Transcaucasia

Transcaucasia is a small but relatively densely populated area separated from Russia by the Caucasian Mountains and bordered on each side by the Black and Caspian seas (see Fig. 5). It is divided into three states: Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. Although formed as individual republics in 1920, in March 1922 all three were incorporated into the newly established Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic, which lasted until 1936, after which each constituted a separate union republic until 1991.

Culturally the region can legitimately claim to contain the most ancient cultures of Northern Eurasia. Each of the three major nationalities, the Armenians, Azerbaijanis, and Georgians, have their own distinctive language; whereas Armenians and Georgians have been Christian since the third century, the Turkic-speaking Azerbaijanis are Shiite Muslim. Transcaucasia's geo-strategic location at the crossroads of Asia and Europe has resulted in subjugation to Persian, Turkish and Russian rule. As part of the Soviet federation, the region's economic development was achieved without the runaway industrialisation experienced by many other union republics, which also limited Russian immigration, making the now sovereign states among the least ethnically Russian.

Transcaucasia is also the homeland to a number of other nationalities, including the Abkhazians and South Ossetians, as well as the Adzarians (Muslim Georgians). Present ethnic tensions in the region are, however, in part a product of a Soviet nationalities policy in which national boundaries were not necessarily drawn according to ethnic criteria. Consequently, the predominantly Azerbaijan community of Nakhichevan, which is part of Azerbaijan, is an enclave within Armenia while the Armenian minority of Mountainous Karabagh (or Nagorno-Karabakh) falls within the sovereign boundaries of Azerbaijan. National, ethnic and religious rivalries fuelled by territorial claims are longstanding, notably between Muslim Azerbaijanis and Christian Armenians, between Georgians and Abkhazians and between Azerbaijanis and Georgians.

Since 1988, the region has been subject to ethno-communal violence
which has escalated with the end of Soviet rule. Transcaucasia provided the first major test for the Gorbachev administration of how to handle the national question, with the region experiencing a series of general strikes and demonstrations and a level of ethnic violence previously unknown in Soviet history. At the forefront was the issue of territorial ownership of Nagorno-Karabakh, triggered in February 1988 by the Nagorno-Karabakh Soviet calling for its enclave’s accession to Armenia. Civil war continues to rage in Georgia, where the rights of its minorities are seen by Georgian nation-builders as an obstacle to the full realisation of Georgian sovereignty.

Figure 5: Transcaucasia
Armenia and the Armenians

Edmund M. Herzig

BACKGROUND

The first historical record of a people called the Armenians and their country, Armenia, dates back to the middle of the first millennium BC, but the survival of the Armenians to the present day, when so many of the other ancient peoples of the region have disappeared, has been a result of later developments: the conversion to Christianity about 300 AD and the creation of an Armenian alphabet and distinct literary language and culture about a century after that. Adherence to its church and language has been the cornerstone of Armenian identity ever since, whenever Armenians have given these up, assimilation into the larger and more powerful communities around them has generally been quick to follow.¹

Armenia's history has been a succession of wars, conquests and partitions, for the country's geographical position makes it both a natural bridge for communication and trade between Anatolia, the Iranian plateau and the Caucasus, and an inevitable borderland and battleground between powerful neighbours: Iran under a succession of dynasties, the East; Rome-Byzantium succeeded by the Ottoman Empire to the West; and more recently Russia to the North. Occasionally parts of Armenia have achieved a temporary or partial independence, but such interludes have been rare and mostly short-lived. Rome and Sasanian Iran fought over and partitioned Armenia, then it was controlled by Byzantium and the Islamic Empire of the Ummayad and Abbassid caliphs, before the Seljuk Turks conquered the whole region in the eleventh century. Thereafter there was no independent Armenian state in historic Greater Armenia until 1918. The Seljuk armies were followed by those of Genghis Khan and Timur, each bringing new massacres, the flight or deportation of more of the Armenian population and the immigration of growing numbers of Turkish nomads, many of whom later settled on the land.

Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries Ottoman Turkey and

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Safavi Iran fought over Armenia and divided it into western and eastern halves (Treaties of Amasya, 1555 and Zuhab, 1639), a division that led to the development of distinct Modern Western and Modern Eastern Armenian languages. The first stirrings of a renewed consciousness of Armenian identity and nationhood can also be detected in this period, mainly among the diaspora communities most directly in touch with Europeans: Venice, Amsterdam and India (Madras and Calcutta).²

In the early nineteenth century Tsarist Russia took eastern Armenia from Iran and later a part of western Armenia from the Ottomans. As the century progressed, the fragile and complex ethnic jigsaw of the Ottoman Empire and Russian Transcaucasia began to be pulled apart by emerging Western-style secular nationalism among Turks, Armenians and the other peoples of the region. Over the years and under the influence of events elsewhere the new nationalisms became increasingly radical in mood and political in their demands, most significantly in territorial ambitions to secure national homelands. Nineteenth century Armenian nationalism remained largely the property of the educated and progressive élites of the big cities, particularly Istanbul and Tiflis (Tbilisi). It emphasised the religion (though this figured less prominently on the agenda of the more radical and revolutionary groups), language, culture and ancient history of the Armenian people, and its prime objective was the liberation of historic Armenia from Ottoman oppression. Armenian nationalists were strongly influenced by the example of the Balkan independence movements, by an awareness of the comparative freedom of Armenians under Russian rule, and by contemporary European political ideas and developments in general.³

Armenian and Turkish nationalism and Armenia's sensitive position on the border between an expansionist Russia and a weak and defensive Ottoman Empire gave rise to competing claims, mutual antagonism and eventual conflict; there were widespread massacres of Ottoman Armenians in 1895-6. The violence of the years before the First World War was, however, overshadowed by the national catastrophe of 1915, which Armenians invariably refer to as the Genocide. The tragic events of that year and their causes are keenly disputed by Armenian and Turkish historians, and the Turkish archives for the period are yet to be fully opened, but this much seems clear: in 1915 a Turkish government desperate in the face of Russian invasion decided to prevent the Armenians on its eastern borders from assisting the advancing enemy by removing or eliminating them once and for all. As many as one and a half million may have died through execution, massacre, and starvation and exhaustion on forced marches to concentration camps in Northern Syria. Tens of thousands more fled to Russian-controlled eastern Armenia, the Middle East, Europe and America. The western part of historic Greater Armenia was emptied of its Armenian population and remains so to this day, while the Armenian
diaspora communities expanded greatly. The experience and memory of the Genocide have left an ineradicable imprint on modern Armenians' self-perception, indeed the Genocide has in part, especially among the survivors and their descendants, replaced religion and language as the central element in Armenian identity.

Today there are probably about six million Armenians scattered across the globe. The great majority live in what used to be the Soviet Union: according to the 1989 census there were 4.6 million Armenians living in the Soviet Union, 3.1 million in the Republic of Armenia, where they constituted about 93 per cent of the population of 3.3 million. Armenia's principal minorities were Azerbaijanis (85,000), Kurds (56,000) and Russians (52,000). By 1989 the Azerbaijani minority was already considerably reduced and has since shrunk to almost nothing. There has also been a continuing stream of Armenian immigrants from Azerbaijan. The population of the Armenian capital, Erevan, is 1.2 million - over a third of the Republic's total. Demographic data on the Armenian diaspora are not full or reliable, but there are probably some two million Armenians in the diaspora communities outside the former Soviet Union: about half a million each in the Middle East and North America, between a quarter and half a million in Europe, and smaller communities in Latin America, the rest of Asia and Australia.

THE INCORPORATION OF ARMENIA INTO THE SOVIET UNION

In the aftermath of the 1917 February Revolution, Transcaucasia was effectively cut adrift from Russia and left to sink or swim. The years from then until the establishment of Soviet power in 1920-1 were a period of continuous acute crisis for Armenia. Initially Transcaucasia was nominally united in a single Republic, but in May 1918 the Assembly of the Republic dissolved itself and Georgia declared itself an independent state. Azerbaijan and a reluctant Armenia had no choice but to follow suit. The Republic of Armenia was much the weakest of the three new states and lacked any powerful protector (Georgia had Germany and Azerbaijan Turkey). Its territory was based on the old Tsarist governorship of Erevan, a small, mountainous, backward and impoverished area - for although Armenians possessed considerable wealth and economic power in Transcaucasia, these were concentrated not in Armenia itself but in Tbilisi and Baku, also the centres of Armenian political and cultural life. Erevan, with a population of thirty thousand (a tenth the size of the other two new capitals), was a minor provincial centre with none of the resources or administrative machinery to govern an independent state.

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These underlying disadvantages facing the government formed by the nationalist and socialist Dashnak party were greatly exacerbated by the problems created by the years of war and the continuing turbulence in the region. Before 1914 Armenia had imported much of its food, but the new Republic was landlocked and had no reliable line of supply to receive imports, nor indeed the resources to pay for them. Agricultural production had fallen drastically during the war years, and of a population of 750,000 as many as 300,000 were refugees from western Armenia. They needed to be fed and sheltered, but initially could make little contribution to the national economy. It has been suggested that as many as twenty per cent of the population died of famine and disease in the first eighteen months of the Republic's existence.

To add to its internal difficulties, the Republic of Armenia was born into a state of war with Turkey (rapidly brought to an end by the humiliating treaty of 4 June 1918) and soon became involved in territorial and ethnic clashes with Georgia and Azerbaijan. These were mostly suspended after the British military intervention in autumn 1918 following Turkey's surrender at the end of the First World War, but the British did nothing to solve the underlying sources of conflict. As soon as they departed in summer 1920 the fighting broke out again and Armenia was soon at war with Turkey, now led by Kemal Ataturk. The campaign was a disaster and at the end of 1920 the Dashnak government made way for the Bolsheviks without resistance, preferring a Soviet takeover to annihilation by the Turks. There was some resistance to the Bolsheviks, but it was relatively short-lived and ineffectual, though the Dashnak party (Dashnaksutuun) remained an important political force in the Armenian diaspora, where it continued to espouse the cause of an independent non-communist Armenia throughout the Soviet period. Since independence it has again become a major political force in Armenia itself.

THE SOVIET ACHIEVEMENT

Armenia in 1920 was a devastated and desperate land and the Soviet achievement must be measured against this background. With thousands dying of starvation, the first need was to provide food; within six years agricultural land under cultivation had risen from about thirty to ninety per cent and food production to nearly seventy-five per cent of pre-war levels. Work began on several major irrigation projects and there was progress in repairing and extending the road network. Industrial reconstruction was slower and unemployment remained a serious problem throughout the 1920s, aggravated by the large number of refugees and the influx of peasants into the cities. During the
first ten years of Soviet rule economic reconstruction took priority over other considerations and there was little progress towards the ideal of a new Soviet urban social order. The great majority of the population remained rural, with less than thirteen per cent classed as proletarians.12

The real revolution came only after 1929, when Armenia was forced through the traumatic upheaval of collectivisation and industrialisation. The human and material costs were immense, but the achievement undeniable: in 1929 just 3.7 per cent of peasant households were in collectives, by 1936 the figure was eighty per cent. By 1931 unemployment was eradicated (at least officially) and the gross product of industry in 1935 was 650 per cent that of 1928, raising industry’s share in the value of total economic production from 21.7 to 62.1 per cent. Social change accompanied economic revolution, and family and village – the traditional units of rural life and agricultural production – had to accommodate the collective. In the towns a new sovietised proletariat came into existence.13

The social and economic progress so violently initiated in the early 1930s continued in subsequent decades, though not at the same breakneck pace. Two-thirds of Armenia’s young and fast-growing population were now urban and in 1975 thirty-eight per cent of the labour force were industrial workers, forty-two per cent worked in the service sector and only twenty per cent were employed in agriculture and forestry.14 Education, health care and standards of living all improved markedly in the post-Second World War period. The economy continued to develop rapidly, though the per capita rate appeared less impressive because of the vigorous demographic growth. By most indicators, however, Armenian living standards continued to lag behind average Soviet levels, let alone those of the West. Such indicators did not, of course, take into account the role of the thriving black economy, which made a significant contribution to the living standards of many Armenians.15

ARMENIAN NATIONALISM IN THE SOVIET PERIOD

National consciousness was already highly developed among educated Armenians by the time of the 1917 Revolution. Armenia’s painful history and the century-long division between the Russian Empire and Ottoman Turkey did much to shape Armenians’ self-image. Pro-Russian sentiment was strong, since Armenians under Russian rule were generally better off than those in the Ottoman Empire and because Russia was widely perceived as a Christian protector. Most Armenians rejected (and by and large still do reject) the Middle Eastern elements in their heritage, choosing to see themselves as an island of civilised Christian ‘Europeans’ in a hostile sea of barbarous Muslim Asians.16 This self-image, already evident in past centuries, was deeply scored into the Armenian psyche by the Genocide of 1915, leaving a traumatised historical consciousness: a continuing sense of outrage at the Genocide, made more bitter still by the lack of any acknowledgement of guilt or reparation on the part of Turkey and by the betrayal of the Western Allies, who reneged on promises of compensation and an independent Armenian homeland after the First World War.17 Nationalist aspirations have since largely been directed towards avenging 1915, gaining international and Turkish recognition of the Genocide and achieving retroactively a territorial settlement more in line with Armenian claims and the Allies’ promises. All strands of Armenian nationalism are to some extent irredentist: all consider the territory currently occupied by the Republic of Armenia to be only a fraction of what Armenians can legitimately claim and nurture hopes of one day recovering some of the land lost to Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan.

From a nationalist viewpoint, incorporation into the Soviet Union had both positive and negative aspects. At the time the overriding consideration was that Soviet Russia had rescued Armenia in the hour of need. The price, however, was the loss of full independence and of much of the territory to which Armenians laid claim. The Bolsheviks renounced all Tsarist gains from Turkey in western Armenia and were, moreover, broadly sympathetic towards Kemalist Turkey, which they perceived as a natural ally in the struggle of the oppressed peoples against Western imperialism. Armenian hopes of Western support and a mandate for Armenia were completely out of line with the Bolsheviks’ international position.18 The territorial settlement in 1921 between the Soviet Union and Turkey (Treaties of Moscow and Kars) entailed giving up not only the Armenia proposed at the Treaty of Sevres (1920) and the western Armenian provinces that had been a part of Russia since 1878, but also the Surmalu district of Erivan (Russian since it was ceded by Iran in 1828) in which stands Mount Ararat, the most potent symbol of the Armenian homeland. It was further agreed that Nakhichevan should form a part of the Azerbaijani Republic though they were separated by Armenian Zangezur. Other border disputes with Georgia and Azerbaijan were also settled to Armenia’s disadvantage, most notably that over Mountainous Karabagh.19

In Armenia, as in other parts of the Union, Soviet cultural policy was ambivalent towards nationalist expression. In the 1920s pragmatic communists accepted the fact that ‘the international outlook is the future ideal, not the immediate one’. National homelands, that is to say territories whose inhabitants mainly belonged to a single ethnic group defined in terms of language, economic life and culture, constituted the basic administrative divisions of the Union and the Soviet government did not initially perceive any inherent threat to its authority from the
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THE GORBACHEV PERIOD

When Gorbachev launched his programme of reforms in the mid-1980s, many voices, critics inside the Soviet Union as well as foreign commentators, predicted difficulties over the nationalities question, but the sudden growth of a radical, popular national movement in Armenia was unexpected. The Baltic republics, the Ukraine and ‘Muslim’ Central Asia all had traditions of anti-Russian nationalism, but Armenia had always appeared politically docile and conscious of the debt it owed its Russian ‘liberators’. What happened there in the last few years of the 1980s can be understood only in relation to the central motivating issue: the question of Mountainous Karabagh.

