



Azerbaijan – Georgian Relations in the Early 20th Century

Samira Habibbayli Ilham¹

PhD in Political Sciences, Institute of Caucasus Studies of Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences

ABSTRACT

This article examines the relations between Georgia and Azerbaijan in the early 20th century. The article utilizes secondary research methods and applies historical and comparative analysis techniques to investigate the relations between the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic and the Democratic Republic of Georgia and Azerbaijan-Georgia relations after the occupation of Soviet Russia.

It is well known that relationships with neighboring states play a significant role in shaping a country's foreign policy. In this context, it has been revealed that several factors influenced the ADR-GDR relations and that these factors, along with common interests, played a crucial role in establishing bilateral relations. It has been concluded that over 23 months, these relations were developed along an upward trajectory, with efforts made to expand cooperation in political, economic, and military-security fields.

The independence of Azerbaijan and Georgia was short-lived. Azerbaijan was first occupied by Soviet Russia on April 28, 1920. Georgia was also occupied by Soviet Russia in February 1921. On December 30, 1922, at the First Congress of Soviets of the USSR in Moscow, the RSFSR, Ukrainian SSR, ZSFSR, and Belarusian SSR voluntarily united into the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Thus, Azerbaijan and Georgia completely lost their independence and existed as allied republics within the USSR until 1991.

As a result of the research, it was concluded that despite the problems, positive dynamics were observed in Azerbaijan-Georgia relations until the occupation of Soviet Russia.

Keywords: *Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan, Democratic Republic of Georgia, diplomatic relations, financial and monetary systems, military cooperation, occupation.*

¹ alis100a@gmail.com

1. Introduction

The total length of Azerbaijan's borders is 3359 km, including land borders of 2646 km. It borders the Russian Federation in the north for 390 km, in the northwest with the Republic of Georgia for 480 km, in the west with Armenia for 1007 km, in the south with the Islamic Republic of Iran for 756 km, and in the southwest Turkey for 13 km. The length of the border between the Republic of Azerbaijan and Georgia is 480 km (Shantadze, 2006). The main part of the border consists of the Ganikh (Alazan) and Gabirri (Iori) rivers, the confluence of the Kura and Gabirri rivers, and Candargol. Land transport and movement of people between the two countries is carried out through five border and customs checkpoints.

Azerbaijan-Georgia relations have a long history. For many years, the political institutions and states of Azerbaijan and Georgia have existed in the same region, formed parts of the common history, established close relations, and cooperated in various fields. These factors and common interests played a major role in determining the establishment of beneficial mutual cooperation with Georgia as one of the priority directions of the foreign policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan after the restoration of state independence.

After the restoration of state independence, it is appropriate to take a look at the history of the relations between the two states in order to understand and evaluate the development dynamics and features of bilateral relations more deeply. In the historical period after 1918, it is possible to distinguish six stages of the relations between the two states: the stage of the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan - Democratic Republic of Georgia, which can be characterized as a stage of mutually beneficial cooperation from May 28, 1918 to April 20, 1920; The stage of relations between the Azerbaijan SSR and the Democratic Republic of Georgia, characterized as a contrasty and sharp stage from April 1920 to February 1921; Azerbaijan SSR-Georgian SSR stage, from February 1921 to December 1922, when the states existed as formal independent subjects and problems were resolved through negotiations; From December 1922 to October 1991, the stage of the USSR, when the economic and cultural cooperation of the two states existed as an allied republic within the union, but independent relations were not possible; From October 1991 to November 1992, the stage fro the restoration of the states' independence to the establishment of diplomatic relations, which was considered as a stage of cold relations due to various problems, especially the discrimination against Azerbaijanis living in Georgia; the stage after November 18, 1992, when diplomatic relations were established.

This study examines the Azerbaijan-Georgia relations in the early 20th century.

