Chapter IV

ETHNIC COMPLEXITIES AS A FACTOR IN AZERI NATION-BUILDING PROCESS
Ethnic factor is an important one so far as Azerbaijan’s nation building process is concerned. Problems like ethnicity, ethnic identity and ethnic nationalism pose insuperable challenges to state and society. Ethnic problems concern basically with the question of relationship between diverse groups of people often characterized by distinct race, culture and religion living within the boundaries of a state. (Kook, 2000, pp. 42-43) Against this backdrop, this chapter reviews the economic, social, historical-cultural and political factors contributing to inter-ethnic conflicts in the Transcaucasus. Inter-ethnic conflicts reflect the contradictory interests and aspirations of different ethnic groups, and have been accompanied by the formation of national movements seeking to defend these interests. National movements are almost always heterogeneous: within their ranks or affiliated with them there may be extremist groups who consciously employ or provoke ‘spontaneous’ violent actions; however, most participants in the Transcaucasus ethnic movements have striven to employ legal methods.

The present ethnic cauldron, what we are witnessing today in Caucasus, is basically product of the collapse of erstwhile Soviet Union. The demise of the erstwhile Soviet Union provided boon to various centrifugal forces to compete each other.

Ethnonationalism has played two very different roles in the cause of the deep societal transformations occurring in and after the Soviet Union. On the one hand, the rise of ethno-politics was a major factor in tearing apart the unitary Soviet state and undermining its communist ideology. Nationalist movements fueled concerns about cultural integrity among ethnic groups and mobilized citizens demanding democratic reform and self-governance. And today, in its cultural and political forms, ethnonationalism is contributing to the
process of state-building from the wreckage of the old Soviet system. On the other hand, ethnonationalism has made the post-Soviet space an arena of destruction, ethnic cleansing and uncontrolled violence. Thousands of people have been killed and millions are displaced, in addition to the enormous material loss. All this has contributed to growing political instability. Ethnonationalism has served to legitimize the activities of ethnic warlords and justify widespread violation of human rights. It has stimulated irresponsible political behaviour and increased the spread of xenophobia and intolerance. While helping to build the new-post communist successor states, ethnonationalism has also been employed to challenge their sovereignty from within and call into question their ability to maintain social order and provide acceptable standard of living. Indeed, ethnic nationalism and the conflicts it has generated have become major obstacles to reform and modernization in the former Soviet Union, seriously challenging liberal transformations in Russia and other states. (Ronen, 1986, p. 1; Tishkov, 1997, p.228)

Some scholars have suggested alternative models to current theories regarding ethnicity and group identity. Robert J. Thompson and Joseph J. Rudolph advocate a comparative framework with which to study the relationship between ethnic conflict and public policy. They describe ethnicity as “a type of cultural segmentation that may also intersect class and territorial segmentation”, and classify types of ethnicity according to the various intersections between ethnic, cultural, class, and territorial segmentation. Analysis of the relationship between the state and ethnicity often reflects contrasting viewpoints concerning the role of the state in creating or in dissolving an ethnic problem. While some scholars maintain that the state can resolve ethnic conflict, others, such as Michael Banton, argue that the state itself is the cause of ethnic conflict. As Banton states, ethnicity only becomes a
political problem when "groups are crystallized in polarization because the political structure renders impossible the kind of bargaining that might otherwise modify the boundary between the communities". (Ronen, 1986, p. 1)

Ethnicity was of course not a new term, nor was the phenomenon new or unrecognized previously; it was merely labelled differently. Karl Deutsch's seminal work, Nationalism and Social Communication: An Inquiry into the Foundations of Nationality, first published in 1953, is devoted in its entirety to the study of ethnicity, although Deutsch uses the terms "nationality", "national diversity", and "differentiation" in lieu of "ethnicity". In the index of Charles Tilly's book, The Formation of National States in Western Europe, some sections are devoted to the issues of religious and cultural diversity. (Ronen, 1986, p. 1)

Ethnicity (ethnic groups or ethnic nationalism) tended to be viewed as a destabilizing, potentially revolutionary force that threatened to disintegrate states or at least to disrupt their smooth functioning. Ethnicity appeared no longer as a term for a folkloric, or a "primordial" phenomenon, the manifestation of local tribal feelings, but as a term applied to a political force with which to be reckoned. In the rivalry between ethnicity and nation, the latter is posited by scholars and political actors to be the legitimate entity, if for no other reason than because the nation fulfills the sovereign state. Ethnicity, ethnic groups, ethnic loyalties, ethnic regions, and/or ethnic nationalisms compete, as it were, with a full-scale, recognized actor in the international scene; ethnicity, in whatever form, competes with an entity, the nation-state, which conceptually is an integral part of modernity. (Ronen, 1986, pp. 4-5)

Ethnic groups do not persist because of some property of inertia in the social system or as a product of genetic processes favoring ethnic solidarity.
Individuals who sometimes identify themselves ethnically, at other times identify themselves in terms of nationality, class, religion, occupation, and so on. If ethnic alignments persist, it is because ethnic divisions are maintained by the efforts of their members as part of a pattern of social interaction. As circumstances change, some minority identifications wither away while old ones are revived or new ones appear. Old coalitions break up and new ones are negotiated. Any view of ethnic politics is severely impaired if it cannot allow for the ways in which the size and character of ethnic minorities depend upon the transactions between them and the majority. (Smith, 1971, pp. 20-21)

In times of acute social crisis when the individual and whole social groups feel marginalized, insecure or threatened in their very existence, people tend to seek security and protection within positive reference groups with which they share common interests, historical memories and systems of values. Among these reference groups religious sects and communities play distinctive roles. The moving relationship which is established between the individual and the group is however ambiguous and there is no automatic reciprocity, because the sect or the religious community is invariably hierarchically organized and subject to a spiritual/formal authority which has the power to include or to exclude.

