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**THE AZERBAIJAN REPUBLIC ESTABLISHED IN 1918: ITS SEARCH FOR  
SUPPORT AND PROTECTION FROM WESTERN COUNTRIES AGAINST  
BOLSHEVISM**

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**ABSTRACT**

In the South Caucasus, Azerbaijani Turks, Georgians, and Armenians live side by side. Among these groups, Azerbaijan has the largest population. The South Caucasus is located at the crossroads of East and West, North and South. Strategically, the region provides access via Iran to the Persian Gulf and Arab countries; via Türkiye to the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern countries; and via the Black Sea to the Balkans and Europe. This has historically made the region highly significant, with the Silk Road passing through this route. The South Caucasus possesses resources that provide raw materials for industrialized countries. Baku, in particular, draws attention with its oil reserves and petroleum by-products such as naphtha.

Following the Bolshevik Revolution, the Central Powers, particularly Germany and the Ottoman Empire, became more active in the region, and the local groups began to establish their own independent states. Azerbaijan declared its independence on May 28, 1918. The Republic of Azerbaijan signed alliance agreements with Türkiye and received assistance from the Ottoman Empire to establish its national army. As a result, the Caucasian Islamic Army was formed and it liberated Baku from British and Armenian forces on September 15, 1918. In October of the same year, the Central Powers accepted defeat in World War I. The 11th and 15th Articles of the Armistice of Mudros, signed by the Ottoman Empire, paved the way for the occupation of Azerbaijan by the Allied Powers. This shift would change the course of events in the Caucasus and lead Azerbaijan to put its relations with Türkiye on the back burner while drawing closer to the Allies. Faced with threats from both the Bolsheviks and the pro-Tsarist Denikin Army, Azerbaijan saw receiving support from the Allies as a necessity to escape this situation and preserve its independence.

This study examines the Republic of Azerbaijan's appeals to Western powers for assistance in preserving its independence in the face of threats from both the Bolsheviks and the pro-

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Tsarist White Army, as well as the diplomatic efforts it carried out with Western actors for this purpose. The primary sources of the study are documents from the League of Nations Archives (Geneva) and the Presidential Archives of the Republic of Türkiye. Another important reference is the Russian-language document collection The Paris Archives, compiled by A. M. Topchibashev. I would like to express my gratitude to Assoc. Prof. Dr. Yasemin Gürsoy Şumnulu for translating the relevant sections of this work into Turkish.

### **Keywords**

Republic of Azerbaijan, League of Nations, Lord Curzon, Woodrow Wilson, mandate, Armenia, Georgia

### **Introduction**

Baku, the most prominent city in the South Caucasus, means “the place beaten by winds.” Throughout history, Baku has drawn attention as a region rich in energy resources, and its value was firmly established with the advent of oil in industrial life. For this reason, Baku became a target for control by Iran, Russia, Germany, and Britain. After the arrival of the Russians in 1806, entrepreneurs began to systematically exploit the natural resources along the Caspian coast. In the Sarukhani region, kerosene production began in 1859. By 1873, Baku had become a major center for oil production. When the government lifted the state monopoly and began selling land to the highest bidder, Russian, Georgian, Armenian, and Jewish capitalists poured into the region. This led to large companies falling under the control of Russian and Armenian capital, while small enterprises remained in the hands of the region’s original inhabitants, the Azerbaijani Turks. The development of the oil industry rapidly transformed Baku into a capitalist city. The rapidly growing city developed in every aspect. While Baku had a population of 15,000 in the mid-1870s, by the 1913 census it had become the largest city in the South Caucasus. There were 214,600 residents in the city center and 119,300 in the industrial district. Foreigners in the city tended to live collectively in central neighborhoods, while Turks were dispersed across various settlements. Turks made up the majority of the South Caucasus population. The administration of Baku was largely in the hands of officials appointed by the Tsarist government. The largest community in Baku was the Turks, followed by the Russians. Armenians ranked only third in terms of population size. For Azerbaijani Turks, religion was the primary marker of identity, whereas for Armenians, it was nationality (Suny, 2019).

After the collapse of the Tsarist regime in 1917, which had politically controlled the region, a fierce civil war broke out in Russia between the Red Army and the pro-Tsarist White Army. This development drew increased attention from Western countries to the South Caucasus. Britain, eyeing control of oil wells in the region, deployed both military forces and relief organizations there. The United States also made its presence felt through missionaries and humanitarian organizations. These aid organizations were most active in Armenia. Following the outbreak of World War I, many Armenians living in Anatolia had migrated to the Caucasus within Russian territory. The Russian authorities had temporarily settled them in areas such as Akhalkalaki and Akhaltsikhe. However, after the fall of the Tsarist regime, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk signed between the Bolsheviks and the Turkish government stipulated that Russia was to return Kars, Ardahan, and Batumi—territories it had seized 40 years earlier—to Türkiye. As this process was delayed, the Turkish army seized the mentioned territories. The transformation of the region into a battleground heightened the need for humanitarian assistance among refugees. As a result, a fierce competition emerged among various powers seeking to gain control of the oil wells left behind by the Russians. Meanwhile, the Bolsheviks were also determined to re-establish Russian dominance in the South Caucasus and bring the region's peoples under their regime. The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk enabled Germany to become more active in the South Caucasus. Having secured Georgia as an ally, Germany objected to the advance of the Turkish army formed under the name of the Caucasian Islamic Army toward Baku. Concerned that the Bolsheviks might destroy the oil derricks in Baku, Germany sought to recognize Baku, along with Shamakhi and Salyan, as an independent entity. Türkiye reacted strongly to this proposal, and Turkish-German relations nearly collapsed.

