

The Social-Economic and Political situation in Transcaucasus (1918-1921)

Alik Gharibyan - Ph. D. in Historical Sciences,
Hayk Hakobyan
Armenological Researches Institute of YSU

Population of Transcaucasus in 1917¹

Tartares, Turks, Karapapaks, Turkomen, Tates, Talichins, Persans -----	2.303.000
Armenians -----	1.787.000
Georgians /139.000 Georgian Muslims / -----	1.784.000
Russians and other nationalities -----	915.000
Kurds -----	102.000
Other ethnic groups -----	117.000

Total -----	7.008.000

Democratic Republic of Georgia (1918-1921)

After the revolution in February, 1917 democratic changes took place in Russia. But the temporary government of Russia couldn't decide those cardinal issues, which especially bothered the wide layers of population. This condition was well used by Bolsheviks (Communists) with the leadership of Lenin and in October, 1917 they overthrew the temporary government. Transcaucasian political parties and organizations didn't acknowledge the legacy of these changes. On November 15, 1917 they created their own government - Transcaucasian Commissariat, which mainly consisted of local parties. In fact, the process of separation of Transcaucasia from Russia began.

This process juridically finished on April 9 (22), 1918, when the creation of independent Transcaucasian Federation was declared, with the center in Tbilisi. The supreme state body of new-created republic was represented by many-partied Same, the chairman of which was elected Georgian social-democrat, N. Chkheidze. The deputy-chairmen were the representatives of Armenia and Azerbaijan.

One of the most important problems, which Transcaucasian government had to solve, was the question of arrangement the situation with Turkey, because the War was proceeding, the Russian army, which fought against Turkey, was decomposed, soldiers left

¹ Armenia: Political and Ethnic Boundaries 1878-1948, Archive Editions, 1998, p 476.

their positions and returned home, and new-established Georgian-Armenian groups couldn't stop the Turkish army. Azerbaijan refused to struggle against Turkey, which was of the same religion and ethnically related.

During the negotiations with Turkey, there appeared the truth, how unreliable was the unifying of Transcaucasia. Between the Georgian, Armenian and Azerbaijanian deputations of Same, there existed the permanent discord. Azerbaijanian politicians were on the side of Turkey, which declared its territorial requirements to Transcaucasia. Georgia was oriented towards Germany, to have the influence on its ally. And, with the help of interfering from Germany, Georgia avoided Turkish occupation. Turks occupied only South-West part with Batumi.

Life showed that Transcaucasia Republic was not a perspective structure. It didn't exist longer than two months and was destroyed after the inner resistances. On May 26, 1918 during the last meeting, Same officially declared the Abolishment of Federation. On the very evening of that day, the session of "the National Council" of Georgia was held, on which Georgia was declared as a Sovereign-Democratic Republic. During the following two days Armenia and Azerbaijan declared their independence, too.

Table 2 the Population of Georgia in 1917²

Regions	Total population	Georgians	Armenians	Turko-Tatars
Tiflis	1.473.000	663.000	411.000	106.000
Batum	122.000	78.000	15.000	15.000
Kutais	1.034.000	993.000	4.600	0
Sukhum	209.000	50.000	20.000	2.000
Total	2.838.000	1.784.000	450.600	123.000

Thus, on May 26, 1918 Georgian State, abolished 117 years ago, was revived. Georgian people accepted this fact with celebration. This historical event was the crown result of the national and social-liberating actions of XIX-XXs Georgia. This day, May 26, is celebrated as the National Independence Day in modern Georgia as well.

The first government of the Republic of Georgia was coalitional, though it consisted mainly of social-democrats. Social-Democratic party was the strongest in Georgia. The leader of the party, Noe Zhordania (1868-1953) became the Chairman of the Government of Georgia.

The young Republic faced hard economical problems. The World War caused a serious damage to the economy, and the situation was hardened by the ceasing of economical relations with Russia and other countries. Industry and means of transportations were out of actions, there was a lack of food. And the government had not any capital in the stable currency, while declaring the Independence. One condition, however, might with advantage be imposed, namely that Batum and perhaps also Poti should be free ports, and that there should be freedom of transit, along the railways in its hinterland, for trade with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Persia and Central Asia.

Germany recognized the independence of Georgia on May 28. But after the defeat of the central states of Georgia in the World War I, the question of the international recognition became again actual. Government of Georgia appealed with this question to the Paris Peaceful Conference. In 1920, after Turkey, Germany and Argentina, Georgia was recognized as de-facto by Great Britain, France, Italy and Japan. And after May 7, 1920,

² Armenia: Political and Ethnic Boundaries 1878-1948, Archive Editions, 1998, p.476

when Soviet Russia recognized the Independence of Georgia, the republic was recognized as de-jure by Antanta countries and other states.

The establishment of Georgian Democratic Republic was running in the most difficult political condition. At first, the country was not recognized by Russian "White Action", which had a motivation of "Entire and Indivisible" Russia. Issues, concerning borders between Transcaucasian Republics were not arranged as well. In particular, Georgia had a territorial quarrel with Azerbaijan about Zakatala district. And Armenian Republic had a claim on Southern regions of Georgia, where the large part of population was of Armenian origin. In 1918 Georgian army occupied Armenian region Lori and Armenian army to set again in that territory. Military actions in Transcaucasia were ceased by the interference of English captainship.