The conventional assumption of modernization school of thought was that religious influence necessarily wanes with the growth of modernity. It was even suggested that modern nationalism replace traditional religious identity. Today, witnessing the ‘revival’ of both religion and nationalism, it is evident that the two identities are not mutually exclusive. They may, in fact, reinforce each other. It seems that the general crisis of the Communist model of modernization has generated a moral crisis in which individuals and entire
social groups seek spiritual comfort in religions, both in traditional
denominations and new sects and millenarian cults. In reshaping the shattered
bonds of solidarity and in redefining their group identity, people use the ‘raw
material’ available to them. They use also religious beliefs and memories as
well as existing or newly created religious institutions. Religion and ethnicity
have an advantage that they seemingly re-establish the psychological link with
the pre-Communist past, and they may, as is the case in the contemporary
laboratories of the Balkans and Transcaucasia, become part of the same process

Identity Issues in Transcaucus during Soviet period

Soviet Azerbaijan and the Northern Caucasus were covered by two
separated officially sponsored Islamic muftiates (spiritual directorates) whose
main role was to control the religious life of the Muslim population of these
two regions, traditionally associated with the Middle Eastern Muslim world.
They were also employed by the Kremlin propaganda abroad to support
various Soviet foreign policy initiatives. The Baku muftiate, one of the four
established in the USSR, was unique because it integrated both the Sunni and
Shia denominations which coexist in Azerbaijan without apparent tensions.
Nevertheless, unofficial Islam, upheld by Sufi brotherhoods and disseminated
by kinship networks, escaped the control of obedient establishment, which was
accused of the betrayal of the basic tenets of the faith. It seems that the 1979
Islamic Revolution in Iran, with its Shia fundamentalism, had little
repercussion among the Caucasus Sunni populations. The Shia segment of the
Soviet Azeri population was on the other hand antagonized by the persecution
of fellow Azerbaijanis in Iran. It was even reported that the USSR opened its
borders to receive Iranian Azeri refugees. With Gorbachev’s reforms the
underground brotherhoods appeared publicly. The *Naqshbandi tariqa* in Chechnya associated itself with the separatist project of Iman Shamil, who fought the Russians in the last century, became the symbolic hero of the new resistance to Russia rule.

During 1989-90 crisis, Gorbachev blamed disturbances due to ‘Muslim fanatics’. He accused Iran of igniting the fires of fundamentalist fervor and warned it to stay out of the republic’s affairs. In fact the political elite of popular front looked towards Turkey for a source of inspiration. Although citizens of Azerbaijan have recently shown a widespread interest in Islam, most foreign observers concluded that the level of secularization of the population is rather high and that only one tiny segment supports the notion of creating an Islamic state.

Despite its theoretical proclivity towards maintaining social harmony, the nationality policy of erstwhile Soviet Union created some sort of disharmony in nationalities relations. Rather than a ‘melting pot’, the Soviet Union became the incubator of new nations. In Transcaucasia, the freer movement of peoples that marked the largest cities, was reversed, and ethnic nationals gravitated toward their own republic. By 1990, Armenia and Azerbaijan were almost completely ethnically homogeneous, or mono-ethnic, societies. (Sunny, Nov/Dec 1990, p. 6)

Whatever the ultimate aims of Soviet Nationalities Policy - acculturation and bilingualism, assimilation, or the creation of a multinational ‘Soviet people’ the dominant developments in the southern Soviet republics of Transcaucasia moved in a different direction. Two contradictory processes dominated all others: (1) a forced modernization that transformed agrarian societies into urban industrial ones; and (2) the ethnic consolidation and
growing cohesion of the major nationalities. The intensification of national identification within the republics has blended toxically with a growing anxiety about the effects of modernization, mobility and accommodation to Soviet norms. (Sunny, Nov/Dec-1990, pp. 6-7)

While other former Soviet republics might complain of demographic and linguistic Russification, or too great interference from the Kremlin, Transcaucasia had enjoyed an unusual degree of cultural and political autonomy that unevenly benefited and disadvantaged the peoples within each republic. By the eve of Perestroika, Transcaucasia was governed by powerful ethnic leadership that both fostered local nationalisms and encouraged the rise of second economies. Ethnic minorities within Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, among them the Armenians of Baku and the Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Region; the Georgians (Ingilös), Jews, Talysh, Tats, and Udins in Azerbaijan; the Abkhaz, Ajars, Armenians, Greeks, Jews, and Ossetians in Georgia; and Azerbaijanis and Kurds in the Armenian republic (not to mention Russians in all three republics experienced a progressive marginalization and discrimination from the dominant, so-called 'titular' nationalities that ran the republics. The discontents of the peoples of Transcaucasia, both with Soviet socialism as they had known it and with their own local leaderships, exploded in the winter of 1988 into the first massive expressions of popular nationalism that the USSR had known in nearly seventy years. (Sunny, Nov/Dec-1990, pp. 6-7)