In response, the German Ambassador to Istanbul, Count Bernstorff, and the Austro-Hungarian Ambassador initiated talks with their governments to convene a Caucasus Conference in Istanbul. Grand Vizier Talat Pasha expressed the Ottoman government's support for holding the conference and stated that the newly independent states of Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia in the Caucasus should also participate. However, Talat Pasha's counterparts responded that they had only been authorized to discuss the status of Georgia, claiming that Azerbaijan and Armenia were not sufficiently established to warrant participation. They also emphasized that Russia's opposition to recognizing these two state formations was a significant concern for them and therefore rejected the inclusion of the Armenian and Azerbaijani delegations. Later, however, Germany decided to accept these terms, reasoning that the end of warfare in the Caucasus would buy them time and allow them to exploit the region's natural

resources. During their meeting with Count Bernstorff, Armenian delegation members Avetis Aharonian and Alexander Khatisian expressed their gratitude to Grand Vizier Talat Pasha for his contributions toward the establishment of an independent Armenia. They also conveyed to Bernstorff that the newly formed Armenian state should be capable of housing 600,000 Armenian refugees. On the other hand, Talat Pasha supported the idea of an independent Armenian state, motivated by the strategic expectation that such a state would serve as a buffer zone between Russia and Türkiye and by the notion that Armenians would finally have a country of their own (Çolak, 2018).

Azerbaijan's greatest concern despite the support it received from the Ottoman government was the possible loss of Baku. On August 10, Enver Pasha wrote to Nuri Pasha: "Even if the Germans do not want to leave Baku to the Azerbaijanis, we are convinced that an Azerbaijani government cannot survive without Baku, and we are determined on this matter!" (Hasanli, 2022, p. 222). To prevent Baku from being taken out of Turkish hands, the Turkish army launched a military operation under the name "of Caucasian Islamic Army" and successfully seized the city (Günay, 2021). Following this development, Germany and Russia signed an agreement on August 27. However, the agreement contained provisions that were practically unfeasible. For example, the Russians agreed to give one-fourth of the oil they obtained from Baku to the Germans. In reality, however, the Russians had been unable to obtain any oil from Baku since the end of July. Meanwhile, as Germany began to suffer setbacks on other fronts, it agreed to take Baku from the British and hand it over to the Russians (Çolak, 2019). Shortly after the Central Powers established their own order in the Caucasus, they lost World War I. This outcome reshaped the global political landscape, bringing old alliances and loyalties to an end.

After World War I, the Paris Peace Conference was convened with the aim of determining the fate of the territories and peoples of the collapsed empires. U.S. President Woodrow Wilson announced his Fourteen Points, which included key principles such as the victorious powers not annexing the territories of the defeated states and the right of every nation to live independently. To ensure the implementation of these principles, the League of Nations was established. Within the League of Nations, a ten-member Council was formed to evaluate the status of small nations. This Council consisted of the foreign ministers of five major powers and their deputies. The principles proposed by Wilson made it more difficult for the victorious countries to simply divide and annex territories. As a result, instead of direct territorial division,

a new method called the “mandate and trusteeship” system was developed. According to this system, newly established states that lacked strong economies and functioning state institutions would be placed under the protection of a major power to help them overcome their deficiencies (Macmillan, 2004).

After the collapse of the empires following World War I, the peoples of those former empires declared their independence and sought to secure a place among the nations of the world. To do so, they needed to find a great power willing to take them under its mandate or protection. This led many of the peoples of the disintegrated empires to search for a protective power during the Paris Peace Conference. The peoples of the former Russian Empire particularly those from the Baltic region, the Caucasus, and the northern Black Sea arrived in Paris with the hope of establishing independent states. This study focuses on the diplomatic efforts of the Republic of Azerbaijan, which declared its independence in 1918 in the South Caucasus, to avoid falling under Bolshevik control by seeking the support and assistance of the Allied Powers and making appeals to the League of Nations. The study also addresses Azerbaijan's relations with the Republics of Georgia and Armenia within this context. The main sources of the study are documents obtained from the League of Nations Archives and the Presidential State Archives of the Republic of Türkiye.

### **Azerbaijan’s Search for Allied Powers Protection Amid Pressure from the Russian Red and White Armies**

After the collapse of the Russian Tsarist regime, a civil war erupted between the White Army which sought to restore the monarchy and the Red Army, which aimed to establish Bolshevik rule. This conflict had severe consequences for all the peoples of the region. Russia fell into economic collapse during this period. In the midst of this turmoil, several peoples formerly under Tsarist rule declared their independence. In the South Caucasus, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan were among the countries that proclaimed independence. To address the developments in the South Caucasus, the Central Powers decided to organize a conference in Istanbul. Representatives from Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Bulgaria, as well as delegates from Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, were expected to attend. On August 25, 1918, the Cabinet of Ministers of Azerbaijan resolved that Alimardan Topchubashov would represent Azerbaijan as the chief delegate at the conference (Hasanli, 2022). The Ottoman government placed its trust in Topchubashov as Azerbaijan’s representative and issued visas to the delegation (HR.SYS. 2457/60). The Ottoman government provided Alimardan Bey with every

possible convenience during his mission and allowed him to consult with his home country as needed (HR. SYS. 2186/73). However, the planned Istanbul Conference failed to convene. Germany refused to enter into negotiations, concerned that the Ottoman Empire would determine the borders in the South Caucasus and that control over the region's railways would not be granted to Germany. As a result, the conference was never held (Çolak, 2019). In response, Ottoman Grand Vizier Talat Pasha traveled to Berlin with the aim of improving Turkish-German relations and securing recognition of the Republic of Azerbaijan's independence. Like Germany, Iran was also opposed to Azerbaijan's independence (ATASE. 930-1-0-0/1-18). Despite Talat Pasha's efforts in Berlin, the situation did not change: neither Germany nor Austria-Hungary recognized Azerbaijan's independence (Hasanli, 2022).