2. Establishment of diplomatic relations between the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan and the Democratic Republic of Georgia

The first diplomatic and political relations between Azerbaijan and Georgia were established at the beginning of the 20th century, when both states declared their independence for the first time. Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, and Azerbaijan were connected by very strong reasons. After the invasion, the Russian Empire ruled the entire South Caucasus from Tbilisi. This city acted as the administrative,

political and cultural center of the South Caucasus. During the fall of Tsarist Russia, Azerbaijani intellectuals fought for independence in Tbilisi. For this reason, the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan was declared in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia. Considering this connection, the establishment of relations with the Republic of Georgia was of great importance. After moving to Ganja on June 16, 1918, the government the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan appointed Mammad Yusif Jafarov, one of the founders of the Republic, who was the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan, as the diplomatic representative of Azerbaijan in this country, in order to ensure regular relations with Georgia (Azərbaycan Demokratik Respublikası, 1996). Mammad Yusif Jafarov held this position from the end of June 1918 to March 1919. Later, Fariz Vakilov and Makinski were appointed diplomatic representatives of Azerbaijan in Georgia. The diplomatic representative of Georgia in Azerbaijan was Nikolay Kartsivadze (Əliyev). Taking into account the economic and trade importance of Batumi for Azerbaijan and its potential in terms of establishing relations with European countries, the consulate of Azerbaijan was established in this city on November 10, 1918, and Mahmud Bey Efendiyev was appointed consul (Azərbaycan Demokratik Respublikası, 1998).

3. The Interstate Cooperation: Challenges and Opportunities

During the 23-month period of independence, relations between Azerbaijan and Georgia were established in many fields. There were serious problems in territorial issues between the two states. It is no secret that after the occupation of the South Caucasus by Tsarist Russia at the beginning of the 19th century, successive administrative-territorial reforms were carried out in order to create discord between the Azerbaijani and Georgian peoples. This did not affect the relations of the two neighboring nations that declared their independence.

A number of ethnic-territorial disputes between the Republics of Azerbaijan and Georgia, which need to be resolved urgently, arose before these states were declared. According to the recollections of the Georgian socio-political figure, professor Z.Avalov, consultations were held between Azerbaijan and Georgia on May 21 in Batum, when the Transcaucasian Federal Republic was still in existence (Rəhmanzadə, 2008). Thus, in these consultations, the Georgian side led by Zhordania, the founder of the Georgian national liberation movement, said that they might give up the Zagatala district if it remained helpless at the last moment. The meeting was fruitless because the parties could not agree.

A few days after the mentioned meeting, the Transcaucasian Federal Republic disintegrated, all three sides declared their independence, and after a short time, disputes arose between Azerbaijan and Georgia regarding the ownership of Borchali, Garayazi, Sighnag, Zagatala regions, or separate parts of those territories. On June 5, 1918, at the meeting of the Georgian government, was heard the military minister's report "On the state of affairs in the Borchali district and the need to clarify the exact borders of the Georgian State." At the meeting, a decision was made to deploy armed forces on the borders of Borchali, Sighnag, and Tiflis regions (Nəsibzadə, 1996). A few days after this decision, Georgian troops, accompanied by German military units, were deployed in Borchali.

In his letter dated June 22, 1918, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan proposed the creation of a mixed commission for the solution of repeated territorial problems. The Georgian side did not accept this offer. Not wanting the situation to escalate further, the Azerbaijani government agreed to the visit of the German and Ottoman delegations to the territory, relying on the proposal to create an international commission in order not to intensify the dispute. Both the Georgian side and the Ottoman and German representatives agreed with this proposal. As a result, it was decided to discuss the issue with the International Commission on the condition that the Azerbaijani Corps detachment remain in Garayazi (Nəsibzadə, 1996).