Incorporation into the Russian Empire provided a new outlet for educated Azerbaijanis, some of whom turned form their religious upbringing to a more secular outlook. Representative of the early scholars and publicists who began the study of the Azeri language were Abbas Qoli Agha Bakikhanov
(1794-1846), who wrote histories of the region, and Mirza Fath ‘Ali Akhundzada (Akhundov, 1812-1872), author of the first Azeri plays. Though eventually these figures would be incorporated into a national narrative as predecessors of the Turkic revival, a variety of conflicting impulses stimulated early Azerbaijani intellectuals. Akhundazada, for example, epitomized the contradictions inherent in the uncertain identity of an Azerbaijani of his time: a tsarist official of impeccable loyalty, he described himself as “almost Persian”, and his philosophical writings reveal the depth of his preoccupation with all things Persian, both good and bad... Nor was he devoid of typically Persian anti-Ottoman sentiments. (Sunny, Nov/Dec-1990, pp. 16-17)

The inter ethnic hostility in Azerbaijan can be traced back to 1905 and in 1918. In the latter event, Bolsheviks allied with Armenian nationalists to put down a Muslim revolt. They feared Armenian claims to what they hold to be Azerbaijani territory (Karabakh and Nakhichevan) and harboured deep-seated resentments toward Armenians whom they consider to have had unfair advantages over Azerbaijani Muslims. The Azerbaijanis’ perception that Armenians are a powerful, influential people close to the centres of Soviet power, who have imperial designs on Azerbaijani territory, were reinforced by the open demands for Karabakh. (Sunny, Nov/Dec-1990, pp. 28-29)

By the end of 1989, the nationalist movements had all but displaced the official power structure in the Transcaucasian republics. In Azerbaijan, the People’s Front, increasingly hostile to the Communist Party, had in August effectively organized a blockade against the Armenian republic, and initiated strikes and demonstrations to force the Azerbaijani Supreme Soviet to declare Azerbaijan a ‘sovereign socialist state’ within the USSR. By November 1998, the Communist Party of Azerbaijan had essentially capitulated to the Front; and
in order to stop the blocked and demonstrations, Moscow ended its direct rule over Karabakh and restored the authority of the local Soviet (28 November 1989). In other parts of the republic local militants challenged the discredited Communist apparatus.

In December 1989, protestors in Nakhichevan tore down border markers and guard posts along the Soviet Iranian border to 'reunite' 'Southern Azerbaijan' to the Soviet republic, something long desired by Soviet Azerbaijani intellectuals. Mass rallies called for the separation of Azerbaijan from the USSR; and in Baku in January 1990, groups of extremists broke from a large rally and began massacring Armenians. After a year and a half of trying to avoid direct military intervention, Gorbachev declared a state of emergency in Azerbaijan, and despatched troops, first to Karabakh and then to Baku. Most of the Armenians in the city had been evacuated by the time the army entered the city. Many Azerbaijanis were killed, dozens arrested, as the Soviet army in a desperate campaign attempted to restore authority to the discredited Azerbaijani Communist Party. (Sunny, Nov/Dec-1990, pp. 30-31)

INTER-ETHNIC CONFLICTS IN THE TRANSCAUCASUS

There are four types of inter-ethnic conflicts in the Transcaucasus:

1) National-social conflicts, arising from movements demanding change in the existing socio-economic status of particular ethnic groups. These movements are often directed against ethnic groups which constitute a minority within the given territory.

2) National-cultural conflicts, arising from demands for the protection and restoration of a native language and ethnic culture. National movements of this type are generally directed against higher (republic-level)
governmental organizations and, to some extent, against the dominant
ethnic group within a republic.

3) Mass-based inter-ethnic conflicts resulting from demands for the revision
(or preservation) of existing territorial boundaries and national state
structures. Such movements are directed against opposing national
movements, government organizations and the peoples of neighboring
union or autonomous republics.

4) National-political conflicts, arising from demands for total independence
and secession from the republic. National movements in this case are
directed against the central republican government. (Soldatova, 1992, pp.
66-67)

Major Causes of Conflict

Analysis of the Karabakh conflict is one of the main focuses of this
chapter. Out of the entire tangle of problems and contradictions which led to
this conflict we can distinguish these major causes: economic, social,
historical-cultural and political.

Economic Causes

Economic causes are the base of regional and ethnic differences within a
particular set of populations. For example, according to statistics published in
the newspaper Bakinsky rabochii (2 March 1998), an Armenian in Nagorno-
Karabakh lived on average better than the general population of Azerbaijan. In
Armenia the standard of living was significantly higher than in Azerbaijan, and
also exceeded the standard of living in Nagorno-Karabakh.
Knowing that the people lived better in neighbouring Armenia, the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh tended to see their lower standard of living as a result of the policies of the republican government of Azerbaijan, which controlled the development of the economy in the oblast. (Actually, the standard of living in the neighbouring mountainous areas of Azerbaijan was even lower than in Nagorno-Karabakh.) This dissatisfaction played an important role in the first stage of the conflict, although even then it was inflated out of proportion in the mass media and in the slogans of the Armenian Karabakh movement. The highlighting of economic demands, as being the most readily understandable for an initially politically passive population, was entirely predictable. Subsequently, as the inter-ethnic conflict intensified, the significance of such demands decreased.

Social Causes

There are two facets of social causes of the inter-ethnic conflict. First, the established practice of designating managerial cadre and leading specialists in the areas of production, trade, security organs, public health, etc. only 'from the top down', by the higher organizations in the republic, is a primary source of inter-ethnic conflict. This practice has meant that in areas populated by ethnic minorities leading posts are occupied primarily by members of the republic's dominant nationality. Under such conditions, any incompetence or corruption among leaders will be viewed by the population through the prism of inter-ethnic relations, which fundamentally exacerbates the situation. This was the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh and it remains the case in the ethnic minority districts and particularly in the rural Soviets of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan.
Secondly, a particularly important role in the formation of conflict situations was played by the voluntary ethnic migrations of the 1950s-1980s. This involved not only the arrival of migrants of a nationality different from that of the local residents, but also uneven rates of emigration by various ethnic groups to the cities from agricultural districts with historically mixed ethnic compositions. When the traditional and accepted balance between ethnic groups began to change radically, the nationality which was threatened with the loss of its previously dominant position was more likely to initiate inter-ethnic conflict.

