

## THE SITUATION IN NAKHCHIVAN AFTER THE COLLAPSE OF THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE, THE DECLARATION OF AUTONOMY, AND ITS DEVELOPMENT

### A SITUAÇÃO EM NAKHCHIVAN APÓS O COLAPSO DO IMPÉRIO RUSSO, A DECLARAÇÃO DE AUTONOMIA E O SEU DESENVOLVIMENTO

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#### Abstract

This article discusses the socio-political situation that arose in Nakhchivan, one of the ancient cultural centers of Azerbaijan, in the early 20th century. It is noted that after the collapse of the Russian Empire, the situation in Azerbaijan, as in all the national peripheries of the empire, became significantly tense. This situation did not bypass the Nakhchivan region either. Armenians committed mass massacres in the Nakhchivan region, as they did in every part of Azerbaijan. The population of the region suffered greatly from the attacks of Andranik Ozanian. Therefore, the progressive people of Nakhchivan implemented a series of measures to save the region from Armenian aggression and appealed to the Ottoman state for help. Self-defense battalions were created from the local population. With the help of the Turkish army and the population, the Armenian aggression was repelled. The Araz-Turkish Republic, established in November 1918, also played a major role in repelling the aggression. After the Sovietization of Azerbaijan, and subsequently Nakhchivan, Soviet leaders like Lenin, Stalin, and Ordzhonikidze wanted to give Nakhchivan

#### Resumo

*Este artigo discute a situação sociopolítica que surgiu em Nakhchivan, um dos antigos centros culturais do Azerbaijão, no início do século XX. Observa-se que, após o colapso do Império Russo, a situação no Azerbaijão, como em todas as periferias nacionais do império, tornou-se significativamente tensa. Essa situação também não poupou a região de Nakhchivan. Os armênios cometeram massacres em massa na região de Nakhchivan, como fizeram em todas as partes do Azerbaijão. A população da região sofreu muito com os ataques de Andranik Ozanian. Portanto, o povo progressista de Nakhchivan implementou uma série de medidas para salvar a região da agressão armênia e apelou ao Estado otomano por ajuda. Batalhões de autodefesa foram criados a partir da população local. Com a ajuda do exército turco e da população, a agressão armênia foi repelida. A República Turca de Araz, estabelecida em novembro de 1918, também desempenhou um papel importante na repulsa da agressão. Após a sovietação do Azerbaijão e, posteriormente, de Nakhchivan, líderes soviéticos como Lenin, Stalin e Ordzhonikidze*



to the Armenians. However, the strong resistance of prominent Azerbaijani figures and the population of Nakhchivan thwarted these plans. Nakhchivan was granted autonomous status within Azerbaijan. The Moscow and Kars treaties signed in 1921 played a major role in this. As a result, the Nakhchivan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was established on February 9, 1924. Shortly after, in 1929, 657 square kilometers of the autonomous republic's territory were given to Armenia by a decision of the Transcaucasian Central Executive Committee. The Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, which underwent a certain path of development during the Soviet era, developed further during the period of the prominent statesman Heydar Aliyev (1969-1982). After Azerbaijan restored its independence in 1991, Nakhchivan entered a high stage of its development during the years of rule of national leader Heydar Aliyev (1993-2003) and his successor Ilham Aliyev (after 1993).

**Keywords:** Azerbaijan. Nakhchivan. Russia. Armenia. Araz - Turkish Republic. Autonomy. Territory.

*queriam entregar Nakhchivan aos armênios. No entanto, a forte resistência de figuras proeminentes do Azerbaijão e da população de Nakhchivan frustrou esses planos. Nakhchivan recebeu status de autonomia dentro do Azerbaijão. Os tratados de Moscou e Kars, assinados em 1921, tiveram um papel importante nisso. Como resultado, a República Socialista Soviética Autônoma de Nakhchivan foi estabelecida em 9 de fevereiro de 1924. Pouco depois, em 1929, 657 quilômetros quadrados do território da república autônoma foram cedidos à Armênia por decisão do Comitê Executivo Central da Transcaucásia. A República Autônoma de Nakhchivan, que passou por um certo caminho de desenvolvimento durante a era soviética, desenvolveu-se ainda mais durante o período do proeminente estadista Heydar Aliyev (1969-1982). Após o Azerbaijão ter restaurado a sua independência em 1991, Nakhchivan entrou numa fase de grande desenvolvimento durante os anos do governo do líder nacional Heydar Aliyev (1993-2003) e do seu sucessor Ilham Aliyev (após 1993).*