After Baku was taken by the Turkish army, the Azerbaijani government relocated there on October 6, 1918. However, the course of the war was turning unfavorable for the Central Powers. In early October, a change of government occurred in Germany. On October 8, Talat Pasha resigned, and the Izzet Pasha Cabinet was formed in his place. Following these political shifts, discussions began around the application of U.S. President Wilson's principles and the possible disbandment of the Ottoman Empire. Eventually, on October 30, 1918, the Ottoman Empire signed the Armistice of Mudros. Article 11 of the armistice required the withdrawal of Turkish troops from Southern Azerbaijan and the South Caucasus. Article 15 placed the borders of the South Caucasus under the supervision of the Allied Powers. The Ottoman Empire also agreed to relinquish the rights it had gained through the Treaty of Batum and to hand over control of the railway lines in the South Caucasus to the Allies. The Allies would be allowed to occupy Baku and Batum, and Türkiye would not object (ATASE. İSH. 7-0-80. 30.10.1334; ATASE. İSH. 9.0.58-2.11.1334; BOA. HSD.AFT. 6-74, H.24.01.1337; for the Armenian perspective, see Hovannisian, 1969). However, Baku was not within the borders of the Ottoman Empire, and Türkiye had no authority to make decisions about its future. Moreover, Türkiye had recognized Azerbaijan as an independent state. Likewise, Türkiye did not have the authority to make decisions regarding Azerbaijan's railways. Nevertheless, the text of the armistice signed by the Ottoman Empire contained binding provisions concerning these matters. Turkish troops withdrew from Baku on November 10, 1918. However, it was claimed that some Turkish officers did not leave Azerbaijan, allegedly staying behind to help organize the Azerbaijani population (Hovannisian, 1969). On the same day, Prime Minister Fathali Khan Khoyski and Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs Adil Khan Ziyadkhanov sent a telegram to U.S. President

Woodrow Wilson, requesting support for the recognition of the independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan by the international community. In early November 1918, a delegation consisting of Nasib Bey Usubbekov, Ahmet Bey Ağayev, and Musa Bey Rafiyev was formed. This delegation traveled to Enzeli to meet with William M. Thomson, the Commander of Britain's North Persia Forces. Also serving as the Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in the region, Thomson refused to recognize the existence of the Republic of Azerbaijan. He claimed that the state had emerged as a result of Turkish intrigues, that Baku would be cleared of Azerbaijani and Turkish forces, and that Baku along with its oil facilities would be placed under British control. He added that the rest of the country could remain under Azerbaijani administration. On November 17, 1918, the British forces composed mainly of Indian troops entered Baku (Hasanli, 2022; Hovannisian, 1969).

### **Azerbaijani Delegation's Engagements During and After the Paris Peace Conference**

After the end of World War I, the Paris Peace Conference the first meeting convened to determine the outcomes of the war and to formalize the victory of the Allied Powers was organized in November 1918 by France, the United Kingdom, Italy, the United States, and Japan. The primary purpose of the conference was to establish the terms of peace treaties to be signed between the Allies and the Central Powers. Among the central issues on the agenda were the future of the collapsed Russian and Ottoman Empires and the fate of their former peoples. The peoples of the disintegrated empires had high expectations from the Paris Peace Conference. The Republic of Azerbaijan also hoped that the conference would lead to international recognition of its independence and territorial integrity, as well as its acceptance as a fully equal member within the international community and its institutions. On November 16, 1918, the Azerbaijani National Council convened and elected Alimardan Topchubashov as the President of Parliament. The Parliament decided to hold new elections and resolved to participate in the peace talks in Paris jointly with the other South Caucasus republics of Georgia and Armenia. It was argued that failure to do so would leave the South Caucasus vulnerable to renewed Russian occupation (Hasanli, 2022).

Beginning in October 1918, Alimardan Topchubashov was in Istanbul, serving as the extraordinary and plenipotentiary ambassador of Azerbaijan to the Ottoman Empire, Armenia, and Georgia. His mission was to conduct diplomatic engagements regarding the new political situation that had emerged following the Armistice of Mudros (Topçibaşı, 2016, p. 6). Within this framework, he submitted a memorandum to the representatives of the Central Powers

outlining Azerbaijan's current situation, its relations with neighboring countries, and its struggle against the Bolsheviks. In the memorandum, he also declared that Azerbaijan was prepared to become part of a Swiss-style federation. Topchubashov believed that the South Caucasus republics should act together and form a joint representation as a South Caucasus Confederation. This idea was formally drafted into a memorandum and submitted to the Council of the Paris Peace Conference, which included France, the United Kingdom, Italy, the United States, and Japan. The memorandum was submitted to Greece as well. Azerbaijan's proposal for a confederation was received positively (Hasanli, 2022).