The Karabakh case presents a classics example of these processes. During the period 1959-1979 in practically all the districts of Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as in the neighbouring districts in Azerbaijan and Armenia which historically had a mixed Armenian-Azerbaijan population, the rural Azerbaijani population increased greatly, while the Armenia population remained constant or even fell. Large numbers of Armenians migrated to the city, while virtually no Azerbaijani left the rural areas. Also, the Azerbaijanis have a higher overall rate of natural population growth, which also tends to increase their share in the population. This process was augmented by an influx of Azerbaijanis from neighboring mountainous districts with high underemployment, who arrived to take the jobs formerly held by the now departed Armenians.

Likewise, in southeastern Georgia the number and share of Azerbaijanis in the local population constantly increased. An additional source of conflict was the arrival of Azerbaijanis experienced in animal husbandry to work on sheep farms in the wake of the migration of the local Georgian population away from their villages and rural districts to the cities. Meanwhile, the
Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, the repeated past migrations of the settled peoples and the regular seasonal wanderings of Turkish herdsmen have resulted in highly contradictory and confused conceptions as to what are the ‘homelands’ and ethnic territories of the populations of the Transcaucasus. During the first half of the 19th century, when most of the region became a part of Russia, it was characterized not by ethnically mixed populations. Thus, in the centre and east of Georgia there were already numerous settlements of Ossetians, Armenians and nomadic Azerbaijanis, while in Southern Abkhazia there were settlements of Georgians. In the Moslem (Azerbaijani) khanates within the territory of present day Armenia and in most of Azerbaijan (including the Karabakh Khanate) Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Tats and others lived in alternating settlements. After the area became incorporated into Russia, the massive migrations of the 19th century complicated the picture still further: Armenians migrating from Persia and ‘Turkey mainly occupied the territory of today’s Armenia, but they also settled in many districts of Azerbaijan, somewhat enlarged the Armenian population of Karabakh, settled in Southern Georgia and spread into Abkhazia. During this period Greeks settled in Georgia and Abkhazia, while Georgians continued to move into Abkhazia, and Russians settled in Eastern Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Indeed, by the beginning of the 20th century, the Russian population represented 10 per cent or more of the total in some rural districts. (Tishkov, 1997, pp.22-27)

In the light of the Karabakh crisis, the historical dispersion of the Azerbaijanis is worthy of particular attention. In 1830 their ancestors, primarily Muslim ‘Turks’, comprised half the population of the ‘Armenian oblast’, the territory of the former Erevan and Nakhichevan Khanates (i.e., almost all of present day Armenia and the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic of Azerbaijan). In 1845 AD, ‘Turk’ nomads (Azerbaijanis) were twice as
numerous as Armenians in the territory of the former Karabakh Khanate. Even after the separation of the mountainous districts populated by Armenians from this historical territory in the early 1920s and the formation of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region, Azerbaijanis from the adjacent plains of the Karabakh steppe continued their summer migrations into the mountains, including those within Nagorno-Karabakh. (In the late 1890s, only about one thirtieth of the Azerbaijanis remained on the plains during the summer season). The present day population of the Azerbaijani plains districts adjacent to Nagorno-Karabakh consists of the descendants of these semi-nomadic people who first settled there in the early 1930s. Even today, old residents can clearly remember their camps in the mountains. Therefore they, their children and grandchildren consider the land of Nagorno-Karabakh to be Azerbaijani.

Such historical sources of conflict cannot of course be eliminated. However, some reduction of cultural differences is probable in the future if the peoples of the Transcaucasus continue to acquire industrial world cultural traditions and the behavioural standards typical of urbanized society. (Tishkov, Valery pp.22-27)

Political Causes

Political causes affecting the development of these conflicts are also widely varied. Some of them arose during the first years of Soviet power, when the borders of the union and autonomous republics and regions of the Transcaucasus were established through compromises between the competing claims of the local ethnic people and with an eye to established economic interconnections. Due to the historical peculiarities attending the dispersal of the various peoples throughout the region, it proved impossible to prevent significant masses of the population from being transformed into ethnic
reports of the activities of national movements, or to distort their goals and discrediting their participants, aroused the indignation of the local population, thereby strengthening the position of extremist forces within these movements and further aggravating the situation. In the last years of the Soviet Union, the serious deterioration of the economic situation throughout the country, coupled with the passivity of the central and republic governments in the resolution of inter-ethnic conflicts, has caused a decline in the authority of all government. In consequence, a significant portion of the population of the Transcaucasus began to see in the national movements and their leaders the only political force capable of exercising power effectively in the republics. (Soldatova, 1992, pp. 61-63)

