

History Of The Nagorno-Karabakh Region

The history of Karabakh is rooted in an antiquity, and it is one of the historic provinces of Azerbaijan, an important political, cultural, and spiritual center.

Territorial claims of the Armenians against the Azerbaijani people and Azerbaijan are the main reasons for the so-called "Karabakh problem".

Karabakh was an inalienable part to all the state formations that have existed on the territory of northern Azerbaijan.

From 4th century B.C. to 8th century A.D. the territory of the current Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan was one of the provinces of Caucasian Albania, the most ancient state of Northern Azerbaijan. After the fall of the independent Albanian state, Karabakh being inseparable from Azerbaijan both geographically and politically, was a part to the Azerbaijani state of Sajids, in 10th - to the state of Salarids, and in 11-12th centuries - to the state of Sheddadids. During 12-13th centuries Karabakh constituted part of the Atabey-Ildenizids state, in the second half of the 13th century- beginning of 15th century, during the existence of the Mongolian Khalugoid state- part of the Jalairids' state. In the 15th century it existed within the states of Gharagounlou and Aghgounlou, and during 16th and 17th centuries Karabakh, as a part of the Karabakh beylerbeyyat (duchy), was within the Sefevi state. The latter consisted of 4 beylerbeyyats: Shirvani, Karabakhi, Erivani and Tabrizi, when a part of the Karabakhi beylerbeyyat was ruled by the representatives of the Turkic Ziyad-oglu tribe, subordinated to Kajars from 16th till 19th century. In the second half of the 18th century Karabakh belonged to the khanate (principality) and along with the latter was incorporated into Russia.

Thus, Karabakh has never been of part of the Armenian state, which was established in Asia, far from South Caucasus.

In the antiquity the population of Karabakh consisted of Albans, and in the early medieval period- of Albans and Turkic-speaking tribes of Barsil, Savir, Hunn, Khazar, which lived on this territory. These tribes were joined by other Kangary. Language of Albans belonged to northeastern- Caucasian family. As it has been established as a result of most recent research, tribes of that family have inhabited the territory, at least, since the mesolithic period, no less than ten thousand years ago.

Arabic conquest of the lowlands of Albania, as well as valleys of Kura and Araz in 7th century, resulted in islamization of the population of the plains and its merging with the Turkic-speaking population of the country. However, Albanian population, ruled by Albanian Mikhranid princes, remained in the mountainous Karabakh along with the Turkic tribes. Descendants of the Mikhranid clan restored the Albanian kingdom in Karabakh in the 9th century. This kingdom was ruled by the Jalairids, descendants of Hasan-Jalal, until 15th century.

After losing political and secular power in the 15th century, the clan of Jalal remained the spiritual leaders of the country. They became Patriarch-Catolicos of the Albanian autonomous church, until 1836, when independence of the church was abolished and subordinated to the Armenian as a result of intrigues of the Armenian clergy.

In the 15th century the Jalalids were granted the title of Melik (count) by Jahanshah. After that the clan broke up and five melikates (smaller autonomous country) appeared in Karabakh: Goulistan, Jraberd, Khachen, Varanda and Dizak. The title of melik was conferred upon the ruling families of the Melikates. Meliks of Karabakh in their letters to the Russian czar call themselves “descendants of the Albanian Arshakids”. The Albanian princes had a title of melik, differing from Armenian titles: ishkhan, tar etc. None of the Albanian Melik Families was of Armenian descent.

Thus, the historical Albanian province of Karabakh until 19th century had been an important political, cultural, spiritual center of Albanian Christian population which managed to preserve its territorial, political, confessional unity and, importantly, -its Albanian self-conscience.

Appearance of the first ethnic Armenian on the territory of Azerbaijan, in particular, in Karabakh, should be viewed through the prism of the Armenian people's history.

As it is known, Armenians aren't aboriginal neither in the Asian part of historical Turkey, nor in the Caucasus. According to Armenologists, the Armenians, who belonged to the Frigian tribes, originally inhabiting the Balkans, following the Cimmerian resettlement appeared in Asia in the 7th century B.C. They have further spread to the east, reaching Euphrates. The last edition of “The history of the Armenian people” states that in the 12th century B.C. groups of Indo-European Armenian-speaking tribes penetrated territories of the Khurrites and Louvian Khetts in the upper reaches of the Euphrates. These tribes were, referred to as “moushku” and “urumu” by Assirian cuneiform texts, and “arims” by the Greek sources, later called “Armenians”.