Embracing a democratic republican system, Azerbaijan formed a four-member delegation on December 28, 1918, during a cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Fathali Khan Khoyski, to represent the country at the Paris Peace Conference. Alimardan Bey Topchubashov was appointed as the head of the delegation, with Mehmed Hasan Hajinski serving as deputy head. Ahmet Bey Ağayev and Ekber Agha Sheikhuislamov were chosen as parliamentary members of the delegation. According to the general authorization document issued to the delegation on January 7, 1919, the delegation was empowered to: "Participate in the peace conference to be held between states and nations after the World War, and in all conferences, alliances, and treaties to be organized between states and nations; and to conclude, on behalf of Azerbaijan, any political, economic, commercial, or financial agreements, alliances, and treaties." The other members of the delegation departed from Baku to meet Topchubashov who was already in Istanbul and then continue together to Paris. After arriving in Istanbul on January 20, the delegation sought visas to enter Paris. Azerbaijan believed that demonstrating a willingness to accept a confederation structure among the Caucasian peoples would make it easier to establish relations with the Allied Powers. In contrast, Armenia viewed itself as part of the Allied Powers and pursued a different diplomatic approach. The Armenians had fought in the armies of the Allied Powers during the war and had sacrificed their lives within those ranks. Moreover, they had been promised the establishment of an Armenian state. They now believed the time had come to claim the reward for their contributions. For this reason, they were unwilling to act jointly with Georgia and Azerbaijan. In fact, during their diplomatic contacts with the Allies, they engaged in propaganda against their neighbors. This hostile stance became evident even during the selection of the delegations. A smear campaign was launched by the Armenians against Ahmet Bey Ağayev, who had been appointed by the Azerbaijani government as a member of the delegation. They accused Ağayev of being a member of the

Committee of Union and Progress and of conducting anti-Allied propaganda during his time in the Ottoman Parliament. It was argued that because of his alleged opposition to the Allied Powers, Ağayev should not be allowed to enter Paris. This campaign was especially prominent in newspapers published in French in Istanbul, most notably in the newspaper *Renaissance*. The campaign proved effective enough to attract the attention of other Allied Powers. It became apparent that France, using this as a pretext, was reluctant to issue visas to the Azerbaijani delegation (Topçibaşı, 2016).

At the Paris Peace Conference, the pro-Tsarist faction operated under the name “Russian Political Delegation”, serving as the unified representative body of the anti-Bolshevik White governments in Siberia, Northern, and Southern Russia. The Russian delegation met with Alimardan Topchubashov, head of the Azerbaijani delegation, and stated that they would not accept the declarations of independence by the peoples of the South Caucasus, claiming that such movements were the result of Germany’s Eastern policy. In response, Topchubashov asserted that they would continue on the path toward an independent Azerbaijan. He added: “We Azerbaijanis wish to live in peace with our neighbors, the Georgians and Armenians, and we want to establish a federal republic similar to the Swiss Confederation.” (Hasanli, 2022, pp. 251).

The main objective of the Russian Delegation composed of former Provisional Government Chairman G. Lvov, former Ambassador to Paris V. Maklakov, former Minister of Foreign Affairs S. Sazonov, and the Chairman of the Northern Region Provisional Government N. Tchaikovsky was to serve as the unified diplomatic representation of the White forces and to oppose all political movements of non-Russian peoples who sought independence following the collapse of the Russian Empire. Their efforts were guided by the principle of a “one and indivisible Russia”. Dissatisfied with the outcome of their meeting with Topchubashov, the Russian Political Delegation issued a statement on March 9, 1919, addressed to the President of the Paris Peace Conference, in which they emphasized: “All matters concerning the future status of the nations within these borders cannot be resolved without the consent of the Russian people. Therefore, no decisions can be made on these issues until the Russian people have freely expressed their will and participated in the resolution process.” (Topçibaşı, 2016, p. 7).

France’s view of the Bolsheviks as a force that had seized power illegitimately in Russia emboldened the pro-Tsarist Russians. France needed a strong ally in the East to prevent

Germany from regaining power, and it saw Russia in this role. The French government regarded the Bolsheviks as a product of German influence. Furthermore, because the Bolsheviks refused to repay Tsarist Russia's debts to France, French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau supported the anti-Bolshevik White movement and took a negative stance toward the independence efforts of non-Russian peoples. This policy stood in contrast to that of British Prime Minister David Lloyd George. Lloyd George favored reaching a settlement with the Bolsheviks and did not oppose the idea of independence for non-Russian nations. He wanted the "Russian Question" resolved swiftly, as the military and financial burden of British troops stationed in the Caucasus had led to growing public pressure on the British government. The Prime Minister was eager to put an end to this situation as soon as possible. The Russian Delegation was not granted official status at the conference. However, its members were allowed to participate in private sessions in an unofficial capacity, where they could present memoranda and be heard. This created a highly complex and uncertain situation regarding the determination of the fate of the peoples of Russia. The United Kingdom sought the support of U.S. President Woodrow Wilson to counter France's position. However, Wilson emphasized that the Allies did not intend to interfere in Russia's internal affairs or support any of the conflicting factions. He stated that they did not recognize the Tsarist regime and that the peoples of Russia should be at peace with each other and with the rest of the world. In this complex environment, only the Armenian delegation from the Caucasus was able to obtain visas and reach Paris without difficulty. France persistently refused to grant visas to the Azerbaijani delegation. Yet back on January 15, 1919, Azerbaijani delegates had met with members of the Armenian delegation in Batumi, seeking common ground for joint action on the international stage. Alimardan Topchubashov, head of the Azerbaijani delegation and a strong proponent of the idea of a "Caucasus Confederation", had been advocating since December 1918 that success depended on regional cooperation. Nevertheless, the Armenians preferred to act unilaterally. They sought to discredit the Azerbaijani and Georgian delegations and prevent their participation in the Paris Peace Conference in order to position themselves as the sole representatives of the region (Topçibaşı, 2016; Hasanli, 2022).