**NAGORNO-KARABAKH: THE CONFLICTUAL MODEL**

The uniqueness of the history, culture, socio-economic development, territory and climate peculiar to any ethnic group will determine its psychology, and also the peculiarities of inter-ethnic tension, in any given region. Despite the variety of forms of inter-ethnic conflict in the USSR, there is a shared basis for the development of inter-ethnic tension in the failures of Soviet economy and society. Beyond this, inter-ethnic tension derives from three sources: (a) inter-ethnic communications; (b) ethnic culture, and (c) the history of relations among people. Each ethnos shares representations, beliefs, opinions and attitudes that respond to the current inter-ethnic policy of the state. Each also has ethno-cultural peculiarities – perceptual schemes and behavioral models, in-group and out-group images – that shape inter-ethnic communication and determine inter-cultural compatibility. (Soldatova, 1992, pp. 66-67)
In accordance with the political and administrative structure of the Soviet state, communication between different people as political, economic and social subjects has almost always been mediated by union, republican, regional and area administrative-command centres, and has thus, because of Soviet economic, social and ecological problems, acquired a negative character in ethnic self-awareness. Today, the relation of national units towards the various centres of power suffers from a crisis of credibility. The Karabakh conflict provides a vivid demonstration of the distrust felt towards the Union Centre as a political arbitrator in inter-ethnic conflicts. The various stages in the development of this conflict were accompanied by demonstrations and meetings protesting against the decisions of the Centre which involved both Armenians and Azerbaijanis. All agreed that they (the locals) ‘gave’ much more than they ‘got’, and that the centre occupied a privileged position. (Soldatova, 1992, pp. 66-67)

Besides, the complex multilevel national administrative system of power and subordination aroused feelings of injustice and deprivation in smaller peoples because of their extreme economic, political and social dependence. The over-centralized system of power-subordination generated the following psychological consequences: firstly, the hierarchy of ethnic minorities and majorities led to Union central power being identified with the power of Russians; republican central power with the power of the various ‘titular’ indigenous nations, and so on. Inter-ethnic relations are thus marred by distrust, intolerance and phobias. (Soldatova, 1992, p. 68; Hiro, February 1998, Online: Web)

The dispute over the claim to independence by the enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan, populated by ethnic Armenians, is the longest running
conflict in the former Soviet Union started in the year 1987. The ceasefire agreement reached in May 1994 has been observed by both conflicting parties, but the prospects for political settlement remain unclear. The principal issues of the conflict include: (a) political status of Nagorno-Karabakh and its relationship to Azerbaijan (b) the return to refugees who, according to Azerbaijan estimates, number up to one million: (c) the liberation of the 20 per cent of Azerbaijan’s territory occupied by Karabakh forces outside the enclave, such as the Lachin Corridor linking the rebellious region with Armenia; and (d) guarantees to Karabakh that there would be no resumption of hostilities.

Azerbaijan maintains that the conflict is a direct consequence of aggression by Armenia. Azerbaijan’s essential demands are recognition by Armenia of Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity, a complete and unconditional withdrawal of Armenian combatants from its territory and the return of refugees. If these conditions are met, Azerbaijan would be prepared to grant a significant degree of autonomy to Nagorno-Karabakh.

The Karabakh leadership continues to consolidate the enclave’s de facto independence and strengthen its armed forces. Five years after the unilateral declaration of independence from Azerbaijan in 1991, the Karabakh Presidential election was held on 24 November 1996. Armenia that denies military involvement in the conflict is ambivalent towards the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, and threatens to recognize Karabakh’s statehood if progress towards a political settlement is not achieved.

Searching for more Russian involvement in a political settlement, then Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeniy Primakov played an important role in mediating between President Heidar Aliev of Azerbaijan, President Levon Ter-Petrosyan of Armenia and the leadership of Nagorno-Karabakh on the
exchange of Prisoners of Wars (POWs) and hostages. Talks mediated by the OSCE-sponsored Minsk Group continued in 1996, without producing a breakthrough. The issue of Nagorno-Karabakh produced a mini-crisis at the OSCE summit meeting in Lisbon in December 1996 when Azerbaijan threatened to veto the final document unless it contained an unambiguous statement of recognition of the territorial integrity principle, while Armenia resolutely objected to this as a guiding principle for settling the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. (SIPRI Yearbook, 1997, pp.112-115)

The Azerbaijani – Armenian conflict became widely known as causing one of the first outbreaks of violence on the grounds of nationalism during the period of Perestroika. Commentary and analysis in the USSR and in the world following the events in Nagorno-Karabakh and Baku differed greatly, however, in their scientific and political approach. Within the Soviet Union, analysis tended to focus on the socio-economic grounds for the conflict – an approach in line with official Marxist-Leninist doctrine. Central mass media have tried to show that the conflict was a result of the joint activities of corrupted state bureaucrats and leaders of ‘underground’ economic structures fighting against the reforms of Perestroika. According to this interpretation the bureaucrats connected with the ‘mafia’ felt that power was slipping away from them, which meant not only the loss of considerable profits, but also the beginning of legal actions against corrupt elements and possible future imprisonment of those involved in the ‘underground’. (Nadeni-Raevski, p.113)

The second prevailing tendency in the central mass media had been to focus on the social and economic problems of Azerbaijan which eventually led to a worsening of living conditions for the local population, and resulted in mass dissatisfaction among the people, including the 180,000 residents of
Nagorno-Karabakh. Party and government officials in Baku have been accused of being totally misguided and incompetent in finding solutions to economic problems. The third tendency of analysis at the Centre had been to assert that 'violation of Lenin's nationality policy' in the Stalin-Brezhnev period was the main reason of mass dissatisfaction of the local Armenian population in Azerbaijan. (Nadeni-Raevski, p.114)