Despite all this tension, both countries were interested in establishing relations. The preservation of the political independence of one state had a great influence on the fate of another state. Yusif Chamanzaminli paid special attention to this issue in his work entitled "Our Foreign Policy". The great Azerbaijani writer wrote: *"There can be no doubt that both Georgia and Azerbaijan want to live independently. If this happens to Georgia, the danger will affect Azerbaijan as well. The freedom of these two countries is connected. If one loses his freedom, the other will have to lose too"* (Çəmənzəminli, 1993)

Despite all this, since Azerbaijan and Georgia were a single economic space within Russia for a long time, agreements and new arrangements in the economic, financial, transport and communication spheres were necessary after gaining state independence. On June 4, 1918, representatives of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and the Ottoman Empire signed an agreement in Batumi to ensure the normal working of the Baku-Batumi white oil pipeline (Azərbaycan Xalq Cümhuriyyəti ensiklopediyası, 2004). This agreement facilitated the export of Azerbaijani oil to the foreign market and created an opportunity for the formation of the economies of the young republics. On the same day, representatives of Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Ottoman Empire and Armenia signed an agreement on the distribution of the steam locomotive fleet belonging to the South Caucasian Railway. It is known that during the Tsarist Russia, the entire wagon-steam locomotive park in the South Caucasus belonged to the Tsarist government. According to this agreement, the rolling stock in the South Caucasus should be distributed according to the length of the railways passing through the territories of all three states. These treaties and agreements marked the beginning of diplomatic regulation of interstate relations.

Perhaps, the most important of the issues that the newly formed republic had to solve was the regulation of the financial and monetary system. At that time, the Tsar ruble, kerinka, the token of the provisional government, the South Caucasus Commissariat bond, and the Baku bond were used in the territory of Azerbaijan. There was a shortage of money in circulation. The Baku bond put into circulation at the beginning of 1918 did not meet the needs of Azerbaijan. In such a crisis, without informing the Azerbaijani government, an agreement was signed on the issuance of 200 million South Caucasus Commissariat bonds, and the banknotes issued by the Tbilisi office of the Russian State Bank were distributed between Georgia and Armenia. This caused the sharp displeasure of the Azerbaijani government. This step, which was taken by leaving Azerbaijan out, did not work. Because the customs and border issues between the states have not yet been resolved. In order to improve the socio-economic situation of the countries, it was necessary to conduct an agreed financial and monetary policy between all three states located in the South Caucasus. On September 6, 1918, the representatives of Azerbaijan,

Georgia and Armenia signed an agreement on the issue of a Transcaucasian bond in the amount of 280 million rubles for financial and monetary credit operations. On November 15 of the same year, an agreement was signed in Tbilisi between Azerbaijan and Georgia on the issuance of an additional 160 million Transcaucasian bonds (Əliyev). The successful financial policy of the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan spoke for itself; the inflation of the South Caucasus and Baku bonds was prevented, and its position in the financial market was strengthened.

On December 26, 1918, an agreement on the exchange of goods was signed between Azerbaijan and Georgia. According to this agreement, free transit of goods carried by rail was allowed between the parties (Quliyev, 2015). According to the 19-article agreement signed by Behbud Khan Javanshir on behalf of the Azerbaijani government and Nikolay Karchivadze on behalf of the Georgian government, mass consumer goods were supposed to be transported without customs duty. Article 1 of the agreement agreed to the duty-free transportation of goods by railway in both directions, and Article 2 agreed to the unimpeded transportation of oil and oil products from Azerbaijan and coal and forest materials from Georgia. According to the 6th and 8th articles of the agreement, the Georgian side agreed to the duty-free transfer of grain and grain products, sugar, and other goods and products to Azerbaijan. This agreement was in the interests of both countries and served to improve the socio-economic situation of the population.