The Armenians attended the Paris Peace Conference with the vision of a "Greater and United Armenia". This envisioned an expansive Armenian state stretching from Tbilisi to the Black Sea and all the way to the Mediterranean an ambitious imperial dream. As a result, they showed little regard for the expectations or aspirations of the other South Caucasus states. Having

supported the Allied Powers during World War I, the Armenians saw themselves as part of that victorious bloc (Hewsen, 2001). For this reason, they ignored Topchubashov's proposal for a confederation and instead chose to wait for the outcome of the conference, seeking to gain time (Hatisyan, 2022). To achieve their objectives, the Armenians were determined to prevent any other representatives from the South Caucasus from gaining influence in Paris. In particular, they launched an intense propaganda campaign against Azerbaijan. This campaign included media reports claiming that an alliance existed between the Turkish nationalist Unionists and the Bolsheviks, that Enver Pasha was in Tashkent, and that his brother Nuri Pasha was in Azerbaijan preparing an attack on Armenia (Kévorkian, 2015). The Armenians held the following prejudice against the Turks, as expressed by Aharonian (Aharonian 1962, p. 66): "Azerbaijan, the natural ally of the Turks, took advantage of Armenia's dire situation and the indifference of the Allied Powers to seize Karabakh. Meanwhile, the Bolsheviks continue to advance. The resulting chaos may signal a general Turk-Tatar (meaning Azerbaijani Turk) assault on Armenia in pursuit of Pan-Turanist or Pan-Islamist ambitions." In response to the damaging effects of the propaganda campaign against Ahmet Bey Ağayev, the head of the Azerbaijani Delegation, Alimardan Topchubashov, was compelled to adjust his political rhetoric regarding Türkiye. He emphasized that the Azerbaijani government stood in opposition to Enver Pasha and the Committee of Union and Progress, that it did not allow their presence in Azerbaijan, and that while Ahmet Bey Ağayev was indeed an Azerbaijani citizen, he could be removed from the delegation if necessary. Shortly thereafter, Ağayev was arrested by the British and deported to Malta (Topçibaşı, 2016).

Baku, with its vast reserves of oil, naphtha, and other underground resources, was regarded as a global city and attracted the interest of many states (League of Nations. C21-31-29-1921-B1). France sought to turn this situation to its advantage. In line with the Allied policy of establishing an economic blockade against the Bolsheviks, it was deemed necessary to deprive them of access to Baku's oil. As a result, France was ultimately compelled to grant visas to the Azerbaijani delegation. The Azerbaijani delegation finally arrived in Paris on May 9, 1919 (Topçibaşı, 2016). Another key theme in Armenian propaganda was the claim that Türkiye sought to annex the Caucasus and unite with Turkestan via Maku and Iranian Azerbaijan. They tried to spread the idea that Türkiye aimed to create a buffer zone of allied states between itself and its historical enemy, Russia. The Armenians argued that the route through Zangezür-Karabakh and Akhalkalaki-Borchalo would prevent such ambitions and claimed that this was why the Turks opposed the establishment of Armenia in these areas (Hatisyan, 2022; Köse,

2016; Yerasimos, 2000). At that time, the region's strategic railways were divided: the Karakilisa–Ganja line was under Turkish control, while the Ganja-Yerevan line was controlled by the Bolsheviks. The Julfa–Tabriz railway had also come under Bolshevik control (League of Nations. C21-31-12-1921-B1).

The growing discussion around the possibility of an American mandate in the region led the Azerbaijani delegation to shift its focus toward the United States and opened the door for a meeting with President Woodrow Wilson. On May 28, Alimardan Topchubashov and Haydar Mammad, the leader of the Mountain Peoples (Dagestanis), were received by President Wilson. During the meeting, Topchubashov informed Wilson that a confederation of the peoples of the Caucasus Azerbaijanis, Armenians, Georgians, and Dagestanis was possible and presented to him a memorandum outlining this vision (Hasanli, 2022). Expressing his deep respect for Wilson's Fourteen Points, Topchubashov emphasized that these principles guaranteed the right to self-determination for small nations. He conveyed the Azerbaijani delegation's desire to be heard at the Paris Peace Conference and to be admitted to the League of Nations, which was being established in accordance with Wilsonian principles. Topchubashov also spoke of a united Caucasus and the possibility of forming a confederation with Armenians, Georgians, and Dagestanis. He stated that the Azerbaijani government was willing to take responsibility for its share of the debts inherited from the Russian Empire, but that it now urgently needed American military and economic assistance. President Wilson responded by saying that such matters could not be addressed until the "Russia problem" was resolved and made it clear that they did not wish to fragment the world into small states. He advised the delegation to present their demands to the Paris Peace Conference (Topçibaşı, 2016). Azerbaijan's demands submitted to the Peace Conference were as follows (Hasanli, 2022, pp. 282-287): "The Peace Conference should recognize the separation of Caucasian Azerbaijan from the Russian Empire. The borders of Azerbaijan, as outlined in the attached map of the memorandum, should be recognized, and Azerbaijan should be acknowledged as a fully independent state under the name of the Azerbaijan People's Republic. The members of the Azerbaijani Peace Delegation should be invited to participate in the sessions and commissions of the Peace Conference. The Republic of Azerbaijan should be accepted into the League of Nations, under the same conditions as other states, and placed under the protection of the League, if necessary."