The Autonomous Oblast of Mountainous Karabagh is 4,400 square kilometres in area; its population in January 1990 was recorded as 188,000, the great majority of whom were Armenians, whose numbers had been swollen by immigration from Azerbaijan, while many of the Azerbaijanis inhabitants had left. The region has been disputed for centuries and Armenian and Azerbaijani historians and ethnographers keep up a fierce debate over whether the region was ‘originally’ Armenian or a part of the long-vanished country of Caucasian Albania. In the early medieval period the Albanians gradually assimilated with the neighbouring peoples, losing any distinct linguistic, religious or cultural identity; those who did not convert to Islam merged with the Armenians, who also took over the Albanian church. From the time of the Seljuk conquest in the eleventh century a Turkish element was introduced into the predominantly Armenian population of Mountainous Karabagh. Despite occasional periods of partial independence, Karabagh was at least nominally a part of some larger Islamic state throughout the medieval period, until Iran ceded the territory to Russia in 1813. After the Russian Revolution it was disputed by the independent Republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan and finally, in the 1920s, declared an Autonomous Oblast within the Republic of Azerbaijan.

There are a number of reasons for Karabagh being what a historian writing in 1983 described as ‘the single most volatile issue among the Armenians’. The first is that Armenian nationalists have tended to equate the Azerbaijans with the Turks of Turkey and to see Azerbaijan’s possession of Mountainous Karabagh as a symbol of the Turks’ success in ‘getting away with’ the 1915 Genocide and the occupation of Armenian lands. Second, Mountainous Karabagh’s incorporation into Azerbaijan was facilitated by the British occupying forces in 1918 and therefore reminds Armenians of the Allies’ betrayal of their cause after the First World War. Third, Karabagh epitomises the unsatisfactory resolution of international and republican boundaries at the outset of the Soviet period: the day before independent Armenia’s government stepped down, Narimanov – the Bolshevik chief in Baku...
sent a telegram to the incoming Soviet government of Armenia ceding Mountainous Karabagh (doubtless in order to sweeten the Armenians' acceptance of Soviet power). This session was never put into effect, however, and in 1921 a plenary session of the Caucasian Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party decided (apparently on Stalin's insistence and reversing a decision reached by majority vote the day before) that, 'considering the necessity of national harmony between Muslims and Armenians, the economic linkage between upper and lower Karabagh, and its permanent ties to Azerbaijan, Mountainous Karabagh should be left within the boundaries of the Azerbaijani Soviet Socialist Republic while declaring it an Autonomous Oblast...'; Mountainous Karabagh was formally incorporated into Azerbaijan in July 1923. Furthermore, since medieval times the mountains of Karabagh have been a centre for the survival of Armenian folk traditions and culture. These, and the future of the Armenian language in Karabagh, were threatened by the discriminatory policies and poor development of the Oblast under Azerbaijani rule. Finally, nationalist aspirations have focused on Karabagh because it is the only part of the Armenian irredenta that has a majority Armenian population and that there is a real possibility of recovering.

Agitation for a reconsideration of the Karabagh question intensified soon after Gorbachev came to power. Late in 1987 there were demonstrations in Erevan on environmental issues as well as Karabagh, and clashes between Armenian and Azerbaijani villagers in Karabagh itself. Early in 1988 a petition bearing some 75,000–100,000 signatures demanding the transfer of Karabagh to Armenia was presented to the authorities in Moscow.

This simmering local dispute was transformed into a major crisis after 20 February 1988, when the Mountainous Karabagh Soviet passed an unprecedented resolution demanding a transfer to Armenian jurisdiction. Armenians demonstrated in support of the resolution in Karabagh, in Erevan and other Armenian towns, and even in Moscow. The first demonstrations numbered a few thousand, but in the course of a week hundreds of thousands were participating in enthusiastic daily demonstrations in the Armenian capital. Participants and observers describe the mood of this first week as spontaneous, optimistic, idealistic and generally loyal to Soviet authority. The targets were the historic wrongs committed against the Armenians in the time of Stalin or before, the corrupt Armenian and Azerbaijani Communist Party leaderships in general, and the maladministration of Karabagh in particular. At this stage the Azerbaijani people as a whole were not the object of animosity. The demonstrators looked to Gorbachev and his reforms to set right past wrongs and reform the local leadership. They were not yet ready to take the law into their own hands nor looking for confrontation with Moscow; in fact many emphasised their Soviet patriotism by carrying placards of Gorbachev and the flag of Soviet Armenia.

The initial government response was fairly muted. The Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR rejected the Karabagh Soviet's request for transfer and tried to place the burden of responsibility for resolving the situation on the shoulders of the Armenian and Azerbaijani leaderships. At the same time high-ranking party officials were sent from Moscow to the Caucasus to monitor the situation and help suggest solutions. Troops were also dispatched to Erevan, though not deployed against the demonstrators. None of this, nor appeals for calm from Demirjan (Armenian Party Secretary) and the Catholics (head of the Armenian church) had any effect, and the mass demonstrations subsided only after two leading Armenian intellectuals returned from an unannounced meeting with Gorbachev and called for a month's suspension of demonstrations on the basis of a promise that the issue would be investigated at the highest level. Gorbachev himself broadcast a message to the Armenian and Azerbaijani peoples in which he accepted that mistakes had been made, but emphasised the need for maturity and restraint in tackling complex issues.

The proposed breathing-space was shattered only two days later by the outbreak of anti-Armenian violence in Sumgait, an industrial town in Azerbaijan. These racist attacks and the apparent negligence or complicity of the security services led, overnight, to a sharp change of mood in Armenia. The official version of events, which suggested a death toll of thirty-two, was widely disbelieved and rumours of hundreds if not thousands of victims had circulated ever since. For Armenians Sumgait seemed a reminder of what their parents or grandparents had suffered at the hands of the Turks in 1915, and of their continuing vulnerability as a minority everywhere outside the Republic of Armenia. In an atmosphere of escalating racial hostility large-scale emigrations from both Azerbaijan and Armenia began. By the end of 1988 more than 200,000 refugees (more than the total population of Mountainous Karabagh) had crossed between the two republics. The often harrowing stories of the persecution and atrocities suffered by these refugees were seized on by the Armenian and Azerbaijani media and played an important part in forming public opinion in both republics and keeping emotions and fears running high. The treatment of the issue in the central Soviet press also contributed to the increasingly radical and rebellious mood in Armenia. While acknowledging the complexity of the issue and criticising past and present republican and local leaderships, the Moscow media, reflecting the views of Gorbachev, branded the Karabagh campaigners as opportunist nationalist extremists, stooges of foreign powers and 'anti-perestroika forces', even going so far as to suggest that the demonstrations in Erevan had been orchestrated by
external enemies. The Sumgait massacre, the growing refugee crisis and Moscow’s unsympathetic response led to a rapid hardening of attitudes in Armenia. With the raising of the spectre of massacre at the hands of Turks, Armenians’ resentments and hostility began to focus on Azerbaijan and the Azerbaijani in general, rather than just on the Communist Party leadership. Faith in Gorbachev and Moscow faded rapidly.

In spring and summer 1988 the popular movement in Armenia developed from a series of spontaneous mass demonstrations to a coordinated network of activists in factories, institutes and offices across Armenia. A Karabagh Committee with about a dozen members, most of them intellectuals, including several current or former members of the Communist Party, began to provide active leadership for the movement. The agenda was also undergoing changes: many still favoured a single issue campaign directed towards the transfer of Mountainous Karabagh, but others were interested in a broader nationalist campaign covering issues such as international recognition of the Genocide, reparations from Turkey, measures to reinforce the Armenian language and steps to discourage Armenian emigration while promoting links with the diaspora. Still others looked on the movement as part of a broader struggle for democracy and reform sweeping the whole Soviet Union, and emphasised the environment, civil rights and other issues.

With no progress on the Karabagh question and little evidence of sympathy or responsiveness from either the republican or the Moscow leadership, the mood of the protestors in Erivan became increasingly impatient and radical, while Armenians in Mountainous Karabagh went on general strike. On 15 June 1988 the Armenian Supreme Soviet succumbed to pressure and endorsed the Karabagh Armenians’ request to transfer to Armenian jurisdiction. Two days later the Azerbaijani Supreme Soviet rejected the demand, bringing the governments of the republics into direct confrontation. The republican communist leadership were clearly incapable of resolving the issue; any solution would have to come from Moscow. On 18 July, after months of intense negotiation, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR flatly rejected the transfer of Mountainous Karabagh to Armenia. Gorbachev particularly emphasised that the decision on Karabagh would set a precedent for other national and territorial disputes within the Union and, in the light of this, the refusal to redraw boundaries was scarcely surprising, but with little on offer in the way of positive measures – a Supreme Soviet in due course – the decision provided no solution to the conflict. The Karabagh Armenians now dug their heels in to resist, developing a radical agenda at the top of which was the demand for full democracy and independence. The Supreme Soviet decision left the Armenian communists paralysed, caught between the conflicting demands of loyalty to their people and to Moscow.

At the end of the year, on 7 December 1988, the north-western part of Armenia was struck by a devastating earthquake, which completely destroyed the town of Spitak (population 25,000) as well as most of the housing in Armenia’s second city, Leninakan. In all about 25,000 lost their lives and some half a million were left homeless. The death and destruction were undoubtedly exacerbated by the poor design and construction of the blocks of flats in which many of the victims lived. The cost of reconstruction was subsequently put at six billion roubles. The enormity of this disaster and the massive national and international relief operation briefly distracted attention from the political crisis, but far from being brought together by the tragedy, the nationalist movement and the communist government were soon at loggerheads again, accusing each other of inefficiency, self-interest and deliberate obstruction in the relief work. Nor did the huge Soviet investment in relief and reconstruction lead to any reconciliation with Moscow. On the contrary, proposals to resettle some of the earthquake orphans in other republics caused an outcry, as Armenians were reminded of the fate of the orphans of the 1915 Genocide – adopted and assimilated into foreign homes.

At the beginning of 1989 Moscow at last took decisive measures to try to break the deadlock over Karabagh. Following the report of the special commission, local and republican government was suspended and the Oblast put under temporary direct rule from Moscow in the shape of a special committee headed by Arkadii Volskii. At about the same time the members of the Karabagh Committee, leaders of the nationalist movement in Armenia, were arrested and held in prison until the end of May. For a few months there were some signs of a return to normality in Karabagh, but then matters deteriorated, with both Armenians and Azerbaijani accusing the Russians of favouring the other side, and withdrawing their support. A general strike in Stepanakert lasted from May to August, when the Karabagh Armenians elected their own National Council, which announced the Oblast’s secession from Azerbaijan and began to function as a shadow government.

In autumn 1989 Azerbaijan initiated a blockade of road and rail links and energy supplies to both Mountainous Karabagh and Armenia. With brief interruptions this blockade has remained in force ever since, with disastrous consequences for Armenia’s economy. Azerbaijan was the main channel for trade with other Soviet republics and Armenia’s industry was very heavily dependent on this trade both for raw materials and other supplies and for markets for its products. Azerbaijan was also a vital channel for energy supplies, particularly since the closure of Armenia’s nuclear power station following the earthquake. Efforts to develop alternative routes have met with little
success. Transport and energy lines through Georgia have been increasingly subject to disruption, while trade and energy routes through Turkey and Iran have remained insignificant — in the former case because of Turkish cooperation in Azerbaijan’s blockade of Armenia, in the latter because the existing infrastructure is inadequate and requires heavy investment before it can make a serious contribution. As a consequence of the blockade many of Armenia’s industries have shut down or been reduced to working at a fraction of their capacity.\textsuperscript{41} Domestic users have been reduced to a couple of hours of electricity per day and almost no heating and transport and other services have been severely disrupted. The blockage has also slowed earthquake reconstruction to a crawl; by December 1990 only seven to eight per cent of the housing projected for the first two years of the programme had been completed and no major enterprises rebuilt. Construction and relief teams from other Soviet republics and abroad left one by one in the face of impossible working conditions.\textsuperscript{42}

In the face of the blockade and the withdrawal of cooperation by both sides, Volkskii was forced to concede that the Special Committee could achieve little.\textsuperscript{43} The special administration was brought to an end and Mountainous Karabagh restored to Azerbaijani control. The next eighteen months, until the attempted coup in Moscow in August 1991, saw a clear alignment of Gorbachev and Moscow with the Communists in Baku against the increasingly independence-minded Armenians. Moscow’s new stance followed the events in Baku of January 1990, when after several days of rioting, and the killing and wounding of a number of Armenians, the Soviet army intervened, bloodily suppressing the Azerbaijani Popular Front and reinforced Azerbaijan’s Communist government. In the same month the members of the Karabagh National Council were arrested and the Azerbaijani authorities, backed by Soviet Interior Ministry (MVD) troops, attempted to reimpose their authority over the Karabagh Armenians. In autumn 1990 and spring 1991 MVD troops participated in barely disguised ethnic cleansing operations in Armenian villages within and outside the Mountainous Karabagh Oblast.\textsuperscript{44} From the end of 1990 conditions in Mountainous Karabagh became desperate: Stepanakert was under siege, with power, water and other essential supplies frequently cut off and continual rocket and artillery bombardment from the Azerbaijani forces in Shusha a few miles away.\textsuperscript{45} At times there was a real danger of the conflict escalating into all-out war; in the spring of 1990 there was fighting across the Armenian–Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic border and in the summer of the same year there were hostilities along the length of the Armenian–Azerbaijani border. Irregular forces and later the fledgling Armenian and Azerbaijani national armies seized or purchased arms from Soviet police and army arsenals. Casualties and damage increased with the growing use of rockets, artillery, armoured vehicles and eventually even aircraft in the conflict.

Moscow’s new pro-Azerbaijani line provoked strong reactions in Armenia. In spring 1990 demonstrators damaged the KGB headquarters in Erevan and there were nine deaths when they attacked MVD troops at Erevan railway station.\textsuperscript{46} The nationalist opposition, although consisting of a number of distinct groups and parties, combined under the umbrella of the Armenian Pan-National Movement (APNM), led by Levon Ter-Petrosian, former leader of the Karabagh Committee. When the APNM won a majority in summer elections to the Soviet Parliament, Ter-Petrosian became chairman of the Parliament, and Vazgen Manukian, another former Karabagh Committee member, Prime Minister. The new government declared its intention of turning Armenia into a fully independent sovereign state incorporating Mountainous Karabagh.\textsuperscript{47}

\textbf{INDEPENDENCE}

It was not until September 1991 that Armenia had the chance to vote for independence in a referendum — the result was ninety-nine per cent in favour.\textsuperscript{48} — and Ter-Petrosian was not elected president until the following month, but the APNM successes in the elections of summer 1990 ended communist rule in Armenia and mark the beginning, if not of full independence, at least of a government committed to it and determined to pursue its own policies independent of Moscow.

The problems facing the new government were immense: an economy in ruins, a crippling long-term blockade by Azerbaijan, a chronic energy crisis, a state of virtual war with Azerbaijan, a heavy drain of resources to support the Karabagh Armenians, serious unrest in Erevan, where well-armed irregular militias and gangsters were refusing to accept any form of control, and threats from Moscow of military intervention if all such irregular formations were not disarmed. Gorbachev was also exerting strong political pressure as he sought to salvage the Soviet Union through a new Union Treaty. Armenia, like the Baltic Republics, Georgia and Moldova, refused to negotiate or hold a referendum on the new treaty, which further soured relations with Moscow. These became so strained that on 6 May 1991 Ter-Petrosian stated that: ‘To all intents and purposes, the Soviet Union has declared war on Armenia’.\textsuperscript{49} Moscow’s stance changed only after the failed coup of August 1991. The Azerbaijani Party leader Mutalibov had welcomed the coup, so Yeltsin’s Russia adopted a more pro-Armenian policy, especially as Ter-Petrosian was from the start a supporter of the new Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).\textsuperscript{50}
Karabagh has remained the central nationality issue, indeed the single most important issue, in Armenian politics since independence. At the same time as Armenia’s referendum on independence, Mountainous Karabagh declared itself an independent republic, but in November 1991 Azerbaijan abrogated the Oblast’s autonomous status, leaving the two sides further apart than ever.