On February 5, 1920, a transit agreement was signed between Azerbaijan and Georgia in Baku. According to this agreement, the parties undertook to ensure free transportation of transit cargoes between the two countries by sea for a period of one year, i.e. without paying any customs duties (Quliyev, 2015). The agreement was signed by the Minister of Trade, Industry, and Food, M. Hajinski, and the Minister of Roads, Kh. Malik-Aslanov, the diplomatic representative of Georgia to the government of Azerbaijan G. Alshibaya mainly served the transportation of oil and oil products to Georgia at reasonable prices and with simplified rules.

The relations established in the military field were of great importance. The document on mutual defense signed in Tiflis on June 16, 1919 indicates the strengthening of diplomatic relations between the two countries (Nəsibzadə, 1996). Foreign Minister Mammad Yusif Jafarov from Azerbaijan, Military Minister Samad Bey Mehmandarov, Chief of General Staff Lieutenant General Mammad Bey Sulkevich, Foreign Minister Y. P. Gegechkori, Military Minister N. Ramishvili, Deputy Military Minister Major General Gedevanov and General Odishelidze from Georgia. According to this agreement signed for a period of 3 years, the countries undertook to act together with all their armed forces and military means against any aggression aimed at the independence of one or both of them. On the basis of this document, a military-technical agreement was also signed between the two countries. This agreement contributed to increasing the technical and personnel potential of the Azerbaijan National Army. In exchange for 1 million pounds of oil and 20 million pounds of oil products sent from the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan to Georgia, 12 light, 12 mountain cannons, 24 Maxim machine guns, 3,000 rifles, etc. military supplies were sent from Tbilisi to Azerbaijan. Georgian officers, who are much more experienced than Azerbaijanis in terms of military training, were involved in the training of national personnel.

4. Azerbaijan- Georgia relations after the occupation of Soviet Russia

Unfortunately, the independence of Azerbaijan and Georgia was short-lived. Azerbaijan was first occupied by Soviet Russia on April 28, 1920 (Ağacan, 2001). The period between 1920 and 1921 can be distinguished as the era of relations between the Azerbaijan SSR and the Democratic Republic of Georgia. The diplomatic and political relations between Bolshevik Azerbaijan and the Democratic Republic of Georgia actually served Russian interests rather than the development of bilateral relations. As soon as Soviet power was established in Azerbaijan, relations with Georgia rapidly deteriorated. Within a few days, the neighboring countries transformed from strategic allies into warring states. This was because a group of members of the Caucasus Bureau of the Russian Communist Party, including G.K.Ordzhonikidze and S.M. Kirov, were eager to Sovietize Georgia. Under their initiative and leadership, complex measures against Georgia began in early May.

On July 12, 1920, the issue of representations in Tiflis and Batum was discussed at the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Azerbaijani Communist Party, and it was decided that only party members would be appointed as consuls in these cities. According to this decision, Ismayilov was to be sent as a diplomatic representative to Georgia instead of Makinski (Qasımli, 1998). By September 1920, there were 40 employees working at the Azerbaijani representation in Tiflis. In subsequent periods, the number of employees was reduced to five, and several difficulties arose in its operations.

The next phase of diplomatic relations began after Georgia was occupied by Soviet Russia in February 1921, marking the period of relations between the Azerbaijan SSR and the Georgian SSR. Despite the contradictions following Georgia's occupation by Russia, the establishment of similar regimes allowed the two countries to resolve their issues through negotiations. Essentially, the relations between the two states became those of territories subordinate to Moscow.

The normalization of Azerbaijan SSR–Georgian SSR relations began in March 1921 with the opening of the Baku-Tiflis-Batum oil pipeline. On June 11, Azerbaijan abolished the customs regime between the two countries (Qasımli, 1998). This move was seen as a step towards unifying the republics with similar internal structures. Later in June, a conference was convened in Tiflis to regulate the internal borders of the South Caucasus republics. On August 5, a resolution consisting of five articles was adopted, determining the borderline between Azerbaijan and Georgia, signed by F.Makharadze and N.Narimanov. On October 5, 1921, the Central Executive Committee of Azerbaijan accepted the agreements signed with Georgia without discussion. On November 15 of that year, a new agreement on the establishment of borders between Azerbaijan and Georgia was signed by the chairman of the Azerbaijani Central Executive Committee, Hajiyeve, and his Georgian counterpart (Qasımli, 1998).