Three days after meeting with President Wilson, Alimardan Topchubashov and Mehmed Hasan Hajinski met on May 31, 1919 with President Avetis Aharonian and Dr. Ohandjanian

the representatives of the Armenian delegation in Paris. According to Aharonian's account, Topchubashov raised the idea of establishing a Caucasus Confederation during the meeting. He stated that Georgia and the Mountain Peoples had already agreed to the idea and asked whether the Armenians would be willing to join as well. In response, Aharonian pointed to ongoing territorial disputes specifically over Karabakh, Lori, and Akhalkalaki. Topchubashov replied that such issues could be resolved through arbitration. However, Aharonian rejected this suggestion, saying that arbitration already existed within the framework of the Peace Conference. Regarding the question of a Caucasus Confederation, Aharonian stated: "As for the issue of a Caucasus Confederation, our answer is that we have never opposed the unity of the Caucasian peoples, and we do not oppose it now. However, these peoples must first become independent states. If we were to join such a confederation, the question of unifying with Turkish Armenia would become even more complicated. Since this matter has not yet been resolved officially, we cannot enter into any new political unions without the inclusion of Turkish Armenians." (Aharonian, 1962, pp. 55-56).

Alimardan Topchubashov continued his efforts at the Paris Peace Conference by establishing contacts with various diplomatic representatives, introducing them to Azerbaijan, and presenting the delegation's demands. Among all these diplomatic engagements, the Azerbaijani delegation prioritized establishing relations with the British. On October 13, 1919, Azerbaijan formally applied to the British government, expressing its willingness to accept a British mandate. Shortly thereafter, the Georgians submitted a similar request (Yerasimos, 2000). However, as Britain was eager to withdraw its troops from Azerbaijan, it proposed that Italian forces be deployed to the region to replace the British and establish a mandate administration. In response, the Azerbaijani delegation expressed deep disappointment to the British authorities. They stated that the Italians would not be able to protect them from the Bolsheviks and warned that there was a high risk of Azerbaijan itself falling under Bolshevik influence. The Italians initially responded favorably to the idea on the condition that the city of Konya in Anatolia would be given to them. However, following a change in the Italian government, the new Prime Minister, Francesco Saverio Nitti, rejected the proposal (Topçibaşı, 2016). During this time, Armenia was also seeking a mandate. It was being discussed that President Wilson would accept this mandate if it received approval from the U.S. Senate. In an effort to encourage the United States to take on a mandate administration, Britain proposed a new plan. This plan included the establishment of an American mandate over Cilicia and the eastern regions of Anatolia where a planned Armenian state was to be formed, as well as over Russian Armenia,

Azerbaijan, and the entire Caucasus until the Russian question was resolved (Topçibaşı, 2016). The Armenians, however, believed that Britain was supporting Azerbaijan in order to maintain control over Baku. They also claimed that the British were subtly suggesting they make concessions in the Caucasus in exchange for territorial gains in Anatolia (Hatisyan, 2022).

The United States was inclined to accept mandates over the Straits, Istanbul, and the Caucasus. As a result of Alimardan Bey Topchubashov's meetings with U.S. President Woodrow Wilson and Frank Polk and Henry Morgenthau, the American representatives at the Paris Peace Conference it was concluded that there would be no interference in Azerbaijan's internal affairs, that the Wilson Principles would be respected, and that Azerbaijani representatives would accept an American mandate. Similarly, talks were held with Georgian representatives, who also agreed to the idea of an American mandate. In June 1919, at the suggestion of the United States, the Council of Ten appointed Colonel William Haskell as High Commissioner to Armenia. The governments of the United States, the United Kingdom, Italy, and France, along with the representatives of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia in Istanbul, were tasked with assisting Haskell in his mission. Upon his arrival in Yerevan, Haskell immediately attempted to transfer Nakhchivan and Sharur from Azerbaijan to Armenia. Azerbaijan strongly objected to this move. Subsequently, U.S. General James Harbord appointed to assess the situation in the region conducted investigations in Azerbaijan and other parts of the Caucasus and ultimately expressed a negative opinion regarding the establishment of an American mandate in the region (Akar, 2019; Köse, 2016; Hasanli, 2022). The Armenians continued to press their territorial claims over Kars, Karabakh, Zangezur, and Nakhchivan during the London Conference as well. They brought up accusations that Azerbaijan had secretly reached an agreement with the nationalist movement in Türkiye led by Mustafa Kemal Pasha. Reports of these allegations appearing in the British press further complicated the efforts of the Azerbaijani delegation (League of Nations. S394-59-3).

Starting in March 1919, the British government began planning to withdraw its forces from Azerbaijan and the South Caucasus due to financial difficulties. This raised the possibility that General Denikin's White Army might enter Azerbaijan. To prevent Denikin from occupying the South Caucasus, Lord Curzon proposed supporting him but also recommended setting clear boundaries for his operations through a formal agreement. However, Denikin had no intention of relinquishing Russia's claims over the South Caucasus. This situation made it essential for Azerbaijan to seek military support from Britain. As a result, intensive negotiations were held

concerning the delay of Britain's withdrawal from the Caucasus and the potential deployment of American forces to the region (Köse, 2016; Topçibaşı, 2016).