In the Southern part of the disputable region, there was created so-called "Neutral Zone", with Georgian-Armenian administration.

In 1918-1920 there were local military movements in South-Western Georgia as well, in Abkhazia, on the territories inhabited by Southern Osetians and in other regions, where armed actions took place. The important part of those actions was caused by the agitation of Communists.

In spite of these facts, the first hardest steps in creation of the State were overcome. In the end of 1920, the marks of economical and political stabilization in the republic were noticeable. Georgia got back Batumi region, which was occupied by English after the defeat of Turkey in the World War. Science and culture began to revive.

And if not the new intervention and annexation, Georgia could get rid of the crisis and stand on the way to the independent development. But the things turned on the contrary. In 1920, the main counterrevolutionary forces in Russia were exterminated, and the process of re-annexation of every domain of the Empire, began. In the same year, Azerbaijan and Armenia were forced to accept the Soviet regime. So, in the beginning of 1921, Georgia with 78 % of perimeter of its land borders was in the Soviet blockade. From South-Western part the young Turkish Republic was the neighbor.

On February 12, 1921, in the region, contiguous to Armenia, communists arranged the peasant rebellion imitation, and on February 16, on the ground of the aid to the "rebels", Russian troops invaded Georgia. The main grouping of the rival side - the Eleventh Army, advanced Tbilisi from the territories of Armenia and Azerbaijan. Besides, the separate formations and subdivisions advanced Abkhazia and central Caucasian passes. After the heavy struggles near Tbilisi on February 25, 1921, the capital of Georgia fell. Georgian troops receded. Social-Democratic Government couldn't manage to organize the real public-general resistance.

Thus, Soviet Russia, from one side, violated the May 7, 1920 Agreement and established Soviet regime in Georgia.

AZERBAIJAN

The Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR) exercised only limited independence during occupations, continual border disputes with neighbors and internal conflict. The ADR was formed on 27 May 1918. On Azerbaijan independence day Khan Khoiski became prime-minister and formed his first Cabinet in Gandzak, as in Baku was the Bolshevik Baku Commune. In 15 of September the Azerbaijanian Government with the Turkish army entered Baku and massacred all the Armenian population (30.000), which were majority during that period. That is why in the census of 1921 in Baku there is not any information about Armenian population and Tats were 83.50%. But in spite of this fact in Mountainous Karabakh Armenian population was 94.40% in that period and Azerbaijani Turks were 5.60% with no Tats.

One week later Azerbaijan signed a friendship treaty with the Ottoman government. The treaty promised Ottoman armed assistance to defeat Armenians and retake Baku. On 17 November Major-General W.N. Thomson came to administer Baku with 2000 English troops and took all strategically and economical institutions. But British troops didn't recognize independence of Azerbaijan. Compare the economical situation with Armenia in Azerbaijan that problem was getting better as the main resource was the oil industry which British oil companies had taken in their hands. In 1918 the population of Azerbaijan wasn't homogenous: Armenians and Azerbaijanis being intermingled in the mountainous districts in the west. Baku was a cosmopolitan city with Armenians, Russians, Persians, Jews, and people of different nationalities engaged in oil industry.

Under here we can compare the quantity of Armenian and Turko-Tatar population, who were living in the Tsarist Baku and Elizavetpol gubernias.

Table 3³

Gubernias	Total population	Turko-Tatars	Armenians
Baku	1.280.000	875.000	120.000
Elisavetpol	1.275.000	783.000	418.000
Total	2.555.000	1.658.000	538.000

Armenian-Azerbaijan relations in this period were marred by the dispute for control over the Mountainous Karabakh Both sides published maps and articles and deployed military forces to enforce their claims to the region. Each accused the other of aggression and infringing on the rights of the other. With the end of World War I and the British occupation of Baku, Azerbaijani leaders used great diplomacy and tenacity to keep all their territory intact. With the traditional British mistrust of the Armenians and Georgians, considered by the British to be natural allies of the Russians, they supported Azerbaijani territorial claims and stopped the Armenians.

According to Britain sources Azerbaijanis are comparatively backward Muslim Turkish-speaking race, which are probably incapable in their present stage of establishing an industry there being almost entirely in the hands of the other nationalities. The connection of Azerbaijan and Turkey, which rests on community of nationality and religion and a common hospitality to the Armenians will be much harder to break than that of Georgia with Germany.

The relations between Azerbaijan and Georgia were better than with Armenia, though there was the issue of Zakatala region. The strengthening of Azerbaijanian- Georgian relations was the signing military-defense treaty in 1919 June 27.

The acceptance of the ultimatum of the Azerbaijan Communist party (Bolshevik) by the interim government in Baku just before midnight on 27 April 1920 formally ended the existence of independent Azerbaijan.