The first Armenian state, established in Asia Minor in the 6th century B.C., lasted until 428 and was only nominally a state being de-facto a province of the Persian and Roman Empires. Attempts to restore the Armenian kingdom were made in 9th-10th centuries and in 12th-14th centuries. Thus, in 9th-11th centuries Armenian Bagratid state, with the capital of Ani, was established in the vicinity of Kars and Erzurum. Later, in 12th-14th centuries, an Armenian Kilikian kingdom was founded in a totally different location on the northeastern shore of the Mediterranean.

Since 15th century the Armenian history is closely linked to the Armenian church. Significance and influence of the church have especially grown after the Catolicos' seat was moved in 1441 from Kilikia to Echmiadzin, in the vicinity of Yerevan. Since that time Echmiadzin assumed both political and general leadership in the life of the Armenians. It became the consolidating and organizing force of the Armenians scattered across many countries.

Thus, Azerbaijani regions of Karabakh, partly populated by Christian Albans, had preserved confessional unity with Armenians while maintaining territorial and

political unity with Azerbaijan.

With the emergence of the Ottoman Empire Armenians lost hope to create their state in Asia Minor. This is when the Armenians turned to the Caucasus and historical Azerbaijan with the idea of the Armenian people “introduce into scientific circles the term “Eastern Armenia” shifts both in time and space from east of the Euphrates to the Caucasus.

Beginning from the 18th century the Armenians penetrating Russia are trying to gain favor of the Russian court, first- of the Emperor Paul I, then- Empress Catherine II by all means. Attracting them by the necessity of liberating the so-called “Eastern Armenia” from Turkish and Persian “yoke”, Armenians practically aimed at cleansing Karabakh and the lands of Zangezur from Azerbaijanis, who so-existed with the fragments of Albanian Christians. Another goal was the Russian conquest of these territories. Undoubtedly, Armenian intendent, by separating these lands from Azerbaijan and joining them with Russia, to continue presenting them as “Eastern Armenia”, this time within Russia. In 1805 by peace negotiations Azerbaijani khanates of Karabakh (founded by Panakh Ali-khan, fortress of Shusha which he erected to make the capital of the khanate, was called Panakhabad), Sheki and Shirvan were forced to accept the Russian rule. During the period of 1806-1813 through embittered wars and campaigns by Tsitsianov, Goudovich and general Kotlyarovskiy the rest of the Azerbaijani khanates- principalities of Talysh, Baki, Gouba, Ganja, Derbent were conquered. Later, in 1826, Russia annexed the khanates of Nakhchivan and Yerevan, populated mostly by Turkic Azerbaijanis.

According to official documents, Karabakh khanate had 90,000 residents, one town and more than 600 villages, only 150 of them were Armenian. There were 1048 Azerbaijani and 474 resident families in Shusha. In villages: 12,902 and 4,331 accordingly. However, already by the end of the 19th century Nagorny Karabakh had Armenian majority of 58 %, while Azerbaijanis constituted 42 % of population. Influx of Armenian population in Azerbaijan, especially into Karabakh, was significant during and after World War I.

Increase of Armenian population in the Caucasus and concentration of predominantly pro- Russian Christian Armenians in the areas bordering Turkey and Persia was dictated by interests of Russia. In addition, this way Russia won sympathies of Armenians in Turkey and secured support in Asia Minor.

Both Turkmenchay and Andrianopol treaties included special clauses allowing for migration of Armenians into the Caucasus, into the lands of Azerbaijan and Georgia. This is when first compact Armenian settlements appeared in Zangazur and Karabakh. In the years 1828-1830 alone 130,000 Armenians migrated. Following signing of Turkmenchay treaty in 1828 Tsarist government created new, previously non-existent political entity- the Armenian oblast (district). This district consisted of Azerbaijani lands of Erivan, Nakhchivan and Ordubad districts and was governed by Tsarist bureaucrats. This was the first attempt to create an Armenian political entity on the territory of Azerbaijan. In 1849 the Armenian district was abolished and Erivan governorship created instead.