Azerbaijani newspapers and political leaders, differing in their political interests and ultimate purposes, have nevertheless agreed on at least one point: they consider the Armenian population of the republic to have no rights on the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. According to the official Azerbaijani point of view, Armenians are newcomers to the area, while the Azeris are the native population. Numerous Azerbaijani scholars, following Turkish examples, have written dozens of 'scientific works' had a multi-ethnic population, including Armenians, Azeris, Kurds and others – both ancient Caucasian and new Turkic-Speaking peoples. (Nadeni-Raevski, p.113-125)

Another popular theory that serves as a foundation for modern Azeri nationalism is the Azerbaijani variant of the so-called 'Caucasian Albania' theory. According to this hypothesis, the ancient territory of Caucasian Albania covered all the modern territory of Azerbaijan and some other territories of the Caucasus long before the invasion of Turkic nomads. Part of this population was later 'Armenianized' and 'Christianized', while another part was 'Turkified' and 'Islamized'. The propagators of this view are such Azerbaijani authors as Z. Buniyatov, F. Mamedova, D. Ahundov and M. Seyidov, who follow theories of this type widely disseminated in Turkey. A scientific hypothesis, when it is simplified enough for easy understanding by a broad public, can prove a strong political weapon, convenient for popular political
movements—especially nationalistic ones. The political situation in Azerbaijan gives a good example of mass support for such a politicized hypothesis.

The concrete political slogans that have been extracted out of this hypothesis are rather astonishing. Adherents insist that all the Karabakh population has common roots and that there are no Armenians in Karabakh; neither are there any Azeris. Both are ‘Albanians’ (or ‘Albans’ – to distinguish them from residents of modern Albania on the Balkan Peninsula). And so, if they are Albans, there is no need for any Nagorno–Karabakh Autonomous Region, which ‘divides the nation’ and leads to ‘Armenian separatism’. That is how the slogan for the liquidation of Karabakh autonomy appeared in Azerbaijan and became a leading one for the nationalistic mass movement. Had it not been for the Armenian population of Karabakh – who see the differences between the two peoples, and whose national self-consciousness is an Armenian not an ‘Albanian’ one – the problem would have been easily solved through ‘Azerbaijanification’ and ‘Islamization’ of the local population, in favour of Azeri nationalism. (Nadeni-Raevski, p.116; Hiro, February 1998, Online: Web)

GENESIS OF THE KARABAKH CONFLICT

Naturally both parties involved tend to lay the blame for the initiation of the conflict on the other side. Armenian sources state that the life of Karabakh Armenians was unbearable under the power of the Azerbaijanis, who tended to take from the region as much as possible while giving almost nothing in return. The Azerbaijan side tries to prove that the Karabakh Armenians living under the power of Baku enjoyed a happy and prosperous life compared with other Azerbaijanis. According to the Azerbaijani view, the Armenian community of Azerbaijan had all the necessary opportunities for cultural development. In
Yerevan, with 2,300 Azerbaijani (1979) there are two Azerbaijani schools, an Azerbaijani theatre and an Azerbaijani faculty in the Armenian Pedagogical Institute named after H. Abovyan, while at the same time in Baku, with more than, 200,000 Armenians, the Armenian theatre and Armenian Pedagogical Institute were closed; and, out of 76 Armenian schools in Baku during the pre-war period [before 1941], not a single one was left (Nadeni-Raevski, pp.117-118; Potier, 2001, p. 32)

For a long period, many problems touching the national interests of the Armenian population were not being solved in the Autonomous Region, especially in the field of culture and education and in the field of cadre’s policy. The constitutional rights of the Autonomous Region were violated.

The ‘initial step’ in this conflict was taken when the Karabakh Armenians appealed to the all union powers in Moscow. In 1986-1987, they collected signatures for a petition in favour of reuniting Karabakh with Armenia. On 1 December 1987, a Karabakh delegation was received at the Central Committee of the CPSU, and in January 1988 another delegation was received in the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet. In January–February 1988, numerous meetings in all the enterprises of the Autonomous Region ‘unanimously adopted decisions to ask the higher powers to solve this problem positively’. Communist Party organizations of the Karabakh Region, predominantly Armenian except for those from Shusha and some Azerbaijani villages, joined in the campaign. On 12 February 1988, several high officials of the republic were sent to the capital, Stepankert, to get the situation under control. At the same time special officials from Baku were obliged to control the everyday activities of local Communist Party Secretaries, state prosecutors and militia (police) commanders All these activities only aggravated the
conflict because the republic chiefs used the language of rude pressure and threats, effective in the past but not sufficient for the present time. On the same day that the Karabakh mass meetings began, new threats followed from the Azerbaijani 'patriots'. Further escalation of tension and the arrival of a division of the 'Inner Forces' (Soviet analogue of the Italian Carabinieri) on 13 February 1988 could not weaken the mass movement. Despite the high-ranking Regional Party and Soviet leaders who acted together with the authorities of the Republic, it was impossible to put a halt to mass demonstration or to change the position to put a halt to mass demonstrations or to change the position of Armenian deputies in the Regional Soviet, who adopted a resolution in emergency session on 20 February 1988 asking the Supreme Soviets of Azerbaijan, Armenia and the Soviet Union to transfer the NKR from the Azerbaijan to the Armenian SSR. On 21 February 1988, the Central Committee of the CPSU adopted a special decision 'About the Events in Nagorno-Karabakh'. On the same day, according to Armenian sources, the first attacks of Azerbaijanis against the Armenian population began in different regions of the Republic. According to Azerbaijani sources the first meetings in Baku and Sumgait with the slogan 'NKAR is an integral part of Azerbaijan' began on 22-23 February 1988. (Nadeni-Raevski, pp.119-120; Coppieter, 2004, pp. 1-29)