ARMENIA

After the events of October 1917 with the decrees about "Peace and truce" Bolsheviks had destroyed Russian battle-front. From the beginning Russian army had left Transcaucasus and Turkish frontier in November 1917. After the armistice in Yerznka (5 (18)-th of December 1917) the battle-front was opened in front of Turkish Army. During some months Turkish army had taken the greater part of Western Armenia and threatened to the survival of Armenian nation. The battles in May of 1918 had stopped the Turkish attack to Eastern Armenia. By the treaty of Batum in 1918 June 4 the territory of the Republic of Armenia equaled 13 thousand square miles, from which 2000 square miles was

³ Armenia: Political and Ethnic Boundaries 1878-1948, Archive Editions, 1998, p 470-476.

occupying the Lake Sevan. Nor Bayazed, the mountains part of Kazakh, Lori-Pambak, Borchalu, a little part of Alexandrapol, and Echmiadzin, a large part of Yerevan and Daralagayaz districts were composing the territory of the Republic of Armenia, in which the population was 1, 1 million from which 100,000 were Muslims, and 600,000 were migrants⁴. The settlements which were abandoned by Armenians had been given to migrants. From these migrants there were 40-50 thousand children; some of them were insured by Armenian government. The other part of children had taken the American Committee of Support of Near East, which also supported to Armenia. Georgia and Azerbaijan didn't have migration problem that is why the social-economical situation of these countries soon became better compared with Armenia.

In summer of 1920 the government of the Republic of Armenia had undertaken the land reform, which didn't succeed as Turkish-Armenian war had began after few months. After Batum Treaty the functions of Armenian Government had taken Armenian National Council and it had moved to Yerevan. The number of the members of Armenian National Council had tripled (approximately 48 persons) which had became The National Council (The Parliament of Armenia).

After the World War I the territory of the Republic of Armenia was 67,000 square km with population of 2,160,000 from which 1,293,000 were Armenians (the majority)⁵.

The social-economical situation was continuing to be bad. The disaster and food shortage had been spread in all over the country.

The exhausted country couldn't complete the State structures and to manage directed aims to the internal policy. The most important issue for the Republic in the foreign policy was the defense of the territories of the Republic and to save them from the attacks by Turks and Azerbaijanis. The industry was collapsed and the greater part of the factories did not function. For instance the copper-industry, which product was 45% of the industry of Armenia had stopped its activities.

To overcome these obstacles RA Prime-minister Hovhannes Qajaznuni visited USA to bring the corn to Armenia, which USA had foreseen for Armenia. The corn was brought to Armenia in May, 1919. A law on credit of 20mln\$ was adopted in June, 1920, for the realization of which an agreement was to be signed with USA.

A progressive incoming tax, established by the RA Government, could hardly cover the expenses of Army and migrants.

Together with heavy internal conditions there also existed the external danger: the territorial claims by the neighbor countries. The relations with Georgia developed in the way of a short-time war for the district of Lori, as a result of which Armenian troops occupied Lori and Sadakhlo and the way to Tiflis was free. The war stopped by the mediation of the Antanta Block and on January, 1919 negotiations started and as a result Lori was proclaimed a neutral territory with the control by GB, diplomatic relations were re-established and control-passing points were re-opened.

The relations with Azerbaijan were still in hard conditions, which had aggressive claims for Mountainous Karabakh, Nakhijevan and Zangezour. The trends of these claims inherited authorities of Soviet Azerbaijan, and as a result of their active propaganda Caucasian Bureau made a decision on the 5th of July, 1921 to leave Mountainous Karabakh in the structure of Soviet Azerbaijan.

The foreign situation of the Republic of Armenia became worse, when it fell in the Turk- Bolshevik pliers. From one side in the end of September of 1920 Turkish army had attacked to RA and from the other side (from Azerbaijan) Bolshevik Red Army was pressuring on Armenia. Towards the end of October the Armenians found the pressure on both sides too severe and on October 30-Th evacuated Kars. After Armenian forces had defeated in Turkish – Armenian war they had to give Turkey territories which were; Kars,

⁴ Report of S. Vratsyan in "Hay Hamaynq" (Armenian community) of 14.10.1918, N 23 Nor Nakhijevan.

⁵ Armenia political and ethnic boundaries 1878-1948, Anita L.P. Burdett, Archive editions 1998., p.476

Surmalu, Ardahan /The province of Kars and district of Surmalu are declared as under dispute. In the course of the next 3 years at any time chosen by the Republic of Armenia a plebiscite is to be taken in these localities for the settlement of their permanent fate / and e.t.c. Nakhijevan had granted as a local autonomy under Turkish protection. After that, Bolsheviks had signed a treaty in Yerevan about passing the government to them and they proclaimed about the Communistic dictatorship in the country.

On March 16th 1921 a Treaty was signed between the Grand National Assembly of Turkey and the soviet republics of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia, with participation of the Russian Federal Soviet Republic. After that the main result of the Treaty of Kars on October 13th as far as we know was to confirm Turkish possession of Kars and Ardahan. The Armenians hoped for Russian support to recover these districts, but the Russians were in no position to oppose the Turkish claim.