**Palavras-chave:** Azerbaijão. Nakhchivan. Rússia. Armênia. Araz - República Turca. Autonomia. Território.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the 20th century, events in the world, especially the failures of the Russian army in World War I, significantly complicated the situation both in the center of the empire and in its national peripheries, leading to the collapse of this vast state. As part of the empire, the situation in Azerbaijan also became extremely acute during this time. Taking advantage of this, Armenians, in order to realize the dream of a "Greater Armenia," committed terrible tragedies in Baku and several other places in the country. These events did not bypass Nakhchivan, one of the ancient cultural centers of Azerbaijan, and the situation in the region deteriorated drastically. At that time, dual power also emerged in Nakhchivan, and large capitalist states, taking advantage of the situation, began to vie for control of this ancient Azerbaijani land. One of the factors complicating the situation in Nakhchivan was the incursions by Armenia into the territory with the aim of annexing these lands. The atrocities committed against the Muslim-Turkic

population by Armenians, who had been settled in the area throughout the 19th century after being migrated to Nakhchivan, further complicated the situation. The situation was further aggravated by refugees fleeing from present-day Armenia as a result of deportation, leaving their ancestral lands to save their lives and coming to Nakhchivan.

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Archival materials, research works, memoirs of witnesses to the tragic events, and other facts undeniably confirm that the year 1918 began with great calamities for the population of Nakhchivan. Armenian detachments, heavily armed with weapons and ammunition obtained from the Russian army, which had been defeated on the Caucasian front and was withdrawing from the area, committed tragic massacres in various parts of the Nakhchivan region as early as March. They carried out sudden raids on the villages of Nakhchivan , Sharur-Daralayaz uezds , and Ordubad , massacring the population, killing women, children, and the elderly, showing no mercy. Archival materials confirm that by the early summer of 1918, Armenians had burned down a large number of Muslim villages and killed thousands of innocent people on an ethnic basis.

In the difficult circumstances that had arisen, the territory of Nakhchivan was subjected to attacks by Andranik Ozanian. Andranik, defeated by Turkish troops near the city of Khoyn in June 1918, moved eastward with his troops along the southern banks of the Araz. Crossing the Araz near the village of Yayji in the Julfa region, he entered the territory of Nakhchivan. As a result of the attack on the village of Yayji, nearly four thousand peaceful residents - women, children, and the elderly - were massacred. The number of victims was so high that there were very few survivors, and consequently, there were not enough people to bury the dead. This tragic event almost completely destroyed the demographic structure of the village's population and caused a severe humanitarian disaster in the region (Atnur, 2013, p. 56).

Andranik's bandit detachments, aiming to capture the city of Nakhchivan, after Yayji, massacred the populations of the villages of Aza, Diza, and Düylün in the Ordubad district. In a short time, he occupied most of the Ordubad district, the city of Julfa, and a number of villages. Periodical press materials confirm that at that time, Andranik

destroyed and devastated many villages in the Gilanchay, Alinjachay, and Nakhchivanchay valleys, brutally killing the majority of the population. In connection with these events, the people of Ordubad and the population of Nakhchivan, in telegrams sent to Baku, reported that Andranik's bandit detachment was committing ruthless massacres and engaging in plunder.

In such a situation, on the initiative of Nakhchivan's intellectuals and national bourgeoisie, the Muslim National Council was established in Nakhchivan. With the active participation and support of the local population, the National Council played a significant role in defending the Azerbaijani population living not only in the Nakhchivan region but also in a vast geographical area stretching from Meghri to Ulukhanli, from acts of violence and mass massacres perpetrated by Armenian armed formations. Considering the complex military-political situation in the region and the numerous appeals of the local population, Turkish military forces under the command of Kazım Karabekir Pasha were brought to Nakhchivan and carried out defensive measures in coordination with the local population.

The integration of volunteer self-defense detachments, formed primarily from the local youth, into the region's defense system was particularly important in increasing the defense potential. As a result of this military-organizational cooperation, the attempts of Armenian armed forces to occupy Nakhchivan and include the region in the ideologically baseless concept of "Greater Armenia" failed. This resistance movement is evaluated as one of the decisive historical factors in preserving the territorial integrity of Nakhchivan, ensuring the physical security of the local population, and maintaining regional stability. In general, the population of Nakhchivan has always considered Nakhchivan an integral part of Azerbaijan and has struggled to reunite with the motherland – Azerbaijan – from which it was artificially separated. The population of Nakhchivan repeatedly and unequivocally expressed that this people would agree to perish in the fires of hostile states, but would not separate from Azerbaijan (Nakhchivan history pages, 1996, p. 29).

It is known that on May 28, 1918, the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic was declared. This event caused great joy among the population of Nakhchivan and created great hopes in them. At such a time, to rectify the severe situation in Nakhchivan and overcome difficulties, certain work was done by the local population and its leaders – Jafargulu Khan, Rahim Khan, Kalbali Khan, and others, as well as by the government of

the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, which prevented the Armenians' territorial claims and the implementation of their policy of ethnic cleansing in Nakhchivan .