An immediate answer from Moscow to the Armenian appeals came with the dispatch to Baku on 22 February of two ruling Politburo members G. Razumovskiy and P. Demichev – the latter was at that time the first deputy chairman of the USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium. The local party leader, Kevorkov, an annoying figure for the Karabakh Armenians, was dismissed, and G. Pogosyan appointed instead. Party leaders visiting Armenia used mass media to calm both sides, television an appeal by the CPSU General Secretary, Mikhail Gorbachev. But the next day the Azerbaijani side launched the
Sumgait violence, sparked off by a mass meeting in the Azerbaijani city of Agdam. A crowd of several thousand Azerbaijanis had moved into the Armenian town of Askeran, attacking cars and buildings on the way. As a result, in clash not far from the town of Askeran, several dozen Armenians were wounded and two young Azerbaijanis were shot. Armenian sources stress that one of these two first victims was shot by "an Azerbaijani militiaman". The Azerbaijani side tends to avoid this fact. (Nadeni-Raevski, pp.120; Kvarchelia, 1998, pp.18-28.

The events in Askeran are considered by both sides to be the starting point for the Sumgait tragedy, which the Armenians see as a new act of genocide against the Armenian people, planned and organized by the Azerbaijani state and Party leaders. In order to prove this, Armenians use the official documents from the trials of the participants in the pogroms, showing that the sharp iron rods used during the attacks had in fact been prepared beforehand in one of the city plants, that some Azeri militiamen took part in the actions against Armenians, while others did nothing to stop the mass vandalism, and that 'vodka and drugs were distributed free of charge' among the Azerbaijani demonstrators. Moreover, on the second day of action after another meeting held in the city centre, 'the First Secretary of the Sumgait City Party Committee Muslim-zade took the state flag of Azerbaijan and led a huge crowd after himself. (Current Digest of the Post Soviet Press, 1989, pp.14-16)

According to official figures, 27 Armenians were killed, 17 women raped and 276 soldiers were injured in trying to stop the 'pogroms'. The Armenian side considers the real figures to be even higher. According to the Azerbaijani side, 'The Sumgait events were organized by the Armenian extremists in order to blackmail the Azerbaijanis and to make easier the
annexation of NKAR’ It is not only the Azerbaijani mass media that takes part in this campaign, but also representatives of official scholarly institutes in the republic, in particular Academician Ziya Buniyatov of the Azerbaijani Academy of Sciences; and corresponding member of the Academy, M.A. Ismailov, as well as many other scholars. Although their arguments failed to convince the majority of Soviet or world scholars, they accorded with public opinion in the Republic because mass psychology there, heated by the continuing conflict, was ready to believe almost any argument about ‘Armenian cruelty’ and the correspondingly high moral quality of the Azerbaijani nation. (Nadeni-Raevski, pp.120-122; Cornell, January 2002, pp.245-276)

In the Armenian mass media, the main publications are not so crude; but mass self-awareness also tends to stress the cruelty of ‘the neighbour’, as Armenians usually call Azerbaijan. One can find many publications devoted to the history of the Armenian people and Armenian-Turkish relations, and the black pages of the genocide of Armenian people in the Ottoman Empire, often comparing the past with modern events in Azerbaijan. The Armenian side tends to argue that recent events show continuity of the old Turkish policy. Over the past few years a new theme has appeared in Armenian publications. Armenian scholars have published a series of documents showing the process of transfer of some regions of the Russian Empire to Turkey, and the role of Bolshevik leaders in this process. The Armenian authors try to show that the proposal for such transfers made by Stalin and Narimanov was finally adopted by Lenin, whose name in connection with these events was taboo for years.

The Armenian All-National Movement (AOD, as it is known in Russian) has taken up this issue in its struggle for an independent Armenian. In private
talks the functionaries of the AOD stressed that the Russian orientation of Armenians was an historical mistake, and that current circumstance makes it essential for Armenia to find a new political and strategic line in the surrounding world. Some stressed that it was necessary to do away with old territorial ambitions, to forget about 'ancient Armenian lands' and 'Ottoman genocide', and to seek friendly ties and even a union with Turkey, and in that way achieve a final normalization of Armenian-Azerbaijani relations. These ideas were not very popular with Armenians, but an anti-Moscow and anti-Gorbachev trend gradually began to prevail in mass opinion. Anti-communism gained more and more new adherents because of mass disappointment with the Armenian-Russian union. Young people and war veterans, non-partisans and party members, stressed that Armenians gave the Union more than 60 generals and 500,000 soldiers to fight the Nazi invasion, and yet when the Armenians needed protection in Sumgait, Baku, Gyandja and other cities of Azerbaijan they received neither protection nor help. On the other hand, despite the anti-Union tendency, the old pro-Russian forces tried to convince their opponents that this new AOD policy will prove a catastrophe for the Armenians. Their hopes we linked to the idea of union with the new democratic forces within the Russian Federation. (Nadeni-Raevski, pp.121-122; Khachatrian, Online: Web, 7 October 2007)