Fighting intensified with the withdrawal of Soviet forces in early 1992, and until the spring the Armenians were mainly on the defensive. Thereafter, however, they managed to seize the initiative and score a number of successes, assisted by Azerbaijan’s military disorganisation and political upheavals. In May they took Shusha, the Azerbaijanis’ main stronghold in Mountainous Karabagh, giving them control of the whole territory of the Oblast. Soon after they opened a land corridor at Lachin to link Mountainous Karabagh with Armenia, greatly facilitating communications and supplies. The military successes of 1992 were continued in spring and summer of 1993, when the Karabagh Armenians took advantage of the virtual collapse of the Azerbaijani army to open a second land corridor at Kelbajar and then to occupy a large swath of Azerbaijani territory around Mountainous Karabagh, including all the land to the South and West of the Oblast as far as the Armenian and Iranian borders, extending as far East as Horadiz. These victories have boosted Armenian morale and provided a welcome respite for the Karabagh Armenians, but most analysts believe that in the long run Azerbaijan’s superior resources will tilt the military balance in its favour. Moreover, international perceptions of the Karabagh Armenians have been altered by their military successes; the shift began with the killing of numerous Azerbaijani civilians at Khojaly in February 1992 and has continued with the capture of territory outside Mountainous Karabagh and the creation of tens of thousands of new Azerbaijani refugees. No longer viewed as the victims of the conflict, the Armenians are now often seen rather as the aggressors, and United Nations resolutions have called on the Armenian forces to withdraw from occupied Azerbaijani territory. Relations with Iran have also been severely strained by the military activities on the border and the new refugee crisis. Numerous attempts at mediation by Russia, Kazakhstan, Iran and the CSCE were eventually rewarded with a lasting ceasefire in May 1994, but it is proving difficult to convert the ceasefire into peace. The gulf between the Karabagh Armenians’ insistence on their right to self-determination and the Azerbaijani’s determination to maintain their territorial integrity remains.

Levon Ter-Petrosian’s government has attempted to steer a diplomatic course, acknowledging its material and moral support for the Karabagh Armenians, but denying any direct military involvement. Talk of political union between Armenia and Karabagh has been dropped and the Armenian government has not even recognised the self-declared independent republic of Mountainous Karabagh, stating that it will recognise any agreement reached between Azerbaijan and the Karabagh Armenians. This stance represents a significant step down from earlier positions and has led to occasionally strained relations with the Karabagh leadership, especially during 1992, when the leader in Karabagh was a member of the radical nationalist Dashnak party. In spite of the government’s attempts to distance itself, Karabagh remains the central issue in Armenian politics, the question that must be solved before there can be progress in other areas.

In politics the stability of Ter-Petrosian’s presidency and the success of his generally moderate and pragmatic policies depend on the Karabagh Armenians at least maintaining their position. The president has no parliamentary majority and the opposition regularly criticises his lukewarm support of the Karabagh cause. So far he has survived votes of confidence, but the opposition parties’ ability to make political capital out of the Karabagh issue represents a clear threat to his position.

There are other nationality-related issues, but Armenia has few minorities and those that remain, predominantly Kurds and Russians, neither voice serious dissatisfaction with their situation nor present any serious threat. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that Armenia today has a more assertively and self-consciously Armenian feel than in the Soviet period and this is not congenial to all. Russian-speaking Armenians, as well as the minorities, feel alienated. The debate over a new constitution introduced in 1994, revolved largely around the citizenship question: should the basic criterion be residence in the Republic of Armenia (as proposed in the government’s draft) or Armenian ethnicity (as demanded by the nationalist opposition). Another potentially dangerous issue is posed by the sizeable and concentrated Armenian minority in Georgia; it has shown some signs of wishing to assert its autonomy or even to seek reunification with Armenia (there is another long-standing border dispute at issue here). The language question is also still alive, but since the collapse of the Soviet Union there is no longer any real sense that Armenian is threatened by Russian.

One other nationality issue particular to the Armenians is that of relations with the diaspora. While Armenians in Armenia are generally keen on promoting relations with the diaspora and acting as a cultural and national homeland for all Armenians, and while they appreciate the considerable donations and investments made by the diaspora, there have been tensions. North American and European Armenians have sometime caused resentment by their perceived condescension. Their readiness to preach the virtues of a free market irks a people suffering rocketing inflation and shortages of basic commodities, and the uncompromising stance advocated
by some on relations with Russia and Turkey can sound hollow to those who will have to live with the consequences of such policies. Such issues are insignificant compared to Karabagh, however. Without peace with Azerbaijan the blockage will continue, condemning Armenia's economy to stagnation for want of supplies, energy and access to its traditional markets in the CIS. The government's economic programme of privatisation, market and financial reform and increased trade with neighbouring countries cannot make real progress under current conditions. Reconstruction after the 1988 earthquake and provision of housing and services for the hundreds of thousands of refugees from Azerbaijan are also stalled.

Armenia's foreign relations are also dominated by Karabagh. Ter-Petrosian's government is committed to establishing normal neighbourly relations with both Turkey and Iran, but while there has been some progress on the diplomatic level, Turkey has so far stopped short of opening her border with Armenia in any significant way because of strong popular support for Azerbaijan. Relations with Iran are not haunted by the same ghosts as those with Turkey and have traditionally been better, but these too have been put under strain by developments in the Karabagh war. Until a lasting peace settlement is agreed, it will remain difficult for Armenia to convince Western countries and international bodies that it should be given the loans and investment it desperately needs, to build or rebuild housing and infrastructure, and to start new and modernise old enterprises. Only relations with Russia have improved with a growing perception of shared interest vis-à-vis Azerbaijan, Turkey and the Turkic and Islamic "crescent".

CONCLUSIONS AND PROSPECTS

Considering the extraordinarily difficult circumstances in which Armenia became independent, the achievements should not be underestimated. So far Armenia has avoided all-out war with Azerbaijan; indeed the current government has succeeded in at least partially distancing itself from the struggle. Relatively speaking, Armenia has also achieved remarkable political stability in a democratic framework. The government enjoys unchallenged control over the whole territory of the Republic (though on a local level the old Soviet nomenklatura still occupy many of the positions of power), and the institutions of democratic government and civic society are functioning, if not without certain strains. Ter-Petrosian has been accused of undemocratic or even dictatorial tendencies and the suspension of the Dashnak party and closure of its newspapers in December 1994 lend weight to those

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accusations, but by comparison with Georgia, Azerbaijan and many other post-Soviet republics Armenia appears a model of political stability and legitimacy. Nevertheless, the slow pace of progress in the new Constitution and other important legislation as well as the growing public apathy and disenchantment with politics in general pose serious problems for future political development.

There have also been some positive economic indications. The privatisation process is well-advanced and 1994 saw real economic growth for the first time since independence, as well as a significant decline in the rate of inflation. The IMF rewarded Armenia with credits and loans. These limited economic successes come, however, after years of near-complete economic collapse and a steep decline in standards of living. If the Karabagh peace negotiations make progress and the Azerbaijani and Turkish blockade is lifted, there is clear potential for further economic growth, but if the present stalemate continues the prospects appear bleak for domestic politics, the economy and international relations. The past six years of Armenia's history have been dominated by this conflict: Karabagh provided the focal point for the independence movement and the testing ground for the new generation of politicians; it also clearly revealed the inability of the communist leadership, glasnost' and perestroika notwithstanding, to resolve the nationalities problems and contradictions embedded in the Soviet system. Now it presents independent Armenia's government with a tough set of choices and challenges. Karabagh will continue to exert a powerful influence over Armenian politics and national debate for some time to come.

NOTES


2. On Armenian history from the advent of Islam to the nineteenth century, see: Dédéyan, op. cit., chapters 5-11; Bourjountzian, op. cit.

3. See: Dédéyan op. cit., chapter 12; L. Nalbandian The Armenian Revolutionary Movement. The Development of Armenian Political Parties through the Nineteenth Century (Berkeley, CA: University of California


13. Ibid., pp. 102–16.


23. Dudwick, ‘Armenia’, p. 269–70; Suny, Looking toward Ararat, p. 188.


Azerbaijan and the Azerbaijans

Tamara Dragadze

At the beginning of 1988 Azerbaijan was propelled into world focus as a result of the dispute over Nagorno Karabakh, the ensuing communal conflict having become one of the hallmarks of Gorbachev's term of office. The determination of the Azerbaijans to retain their territorial integrity, as established when they were incorporated into the Soviet Union, was one of the most intractable problems Gorbachev had to face. The desire of the now independent Azerbaijan to retain both its independence and its territorial integrity are issues that many within governmental circles in Post-Soviet Russia have also been reluctant to come to terms with.

BACKGROUND

The Azerbaijans inhabit a land along the Eastern edge of the Caspian Sea, sharing borders with Iran, Armenia, Georgia and Dagestan. Southern Azerbaijan, with its capital Tabriz, is in Iran and for the whole of the Soviet period it had been more or less constantly cut off from Northern Azerbaijan which formed Soviet Azerbaijan, now the Azerbaijan Republic, despite linguistic, cultural and kinship links between the two halves. Today the Azerbaijan Republic covers a territory of 86,000 square kilometres and boasts a rich and varied countryside with high mountains along the Great Caucasian Range and a tropical micro-climate to the south of the republic.

The Azerbaijans view themselves as the direct inheritors of the many cultures and civilisations that thrived on their land over the centuries. Undoubtedly, as in other parts of the Caucasus, the territory witnessed very early human habitation, with rock carvings in Gorustan and evidence of Zarathustrian worship being a source of national pride. Its location provided a crossroads between East and West which was enjoyed by scholars and merchants in antiquity and in the Middle
Ages, but coveted by powerful conquerors from the neighbouring areas. Thus the Medians were succeeded by the Achemenid State in what is now Southern Azerbaijan, but by the 2nd century AD the Caucasian Albanian Kingdom began to establish itself in the Northern areas in whose name outstanding Christian churches were later built, whose origins are now fiercely disputed by the Armenians, Turkic-language tribes began to settle in the area from around the 2nd century, but Azerbaijanis today insist that they assimilated with the native peoples and only the settlers' language type came to dominate and not their population or culture.1

By the end of the 7th century AD much territory came under the rule of the Arab Caliphates. Islam became the predominant religion, although Christianity and other religions persisted among some sections of the population. There subsequently flourished a series of Islamic cultural centres where poets such as Nizami of Ganja, Fizuli and others, whose poetry is now recited at public meetings, made their names. The more independent State of Shirvan was established and is said to have fiercely resisted the invasions first of the Seljuk Turks and then of the Mongols. Later the Safavids were to unite Azerbaijan before a series of small feudal states were established, under a Persian sphere of influence.

The turning point in modern Azerbaijani history came with the entry of Russia into the Caucasian arena, Russia's Caucasian frontier with Iran being 'in many ways as important an arena of 19th century Great Game as British India's frontier with Afghanistan'.2 The first accords with Persia, the Treaty of Gulistan in 1813 and the Treaty of Turkmenchay in 1828 resulted in Azerbaijan being divided in two, with Northern Azerbaijan being ceded to Russia, establishing the political pattern that has continued to this day.

The economic and cultural consequences of Russian colonisation have bred in today's post-Soviet Azerbaijan an ambivalence towards Russia: on the one hand Russia opened the door to Europe in the 19th century, bringing industrialisation and new ideas to the region. On the other hand the Azerbaijanis lost control of their own destiny and their resources, a theme we shall return to below.

THE AZERBAIJANI NATION IN MODERN TIMES

By the end of the 19th century, Azerbaijani intellectuals had turned Baku into an important centre of modern Muslim culture. Thus Azerbaijanis can boast that the first modern theatre in the Muslim world and the first Muslim opera were opened in Baku. In the 19th century there were already several newspapers and a growing native literature. A few Azerbaijanis had grown oil-rich, along with a greater number of West Europeans, Armenians and Russians. The Azerbaijani magnate Taghiyev subsidised every kind of cultural activity, including a grammar school for Azerbaijani girls. The cultural universe in Baku at the time extended to Istanbul and Tabriz, to Kazan (where Tatar intellectuals had devised their own form of Jaddism and called for cooperation and a union of Russian Muslims), to Moscow and St. Petersburg, Paris and Berlin. A literary language had to be devised that would cater for some of the political ideas afloat at the time, which focused on integrating the majority of the rural population into mainstream Azerbaijani progress. This inevitably led to reflection on Azerbaijani ethnic identity,4 as did the development of yearnings for independence from Russian colonial rule. The tactics through which this was to be achieved centred on the choice of three options: Pan-Turkism, Pan-Islamism or Azerbaijani nationalism.

By the early 20th century colonisation of Azerbaijan also resulted in a shift in the ethnic composition of the population, especially in the urban centres, although Russia had already used rural areas as a dumping ground for Russian dissident sectarian communities. Inevitably, with subtle intervention from various political groups as well as even subtler encouragement, occasionally, from the Russian government, ethnic conflict erupted between Azerbaijanis and Armenians, the latter numbers in the area having increased since Russian colonisation. Political allegiances were also to develop along ethnic lines, Bolshevism in particular was to be dominated by non-Azerbaijanis.

With the collapse of the Tsarist government in late 1917 the question became even more urgent as to whether the Azerbaijanis were to express their nationhood culturally or territorially.5 This was no parochial question, since Bakı was a leading world oil-supplier whose fate could affect Russian and Western interests. The complexities of Turkey's involvement in the peace talks at the end of the First World War only added to the conflicting loyalties of the powers involved in deciding the Azerbaijanis' fate. A multinational working class population in Baku provided fertile ground for Bolshevik recruitment, not so in the countryside, however. The heightened tensions and further misguided intervention from external interested parties undoubtedly contributed to a massacre by Armenians of Azerbaijanis in March 1918, followed by a revenge massacre of Armenians in September of the same year. Amidst the affray the Baku Commune was established6 in the capital, whose business was carried out in Russian and whose aims were 'internationalist'. A section of the indigenous population and many leading native intellectuals doubted the system's capacity to serve their interests as effectively as would a sovereign Azerbaijan nation. With the collapse of the Commune and the flight of the Baku commissars, few of whom were Azerbaijani, an independent Republic of Azerbaijan was declared in 1918, as were Republics in the other two Trans-Caucasian nations. Largely tolerant of political diversity
and dominated by a benevolent bourgeoisie, a government led
the Azerbaijani Mussavat (literally Equality) Party was established.
Immediately, the attributes of a national culture befitting an
independent country were also created, such as the University of
Azerbaijan in Gorbachev’s time. The national flag resurfaced and
the 11th Division of the Red Army, whose entrance established
Soviet rule, was sometimes referred to in samizdat as
army of occupation.9
In the process of the carving out of the three Caucasian republics
by the Bolsheviks, Azerbaijan was seen by Georgias and Armenias,
Armenians, by the allocation of Nagorno Karabagh to the Soviet
Republic, and the autonomous region status accorded to Nagorno Karabagh
the fact that their province of Nakhichevan is isolated by Armenian
territory since Zangezur was allocated to Armenia, again by the
Caucasian Bureau in which there was only one Azerbaijani.10
Other members of the KavBureau, as it was called, were denounced as enemies
of the Azerbaijani people at the November 1988 demonstration
in particular Armenian Bolsheviks such as Shaumian. The leading
Azerbaijani Bolshevik convert, Nariman Narimanov, died in 1925 in
what Azerbaijani today see as sinister circumstances. The events of
1920 and 1921 that accompanied the establishment of Soviet power
in Caucasus were at the centre of most national debates up to the end
1991, when Azerbaijan gained independence. Today, as the republic
struggles to maintain it, the debates are more about the strength
or weakness of the UN as a guarantor of national sovereignty and
whether there is a real chance for Azerbaijan to find relief from
economic hardship through the republic becoming a modern oil-rich
AZERBAIJAN UNDER SOVIET RULE