The local population played a significant role in preventing the atrocities committed by Armenians in Nakhchivan. For this purpose, starting from July 1918, volunteer detachments were formed in Nakhchivan. As a result, up to 20 volunteer battalions were organized in Nakhchivan and surrounding areas. These battalions, consisting of 220-500 men each, had four in Nakhchivan, three in Sharur-Daralayaz, and others in Vedibasars, Gamarli, Zangibasars, and Bashkend (Aralık). These volunteer forces formed a barrier against the Armenians (Atnur, 2013, pp. 82-83).

The government of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, attaching great importance to establishing and expanding relations with Nakhchivan, sent 400,000 manats to the Nakhchivan National Council to aid the population of Nakhchivan, Sharur, and Ordubad, who were in a difficult situation, and an additional 300,000 manats were planned to be sent (Hajiyev, 2010, p. 16).

To facilitate relations with Nakhchivan, an assistant to the Governor-General of Karabakh for the administration of the Nakhchivan region operated, and a little later, a position of commissioner for special assignments concerning the Nakhchivan region was established under the Karabakh Governor-Generalship. Samad sir Jamilinski was appointed Governor-General of Nakhchivan. Although S. Jamilinski's headquarters were initially in Ordubad, they were later moved to Nakhchivan (Hajiyev, 2010, p. 16).

After the government of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic ceded Iravan to the Armenians on May 29, 1918, the Armenians became even more active in trying to seize Nakhchivan. The increased role of the USA in the region further emboldened the Armenians. Pressures on Nakhchivan increased, and therefore, on the initiative of the population, the Araz -Turkish Republic was established here in November 1918 to protect the region from Armenian occupation. Covering a vast area (8,696 square kilometers), including the Nakhchivan and Sharur-Daralayaz uezds, the Ordubad district, Sardarabad, Ulukhanli, Vedibasars, Gamarli, Meghri, and Surmali, and with a population of nearly one million, the capital of the Araz -Turkish Republic was the city of Nakhchivan (Hajiyev, 2010, p. 9). Despite its relatively short existence, the Araz -Turkish Republic played a crucial role in mobilizing the local population against the aggressive activities of Armenian armed formations and organizing the defense potential against the backdrop of

the complex military-political situation in the region. This political entity created conditions for the military and political organization of the population, encouraged the formation of volunteer self-defense detachments, and, as a result, made a significant contribution to protecting the region from the threat of Armenian occupation. In this regard, despite its short-lived activity, the Araz -Turkish Republic holds important historical significance in the formation of national resistance and self-defense battalions in the Nakhchivan region.

In this endeavour, the national forces – battalions – whose foundations had been laid earlier and which were organized by the Araz -Turkish Republic, played a significant role. These included the Nehram battalion led by Kabla Mukhtar, the Jafari battalion led by Kabla Karim, the Diza battalion led by Mahammadreza Bey , the Sharur battalion led by Huseyn Aliyev , the units in the Sharur-Sadarak villages led by Hasan Shahverdi son , the Yengija forces led by Mashadi Alasgar Agha, the Karkar forces led by Mohsun Jamalov , the Jalilkend-Zeyva-Dudanga village forces led by Fatullah Huseynov and Karbalayi Habib bey , and the Ordubad battalion led by Ibrahimkhalil Akhundov ( Atnur , 2013, p. 124). Thanks to all this, Nakhchivan was saved from Armenian aggression through the power of its people. The territorial integrity of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic was ensured.

Although some researchers believe there were no connections between the Araz -Turkish Republic and the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, research conducted in recent years confirms that these connections did exist, albeit weak, and both sides, including the Araz -Turkish Republic, attached great importance to establishing them. For this purpose, a special mission of the Araz -Turkish Republic was even sent to Baku on March 8, 1919. The issues raised by the delegation regarding the situation in Nakhchivan were discussed in the Azerbaijani parliament on March 10, 1919 (Hajiyev, 2010, p. 13).

In early 1919, the British occupied Nakhchivan and abolished the Araz -Turkish Republic and the Nakhchivan National Committee. Trusting the Armenians, the government of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic withdrew its troops from Zangezur based on the terms of the agreement signed with Armenia on November 23, 1919. Taking advantage of this, the Armenians occupied Zangezur, and the foundation for Nakhchivan's separation from Azerbaijan was laid.

