Sahakyan, “The Rhetorical Face of Enmity: the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict and the Dehumanization of Armenians in the Speeches by Ilham Aliyev,” *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* (2022), DOI: 10.1080/14683857.2022.2153402.

61 International Court of Justice Reports of Judgments, Advisory Opinions and Orders Application of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Armenia V. Azerbaijan) Request for the Indication of Provisional Measures Order of 7 December 2021, <https://www.icj-cij.org/public/files/case-related/180/180-20211207-ORD-01-00-EN.pdf>.

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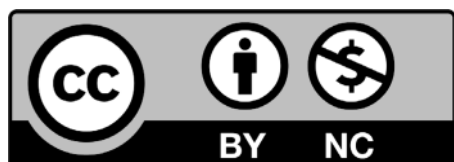
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