The Sovietisation of Azerbaijan had a two-pronged thrust: first, to harness
its economic resources so as to serve the interests of the Soviet Union as
a whole and, concurrently, to create as elsewhere in the USSR through
Soviet nationalities that were Muslim had and used the Arabic script,
Latin and then to Cyrillic. The influence of the Azerbaijani language
beyond the borders of the Republic into neighbouring Daghestan, for
example, was abandoned.11 Under Stalin, the border with Iran was
AZERBAIJAN AND THE AZERBAIJANIS

Azerbaijani with Iranian passports were expelled in 1938,
completing the process of isolating Soviet Azerbaijan. Likewise,
in 1937 many surviving intellectuals were imprisoned or executed.
In many parts of the countryside an anti-religious campaign was unleashed. Thus, historical sites
and religious significance were destroyed: for example the shrine of
the Fybat outside Baku, whose natural spring had been legendary
for more than a millennium, was dynamited and covered over,
terribly to make way for the building of a road. Under Stalin
and deportations of whole populations took place. Thus, in 1948,
around 100,000 Azerbaijans were deported from Armenia.12 In a
typical speech, Gorbachev once reminded the Armenians that before
the Revolution Azerbaijan had formed 43 per cent of the population of
Erivan.13
The population of Azerbaijan had in-built complexities because of
the large national communities living within its borders. In 1979, the
population of Azerbaijan stood at 6,025,500. The ethnic composition
was said roughly to be: Azerbaijanis, 4,708,000; Armenians, 475,000;
Russians, 475,300; Daghestanis, 205,100; Jews, 35,500; Tatars, 31,400;
Ukrainians, 26,400; Georgians, 11,400; others, 57,100.14 It should be
pointed out, however, that successive local governments in Azerbaijan
have been nervous of potential claims by ethnic minorities for ‘autonomous
region’ status. As a result, scant attention was paid to the separate
degree of the Talysh, the Tats, Muslim Georgians (but not Christian
Georgians) and other minorities who until recently had to declare
themselves ‘Azerbaijani’. It was under Gorbachev that these issues came to be discussed
publicly, and not without acrimony. The recent armed conflict in and
around Nagorno Karabagh resulted in important adjustments to ethnic
culture in their own language have been officially enshrined in recent
government decrees. At the same time Azerbaijanis assert that their
own language and culture should be recognised as dominant in the
Azerbaijani republic as it would be in any other nation state, although
little fuss is made about the use of Russian even to conduct official
business. As elsewhere in the Soviet Union, the population was declared to be
100 per cent literate, which was hailed as a great Soviet achievement.
Today there are several establishments of higher education, including
a national university, a polytechnical institute and an Academy of
Sciences of Azerbaijan. However, during the Soviet period there were
other establishments that would have been less likely to be found in
the other two Caucasian republics, such as a branch of a technical
institute of Odessa. There is more teaching in the Russian language

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in Azerbaijan, which cannot be explained only by the large non-
Azerbaijani population in Baku. Azerbaijani intellectuals who have
greater facility in thinking aloud in Russian than in Azerbaijan are
more numerous, perhaps, than those of the titular nationalities in the
other two republics. During the Soviet period in the country at large
there had been a greater, or at least more successful, effort to obtain
acceptance of Azerbaijan’s union with Soviet Russia through the use
of particular symbols. Thus one saw in the countryside a proliferation
of Russian names for State Farms, such as Kallim or Sverdlov or Kiry,
which the other two republics had largely avoided.

Industrialisation under the Soviets increased by expanding the already
established enterprises and work force in Baku. In the post Second
World War period large new industrial towns such as Sumgait and
Ali Baramly were built which absorbed not only part of the growing
Azerbaijani rural population but also immigrants from elsewhere as
well as, in the case of Sumgait, large numbers of prisoners serving their
sentences through active labour.

At the same time, although non-Azerbaijani were less likely to
benefit from patronage, the diverse ethnic groups lived relatively
peacefully, racially motivated murder was rare, and the Houses of
Friendship large and the lip-service to inter-ethnic harmony loud and
clear. Certain sections of the population today look back at these
aspects of the period with nostalgia and regret.

The political history of the local leadership has been chequered, and
some writers have judged discriminatory many policies carried out
in Azerbaijan by the Moscow authorities.\textsuperscript{15} Undoubtedly, however,
under the Brezhnev regime a successful \textit{pax sovietica} was established
in which dissident nationalist elements were ruthlessly suppressed,
largely by a local leadership eager to retain the \textit{status quo} through
which relatively lavish lifestyles could be maintained through local
networks of corruption.\textsuperscript{16} Haidar Aliyev became Communist Party
First Secretary in Azerbaijan in 1969. He won Moscow approval by
expanding the sectors of the economy that were deemed to be of
'all-Union significance'. In the countryside vast territories that had
previously served the local population in fruit and vegetables were
turned over to mono-culture, such as to vineyards whose produce was
almost entirely exported from Azerbaijan. The number of enterprises
run entirely as subsidiaries of Russian factories or by ministries in
Moscow increased. Aliyev succeeded, however, in obtaining a virtual
monopoly in the whole Soviet Union for Azerbaijan to produce air-
conditioners and in several oil-related industries. On the whole, he was
seen to be a 'strong leader', and through an elaborate patron-client
system was able to bring, through informal channels, stability despite
a population increasingly divided between the privileged and those who
were not.

AZERBAIJAN UNDER GORBACHEV; THE STRUGGLE FOR
INDEPENDENCE

If for centuries the Azerbaijanis have pondered which way to express
their ethnic identity and sense of nationhood, under Gorbachev this
aspect unequivocally found its expression for a majority of the
population in the strongest sense of territoriality yet documented.
 Apart from difficulties of a more political nature linked to local party
inertia and national conflicts over territory, Gorbachev was faced with
particular problems in Azerbaijan because of the effects of a growing
population with increasing awareness of their economic depravations.
The population of Azerbaijan in 1987 had reached 6,811,000 and
the excess of births over deaths had been 2.9 per cent in the past
two years. From 1970 to 1985 the rural and urban populations had
been equal, but the past two years had witnessed an increase in favour
of urban dwellers (54 per cent urban, 46 per cent rural).\textsuperscript{17} This growing
youthful population demanded education (further education usually is
seen as the way to better jobs) and employment. Increasingly more
rural people looked for both in the cities. There was a sharp increase
in unemployment (unofficially 14 per cent), although reliable statistics
are hard to come by. They believed that the racist attitudes of other
peoples of the USSR towards them increased and this promoted a
greater reluctance in the population to seek work outside Azerbaijan.
Urban housing problems also grew in consequence, the number of
factory workers living in hostels and families living in virtual shacks at
the edge of the cities becoming larger than ever. In rural areas the land
available varied sharply but gainful employment was hard to acquire
for school leavers in a system that remained inflexible and gave little
scope for improvement. The leasing system in farming promoted by
Gorbachev had hardly begun and was rigidly controlled. The state
still forbade movement away from mono-cultures such as cotton or
grapes. Choice in the use of pesticides was also not allowed, and such
decisions had an increasingly disastrous effect on animal husbandry and
soil quality.

The economy, according to official statistics, would be seen to have
grown impressively, although in demonstrating this the authorities
had to resort to devices such as using base dates like 1913 or
1940 to show recent growth in relation to those earlier times and
to conceal more recent trends.\textsuperscript{18} The Five-Year Plan of 1980–5 was
nevertheless demonstrated to have increased to 116.4 million roubles
in overall production compared to the 1976–80 period, which yielded
85.9 million roubles.\textsuperscript{19} In the very new climate of media openness that
began in Azerbaijan only in September 1989, a new picture emerged.
Between 1980 and 1988, it is claimed, one-fifth of annual production
was wasted each year.\textsuperscript{20} More damning, however, was the alleged
fact that no other republic was afflicted by such disproportions.
The lagging behind the rest of the USSR in all indices of economic welfare of the Azerbaijani population grew from 1.7 to 2 times in the same period (1980–8). It was revealed that the Republic held one of the last places in the Soviet Union for levels of social and cultural benefits. Per capita use of national income was only 62 per cent of the average level for the rest of the Soviet Union, there was only 65 per cent use of average Soviet social funds and only 59 per cent of consumer goods compared to the overall average in the Soviet Union. The same article, published in the Communist Party's official papers (Komnunist Azerbaijan in Azerbaijan; Bakinskiy Rabochiy in Russian) declared that the average per capita income in Azerbaijan was 75 roubles per month, whereas such a low wage was received by only 12.6 per cent in the rest of the country. Whereas those in the Soviet Union receiving more than 200 roubles per month formed 17.2 per cent of the whole, in Azerbaijan only 6.3 per cent of the population benefited in this way.

Thus, the Azerbaijani asked why they should occupy this humiliating position, having supplied the world and the Soviet Union in particular with oil for a century. Even though Siberian oil resources and petroleum products gained in importance and their own diminished towards the end of the Soviet period, they pointed to other mineral resources and even to their export of agricultural produce as having significance. Why should so many Moscow ministries control such large sectors of industrial production if Azerbaijani wealth were so small? This last question, however, led to the riposte of the newly-formed Popular Front of Azerbaijan, subsequently adopted by the local Communist Party too: most of the gross national product of Azerbaijan was deemed to leave the republic. The Popular Front said 93 per cent of GNP was expropriated, and only portions of this were returned annually in unpredictable handouts from the centre. In consequence, Gorbachev had to face in Azerbaijan one of the most forceful demands for economic independence in the Soviet Union.

The transition to self-financing and self-accounting encouraged by the centre was transformed locally into serious demands for control over all production on the territory of the Azerbaijan Republic. Insistence from the centre that 'production of all-Union significance' should be excluded from local control was met with fierce resistance. Whereas the Baltic republics demanded the same firmly but quietly, the Azerbaijani population was viewed by the centre as volatile. The Azerbaijans appeared so disgruntled that they claimed to be willing to take untold risks to achieve this aim. It must also, and importantly, be said that the majority of the working class was Azerbaijani and that initially participated more than in any other Union republic in the organisation and expression of national dissent.

Economic grievances, however, had sharpened the division between the local Azerbaijani Communist Party and the majority of the population, who regarded it as a bastion of privilege paid by subversion to the centre. The Popular Front was recognised officially only in September 1989, and it was only force of circumstances, in particular the growth of industrial unrest, that finally forced the local Communist Party to agree to consult the Popular Front and to join it in the struggle for republican sovereignty, particularly in the economic sphere.

To begin with, the Popular Front of Azerbaijan achieved unprecedented local prestige and influence in a rapid reversal of fortune in September and October 1989. As described below, the way this happened reflected some of the new democratic elements in the Gorbachev era: the direct use of television, mass demonstrations and strikes.

As elsewhere in the Soviet Union, groups of intellectuals had gathered informally, particularly since the mid-1960s, to discuss ways of gaining concessions from the government for personal liberty and, in the case of the minority republics, for national self-determination. The restoration of national monuments, the concern for the ecological devastation caused by mindless policies and other similar issues had always been at the forefront of these mostly clandestine discussions: under Gorbachev they gathered momentum and were expressed more openly. On the fringes of open dissent in Azerbaijan there had been members of the intelligentsia who maintained their distance overtly, as a tactic in order to act as mediators with the local party who at first had been totally hostile. Exceptionally in Azerbaijan, however, the initiative for the organisation of dissent through mass demonstrations was taken by the working class, notably in November 1988, which at first distanced itself from the intelligentsia whose members it deemed to be mainly corrupt in their pursuit of personal wealth. On that occasion, nearly a million people gathered in the main square in Baku, with workers being joined by students and other citizens. The initial impetus was to protest about Moscow's handling of the Nagorno Karabakh affair and the Armenian hostility, but very soon protests were to centre on economic mismanagement and workers' rights. Workers from the podium tightly controlled the meetings, suppressing what they deemed to be provocative actions such as the shouting of anti-Armenian slogans. They organised campfires for warmth in the November chill and distributed food to the demonstrators after insisting that the Russian soldiers who stood surrounding them be fed first. The central authorities, however, became nervous after the tenth day and finally, after repeated and clear warnings about their plans, moved in troops and tanks and cleared the relatively small number of people who had remained in the square, arresting the leaders, among whom was Neimtar Panakhov, at the time dubbed the 'Lech Walesa of Azerbaijani'. In an interview with the author, Panakhov affirmed his belief that it was the authorities' fear of an Azerbaijani democratic workers' movement that had motivated their
inaction to stop the Armenian irredentist movement, which they knew full well would be highly provocative for the Azerbaijans. In his view, the November meeting had started spontaneously but could have been disbanded easily had the government agreed to a genuine dialogue on worker grievances (the local and Moscow officials refused to appear in public at the time). It must be said, however, that in 1990 the workers’ movement disintegrated rapidly and has not played a part in Azerbaijan’s politics since then. In a document dated 30 October 1989, a member of the Popular Front voiced concern at the possibility of a rift between the moderate intellectuals (and a minority of moderate workers) among the few Popular Front leaders and the militant workers on whose support the Popular Front movement depended. Later, in 1990, Neniat Panakhov had to go into hiding, having been successfully discredited as an irresponsible leader whose overzealousness provoked in part the massacre by Soviet troops of innocent civilians on 20 January 1990.

It is important to pay attention to the role of the Popular Front of Azerbaijan during its apogee in 1989. Much of its activity had been devoted to finding ways of solving the Nagorno Karabakh dispute; yet, interestingly, the programme of the Popular Front of Azerbaijan did not specifically mention Nagorno Karabakh at all. First, the programme declared that the aim of the Popular Front of Azerbaijan (PFA) is to support perestroika as a general social movement aiming to improve and democratise all spheres of our lives. It supported the objective that the ‘social, economic and political norms and practices correspond in spirit and in letter to the basic law of the Constitution of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Azerbaijan’. The PFA ‘absolutely condemned the use of force in political struggle’; its founding values were ‘humanism, democracy, pluralism, nationalism and human rights’. It did not differentiate ‘according to social group, Party membership, nationality or religion’. However, more difficult for Gorbachev was its declaration that ‘The main task of the PFA is to achieve political, economic and cultural sovereignty for the Republic of Azerbaijan’, including independent representation abroad in the UN and UNESCO. It also supported the abolition of political barriers that impeded the development of economic and cultural ties with Southern Azerbaijan, ‘while recognizing the indisputable borders between the USSR and Iran’. The programme also advocated that peasants, ‘the true owners of the land’, should have the land handed back to them for unlimited use, to have complete freedom to cultivate it as individual owners or in a collective. The PFA also noted that the slogan ‘Factories and plants to the workers’ could be put into action only by endowing the council of workers’ collectives with rights in the managing of enterprises and by ensuring that ‘competent managers are in charge of enterprises through free and democratic elections’. The PFA programme had a strong component on human rights: ‘Freedom
Dialogue began between the Azerbaijani government and the PFA. To demonstrate this, the second secretary of the Communist Party in Azerbaijan, V. Polyanchichko (Moscow usually appointed non-native, invariably Russian or 'Russianised' Ukrainian, second Party secretaries in the Union republics) appeared at a mass meeting and announced that a special session of the Azerbaijani Supreme Soviet would take place on 15 September, to which the PFA would be invited. However, the PFA leaders announced at the same meeting that if at precisely 8.30 p.m. on 10 September someone from the PFA leadership did not appear on television to call an end to the strike, people were to resume it on 12 September.

Indeed, three PFA members and three officials did appear on television together and the strike was halted. The next day, however, A. Vezirov, the First Secretary of the Communist Party in Azerbaijan, flew back from Moscow and was displeased, apparently, with what had taken place in his absence. This was seen as an indication of how local leaders were under the thumb of the central government in Moscow.

