

Forum: Historical Committee

Issue: Independence of Azerbaijan

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Introduction

Azerbaijan is a country that has been struggling with difficulties since the day it was founded and is currently in a difficult situation. Azerbaijan is dealing with economic, political and military problems in this period. While dealing with these problems, it has to manage a war. The Azerbaijani president elected before Elchibey failed to manage this situation and the people responded to this failure by voting for Elchibey in the election. The newly elected president seems to have put Azerbaijan in an even worse situation while trying to save it from this situation. War on one side, rebellions on the other..

Definition of Key Terms

USSR: Acronym of United Soviet Socialist Republics.

Glasnost: The general name of the policies implemented by the president of the USSR, Mikhail Gorbachev, to find solutions to the economic problems in the country.

Black January: Violent crackdown implemented by the USSR in 1990, targeting the anti-Soviet sentiment and Azerbaijani nationalism in Baku.



Current Situation of Azerbaijan

The Republic of Azerbaijan, founded in 1991, is a very new country. Although there were many countries previously ruled or founded by Azeris, this new state is the first sustainable nation state of Azeris. Aside from the difficulties of being a new country, Azerbaijan is a country that broke away from a disintegrating empire. It is also a country at war with Armenia. Apart from these problems, Azerbaijan found itself in a very difficult situation when problems such as inadequate economy, a newly established republic, democracy newly recognized by the people, diplomatic problems, rebellions, military inadequacy, and dependence on Russia in the economy emerged.

After 1 year, Azerbaijan changed its president through elections and pro-Western Ebulfez Elchibey was elected instead of pro-Russian Ayaz Mutallibov. The president who came with this election, Ebulfez Elchibey, wanted to achieve his biggest dream, the idea of Great Azerbaijan. Great Azerbaijan, that is, the unification of Southern Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh, located in the north of Iran, and the Republic of Azerbaijan. Another wish of President Elchibey was to save his country from Russian influence and dependence. In this regard, Elchibey took some anti-Russian economic, political and military decisions. He made bold decisions on the economy and signed agreements with western companies, but this angered Russia. Elchibey also removed the Russian military force in his country. Of course, as a result of these decisions, relations with Russia deteriorated.

These and similar events caused Azerbaijan to become what it is now. A country with bad relations with its neighbors, bad relations with the greatest power in the region, a country at war, and a country where civil war may break out due to rebellions.



The Dissolution of the USSR

In late 1991, the Soviet Union, better known by the acronym USSR, collapsed. This event led to the creation of 15 new states in place of the now-collapsed USSR - one of which was Azerbaijan. This was brought upon by many factors, including nationalist movements in the constituent republics of the USSR and the inability of the Moscow government to secure an acceptable lifestyle for many of its citizens.

This constant weakening of the Moscow government also allowed Azerbaijan a chance at its independence, which it took in October 1991, before the official dissolution in December of the same year. Elçibey himself was elected as the de facto leader of this independence movement in late 1989.

With Gorbachev's leadership, the USSR embraced a policy of openness, referred to as glasnost. On top of this, his increasingly liberal policies continued to divide the upper echelon of Soviet leadership – some embraced his reforms while many despised him and his turning of the USSR into what they saw as a “dirty capitalist nation”.

On top of this, many constituent nations pushed for greater autonomy – sometimes peacefully and sometimes with violence. Beginning in 1988, the USSR started to feel its core territory was in danger, starting with the Baltics and the Caucasus. Estonia at this time started to organize its first election and changed its official language Estonian, replacing Russian.

In this environment, Azerbaijan itself also started to rebel against its Soviet overlords, fighting several battles with Armenia (also a holding of the USSR) and declared independence on its own terms: events starting with the “Black January” civil unrest and the subsequent decision by the ruling communist party of Azerbaijan to drop the words “Soviet Socialist” from the country's name. This was in conjunction with the reintroduction of the Azeri flag, replacing the current Soviet one, and the acceptance of the Declaration of Independence on October 18, 1991.