In response to the advance of Denikin's White Army, Azerbaijan and Georgia signed a military defense agreement on June 16, 1919. According to the agreement, both countries pledged to jointly defend themselves in the event of a White Army incursion into the South Caucasus. Armenia, however, refused to join the alliance and instead offered a guarantee of neutrality on the condition that Karabakh be handed over to them. Azerbaijan and Georgia gave Armenia a two-week deadline to join the agreement. In the treaty, Azerbaijan and Georgia committed to resolving all disputed matters through arbitration, to jointly participate in diplomatic negotiations aimed at protecting both countries' independence and sovereign rights, and to act in solidarity. This agreement represented a significant step toward the establishment of a South Caucasus confederation. The treaty was submitted to Georges Clemenceau, the French Prime Minister and the President of the Paris Peace Conference. However, no response was ever received. On June 17, a joint declaration was issued by the diplomatic representatives of seven newly established states on former Russian imperial territory Azerbaijan, Estonia, Georgia, Latvia, the North Caucasus, Belarus, and Ukraine. In the declaration, they collectively appealed to the Supreme Council to recognize their independence. On October 8, the same seven states submitted another note to Georges Clemenceau, once again requesting formal recognition of their independence. In his report dated September 22/25, 1919, Alimardan Bey Topchubashov wrote: "The Allies are not only refusing to open any discussion on our independence, but apparently they do not even wish to consider it." (Topçibaşı, 2016, pp. 52-61).

In the region, competition between Germany and Britain intensified because of the significance of Baku's oil resources (Şahin, 2005). In July 1919, the British government appointed Oliver Wardrop an advocate for the independence of the Caucasian peoples as the High Commissioner to the South Caucasus. Britain aimed to curb German and Turkish influence in the region (Topçibaşı, 2016). By autumn, it was widely rumored that British forces would withdraw from the Caucasus and instead maintain a force of 10,000 volunteer troops near Batumi on the Black Sea coast (Aharonian, 1962).

As a result of the local population's unwillingness to be annexed by Bolshevik Russia, the United States took on a mediating role. In the autumn of 1919, American Colonel J. C. Rhea was appointed as the Interim Allied High Commissioner to Armenia. In early 1920, Colonel

Rhea held meetings with representatives of the Caucasian republics: Armenian Prime Minister Hatisyan, Azerbaijani Prime Minister Yusubbekov, and Georgian Foreign Minister Gugeshvili. These meetings revealed that all three republics were unwilling to fall under Russian control and were open to receiving American assistance (Armaoğlu, 1991). However, tensions arose during the discussions, particularly due to proposals to sever Azerbaijan's connection with Türkiye and to transfer certain Azerbaijani territories to Armenia. Further complications emerged when Armenian General Andranik occupied several disputed regions, ultimately preventing the parties from reaching an agreement. During the negotiations, the term "Turkish Armenia" was used. This referred to the proposal of transferring certain territories from Türkiye to Armenia in order to expand Armenian territory, enhance its economic capacity, and place it under a mandate administration. Additionally, the idea of transforming the three republics Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia into a federative structure and presenting a joint application to the Paris Peace Conference was also discussed. Azerbaijan and Georgia accepted this proposal, but Armenian Prime Minister Hatisyan rejected it. Throughout the discussions, it was repeatedly emphasized that Azerbaijan's position was more favorable than Türkiye's. This reflects a deliberate effort to weaken the close ties between the Azerbaijani and Turkish governments. By driving a wedge between the two, the goal appeared to be to isolate Azerbaijan diplomatically (League of Nations. R561.11-1694-3101).

On December 22, 1919, during a meeting in London between Lord Curzon and Philippe Berthelot, Secretary-General of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the recognition of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and the North Caucasus alongside the broader issue of the Turkish Question was discussed. Curzon stated that the governments of the Caucasus should be placed under the mandate of a major power. However, he also emphasized that Britain still did not formally recognize these states. Curzon expressed the view that the Caucasian states should cooperate with one another under an autonomous status, and if a victory against Bolshevism were achieved, they could later become part of a reconstituted Russia in a federal framework. However, if Denikin failed in his campaign, the Allies might then reconsider the issue of recognizing the independence of Azerbaijan and Georgia. Two days later, on December 24, Curzon prepared a special memorandum concerning the recognition of Georgian and Azerbaijani independence. He noted that among the Transcaucasian republics, Georgia was the most suitable for independent existence, followed by Azerbaijan. He stressed that the survival of these two nations as independent states would depend on their ability to maintain good

relations with each other. Curzon warned that if the Bolsheviks invaded Azerbaijan, Georgia would likely face the same fate. For this reason, diplomatic negotiations were initiated (Topçibaşı, 2016).

Following the defeat of Denikin's forces, Azerbaijan became increasingly vulnerable to a Bolshevik offensive. On January 2, 1920, Soviet Foreign Commissar Georgy Chicherin sent official notes to the governments of Azerbaijan and Georgia, informing them of Denikin's defeat and proposing cooperation to eliminate the remaining remnants of his army. The following day, Oliver Wardrop, the British Commissioner in Tbilisi, wrote a letter to London suggesting that the idea of a *Caucasus Front* be revived this time to resist the Soviets. He proposed that this front be established between Georgia and Azerbaijan with British support. A few days later, both Georgia and Azerbaijan formally requested recognition from the Allied Powers in order to face Moscow as legitimate states at the negotiating table. These two countries also responded to Chicherin with similar replies, maintaining their positions as independent states (Yerasimos, 2000). Azerbaijan requested military assistance from the United Kingdom. On January 10, 1920, a meeting of the Allied Powers' Foreign Ministers was held in Paris. During the session, Britain proposed that Azerbaijan and Georgia, being under immediate threat from the Bolsheviks, should be granted de facto recognition. It was also stated that the issue of Armenia would be addressed within the broader context of the Turkish Question at the Peace Conference. France supported Lord Curzon's proposal but made recognition conditional upon the determination of these states' borders with Armenia. Italy also agreed to recognize the states but noted that it would consult with the governments of the United States and Japan. Subsequently, the Supreme Council officially recognized the independence of Azerbaijan and Georgia on January 12, 1920, and Armenia on January 19, 1920 (Hatisyan, 2022; Hasanli, 2022).