The PFA called a meeting on 13 September at which allegedly half a million people were present, and announced that Vezirov had told 9 p.m. that evening to sign the prepared protocol to avoid a renewal of the strike, which he did. Two days later, the Extraordinary Session of the Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan was covered by direct television broadcast. Crowds nevertheless stood outside the building as heated discussions took place inside, culminating in high tension when the exasperated PFA turned to the television cameras and announced their wish that the strikes resume. It was one o'clock in the morning and masses of people still stood outside. Sensing the gravity of the situation, Vezirov asked for a 15 minute break that turned into two hours, after which concessions were made to the PFA. Shortly afterwards, the press agreed to publish the discussion papers for drafting laws on economic and political sovereignty. The PFA from now on, instead of being subject to sporadic arrest and harassment, was officially recognised. The Azerbaijani government leaders appeared on television from time to time to state that the yearnings of the PFA for sovereignty as well as an end to the conflictual situation in Karabakh were identical with their own wishes.

In early 1990, the PFA was eclipsed and, even though its chairman later became president of the republic for a year, it never again represented the full unity of purpose and decisive strength of the period just described.

Any desire for a gradual transition to self-rule evaporated rapidly after a dramatic event which, through its large scale, made Azerbaijan unique in the whole of Soviet history. January 1990 has been dubbed 'Black January' in Azerbaijan. Tensions had been growing with every new wave of refugees from Armenia and there was an increasing sense of frustration with Moscow over negotiations for sovereignty. From 13 to 15 January 1990, roving bands started to raid Armenian homes and commit atrocities. Inexplicably, large numbers of former prisoners had been released just before, and, at the same time, the forces of law and order abstained entirely from taking any action during the three days of violence. Alleged perpetrators of violence who were brought to the police stations and army stations were immediately released. It was mainly Azerbaijani conservatives who provided escorts for the Armenians fleeing from Baku. Elsewhere and in rural areas in particular it was often Russian army units that rounded up Armenians and forcibly escorted them out of the country. Thus, a tragedy of huge proportions took place, when the entire populations of Armenians and Azerbaijanis in each other's countries left their homes to become refugees elsewhere. A region that for centuries had been characterised by heterogeneous populations suddenly, at the end of Soviet rule, changed its character in what probably will be an irreparable way.

Several days after the departure of the last Armenians, on 19 and 20 January 1990, an event occurred that has become inscribed on the consciousness of Azerbaijanis for the foreseeable future: Russian manned Soviet tanks drove into the streets of Baku killing people indiscriminately, with unconfirmed figures of around two hundred dead and several hundred wounded. According to General Yazov, the deployment of troops in Baku had the purpose of 'upholding Soviet power', to dismantle the power of the PFA and restore it to the local Communist Party. Azerbaijanis could not at the time understand Western governments' gullibility at having believed Gorbachev's initial excuse that the massacre was a humanitarian effort to save Armenians, when none had been killed for several days. He was to be contradicted by his own military officials, who said the action was directed at Azerbaijani political attempts to leave the Soviet orbit.

There was much acrimony. The Communist government in Azerbaijan was unanimous and bitter in its attack against Moscow, but it was able to discredit the PFA for having lacked caution. Vezirov was dismissed for inaction and replaced by Ayaz Mutalibov, who became one of the First Party Secretaries subsequently to be President of his republic. After the coup attempted in Moscow in 1991, about which he was somewhat silent, Ayaz Mutalibov directed his government to declare sovereignty but his own position was that Azerbaijan would have to seek true independence only gradually, given her dependence on Russian supplies in the economic field. By the end of the year Azerbaijan found itself an independent republic, part of the free-fall experienced by the Union republics when the Soviet Union fell apart. This was not what Gorbachev and his entourage had planned, but it was certainly what Azerbaijan had fought for.
Since May 1994 there has been a ceasefire between the Armenian and Azerbaijani forces, but no government in Armenia or Azerbaijan settled the issue of Nagorno Karabagh. That the Armenians’ demands from late 1987 onwards to administer the region from Erivan should have met with such fierce reaction from the Azerbaijans can be explained in several ways. First, the Azerbaijans learned to think of their nationhood in territorial terms. It would have been seen by the Azerbaijans as the ultimate insult if the Soviet authorities ordered them to hand over territory they had thought was their ‘unalienable resource’ at a time when they had become increasingly aware of the way they had been economically exploited by the centre. Second, they could not accept the legitimacy of Armenian demands on historical, statistical or political grounds. Third, they perceived that the outside world had interpreted their refusal to concede the territory as provocation accepting minority Armenian views that dismissed the Azerbaijans as aggressive barbarians. Fourth, and this has come to the forefront recently, the crisis of Nagorno Karabagh is seen to be an instrument manipulated by a particular Russian grouping in order to establish its hegemony over the region again.

The original decision taken in 1921 on the republican borders had been ceaselessly disputed, however discreetly at times. When Gorbachev came to power, many Armenians in the enclave of Nagorno Karabagh had become exasperated by what they believed was the deliberate mismanagement of their region by Baku. Some Azerbaijans today say those Armenians were not alone in suffering the consequences of bad administration, and that corrupt government should have been eliminated rather than allowing nationalist diversions to develop. Instead, indecision in Moscow was the result, it is thought, of a policy of seeking piecemeal measures to encourage Armenian nationalist interpretations of events and to create instability in order to gain greater control over the republics at a later stage. Conspiracy theories abounded in Azerbaijan as a result of each concession Moscow is perceived to have made to Armenian sentiment, which made it more difficult for Gorbachev to reach an understanding with the Azerbaijans.

After independence at the end of 1991, Russia insisted on being the main mediator in the dispute, although lip-service was paid to the efforts of the CSCE. Neither Armenia nor Azerbaijan can contest this, since Russia is virtually the sole supplier of weapons to both sides in the conflict and so any agreement excluding Russia would be meaningless. Furthermore, what the Azerbaijans see as a de facto recognition by the United States and Western Europe of the Caucasus as being within the ‘Russian sphere of influence’, it is unlikely that the call for international peacekeepers and monitors will be given high priority in the West.

AZERBAIJAN AND THE AZERBAIJANIS

The Nagorno Karabagh affair can be divided so far into four phases, the first beginning in November 1987, the second in September 1989, the third in 1992 and the fourth in 1994.

Most articulate Azerbaijans claim that the issue of Nagorno Karabagh started in November 1987 when Gayyagyan, one of Gorbachev’s economic advisors who is of Armenian ethnic origin, declared that he believed that Nagorno Karabagh should be handed over to the administration of the Armenian Soviet republic. In view of the system of personal patronage, there was nervousness at the thought that someone so close to the General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party should be of that opinion. The Azerbaijani version of events obviously differs from the Armenian version, more familiar to the West. Azerbaijans nearly all believe that the mass protests in Nagorno Karabagh by the Armenian population were organised not by local inhabitants but by leaders from the Armenian republic with the active connivance of elements of the Russian KGB, who at the time would still have been able to stop them had they wished to. They point to the resentment felt by the majority of Armenians who lived in Baku at the risks they were being exposed to by the protests in Stepnokert, capital of the Nagorno Karabagh enclave and in Erivan, capital of Armenia. When spirits became heated in both Erivan and the enclave, two Azerbaijani youths were killed in early 1988 and others fled from the area. Up to 2,000 Azerbaijans from Armenia were said to have arrived then in Sumgait. Baku radio, allegedly believing it could calm the fervent spirit of the Armenians by telling them of the risks involved in their movement, announced the deaths of the two Azerbaijani youths, thinking this would make the Armenians regret their actions. Instead, the announcement allegedly backfired: the Azerbaijans population, hearing the news, was outraged and the massacre of Sumgait took place, in which a disputed number of Armenians lost their lives in the most macabre of circumstances.

The events in Sumgait form a landmark in Gorbachev’s rule — ethnic violence on a scale unknown by his immediate predecessors. The massacre in Sumgait is also a turning point in the history of the modern Azerbaijani nation, for it is the event that brought this previously lesser known nation to world attention, and gave it a reputation the Azerbaijans resent. The social and ecological conditions in Sumgait were regrettable, Azerbaijans explained to the author, with 20 per cent of its population being prisoners in forced labour and one of the highest infant mortality rates because of pollution. Many Azerbaijans felt obliged to ask the world not to condemn a whole nation because of the atrocities, however horrific, committed by a small number of mostly very young men. They also wished to refute the stereotypical image of themselves as ‘wild Turks’ whom the Armenians have likened to the Western Turks responsible for the massacre of Armenians in 1915. They pointed to inexplicable
circumstances, such as an Armenian video-cameraman ready to record
the violence as soon as it began. Moreover, Moscow, although perhaps
not Gorbachev alone, was perceived to have handled the situation
in a way that would, at the time, alienate the Azerbaijani public.
As public sympathy rose for the Armenian cause, the Azerbaijani
leadership argued that they were not given a chance to get equal media
coverage for their version of events or for the violence to which they too
fell victim.

There was a rapid escalation of terror immediately after the events
of Karabakh. The Azerbaijani leadership insisted that they suffered more
deaths than the Armenians. The dramatic exchange of population
between the Soviet Republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan mentioned above,
with some refugees arriving in Azerbaijan apparently not even fully
dressed, caused a public outcry that the authorities and eventually
martial law attempted to diffuse. When direct rule was imposed in
Nagorno Karabakh by a special committee set up by decree on
12 January 1989, the Russian commander in chief A. Volsky, in the
interests of security, asked all 16,000 Azerbaijani refugees to leave the regional
capital Stepanakert, an act interpreted by a majority of Azerbaijani
residents as blatant anti-Azerbaijani bias. More worrying, however, was the
portrayal of the special administrative arrangement as a first step
towards the rulers in Moscow conceding Nagorno Karabakh to
Armenia. At the Communist Party level there were also resolutions
and counter-resolutions between the Soviet republics of Armenia
and Azerbaijan (see chapter 13), resulting in the kind of deadlock
characteristic of totalitarian communist rule. The second phase
in the Nagorno Karabagh debacle began in September 1989, when
reports that started in June reached the rest of Azerbaijan that not
only were Azerbaijani villages near Shusha in the southern part
of Nagorno Karabagh still cut off after more than a year from water
and electricity supplies, but the remaining Azerbaijani civilians were being
threatened by armed bands of Armenians whom the forces under
Volsky had ignored. As this was the period when the Popular Front
was seen to be more vociferous than the local Communist Party and
was gaining momentum, the former proposed a railway blockade of
goods destined for Armenia.

The blockade (called an ‘embargo’ by the Popular Front) was
thought to demonstrate two factors: first, that Azerbaijani railway
workers and even Azerbaijani passangers were not receiving sufficient
protection from Soviet forces directed from Moscow or the forces of
either republic against alleged attacks when travelling through
Azerbaijani territory. Second, the blockade was supposed to serve
as a demonstration to the world that Armenia was dependent on
Azerbaijani goodwill to receive the goods it so badly needed, and,
by implication, that having refrained from such action in the past
had demonstrated Azerbaijani restraint and good manners. The outcry

following the news that badly needed materials for the reconstruction
of parts of Armenia so adversely affected by the earthquake in
December 1988 were being withheld or deliberately ruined was met
with a certain amount of indifference among the Azerbaijani popular
leadership. Never had the fact been released that the first Soviet
planes to crash (with the loss of around 70 lives) bringing relief
to earthquake-stricken Armenia had actually come from Azerbaijan.
They had instead been accused of having been jubilant when the
earthquake took place in Armenia. Azerbaijani leaders constantly deny
this.

A new decree from Moscow on 28 November 1989 dissolved
the special commission ruling Nagorno Karabakh and returned its
administration to Azerbaijan. Rumours, increasingly frequent, spread
through the rest of the country that the Armenian armed guerrillas were
now going to seize by force the enclave and the two regions separating it
from the borders of the Armenian republic. An Azerbaijani ‘voluntary
militia’ was established and skirmishes began between protagonists
from both republics. Fighting also took place north of the enclave
and along the borders between Nakhichevan and the Armenian republic.
In protest, Azerbaijani crowds in southern Nakhichevan claimed land
along the border with Iran usually kept as a no-man’s land for Soviet
military use. They also demanded the right to visit relatives in Iran
and the opening of the border in the way the Berlin Wall had been
breached in Germany. The lack of resistance by the Russian border
guards was surprising and later interpreted by the Azerbaijani leaders as
a deliberate passivity in order to discredit them and to justify the armed
intervention against crowds in Baku in January 1990.

The third phase in the Nagorno Karabagh debacle began in the
aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union. This phase involved
two characteristics: (1) the fate of politicians in Azerbaijan began
to be decided more or less locally rather than in Moscow and the
issue of Nagorno Karabagh became one of the most important factors
for their success; (2) a military solution to the problem became the
approach preferred by both sides, which exposed them to manipulation
by Russia, the sole supplier of weapons to both sides.

First in February 1992, President Ayaz Mutalibov, who had resisted
the formation of a national army although Azerbaijan was fully
independent, was ousted in the wake of the massacre of refugees
fleeing Kelbajar, a town the Armenian forces had taken with the
help, the Azerbaijani leader, in the 366th Russian Regiment (of
the 23rd Division) still stationed in Nagorno Karabagh. In June 1993
when President Abulfaz Elchibey was in turn ousted, one of the many
reasons given was his failure to win the war.

The military solution was disastrous for the Azerbaijani army, which
consisted of unorganised and uncoordinated Azerbaijani battalions run
by warlords, with the dubious assistance of a handful of Afghan
mercenary and others alongside untrained young Azerbaijani men. The net result of their defeats has been that up to 20 per cent of all Azerbaijani territory is occupied by Armenian forces and there are officially up to 1 million refugees and displaced persons, i.e. one in seven citizens of Azerbaijan, creating a terrible burden. The conquests have permitted the Armenians, to gain control of land linking the republic directly to Nagorno Karabakh as one land mass, and much of the Azerbaijani border with Iran. According to Azerbaijan sources the scorched earth policy of the occupying forces will make it difficult for the Azerbaijani population, if it ever returns, to start normal life again.

The fourth phase in the Nagorno Karabakh debacle began in May 1994 with a declaration of a ceasefire by both sides which has been maintained for over six months at the time of writing. A political solution is still being sought, but at least the fighting, which has resulted in around 20,000 deaths on both sides, has stopped for the moment.

AZERBAIJAN SINCE INDEPENDENCE

Towards the end of the Soviet period under Gorbachev, foreign oil companies were invited to negotiate joint ventures with the Azerbaijan Republic. After independence, the Azerbaijan State Oil Company had the right to negotiate on its own and, in turn, had to reorganise itself to take on the decision-making functions that previously had been placed in Moscow. The result of the four years of negotiations has been that Azerbaijan is becoming known worldwide for its oil even more than its past fighting with Armenia since the reserves in the Azerbaijan sector of the Caspian Sea are considerable. On 20 September 1994, an agreement was signed between Azerbaijan and a consortium of 10 foreign oil companies to develop two offshore oil fields. Interestingly, however, a week before the contract was signed by the former President Elchibey, the Russian barracks in Gandja, the second largest city in Azerbaijan, was evacuated in the dead of night, without the Russian forces informing the central government in Baku. The local warlord, Suret Huseinov, popular for his exploits in Karabagh and for his business acumen which had provided sufficient profits for his own battalion to be well clothed and fed, took possession of the intact weapons and provisions the Russians had left and mounted a coup against the president in Baku. To avoid bloodshed and recognising his government's loss of popularity, President Elchibey fled without a fight but not before calling on Haidar Aliyev, former strongman in Soviet times, to take over from him. Aliyev, however, had torn up his Communist Party card, spent some time in his native province of Nakhichevan and decided it was important for Azerbaijan to maintain its independence from Moscow and control its own resources. He was now seen as an elder statesman with experience and authority. He agreed that Azerbaijan should become a member of the Commonwealth of Independent States to achieve some concessions from Russia, but pledged himself to stand firm in all matters concerning the economic and political sovereignty of Azerbaijan. Elections were called rapidly and his position as president was confirmed in October 1993. Suret Huseinov was given the coveted position of Prime Minister but within months Azerbaijan had lost territory to the Armenian forces and the economy began a downward spiral that only foreign investment will be able to stem. Within days of the signing of the oil agreement Suret Huseinov was again implicated in an attempted coup against the government of which he was a member, the aim of this coup possibly being to bring Ayaz Mutalibov, who now lives in Moscow, back to power. Haidar Aliyev, through appealing to popular support and relying on international backing for his country's independence and right to control its own oil, survived the attempt to oust him. He united the opposition, the regions and the business community in support for his position.