The First Nagorno Karabakh War

The First Nagorno-Karabakh War was the earliest flare of what would become a much larger regional conflict. Starting as a series of ethnic tensions between Armenians and Azeris, the conflict quickly heated up and turned into a full scale war in 1992

Major Countries Involved

Armenia: Armenia is a newly established country like Azerbaijan. Armenia is a country that left the Soviet Union and, like Azerbaijan, deals with economic, social, political and military problems. The difference between Armenia and Azerbaijan is that Armenia is supported by a power like Russia. This support is Armenia's trump card in the war. Armenians and Azeris have been at odds since the 1980s. The main reason for this dispute is the ownership of the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region. A war erupted over this region, known as the First Nagorno-Karabakh War. Due to this war, diplomatic relations with Armenia have been suspended

Iran: Iran is a regional power for the Middle East. 15 years after the Islamic revolution in Iran, a powerful Iranian State emerged. With this power, the Iranian state began to get involved in the events in the region and shape the region according to its own wishes. Azerbaijan-Iran relations have generally been good due to cultural and religious affinity, but this changed under Elchibey. Relations with Iran deteriorated because of Elchibey's most important policy, the idea of a united Azerbaijan. This idea aims to culturally and politically unite the South Azerbaijan region in the north of Iran, the Azerbaijani territories and the Nagorno-Karabakh region into a single country. In addition to this idea of a united Azerbaijan, Elchibey's speeches about the rights of Azerbaijanis living in the South Azerbaijan region led to a deterioration in relations. For these reasons, Iran supported Armenia and the relations between Azerbaijan and Iran have grown colder.



Russia: Before Elchibey, the state was pursuing a pro-Russian policy, but with the arrival of Elchibey, an anti-Russian policy began to be pursued. This policy aimed to completely remove Russia from Azerbaijan's internal affairs. In this direction, Elchibey ended the Russian military presence in Azerbaijan, signed agreements on the extraction and processing of energy resources in the Caspian Sea and did not include Russia in these agreements, and turned his trust and interest to the USA and other western states for mediation instead of Russia, which had been the mediator in the war with Armenia until then. As a result, Azerbaijan-Russia relations deteriorated. Russia, which was already supporting Armenia, increased its support and tried to interfere in Azerbaijan's internal affairs.

Türkiye: With the arrival of Elchibey, Türkiye-Azerbaijan relations improved. However, this situation did not last long. Elchibey had some expectations from Turkey, but Türkiye did not fulfill these expectations. While Elchibey expected military and economic assistance from Türkiye for the First Nagorno-Karabakh War, which was the biggest problem, Türkiye did not fulfill these expectations, and instead of doing so, Türkiye was contented with taking the issue to NATO. The reason for this was the different views within the government. As a result, Turkish-Azerbaijani relations deteriorated.

USA and Other Western Countries: The United States and other western states have long wanted to increase their influence in the Caucasus region, but could not do so for a long time due to the Soviet Union, which held that region. This continued until the Soviet Union officially collapsed on December 26, 1991. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, 3 states established in the Caucasus region attracted the attention of western states; Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan. They immediately worked to improve relations with these states. Under Elchibey, Azerbaijan left behind the pro-Russian policy it had pursued under Ayaz Mutallibov and started to follow a



pro-Western policy. Due to this policy, Azerbaijan's relations with Russia deteriorated, but relations with the US were improved and economic agreements were signed with some western countries. With these agreements, the Russian influence in the country was tried to be reduced and this was achieved. Thanks to these developments, Azerbaijan has increased its recognition and popularity in Europe and laid the foundation for relations with countries that could become allies in the future.

Timeline of Events

Date (Arial size 12 bold, centered)	Description of event* (Arial size 12 bold, centered)
February 20, 1988	The first Nagorno-Karabakh War begins
January 19-20, 1990	The events of Black January, a happening of Anti-Soviet civil unrest in Baku
October 18, 1991	The Azerbaijani Parliament accepts the Declaration of Independence, declaring the country independent from the Soviets
December 26, 1991	The Soviet Union formally ceases to exist



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