In 1836, in order to secure support of Armenians in Turkey and trying to subordinate

them to pro-Russian oriented Armenian Patriarchy in Echmiadzin, Tsarist government made a number of concessions to the Armenian Echmiadzin Church. These concessions included abolition of the Albanian Patriarchy, the independent Albanian church, and subordination of it to the Armenian and Georgian Church. Later, in 1909-1910, the Armenian Georgian church with permission of the Russian Sinod destroyed archives of the Albanian church and eliminated samples of the Albanian literature. V.L. Velichko wrote that the Armenian clergy had used similar approach to Albanian Christian shrines, the same way the Georgian monuments were treated. After abolition of the Albanian Church Albanians if Karabakh migrated to the left bank of Kura river, preserved their identity and still live in the Azerbaijani village of Nij.

The issue of so-called "Western Armenia" is related to the situation of Turkey's Armenian population and following 1878 talks held in Berlin and San-Stefano became "the Armenian question", which impeded Turkey undertaking reforms in the Armenian-populated vilayets (regions). In reality, only Tsarist Russia was pushing for realization "the Armenian question". Two political parties, "GNCHAK" (1887) and "DASHNAKTSUTYUN" was created for that purpose. These parties developed ideological justification for Armenian territorial claims in the Caucasus. "DASHNAKTSUTYUN" used terrorism and armed rebellion to achieve its goal of unifying territories with Armenian migrant population from Iran and Turkey. "DASHNAKTSUTYUN" party frequently changed its orientation from pro-Russian to pro-European and then from supporting Turkish revolutionary movement back to supporting Russia.

During the Balkan war of 1912 -1914 Russia proposed creation of an autonomous Armenian district in Turkey, so-called "Western Armenia" from vilayets of Erzeroum, Van, Bitlis, Diyarbakir, Harput, Sivas. This proposal wasn't supported by the European states. The Armenian political parties mentioned above and authorities of the Russian Empire in an attempt to contain national-liberation movement in the Caucasus provoked first clashes between Armenians and Azeris. As a result, between 1907 and 1912 about 500.000 Armenians from Iran and Turkey migrated into Kars, Erivan and Elizavetpol districts, which had overwhelmingly Azerbaijani population. This took place with assistance of Russian authorities in order to make inter-ethnic situation even more tense and strengthen Russia's dominance in the region.

February and October Revolutions of 1917 marked a new stage in "the Armenian question". In October 1917 Armenian Congress convened in Tiflis and demanded Russian annexation of East Turkey's territory occupied by the Russian Army during World War I. On 31 December, Council of Commissars adopted a decree signed by Lenin and Stalin on free-determination of "Turkish Armenia".

Following collapse of the TransCaucasus Parliament the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR), the first democratic state in the Muslim world, was established on 28, May, 1918. One of the first steps of the ADR's government was to yield on 29, May, 1918 town of Erivan (Yerevan) to Republic of Armenia, which had declared independence but had no political center. Territory of Armenian Republic was limited to Erivan and Echmiadzin districts with 400.000 residents. Later, all means were employed to implement policies aimed at changing demography of Erivan and Zangezur in favor of Armenians.

Azerbaijan's foreign policy objectives at that period included developing friendly and neighborly relationship with Armenia. Unfortunately, "DASHNAKTSUTYUN" government of Armenia had expansionist plans and claims on Nakhichevan, Zangezour and Karabakh, all of which were parts of Azerbaijan. This led to the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan in 1918-1920. According to available data, during summer of 1918 alone 115 Azerbaijani villages were destroyed, 7,000 people killed and 50,000 Azerbaijanis left Zangezour.

US President Wilson accepted instructions from the League of Nations, which stated that Armenia "cannot exist without support" and that its borders must be defined. However, the Senate decided that "the Armenian question" is a European issue and rejected the "mandate of Armenia".

The French Government acted similarly towards Armenians regarding Cilicia, which had been occupied by France in 1919. In 1921 France concluded peace treaty with Turkey, and gave up Cilicia.

Thus, the Armenian issue concentrated in the South Caucasus. In March-July 1920 clashes with Dashnak forces took place in Karabakh, especially in Shusha, Nakhichevan, Ordubad. Hostilities took place in Khankendi, Terter, Askeran, Zangezour, Jeyhulan, Nakhichevan, Ganja, and dozens of Azerbaijani villages were destroyed.