The Russian Foreign Minister's spokesman, two hours after the oil contract signature, objected to Azerbaijan's claiming that the Caspian Sea had been divided into sectors since the 1970s and demanded that Russia be consulted before any commercial contracts were signed. When Haidar Aliyev came to power, the Russian company Lukoil was given a 10 per cent stake in Azerbaijan's own share and the right to participate in the collective decisions taken by the production team consisting of themselves – Azerbaijan and Russian – with British, American, Turkish, Norwegian and Saudi Arabian companies. This has pushed Azerbaijan into the international arena in a way that it hopes will be irreversible. Unless moderates in Russia prevail over the forces there bent on restoring hegemony in the former Soviet republics, the issue of defending Azerbaijan's rights to forge its own economic policy, including foreign investment, could possibly force the Western-led international community into choosing whether or not to confront Russia over Azerbaijan. Iran and Russia share a reluctance to see Azerbaijan achieve full independence underpinned by oil-rich prosperity, whereas Turkey sees Azerbaijan as a region which to demonstrate its own importance in the region through its offers of aid, support and advice. Because of its oil reserves, therefore, Azerbaijan hopes to resist absorption into a wholly Russian orbit although, at the time of writing, this is not a foregone conclusion.

Azerbaijan has also had the experience of receiving aid for its refugees from many international charities, although it believes more could be achieved if more political support were forthcoming as well. The
TRANSCANASIA

Council for Security and Cooperation in Europe set up a 'Minsk initiative group' first with an Italian and then with a Swedish chairman to mediate and negotiate a settlement to the conflict in Karabagh. Although itself a member of the 'Minsk initiative group', the Russian government appointed its own special envoy who has conducted parallel negotiations. No attempts have succeeded so far in getting the parties to the conflict to negotiate outside the Russian mediation, which would involve the placing of Russian peacekeeping troops who would not be under the command of any international body along the outside edge of the occupied territories most detrimental to Azerbaijan's position. It is also assumed that the reopening of Russian military bases in Azerbaijan would have to be accepted as well. The Armenian side is also not entirely convinced as its role as a pawn in Russia's wider geopolitical strategy would be generally beneficial in the long term. Except for the ceasefire, not much has been achieved as yet in the peace process, although informal meetings between the two Caucasian sides are increasingly frequent.

PROSPECTS

Azerbaijan stands at the crossroads. Since 1992 it has achieved diplomatic recognition in the international community, and through its oil negotiations has entered the international economy also. This has made it more vulnerable on two counts: (1) it is difficult for Russia to come to terms with an oil rich country on its presumably vulnerable Southern flank eschewing control by Moscow; (2) with the potential that oil transactions can bring, Azerbaijan's political stability may become hostage to individual ambitions seeking to profit, while the legislation that could prevent this is incomplete and unlikely to be implemented in the short term. Electoral reform, privatisation legislation and other markers required for a transition to democracy and a market economy are developing at a slow pace, partly because of the political upheavals and the time lost over the conflict in Karabagh. With an ever increasing diplomatic corps and business community in Baku, Azerbaijan is seeking outside help in modernising and internationalising its education system and economy. There is, however, always the possibility that the rural areas, given their deeply deprived state will become volatile and that external forces will take advantage of the discontent before the economic benefits of oil development start to be redistributed among the population at large.

AZERBAIJAN AND THE AZERBAIJANIS

NOTES

4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
10. Swietochowski 1985 op. cit.
14. Narodnoe khozajstvo Azerbaidzanskoi SSR k 70 letiuyu velikogo oktyabrya 1987 (National economy of the Azerbaidzhani SSR towards the 70th anniversary of Great October) Gosudarstvenny komitet Azerbaidzanskoy SSR po statistike Baku; Azerbaidzhansko gosudarstvennoe izdatelstvo.
17. Derived by author from Narodnoe Khozajstvo 1987, op. cit.
19. Ibid.
Georgia and the Georgians

Stephen Jones and Robert Parsons

BACKGROUND

Sakartvelo, the land of the Kartvelians (as the Georgians call themselves), lies between the Black and Caspian seas and on the southern flanks of the main Caucasian range. A naturally abundant land, it has always attracted the attention of its more powerful southern and northern neighbours. As a consequence, its history, apart from brief interludes of peace, has been a long struggle for survival.

Georgia has been exposed to a wide range of cultural influences: classical, Byzantine, Persian, Turkish and, more recently, Russian, but the single most important moment in the early beginnings of national identity was Georgia's conversion to Christianity in the fourth century AD.

As Islam spread rapidly through Asia Minor, Georgia, like Armenia, began to forge an identity that marked it off from the surrounding Persian and Arab worlds. With the collapse of the last Armenian state on the Armenian plateau in the eleventh century, Georgia was left as a solitary outpost of Christianity. Yet it was just at this moment that the Georgian state reached the peak of its powers. From the eleventh century, the term 'Sakartvelo', describing all the land occupied by the Georgians, entered into common usage and, for the first time, all the Georgian lands, stretching from the Black Sea to the Caspian and south into present-day Turkey and Iran, were united under one ruler.

Against a background of political unity, economic prosperity and military success, Georgian culture flourished until the Mongol invasions of the mid-thirteenth century shattered the power of the central state. Fractured by the rivalries of its feudal princes and constantly invaded by the Mongols, Persians and Turks, Georgia entered into a long period of decline that lasted well into the eighteenth century.

In 1783, however, King Irakli II, who had successfully reunited the eastern half of the Georgian state, concluded the Treaty of Giorgievsk
with Russia. By its terms, Georgia ceded control of foreign and defence policy to the Russian crown, but retained sovereignty over its internal affairs. It was to prove to be the first step on the road to incorporation into the Russian empire. In 1801, Tsar Paul abrogated the terms of the treaty by forcibly annexing the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti (East Georgia).

Over the ensuing sixty years, Russia took over piecemeal most of the remaining Georgian territories, until by the conclusion of the Russo-Turkish war in 1878 much of the medieval Georgian state had been reunited under its control. But, although Georgians were grateful to the Russians for protecting them from their Muslim neighbours and regaining their lost territories, they bitterly resented the division of Georgia into separate administrative provinces and the persistent denigration of their culture and language. It is an ambivalence towards the Russian presence that persists to this day.

By the late nineteenth century, opposition to the Russians had led to the formation of a national liberation movement among the Georgian intelligentsia. But what began as a student movement had by the turn of the century spread to the peasantry and working class. The main beneficiaries were the socialists, who were quick to exploit a coincidence of class and nationality: whereas the bourgeoisie was predominantly Armenian and Russian, the Georgians comprised the peasantry, working class and increasingly destitute aristocracy. Within years, the Georgian socialists, as members of the Menshevik wing of the Russian Social Democratic Party, had created a mass organisation with branches all over the country.

In 1917 the openness and minimalist aims of the Georgian Mensheviks brought them into conflict with the Bolsheviks. Nko Zhordania, the leader of the Georgian party organisation, refused to recognise the legality of the October Revolution, preferring instead to lead Georgia to independence.

GEORGIAN INDEPENDENCE 1918–21

The reluctance of the Georgian Social Democrats to separate from Russian proved short-lived. In his declaration of Georgia’s independence on 26 May 1918, Zhordania abandoned the ideas of class struggle in favour of national unity and relegated socialism to the status of a distant goal.

But the new government faced enormous problems. Years of exploitation under the tsarist administration had left the Georgian economy unbalanced and unprepared for self-rule. Regarded primarily as a supplier of raw materials, its industrial development had been even slower than that of central Russia, producing in 1915 to the value of 10 roubles of factory-made goods per capita a year. By 1918 war and revolution had undermined even that modest achievement.

Independence, while enthusiastically welcomed, was achieved against a background of economic collapse, sudden loss of the crucial Russian market and Turkish invasion. Communications between the capital, Tbilisi, and the outlying districts were almost non-existent, food was scarce and the administrative infrastructure had collapsed, leaving few with the experience to fill the role of the Russian bureaucracy.

Nor did the end of the war bring relief. Despite its neutrality, both sides in the Russian Civil War were hostile to Georgia. The Whites sought on several occasions to seize parts of its territory, while the Bolsheviks helped organise uprisings in the national minority areas of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. But the Russians and Turks were not the only threat: in December 1918 the Armenians invaded following a dispute over the border regions of Lore. Only British intervention brought the conflict to an end.

Against this background the Georgian Social Democratic Party (GSDP) began increasingly to stress the urgency of active popular support for the state, a difficult task in a country where there was no recent history of a united, independent state structure and where the peasantry had grown used to regarding the state as alien and hostile. They saw little participation in the electoral process and a programme of Georgianisation as the keys to overcoming popular indifference.

Local government elections in 1918 were followed in 1919 by national elections. Under a system of proportional representation, the GSDP won convincingly, securing 109 of the 130 seats in the Georgian Constituent Assembly. Remarkably, 70 per cent of the rural electorate turned out to vote.

Electoral reform was accompanied by a national education programme. Georgian became the official medium of instruction and a crash programme was undertaken to build schools and libraries in the villages. The first Georgian university opened in January 1918. Yet, like so many of the reforms in 1918–21, they were never fully realised. Because of the economic crisis, teachers were badly paid, often close to destitution, and schools had few textbooks. Moreover, the reorganisation of education and the new status of Georgian demanded the creation of an entirely new syllabus and set of textbooks. Neither of these existed by the time of the Russian invasion in 1921.

For all the problems, however, many had believed in 1920 that the worst was over. The Social Democrats still commanded enormous support, particularly among the working class and peasantry, and Soviet Russia had signalled its readiness to recognise Georgia’s independence. On 7 May 1920 Lenin signed a treaty renouncing Soviet Russia’s claim to Georgian territory and any right to interfere in Georgia’s internal affairs. But less than a year later, on 11 February 1921, on the pretext of an uprising in the neutral zone of Lore between Georgia and
Armenia, the Red Army invaded. Six weeks later Georgia’s short-lived independence was at an end.6

THE GEORGIANS AS PART OF SOVIET LIFE

As Soviet historians later admitted, the invasion was no more than a localised protest among Armenian peasants, engineered by the leader of the Caucasian Bolsheviks, Sergo Ordzhonikidze, a close associate of Stalin.7 The poor standing of the Bolsheviks in Georgia fell even lower as a consequence of the invasion. Its membership in the countryside still numbered fewer than 6,000 by 1924. Most of the new recruits, moreover, were poor, uneducated peasants.8 But the government faced more than just an ideological struggle. The economy was in ruins, with industrial output in 1921 a mere 13.8 per cent of its 1913 level and inflation spiralling out of control.9

Industrial reconstruction in the 1920s moved slowly. Despite investment in several major hydroelectric projects and the creation of a number of large-scale industrial associations, output in 1925 had still reached only 86.4 per cent of its pre-war level, while unemployment remained high.10

Georgia was a predominantly rural society. Some 70 per cent of its national income was derived from agriculture and 85.5 per cent of the population lived in the countryside.11 The Bolshevik land reform of April 1921, which brought Georgia into line with Soviet Russia, did little to improve life, partly because the independent Georgian government’s own land reforms had already redistributed most of the available land and partly because of the overall shortage of land. At 40.1 persons per square kilometre, Georgia had one of the highest population densities in the USSR in the 1920s. The all-union average was 7.3. 12

The Party authorities continued to regard the peasantry as a threat to their authority throughout the 1920s, always fearful that national and economic grievances could fuse into armed resistance. Despite the Party’s failure to win active support, however, the stability brought by the first years of Soviet power proved enough to win the peasantry’s acquiescence. By 1926, agricultural output was back to 85.5 per cent of its 1913 level,13

The change in regime did little to alter established demographic patterns. As a result of the pro-Georgian policies of the GSDP government, independence had witnessed a rise in the Georgian share of the population from 67.7 per cent in 1917 to 71.5 per cent in 1922–23, a development that was partially reversed as Armenians and Russians returned to Georgia after the invasion. By 1989 Georgians comprised 70.1 per cent of the population of 5,448,600,14

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Political opposition to Moscow continued at least until 1925 from the defeated Georgian intelligentsia, supported to some extent by the working class and peasantry, and, more surprisingly, from the Georgian Communist Party leadership, which resented the attempts of the centre to limit its autonomy. This inner party issue focused on a bitter dispute between the ‘national deviationists’, led by Budu Mdivani, and the Caucasian Buro, led by Ordzhonikidze, about the pace of the socialist revolution in Georgia and the question of whether Georgia should be incorporated into the USSR as a separate republic or as part of a Transcaucasian federation. In December 1922, the Georgian Bolsheviks were forced to concede defeat. Georgia entered the USSR as a part of the Transcaucasian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic (ZSFSR). The arrangement not only granted the ZSFSR powers to establish overall economic plans for the area and the right to overrule any republican decision, but also deprived the republics of their separate right to secede. That was now invested in the ZSFSR as a whole. The defeat of the ‘national deviationists’ brought a new centralist Party leadership into power and heralded the beginnings of tougher policies in the republic.

The resistance of the nationalist opposition to Soviet power crumbled with the defeat of a popular uprising in August 1924. As many as 4,000 people were subsequently executed.15 It was a forewarning of the fate that awaited Georgia in the 1930s. The collectivisation and industrialisation of 1928–32 were followed in 1936–38 by political purges that cut a deep swathe through the intelligentsia and wiped out almost the entire Georgian Party leadership.

The full force of collectivisation hit the republic between October 1929 and March 1930. In just four months the number of collectivised families rose from 3.4 per cent to 65.2 per cent.16 In March, however, the campaign suddenly slackened in response to Stalin’s ‘Dizzy with success’ article in Pravda. By the beginning of 1932 the number of collectivised farms had fallen to 36.1 per cent of the total.17 But the financial penalties of remaining outside the collectives began to have the same effect as the violence of the initial campaign. By the end of the decade 92.3 per cent of agriculture had been collectivised.18

The transformation of agriculture was accompanied by an equally dramatic transformation of industry. The total value of production reached 503 million roubles in 1932, almost thirteen times its pre-war level, and then more than doubled in the second five year plan to reach 1,047 million roubles in 1937, 75.2 per cent of the national product.19 By 1940 industrial output had increased 670 per cent over 1928. Between 1930 and 1934 the size of the industrial workforce grew by 40.5 per cent, while by 1939 the population of Tbilisi had swollen to 519,000, some 225,000 more than in 1926.20

The violent economic revolution was matched by brutal purges of the intelligentsia and Party and government apparatuses, orchestrated...
produces a wide range of industrial and consumer goods. Industrial output rose by 240 per cent between 1940 and 1958 and by 1979 53.3 per cent of the workforce was employed in industry and only 16 per cent as collective farmers. Georgia had more doctors per head of the population than anywhere else in the Soviet Union, and by 1979 had proportionately more people with a higher education than any other republic (150 in every 1,000). Yet it was evident that the Georgian economy was not performing well. Industrial output in 1960–71 was the third lowest of any union republic and, despite some recovery while Edward Shevardnadze was Georgian Party First Secretary (1972–85), was struggling to achieve any growth by the end of the 1980s.

GEORGIAN NATIONALISM

At the time of the Russian invasion in 1921, Georgian national consciousness was high and cultural activity well developed. Initially the invasion strengthened national sentiment, although subsequently a combination of physical elimination of opponents and a conciliatory cultural policy won the acquiescence of the Georgian people without ever undermining their underlying attachment to the nation.