Step by step the Karabakh conflict escalated. New waves of refugees fled across the borders of the two republics. In Nagorno-Karabakh, Azeris expelled Armenians from schools, enterprises and offices, and attacked their houses in the ethnically mixed towns and villages on the territories where they had a majority of population. The Armenian side did the same. Both sides strove to show that their actions were only a counter to the actions of the other. Gradually all these activities became so widespread and devoid of any control
(even by local nationalist leaders) that so observer can now mark the starting point or determine the guilty side or the victim side. The ordinary people of both nations became the victims, and leading nationalists from both communities were surely guilty. As to the organization of mass deportations, we must note that the attacks in Azerbaijan against the Armenian population had a mass character. Crowds of hundreds or thousands of people attacked Armenians and those who tried to defend them. The victims were often wounded, and, without retaining any property, fled to Armenia, in turn causing new waves of deportations of Azeris from Armenian territory. Bearded young men were the organizers of deportations from Armenia. In private talks, these ‘bearded ones’ claim that in the beginning of the conflict they deported Azeri families only after giving them an opportunity to sell their houses and other property. ‘But when we saw severely beaten Armenians, together with raped women and girls, coming from Azerbaijan, we stopped giving the Azerbaijanis the opportunity to sell their houses’. Official documents published in Azerbaijani language confirm these facts. (Nadeni-Raevski, pp.122-123; Coppieters et al, “Commonwealth and Independence in post-Soviet Eurasia”, Routledge, 1998, pp.1-12)

The total number of deported Armenians was more than 300,000. The situation in Armenia was worsened by the disastrous earthquake of 7 December 1988, which killed tens of thousands of people, and left about half a million homeless. Armenian refugees from Azerbaijan were the urbanized residents: industrial workers, engineers, scientists, school teachers, civil servants, etc., who are not suited to a new life and work in the countryside. In conjunction with the victims of the earthquake they have created an immense problem of declassed masses in Armenia. In order to solve this problem, what the Armenian government needs is to have vast resources and a stable situation
within the Republic and on its borders; but neither the old government of the Republic nor the new one have achieved these two essential conditions. Wide international and all-union help after the earthquake so vital for Armenia has still not been forthcoming. (Nadeni-Raevski, p.123; Zverev, 1996, p. 46)

In the USSR and abroad some hoped that this tremendous disaster would put an end to the conflict between the two Republics. But all hope was in vain. The escalation of mutual attacks on the borders and in Karabakh continued, and the Azerbaijaniis mounted a full blockade of railroads connecting Armenia with the outside world. An attempt at transit through Georgia could not compensate for the losses, for this channel had served to carry only 15 per cent of the total transport of goods, and was thoroughly exploited by Georgia itself. Georgia had also received some materials through the Azerbaijani railroad before the blockade, and was in no position to expand the transportation for Armenia through the mountainous region. Besides, the border region between Georgia and Armenia is populated with Azeris, who attacked the train and started a terror campaign against Armenian locomotive crews. Only when the crews were replaced by Georgian ones did the terror diminish. The border situation led to the paralysis of reconstruction works in the earthquake zones, and resulted in a further escalation of hatred against the Azeris, who were blamed now for inhumanity. Those in Armenia who were ready for a dialogue lost credit in the eyes of the public.

The situation led to the strengthening of nationalistic circles in the political parties of the Republic (the total number of political parties in Armenia is more than 70 by now). The creation of ‘Self-Defence Force’ is now consisting of the existing groups of ‘breaded ones’ and some recently formed detachments. The campaign to create such forces received a strong impulse
after attacks carried out by the *Azerbaijan Popular Front* military units against the border guard systems along the entire border of Azerbaijan and Iran and Turkey. Widespread declarations by Azeris that they wanted only to restore relations with their relatives in Iran, whom they had not seen for 70 years, could not convince Armenians of the peaceful intentions of 'the neighbour'. Armenians were sure that the 'anti-border war' was organized to receive arms and help from Southern Azerbaijan to permit escalation of violence against Armenia. New waves of refugees from Azerbaijan, mass pogroms leading to total deportation of the Armenian population and the capture of young bearded Iranians by units of the Soviet Army seemed to prove this. As a result, numerous terrorist groups started a massive campaign for the seizure of armaments all over Armenia, while the central powers tried to control the situation in both republics. (Nadeni-Raevski, pp.123-124)

According to Armenian sources, 157,000 Azeris had been deported from Armenia. The majority of these were rural people not able to substitute for the lost urban Armenian population in Azerbaijan. Their qualifications did not correspond to positions in city enterprises; nor were they psychologically prepared for life in large cities. Moreover, these people did not feel guilty and could not understand why they were deported. That is why blame for the deportations was laid on all of the Armenians, including those in Azerbaijan; and it was not difficult to channel Azeri grievance into the Anti-Armenian campaign. The immigrant Azeris were the main force used by the militant nationalists in the anti-Armenian pogrom.
Another problem also faced the Azerbaijan authorities: the 40,000 Meskhetian Turks\(^1\) who had immigrated to Azerbaijan from Uzbekistan after the clashes in the Fergana Valley. The Meskhetians had been deprived of their property and had suffered heavy losses in the fierce inter-ethnic clashes with the Uzbek population. They proved a fertile ground for the anti-Armenian campaign. No doubt, ethnic factor is playing an important role in sustaining the conflict scenario of Caucasus, what must be remembered is that the external players, are also partly responsible for aggravating the present conflict.

\(^1\) Meskhetian Turks are the former Muslim inhabitants of Meskheti (Georgia), along the border with Turkey. They were deported to Central Asia in 1944 by Stalin and settled within Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. A majority (more than 80 per cent) of Meskhetian Turks are ethnic Turks (Turkish-speaking agriculturalists) and (Azerbaijani-speaking pastoralists)) with Kurds and Hamshenis. A minority (about 20 per cent) are descendants of indigenous Georgians who became Muslim in the 17\(^{th}\)-18\(^{th}\) centuries. The estimated population of Meskhetian Turks is around 300,000. They are known as Ahuska Türkleri (Akhaltsikhe Turks) in Turkey. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meskhetian_Turks