Independence of Azerbaijan was crushed after the Bolshevik 11th Red Army had invaded the country and the Soviet Socialist Republic of Azerbaijan was proclaimed on April 28, 1920. Soviet Russia decided not to allow turning Armenian republic into anti-Russian bridgehead. It became a mediator in settling the border disputes between Armenia and Azerbaijan. In July 1920 Dashnak government in Erivan gave a secret order to the Dashnak military forces to begin guerrilla punitive activities in Karabakh, Nakhichevan and Zangezour. The same summer the Bolsheviks have crushed the Dashnak troops that had invaded Karabakh, and established Soviet rule here. Later, in November 1920, the Dashnak regime was overthrown in Armenia.

The letter written in 1920 by chairman of the Revolutionary Committee of Azerbaijan N. Narimanov, member of the Caucasus regional committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan A. Mikoyan and member of the Communist Party of Armenia A. Noutjianian and the people's commissary (minister) of foreign affairs G. Chicherin and G. Orjonikidze stated: "As far as a supposedly dispute about these places and they must stay within Azerbaijan. The regions of Djulfa and Nakhichevan are populated solely by Muslims...and must join with Azerbaijan".

G. Orjonikidze, who in his telegrams to V. Lenin, I. Stalin, G. Chicherin has been underlining economic bent of Karabakh and Zangezour for Baku and Azerbaijan government, the Dashnaks, are striving for joining Karabakh with Armenia, but for the population of Karabakh it would mean to be deprived of their life-line, which is Baku, and to be connected to Erivan, which which it hasn't ever been linked in any way".

Responding to the territorial claims of the Armenian SSR the Caucasus bureau of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party at its meeting dated July 5, 1921

decided: "Proceeding from the necessity to maintain ethnic peace between Muslims and Armenians, economic ties Azerbaijan, Nagorno Karabakh is to be left within Azerbaijan SSR and to be granted broad regional autonomy with the administrative center in Shusha, which is a part of the autonomous region." Establishment of the autonomous region wasn't artificial, though it contradicted historic right of Azerbaijan for its own lands. It was a result of complicated situation in Nagorno Karabakh and around it.

In 1922 the Azerbaijan SSR was included into the USSR. Within the latter the attributes of republics' independence were a formality. On July 7, 1923 the Central Executive Committee of Azerbaijan issued a decree "On the establishment of Nagorno Karabakh autonomous region". Thus, the government of the Azerbaijan Republic by the act of law created an autonomy on the territory of the Azerbaijan in the interests of its Armenian citizens. At the same time, three hundred thousands of Azerbaijanis who have lived in compact settlements in Armenia were refused even cultural autonomy by the governments of both the USSR and the Armenian SSR. That violated their rights and had eventually led to multiple deportations in 1948-1950 and to more than one dramatic forced resettlement from Armenia, including more than 200,000 in 1988-1989 alone.

It is necessary to emphasize that after the establishment of Soviet rule all over the South Caucasus in 1921, the territories that had been captured and separated from the Republic of Azerbaijan weren't claimed by government of the Azerbaijan SSR. On the contrary, the next, "peaceful" stage of separation started with the assistance of communist leadership of Russia and the Soviet Union. In 1921 "acquisition" of the province of Zangazour by Armenia was legalized, which led to complete isolation of Nakhichevan from Azerbaijan. In 1922 the Bolsheviks dealt with Azerbaijani territories of Dilijan and Geycha in a similar manner. In 1929 several villages were separated from Nakhichevan and transferred to Armenian SSR. In 1969 the Armenian SSR again extended its territory by acquiring Azerbaijani lands, this time - in the Gedabek district. In 1984 under the pressure from central authorities, as it had been in the previous years, Azerbaijan handed a number of villages in the district of Kazakh to Armenia.

Taking into account the above, it's crucially important to underline that as of January 1, 1920 the territory of the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan was 113,900 square km. Now the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan is 86,600 square km. According to the population census of 1989, the population of the Autonomous Region of Nagorno Karabakh (ARNK) was 186,100. 138,600 of them were Armenians (73,5 %) and 47,500 Azerbaijanis (25,3%).

The new stage of the Armenian-Azerbaijani confrontation at the end of the 1980s was caused not by the far-fetched suppositions about "discrimination of the Armenian minority" in Azerbaijan and economic hardships, but by the beginning of implementation of long-conceived plans of expansion. The most favorable conditions for that were created in the period of collapse. Beginning in February 1988, Armenia, with the connivance of the leadership of the USSR, instigated anti-constitutional activities by the administrative structures of the ARNK. Those steps became the prologue of the wide-scale armed aggression of Armenia against Azerbaijan.