In the pre-Gorbachev period, Georgian nationalism manifested itself on several occasions, notably in 1924, 1956 and 1978, usually with bloody consequences. The attempt in 1924 to restore independence was crushed and led to severe repression; in 1956 Georgian protests against Khrushchev’s 20th Congress speech on Stalin assumed a vaguely nationalist character, and in 1978 thousands defied armed troops in Tbilisi to demand that Georgian be reinstated as the state language of the republic.

The motives behind the 1956 demonstration are far from clear. Some were simply responding to a sense of injured national pride — they saw Khrushchev’s attack on Stalin as an attack on the Georgian people as a whole; others, reflecting a view widely held throughout the USSR, were protesting against the denigration of a man they had grown up to believe was beyond criticism; while others simply took the opportunity to express themselves freely for the first time in their lives. For them it was the first chink of light. The consequences were tragic; many tens of people were killed when troops fired without warning. The incident left a deep mark on the consciousness of the post-war generation of Georgians and reinforced national distrust of the Soviet state.

Unlike 1956, the demonstrations in Tbilisi in 1978 passed without violence and for that reason alone marked an important stage in the recovery of national confidence and the development of the current national movement. Even more importantly, the party authorities gave
way to the demonstrators' demands. The status of the Georgian language, resistance to Russification and the defence of national rights became the rallying points of the Georgian intelligentsia's opposition to Moscow through the 1970s and early 1980s.

The effects of perestroika were at first slow to reach Georgia, dripping through the filter of conservative Party opposition until popular opinion, encouraged by awareness of what was happening elsewhere in the Soviet Union, began to put pressure on the leadership for faster change. Patishvili, the man suddenly called on to replace Shevardnadze as First Secretary of the Georgian Party when the latter moved to Moscow as Foreign Minister in July 1985, appeared uneasy in his new post, unsure of how to respond to the demands of the time. While perestroika deepened in parts of Russia and the Baltic republics, Patishvili rallied against economic sabotage, moral degeneration and a growing private property mentality. Despite public statements in favour of perestroika and glasnost', for his first two years in office Patishvili was preoccupied with weeding out Shevardnadze's proteges and building up his own power base. By 1987, at least eight former close associates of the Foreign Minister had been dismissed, and some of them imprisoned on corruption charges. But Georgia was not immune to the changes taking place elsewhere in the Soviet Union. The party's daily Georgian-language paper, Komunisti, began to run a series of investigations into the corrupt practices of the Ministry of the Interior, and at the end of 1986, Tengiz Abuladze's film Monanieba (Repentance) and the subsequent public discussion broke one of the taboos of Georgian life and so removed one of the psychological barriers to the re-examination of Georgian history that was soon to follow.

In early 1987, frustration at the slow pace of perestroika began to form around a number of key issues. The first of these was ecology, a response not just to the wanton damage to the countryside, but also to people's lives. In March 1987 many blamed the heavy avalanches and consequent loss of life in the mountainous area of Svaneti on the construction of too many hydroelectric stations. Whether they were right or not mattered little. The common perception was that the authorities paid no attention to people's needs, were contemptuous of public opinion and more concerned with private gain than with the welfare of the nation.

This was what lay at the heart of the opposition in 1987–88 to a plan to build a railway across the Caucasus linking Georgia directly with Russia. The scheme would have been the most expensive in Georgia's history. Not unusually, it went ahead without public consultation or regard for potential pitfalls. The project brought into focus a number of issues that Georgian dissidents had been protesting about over the previous decade: damage to the environment, pollution and the destruction of historical monuments, many of which lay in the line's path. It was to prove the catalyst for the formation of the national movement.

By the summer the dispute over the railway had given rise to a more perceptive debate in the republican press – the first real evidence of glasnost'. The temperature rose still higher as the public became aware that Soviet troops were using one of Georgia's most ancient monasteries – Davitgaredzha – for artillery practice. The disputes over the environment and the destruction of historical monuments and spiritual values gradually brought glasnost' to the Georgian media. By the end of 1987, the press had caught up and was calling for a re-examination of the blank spots of Georgian history.

In the face of official procrastination over the demands for an end to work on the Caucasian railway and removal of the firing range, opposition to the authorities expanded to encompass wider issues. At the end of 1987, several prominent dissidents formed the Ilia Tchavchavadze Society, named after the founder of the nineteenth-century national liberation movement. It demanded, among other things, that all matters concerning the future of Georgia be settled in accordance with the wishes of the Georgian people, that Georgian became the state language of the republic, that fundamental importance be attached to improving the study of Georgian language, history and geography at school and that Georgians be allowed to perform their military service in Georgia.

But an influential and more radical wing broke away in early 1988 to set up a loose alliance of groups united in their rejection of compromise with the authorities. Initially at least, this included the Georgian Helsinki Group, the National Democratic Party, the Georgian National Justice Union and the Georgian National Independence Party, all of whom regarded any form of cooperation with the state, even when there was potential advantage to be gained, as a form of moral compromise. All, to one degree or another, stressed the importance of the close association of the future independent state with the Georgian Orthodox Church. This overtly religious strand in the outlook of the opposition groups struck a chord with young Georgians who led a religious revival as thousands were christened in mass baptisms in different parts of the country.

Despite making a number of gestures in 1988 to win popular support, the Party failed to curb the growing influence of the unofficial organisations, and in the summer was forced to bow to public pressure on the Caucasian railway. With the Party on the defensive, a series of demonstrations in September called for the closure of the firing range and the rapid extension of democratisation. The September demonstrations marked a watershed in the development both of the national movement and of the attitude of the Party towards it. By its repeated attempts to marginalise the opposition groups and its failure to follow the example of the Baltic Party.
organisations in co-opting the reform movements, the Party missed an opportunity to bridge the gulf between itself and society. Devoid of any coherent policy and bereft of moral authority, the Georgian Party became increasingly confused in the face of the growing challenge to its authority.

Complaints began to be voiced about discrimination against Georgians in the Abkaz Autonomous Republic in north-west Georgia and the republic's demographic situation. In contrast to the Baltic republics, Georgians were not complaining about Russians, who make up less than 8 per cent of the population, but about the rapidly expanding Azeri population in south-west Georgia and the Armenians in the southern regions of Akhalkalaki, Akhaltsikhe and Bodanovka. What made matters worse was that corrupt Georgian party officials had been illegally selling state land to Azeris, many of them settlers from neighbouring Azerbaijan. With land at a premium because of the population density, Georgian nationalists began to call for the expulsion of Azeri settlers and the establishment of a pro-Georgian demographic policy.33

By denying legal outlets to dissident opinion and by doing nothing to increase the involvement of the people in the political process, Patiashvili widened the gulf between state and society at a time when perestroika was supposed to be narrowing it. Nothing illustrated this better than the Georgian leadership's conduct of the March 1989 elections to the USSR Congress of People's Deputies. What was intended as an example of the democratisation of Soviet society in Georgia merely confirmed how little had changed: 57 per cent of the constituencies had only one candidate, far above the Soviet average, and the turnout was claimed to be an absurdly high 97 per cent.34

Against this background, the political situation deteriorated in March, when ethnic tension between the Abkhaz and Georgians spilled over into violence. Calls by Abkhaz nationalists, among them senior Party members, for separation from Georgia brought a furious response throughout the republic and were the direct cause of the demonstrations the following month in Tbilisi. But what began as an anti-Abkhaz protest evolved into a massive demonstration for independence.35

With factories coming out on strike, the transport system paralysed, peasants pouring in from the countryside, vast crowds choking the centre of Tbilisi and over 100 people on hunger strike on the steps of the government building, Patiashvili called on Moscow to grant him the use of special troops to disperse the crowd. Permission was granted. Gorbachev and Shevardnadze were absent on state visit to Britain.36 Early in the morning of 9 April, airborne troops joined special and regular Interior Ministry units in what the commissions investigating the tragedy have described as a 'punitive operation' against a peaceful demonstration.37 Nineteen people were killed, sixteen of them women.

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More than 4,000 people were treated for injuries and over 500 were hospitalised. Two more people were killed by troops later the same day.38

Although ultimate responsibility for the use of the troops rested with senior Politburo members and ministers in Moscow— notably Ligachev; Chebrikov, the former head of the KGB; Yazov, the Minister of Defence; and Colonel-General Radionov, the Commander-in-Chief of the Transcausian Military District, Patiashvili was seen as responsible for the chain of events that led to the April tragedy during the previous year.39 But if the attack was intended to intimidate the Georgians, it clearly backfired. Instead, it radicalised popular opinion and greatly boosted the standing of the leaders of the national movement. According to a poll carried out by the Georgian Supreme Soviet Commission investigating the events of 9 April, 79 per cent of the Georgian population felt the unofficial groups represented the national interest, while 71 per cent had a 'negative attitude' towards the former leadership.

9 April was seen by Georgians as yet another national trauma which, like those of 1921, 1924, and 1956, was created by the colonial power in Moscow. It accelerated the collapse of communism in the republic, and symbolised the hollowness of perestroika and the illegitimacy of Moscow's rule. It allowed myriad new parties to set the political agenda despite the policy of the new communist leadership under Givi Gumbaridze which followed the strategy of the Lithuanian communist party by incorporating nationalist demands into its programme. In September 1989, Gumbaridze, who had briefly been Georgia's KGB chief before his promotion to first party secretary in April 1989, published a new version of the Georgian party's programme which called for national sovereignty, including the supremacy of Georgian law over all-Union law, Georgian citizenship, the separation of powers, multiparty elections, and an end to the Party's monopoly.40

By the following summer, the communist-dominated Georgian Supreme Soviet had passed laws enhancing Georgia's sovereignty, and the Georgian government had approved policies of Georgian settlement in minority areas, pressed Soviet troops to abandon military bases (notably in Mtseketa), promoted the Georgianisation of place names and a new national history in the schools, and established a commission to explore a judicial mechanism for the formal separation of Georgia from the Union. But Gumbaridze's policy of political reform and openness only revealed the depths of Georgian estrangement from the system, as professional organisations from trade unions to the republic's football league broke with their all-Union counterparts and announced their independence from the Communist Party. The Georgian Communist Party could not compete with the strong moral authority of the new parties, the most prominent of which was the Round Table group under Zviad Gamsakhurdia, former dissident and
the son of one of Georgia's greatest patriotic novelists, Konstantin Gamsakhurdia.\textsuperscript{41}

The formal end to communist power came in October 1990 with elections to the new Georgian Supreme Soviet. Despite controversy surrounding the electoral law, which limited candidates to residents of ten years, disenfranchised the Soviet military and forbade the registration of parties 'whose activity does not extend over Georgia's entire territory' — thus excluding ethnic and regional parties — the election was conducted fairly and based on a mixed system of majority and proportional representation. Of the six parties and five electoral blocs that took part, the radical nationalist Round Table–Free Georgia bloc led by Gamsakhurdia secured 155 seats out of 250 (54 per cent of the vote). The Georgian Communist Party, with most of its support in rural and ethnically non-Georgian areas, came next with 64 seats (26.6 per cent of the vote), and the Popular Front was third with 12 seats (1.93 per cent). The result was greeted with jubilation, although in retrospect it determined many of the problems that were to follow. None of the blocs representing moderate intelligentsia opinion were successful in the elections, and ethnic minorities were hardly represented at all. The Supreme Soviet was polarised between a majority of deputies who proudly dubbed themselves the 'irreconcilables', well-versed in the popular politics of the street and full of bellicose rhetoric about the coming battle with Moscow, and the minority of communist deputies unprepared for opposition politics, viewed as a fifth column.

THE GAMSAKHURDIA ERA

Gamsakhurdia's period in office was characterised by political violence, economic decay, social polarisation, international isolation, and finally war. But Gamsakhurdia, who was incompetent, naive, authoritarian and prone to self-aggrandisement and paranoia, was only part of the tragedy that brought Georgia to a military takeover in December 1991. Georgian society, as I have argued elsewhere, was ripe for Gamsakhurdia. His militant populist themes of national unity, direct action, mass participation, anti-elitism, traditionalism and heroism appealed to a population that was deeply nationalistic, embittered with the Soviet system and all it represented, and undergoing the trauma of rapid economic and political change.\textsuperscript{42} But Gamsakhurdia's success — and his final downfall — cannot be understood apart from the legacy of both Georgian and Soviet political cultures. The Soviet system produced the social and institutional structures ideal for Gamsakhurdia's branch of populism. It stunted social and political differentiation, prevented the growth of autonomous interest groups and parties, and undermined a sense of political efficacy and political accommodation. Politics was personalised, revolved around top leaders, and its language was reduced to Manichaean choices of 'good and bad', or 'them and us'. The state was authoritarian and promoted generally egalitarian expectations. At the same time, despite the early years of rapid social mobility, Soviet policies left multiple divisions between a small politico-cultural elite and a large socially undifferentiated mass, between urban and rural populations (particularly between Tbilisi and the provinces), and between Georgians and non-Georgians, all of which Gamsakhurdia successfully exploited in his claim to represent the 'voice of the people'.

But it was not Soviet political structures alone that provided Gamsakhurdia with his populist base. He benefited from Georgian cultural values such as the hagiographic view of native writers and leaders, mystification of the past and support for conservative family values, all of which, paradoxically, were encouraged by the Soviet system itself.\textsuperscript{43} The Soviet system also forced Georgians, due to the inefficacy of formal structures, to develop their traditional reliance on personal loyalties and nepotistic networks, and it produced an intelligentsia largely untouched by the constant revision, critique and renewal that characterises its Western counterparts. This left it with a belief in moral certainties and in its own culture's neglected superiority, a view it communicated to the majority of the population. Gamsakhurdia, with his policies of Georgianisation, glorification of the national past, state paternalism and intolerance of challenges to national unity, was representative of this way of thinking. In the May 1991 Presidential elections, Gamsakhurdia won 87 per cent of the vote.\textsuperscript{44} Gamsakhurdia, like most Georgians, believed that independence (declared 9 April 1991), elections and a multiparty legislative body were sufficient for democracy. Concepts such as the protection of minorities, cooperation between competing elites and procedural norms limiting executive power guaranteed by the rule of law were poorly understood. Within a short period Gamsakhurdia had introduced a legislative programme which represented, on paper at least, a Rechtsstaat: laws on the freedom of the press, an independent judiciary, political parties, religious and economic freedom, and the separation of powers.\textsuperscript{45} But the basic democratic thrust of these laws was flawed by omission or vagueness, and undermined by other less democratic ones like those on the Prefecture and Presidency. These laws, along with a new constitution, preserved a highly centralised system with enormous powers in the hands of the President and his appointees. Arguably these powers, such as his right to appoint and dismiss Prime Ministers, cabinets and top army officers, or to dissolve the parliament, call a referendum and declare a state of emergency and rule by decree, were similar to those of the French President. But Gamsakhurdia's Presidential preeminence was heightened by his power to suspend the force of laws and decrees passed by the legislatures of
autonomous republics and regions in Georgia and by his right to serve unlimited terms. He could only be impeached by three-quarters of the parliamentary vote for an act of treason.47 But the real problem was not the legislation, rather its irrelevance. Gamsakhurdia’s obsessive emphasis on national unity led him to a number of conclusions: ethnic minorities were dangerous, the state should be active and vigilant, the media and the opposition were factional and potentially disloyal. Gamsakhurdia’s own rejection of ‘prudence’ and ‘compromise’ in relations with the opposition, and his lack of understanding for institutional and normative boundaries in the political arena, led to an association of himself and his allies with the state. His populist style, with its emphasis on referenda, rallies, letter-writing campaigns and glorification of the leader, created a highly charged emotional atmosphere in which ‘enemies of the nation’, ‘Judasies’ and ‘red intelligentsias’ figured prominently.