Thus, it can be concluded that, unlike the previous period, Azerbaijan and Georgia were able to resolve their issues through negotiations, but their attributes of independent statehood had been abolished.

The subsequent period of Azerbaijani-Georgian relations was from 1922 to 1991, during which both countries were part of the USSR. During this period, mutual relations were maintained within the framework of the union state, as neither Azerbaijan nor Georgia was independent.

Following the occupation of the South Caucasus states by Soviet Russia, the process of rapid unification began. Everything was arranged as if the people of Transcaucasia desired to create a political union. As early as November 3, 1921, the Caucasus Bureau of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party proposed the formation of a federative union among these republics, which was quickly discussed and accepted by party organizations and soviets. On April 14, 1922, railways were unified, and on June 2, 1922, foreign trade departments were merged. A decree dated June 13, 1922, mandated the unification of the foreign policies of the South Caucasus republics. According to this decree, general leadership of the republics' foreign policies would be carried out by the Union Council, in line with the union treaty, and the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs of the allied republics would be abolished. On August 21, a decree on the unification of foreign policy was issued with the signature of N. Narimanov, stating that general leadership of foreign policy would be carried out by the Presidium of the Union Council through the Foreign Relations Department.

Thus, Bolshevik Russia restricted Azerbaijan's independent foreign policy, initially merging it with the South Caucasus republics and then fully subordinating it by closing down its foreign representations.

Initially, the republics were united in the Federation of Transcaucasian Republics. On March 12, 1922, the authorized conference of the Central Executive Committees of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia confirmed the union treaty between these republics. The Union Council, which oversaw military affairs, finance, foreign trade, transportation, communication, and anti-revolutionary struggle, and the Supreme Economic Council, which determined economic policy, were established.

On December 30, 1922, at the First Congress of Soviets of the USSR in Moscow, the RSFSR, Ukrainian SSR, ZSFSR, and Belarusian SSR voluntarily united into the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) (Ömərov, 2012). Thus, Azerbaijan and Georgia completely lost their independence and existed as allied republics within the USSR until 1991.

5. Conclusion

The research revealed that at the beginning of the 20th century, Azerbaijan-Georgia relations developed on a rising line. As we mentioned above, although relations between the two countries were strained due to the Borchali issue in the first days of independence, the states reached an agreement and managed to establish beneficial mutual relations.

Strategically, the interests of Azerbaijan and Georgia coincided. There were many reasons why relations should be established at a high level. First, Georgia was demanding Azerbaijan's oil and oil products. Secondly, Georgia was of great importance for Azerbaijan as a transit country. The oil and oil products that ensure the economic development of Azerbaijan were transported through Georgia's territory through the Baku-Batum white oil pipeline and railway. Third, the alliance was necessary to achieve

peace in the South Caucasus and prevent foreign interference. Fourthly, after nearly 100 years of Tsarist Russia's slavery, the economy, finance, money, transport, and other systems of the newly established South Caucasus states were interconnected, and it was impossible to break these bonds in a short period of time and act alone.

The relations between the Azerbaijan SSR and the Democratic Republic of Georgia were sharp and contradictory, Bolshevik Russia used Azerbaijan as a means of pressure against Georgia, and the Azerbaijani Bolsheviks made efforts to Bolshevize Georgia.

The next phase of diplomatic relations began after Georgia was occupied by Soviet Russia in February 1921, marking the period of relations between the Azerbaijan SSR and the Georgian SSR. Essentially, the relations between the two states became those of territories subordinate to Moscow.

The research concluded that despite the problems, positive dynamics were observed in Azerbaijan-Georgia relations until the occupation of Soviet Russia.

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