Starting in January 1920, members of the Supreme Council began discussing the issue of providing military assistance to Azerbaijan and Georgia. Meanwhile, the Bolshevik threat was growing steadily day by day (Topçibaşı, 2016). Despite these discussions, Azerbaijan failed to receive the expected support. Instead, the contentious regions of Karabakh and Zangezur were brought to the forefront as conditions for aid. During this period, Armenian forces launched attacks in Karabakh and began spreading propaganda claiming that an alliance agreement had been signed between Azerbaijan and Türkiye on January 17. Rumors also circulated that any weapons sent to Azerbaijan would be used against Armenians. These reports were widely

covered in the French press and gained traction. The propaganda was effective, and as a result, the promised weapons were not delivered to Azerbaijan. Alimardan Bey Topchubashov was forced to officially deny the claims of a Türkiye-Azerbaijani alliance. However, the negative atmosphere created by these accusations cast a shadow over all of Azerbaijan's diplomatic efforts. Topchubashov repeatedly emphasized in his official meetings that Azerbaijan supported the idea of a Swiss-style federation in the South Caucasus and that it had not entered into any alliance agreements with either Türkiye or Iran (Topçibaşı, 2016). These diplomatic efforts continued for months. However, President Woodrow Wilson ultimately came to view the Bolshevik takeover of Azerbaijan as inevitable. Concerned that any weapons sent to the region might fall into Bolshevik hands or be used against the Armenians, he refused to authorize the shipment of arms to Azerbaijan (Yerasimos, 2000). While Azerbaijani forces were being deployed to Karabakh, the Bolsheviks entered Baku between April 28–30, effectively occupying Azerbaijan. Upon receiving the news of the occupation, Alimardan Bey Topchubashov prepared a note addressed to the Supreme Council. In the note, he emphasized that Azerbaijan had been invaded by the Bolsheviks as a direct result of the Allies' failure to deliver military aid. Nevertheless, he affirmed that Azerbaijan would continue its struggle and expressed confidence that the Supreme Council of the Allied Powers would ultimately guarantee the full independence and territorial integrity of the Republic of Azerbaijan (Topçibaşı, 2016). The Bolsheviks aimed to bring the entire region under their control and to impose their regime across the South Caucasus (League of Nations. C21-68-102-1921-B1).

Believing that resistance to the Bolshevik occupation was necessary, Alimardan Topchubashov submitted a letter to Eric Drummond, Secretary-General of the League of Nations, on November 1, 1920, requesting Azerbaijan's admission to the League. In the letter, he wrote: "The Azerbaijani people, with a population of four million and a capital in Baku, who declared their independence on May 28, 1918, have been patiently awaiting the day they would be admitted to the League of Nations..." (Hasanli, 2022, p. 366). Later, on December 7, 1920, the President of the Azerbaijani Peace Delegation, A. U. Topchubashov, addressed another letter to Paul Hymans, President of the League of Nations. In it, he described the catastrophe Azerbaijan had been suffering since April because of the brutal invasion and aggression of Russian Bolshevik forces and once again appealed for Azerbaijan's admission to the League of Nations (League of Nations. R564-11-2558-15480). However, the General Assembly of the League of Nations rejected Azerbaijan's application for membership, citing reasons such as

undefined borders and ongoing disputes with neighboring countries (League of Nations. S394-59-3). This decision dashed Azerbaijan's hopes of securing support or assistance in resisting the Bolsheviks. Following the signing of the Treaty of Moscow between Soviet Russia and Türkiye, which defined the borders between them, the Caucasian republics declared in September 1921 that they had decided to form a political and economic union among themselves. Once again, they applied to the League of Nations, seeking protection against the Soviets and the Turks (League of Nations. R592.11-13914-15911).

### **Conclusion**

After the Bolshevik Revolution the South Caucasus was liberated from the Russian rule. The Russian administration that overthrew the Tsar ended its war with the Central Powers by signing the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk on March 3, 1918. As a result, a new period began in which Germany and the Ottoman Empire became the dominant powers in the South Caucasus, and the independent states of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia were established. However, after the Allied Powers emerged victorious in World War I, the region came under Allied occupation.

While a civil war unfolded in Russia between the pro-Tsarist White Army and the Bolshevik Red Army, the Caucasian republics faced territorial disputes, leading to regional conflicts. To implement the Wilson Principles, which were based on the right of every nation to self-determination and territorial integrity, the League of Nations was founded. It was decided that newly formed states would be placed under the mandates or protection of the Great Powers. In this context, the South Caucasus republics sought mandates in order to avoid falling under Bolshevik control and to preserve their independence.

The Republic of Azerbaijan, under the leadership of Alimardan Bey Topchubashov, formed a delegation to participate in the Paris Peace Conference and the London Conference. The delegation held meetings with Allied leaders, including President Woodrow Wilson and Lord Curzon. Azerbaijan's delegation proposed to the League of Nations the creation of a South Caucasus confederation and requested protection preferably by the United Kingdom or the United States. They also applied for League membership. However, Azerbaijan's requests were denied, citing reasons such as undefined borders and unresolved disputes with neighboring states. Although the Allied Powers eventually recognized Azerbaijan as an independent state, the Bolshevik occupation ultimately led to the loss of Azerbaijan's independence.

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