By the summer of 1991, the national consensus that Gamsakhurdia so desperately sought was disintegrating. The inordinately influential cultural intelligentsia of Tbilisi was deeply resentful of Gamsakhurdia’s attacks on its authority and his heavy-handed manipulation of cultural institutions through intimidation and personnel changes. Parliamentarians including members of Gamsakhurdia’s own bloc and sacked former colleagues were alienated by his cavalier manipulation of procedure, endless revisions of the constitution, and frequent use of dubious legitimate Presidential decrees.48 Finally the extra-parliamentary opposition, excluded from all political consideration by Gamsakhurdia and with some of their leaders in prison, expressed their opposition to Gamsakhurdia through street rallies, hunger strikes and paramilitary activity. But crucial to the opposition’s success was the August 1991 putsch in Moscow. Gamsakhurdia’s response was perceived as weak, and his decision to demote the Georgian National Guard by putting it under the control of the Georgian Ministry of Interior was taken as submission to the Moscow conspirators’ demands.49 The majority of the National Guard, the only effective military force in Georgia apart from Soviet forces, followed its commander, Tengiz Kitovani, into opposition. From August until the end of the year when Gamsakhurdia was overthrown by a coup led by the National Guard and paramilitary groups of the extra-parliamentary opposition, Georgian political life was characterised by parades, demonstrations, barricades and occupations. Gamsakhurdia’s decision to put all the power ministries under direct Presidential control, his expulsion of the entire communist party bloc from parliament, and his attempt to mobilise the rural population in his defence proved fruitless. Soviet troops secretly supported the opposition with arms and the population was too exhausted to take sides.

GEORGIA AND THE GEORGIANS
THE SHEVARDNADZE ERA

In January 1992, a Military Council came to power, led by the grand vizier of Tengiz Kitovani, Tengiz Sigua, Gamsakhurdia’s former prime minister, and Jaba Joseliani, leader of the powerful paramilitary organisation Mkhedrioni (Horsemens). The Council declared its aim to be the restoration of democracy and created a Provisional Government and a Political Consultative Council consisting of all the major political parties. But despite its policy of national reconciliation, the Military Council proved incapable of restoring civil order or of ending the republic’s international isolation. In March the Military Council invited Eduard Shevardnadze to resume his leadership of the Georgian republic, and the short interregnum of praetorian guardianship came to an end.50

Shevardnadze inherited a state, that, in the strict Weberian sense of the word (‘an organisation which monopolises legitimate violence over a given territory’); no longer existed. There were two wars, one with the South Ossetian secessionists, the other with the ex-President’s supporters in Mingreilia, western Georgia. Both the southwestern autonomous republic of Adzharia under Aslan Abashidze and the Abkhazian autonomous republic under the leadership of Vladimir Ardzinba were out of Tbilisi’s control. The Armenian and Azeri-populated regions on the republic’s southern borders had established ethnocratic hierarchies which effectively ran themselves. There was no army responsible to a legitimate executive power, rather a number of competing paramilitary groups, and the structures of government had ceased to function. Of the multiple and interrelated tasks that Shevardnadze faced, the most pressing were an end to the wars in South Ossetia and western Georgia, accommodation with Georgia’s ethnic minorities, the re-establishment of civilian control over the paramilitaries and the restoration of some normality in economic life. At the same time Shevardnadze, who had replaced a legitimately elected President removed by a military coup, needed to seek popular and international legitimacy through a revived democratic system.

Shevardnadze’s period in office has brought mixed results in all areas, and many of the problems remain unresolved. He has been dogged by powerful paramilitaries unwilling to cede their power, Russian military intervention in Abkhazia and to a lesser extent in South Ossetia, devastation of the economic and political infrastructures, and a population severely hampered by its Soviet mentality.51 Despite these obstacles, Shevardnadze’s realism and his willingness to compromise brought the conflict in South Ossetia to an end within three months of his arrival. Within seven months in October 1992 he had established a newly elected parliament and temporary power structure, with himself popularly elected as both Chairman of Parliament and Head of State.52 The appeasement of Gamsakhurdia’s followers and the
national minorities proved less easy. In June 1992 Shevardnadze withstood a feeble coup attempt by Gamsakhurdia’s supporters in the centre of Tbilisi, but far more threatening was the war in western Georgia where Gamsakhurdia had extensive support among the local Mingrelian population. The war lasted until the autumn of 1993, when Gamsakhurdia’s forces, after almost capturing the western Georgian regional capital of Kutaisi, were defeated by a combination of Georgian and Russian forces. In January 1994 Gamsakhurdia was dealt either by suicide or at the hands of his own followers, which brought an end to the armed revolt. But it did not heal the bitter regional and political divisions that Gamsakhurdia’s rule had exacerbated in Georgian society.

The civil war and a more protracted war with Abkhazian separatists, which broke out in August 1992 and ended in Georgia’s defeat in September 1993 with the loss of the Abkhazian autonomous republic, and over 20,000 lives, undermined Shevardnadze’s attempts to rebuild Georgian institutions and ‘civilianise’ the Georgian paramilitaries. The permanent military crisis increased the power of the paramilitaries, particularly in the absence of a regular army. Shevardnadze was forced to indulge in a careful balancing act between the two military leaders, Tengiz Kitovani and Jaba Ioseliani, commanders of the National Guard and Mkheidriti respectively. It was only in May 1993 that he was able to remove the impetuous Kitovani as Minister of Defense. Kitovani had already disobeyed Shevardnadze a number of times, including an unsanctioned military action against the Abkhazians which had led to the 13 month war. Ioseliani proved politically more flexible than Kitovani but, despite persistent attempts by Shevardnadze to integrate Ioseliani’s militia into the regular armed forces, he still commands it like a personal army. While the possibility of violence continues in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and the southern regions populated by Armenians and Azeris, Shevardnadze needs Ioseliani. Ioseliani remains unpredictable, and his assertions of independence from Shevardnadze and his government have led to serious political crises on a number of occasions. But at the same time Ioseliani’s Mkheidriti has frequently saved Shevardnadze from military defeat. Thus despite protests from the Georgian parliament, which points to Ioseliani’s criminal background and involvement in the black market, Shevardnadze continues to employ him in responsible positions such as chairman of the delegation conducting peace talks with Abkhazian separatists in Geneva and Head of the State of Emergency Provisional Committee set up in October 1993. Ioseliani, through his informal network of clients who control Mkheidriti, large sections of the economy and government ministers, remains one of the most powerful men in Georgia, but his unpopularity with the Georgian population has encouraged him to maintain his alliance with Shevardnadze.

The war, as well as providing paramilitaries with their raison d’être, increased the crime rate as armed soldiers returned home to joblessness, and undermined the legal power structures set up by the temporary law on State Power in November 1992. The parliament, due to a bad electoral law designed to prevent a repeat of the single-party monopoly of the legislature under Gamsakhurdia, comprised twenty-six factions parties. The inexperience of the new politicians, the limited power given to the Speaker and parliamentary authorities to control the conduct of debates, the newness of procedure and a traditional Georgian nihilism towards rules were not unsurmountable barriers to an effective legislature. But fluctuation in the fortunes of war, mistakes in its conduct and condemnation of Shevardnadze’s policy of capitulation to the Russians, who eventually forced Georgia back into the CIS in October 1993 and extracted military basing rights in return for their arbitration in the conflict, led to a hysterical legislature in which opponents labelled one another traitors. Such highly charged partisanship prevented compromise, sabotaged parliament’s legislative programme and undermined public confidence in parliamentary politics. Parliamentarians ceased to attend legislative committee meetings, neglected constituents’ local needs, and created regular crises with demands for Shevardnadze’s resignation. Bitter distrust between the parliamentary opposition and Shevardnadze grew as the latter ignored parliament’s sensibilities, gained and used emergency powers to resolve Georgia’s military, financial and political crises. A weak and disorganised parliament suited Shevardnadze, but it undermined a central pillar of the new constitutional structure, and has done great damage to the long-term health of Georgian democracy.

The war undermined the Georgian economy, already devastated because of the breakdown of supplies, particularly energy, grain and raw materials for manufacturing from the former USSR. All resources were devoted to the war effort, economic reform was postponed indefinitely, and following Georgia’s defeat in Abkhazia the state was burdened with a quarter of a million refugees. Shevardnadze cannot be blamed alone for the 1993 levels of GDP, industrial and agricultural output and labour productivity, which have fallen to the levels of the 1960s, nor for the devastation of war or the 9,000 per cent inflation, but his passivity in the area of economic reform and commitment to a National Bank policy of massive credit emissions contributed to the permanent economic catastrophe in republic. Until September 1994, when under pressure from the World Bank and IMF the first steps were taken to implement economic reform, there had been no effective privatisation, total confusion in land redistribution, continued massive price and employment subsidies, an absence of revenue collection and hence an uncontrolled budget deficit. This led to a massive decline in living standards and unprecedented levels of poverty as the salaries paid by the government in official ‘coupons’ became totally worthless. The average monthly salary of one half million coupons (approximately
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50 cents) can be used to buy rationed bread, pay for certain utilities and public transport. The remainder of the economy functions in roubles or dollars, currencies that are not taxed and have to be earned by moonlighting, trading or borrowing. The absence of economic restructuring, which preserved an incompetent ministerial structure that discouraged foreign investment and prevented revenue earnings, increased Georgia's dependence on Russian energy and contributed to the misery of Georgian winters, during which most domestic consumers were deprived of heat, electricity and hot water.58

Shevardnadze has responded to the war and to the accompanying economic and political crisis with caution. His personnel policies have demonstrated a particular weakness for balance and continuity at the expense of change. Almost all of Shevardnadze's cabinet are former apparatchiki, such as Prime Minister Otar Patatsia and deputy Prime minister Avtandil Margiani, appointed for their regional political bases rather than their commitment to reform.59 While useful in a system based on clients and personal networks, they are a brake on the transition to a leaner, better-managed bureaucracy and an independent economy.

CONCLUSIONS

Georgia continues to exist, as one Georgian scholar put it to me, in a state of 'stable catastrophe'. Shevardnadze has made some progress in reducing crime and, since the appointment of Vardik'o Nadibaidze as Defence Minister in April 1994, has begun to restore a regular military under civilian control. He has improved relations with Georgia's national minorities and preserved basic civil liberties despite the pressures of a state under siege. He has ended Georgia's international isolation and brought relations with strategic neighbors Russia, Armenia and the North Caucasus onto a more even keel. But the concentration of enormous powers in his own hands, his indifference to the self-destruction of the Georgian parliament, his promotion of conservative apparatchiki to policy-making positions, and his neglect of the economy have undermined popular faith in the institutions of democracy and the market. His dogged commitment to peaceful resolution of conflicts with the Abkhazians, Ossetians and Russians has brought him limited success. Both Abkhazia and South Ossetia remain outside Georgian control, and despite a signed agreement with the Abkhazian separatists in May 1994 for the return of refugees, very few had been resettled six months later. In order to bring peace to Georgia, Shevardnadze sacrificed Georgian sovereignty. Russia exercises the greatest influence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and in return for its arbitration of the separatist conflicts it had militarily supported it was granted three military bases, joint use of all Georgia's ports and airfields and supervision of Georgia's borders. Georgia is not a client state, but Russia has taken it well beyond the limits of Finlandisation. More than anything else, events in Russia will determine Georgia's political future.

Shevardnadze managed to save the Georgian ship of state when it was perilously close to sinking, but has given it very little direction. His attempts to reaffirm political authority and end the 'feudalisation' of politics, characterised by geographic and political regionalism, the rise of unaccountable economic and political barons, and a system of informal and undocumented obligations and rules, are constantly underlined by Shevardnadze's own political practice. He continues to concentrate powers in his own hands, promote old clients, ignore the legislature and stall on major economic change. But as yet there is no credible alternative to Shevardnadze, and until there is, it seems likely that Georgia will continue its laggarding transition to democracy and the market.

NOTES

1. K. Kandelaki Sak'art'velos Erevunii meuneobha, dagni meore (Paris, Institute for the Study of the USSR, 1960), p. 87. Output per capita in Russia as a whole was 30 roubles.
11. Steven Jones, op. cit. p. 618.
13. Ibid., p. 137.
15. Until recently the 1924 uprising was one of the many 'blank spots' in Georgian history. Since 1988, however, it has become the subject of numerous articles in the Georgian press, and, already, a novel, Shakh Dvomiebi by Guram Gegeshidze, serialised in the monthly Mnadobi, 3,4 (1989).


17. T. Zhgeni, 'Kolmuneoba's sameurnoe-organizatsiuli garmkhtsebts in Sakk'art'velo istoriis narkvevebi 7.7' (Tbilisi, Sabclt'o Sab'k'art'velo 1976), p. 444.


21. This is a point strongly made by many Georgian writers, who feel that an attempt is being made in the Russian media to attribute Stalin's excesses to his Georgian birth and, at the same time, to suggest that he protected Georgia from the worst excesses of the 1930s. In an open letter to Gorbatchev, published in the literary paper Literaturuli sak'art'velo on 21 April 1989, more than 200 writers argued that the bloody action taken by Soviet troops against Georgians demonstrated that month was the 'logical conclusion and crowning of the general denigration of the Georgian people sparked off in the central press, radio and television'. One writer, Guram Pan'dzhikidze, pointed out in Literaturuli sak'art'velo, 21 and 28 October, 1988, that aside from the repressions of 1924 and 1937, Georgia also suffered in 1981 when thousands were taken from the Tbilisi intelligentsia overnight and exiled to Central Asia. He noted too that Georgia suffered more than 300,000 losses during the war, over 10 per cent of the population and proportionately higher than any other republic.


25. Shevardnadze did for a while achieve notable results in revitalising the Georgian economy, although from a relatively low base. In his first two years, industrial output grew by 9.6 per cent and agricultural output by 18 per cent. Georgia was one of only four republics to fulfil the tenth five year plan targets. But today the Georgian economy, like that of the rest of the former USSR, is struggling to achieve any growth at all.


28. Saliko Khabezishvili, the former Central Committee Secretary for Industry, had worked with Shevardnadze since their time together in the Georgian Komsomol in the 1950s. In February 1987 he was sentenced to fifteen years' imprisonment on charges of corruption. See Komunisti 22 Feb. 1987.
names alone, the ethnic minorities were poorly represented; with two Armenians, one Azeri and one Russian. The total turnout was under 70% per cent. For a full breakdown of the election results by district, see Akhali Sak'art'velo 16 November 1990, p. 3 and Zaria Vostoka, 14 November 1990.

43. Jones, 'Populism in Georgia', op. cit.


45. For the Presidential election results, see Foreign Broadcast Information Service Daily Report: Soviet Union (henceforth FBIS-SOV), 91/10, p. 148.


47. An example of his disregard for the law was his expulsion of the Communist Party deputies from the legislature shortly after the August 1991 putsch and his nationalisation of the party's property. Between October 1990 and 1991, using his majority in the parliament, Gamsakhurdia pushed through twenty amendments to the constitution without discussion and almost no consultation with the broader public.


49. Eduard Shevardnadze was First Party Secretary of the Communist Party of Georgia from 1972 to 1985, when he was appointed Soviet Foreign Minister.

50. For a discussion of Russian military involvement in Caucasus in the post-Gorbachev period, see Thomas Goltz 'Letter from Eurasia: the Hidden Russian Hand' Foreign Policy, No. 92, Fall 1993, pp. 92–116.


52. Zviad Gamsakhurdia was himself of Mingrelian origin, although he spent his life in Tbilisi and did not speak the Mingrelian language.

53. In September 1993 a cabinet shake-up gave Mkhedrioni official status as the Georgian Rescuers' Corps with its own state committee led by Giorgi Gelashvili. This had been one of Ioseliani's demands in return for Mkhedrioni's participation in the war against Abkhazia. The organisation remains under Ioseliani's personal control, based on a system of personal loyalty to the leader.

54. For example, Ioseliani's accusations of dictatorship, leveled at Shevardnadze during a parliamentary debate concerned with granting additional state of emergency powers to the Head of State in September 1993, led to Shevardnadze's brief resignation.

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