As is known, the military intervention of the XI Red Army in Baku on April 27, 1920, effectively put an end to the existence of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic. With the Bolsheviks seizing political power on April 28, Soviet power was declared on the territory of Azerbaijan, thereby liquidating the country's independent state structures. This process not only ended Azerbaijan's activity as a subject of international law but also resulted in it coming under the military-political control of Soviet Russia. After the establishment of Soviet power in Baku, the process of Sovietization was extended to other regions of the republic in a short time. Within this framework, Soviet power was declared in the Nakhchivan region on July 28, 1920, and the existing local political and administrative structures were abolished. As a result, the Nakhchivan Soviet Socialist Republic was established, and the administrative-political status of the region was reformed according to the Soviet governance model. The Sovietization of Nakhchivan was not limited to a change of power; it also paved the way for radical changes in the socio-economic, political, and military life of the region. With the establishment of Soviet power, a centralized governance system was introduced, and local political initiatives and elements of national self-government were gradually eliminated. This process had a serious impact on the determination of Nakhchivan's administrative-legal status in subsequent periods, on regional geopolitical relations, and on the formation of Azerbaijan-Armenia border issues.

Expressing the will of the Nakhchivan population, M. Bektashov, a few days after Sovietization, on August 10, 1920, wrote a letter to N. Narimanov, declaring Nakhchivan an inseparable part of the Azerbaijan SSR and expressing their readiness to unite with it.

After the establishment of the Armenian SSR on November 29, 1920, the Armenians' territorial claims to Nakhchivan expanded further. At this time, VI Lenin, I. Stalin, and S. Ordzhonikidze advocated for the idea of giving Nakhchivan to Armenia. Even before the establishment of Soviet power in Armenia, on November 4, 1920, during a discussion of the "Situation in Armenia" with the participation of members of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the AK(b)P and the Caucasian Bureau of the RK(b)P, I. Stalin declared that if one wanted to know who Zangezur and Nakhchivan should belong to, they could not be given to the current government of Armenia (ie, the Dashnak government), but could be given when there is a Soviet government.

This statement was made at a time when Red Army units had already entered the South Caucasus, Sovietizing Azerbaijan and, shortly after, Nakhchivan. The Sovietization of Armenia was very close. In other words, Armenia was Sovietized on November 29, ie, 25 days after the statement. Analysis of existing historical sources shows that Joseph Stalin's foresight in assessing the complex political-military situation in the South Caucasus and his strategic position regarding the redrawing of the region's administrative-political map played a significant role in making decisions concerning Azerbaijani territories. Particularly on the issue of the future status of the Nakhchivan and Zangezur regions, his position was characterized by an approach that essentially envisaged placing these territories under the administrative-political control of Armenia. After the Sovietization of Armenia, the regional policy implemented by the Soviet leadership, especially the biased approach of the central authorities to national-territorial issues, resulted in decisions with an openly anti-Azerbaijani character. As part of this policy, despite the historical-geographical and ethnic realities of the Zangezur region, a significant part of its territory was incorporated into the administrative borders of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic. Consequently, the expansion of the Armenian SSR's territorial unit at the expense of Azerbaijani lands was formalized on a legal-administrative level, and the Zangezur uezd was established within the Armenian SSR by the decision of the Council of People's Commissars of the Armenian SSR dated July 20, 1921. This decision disrupted the historically formed administrative-political balance in the region and laid the groundwork for long-term tensions in the formation of the Azerbaijan-Armenia borders (Nakhchivan encyclopedia, 2005, pp. 369-370).

Thus, with the transfer of Zangezur to Armenia, the Nakhchivan region was artificially separated from the main part of Azerbaijan. Therefore, national leader Heydar Aliyev, discussing these issues, noted that if the transfer of the Zangezur region to Armenia had not happened, perhaps Nakhchivan's autonomy would not have been necessary, and Azerbaijan would have been a country with a unified territory (Azerbaijan newspaper, February 12, 1999).

Due to this negative attitude of Soviet leaders towards Azerbaijan, especially in connection with the declaration of December 1, 1920, regarding Nakhchivan voiced by N. Narimanov, widespread protests by the Nakhchivan population began on December 5. Because the situation in Nakhchivan became tense, the republic's leadership sent Behbud

Shahtakhtinski, a member of the Revolutionary Committee and Commissioner of Justice, to Nakhchivan (Hajiyev, 2003, pp. 98-99). Behbud Shahtakhtinski played an exceptional role in organizing the population against Armenian aggression. Seeing the seriousness of the situation, the Revolutionary Committee of Armenia recognized Nakhchivan as an Independent Soviet Socialist Republic on December 28, 1920, and declared that it had abandoned its territorial claims regarding Nakhchivan. Armenian cunning was also evident in recognizing Nakhchivan not as part of Azerbaijan, but as an independent state separate from Azerbaijan, recognizing it as an independent Soviet Socialist Republic rather than as a part of Azerbaijan to make it easier to realize future territorial claims against Nakhchivan.

Even after the establishment of Soviet power, the Armenians' territorial claims to Nakhchivan continued unabated. Since they did not abandon their claims, a referendum was held in Nakhchivan in January 1921, with the participation of representatives from Russia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia, to ascertain the opinion of the population regarding this issue. The results of the referendum were very successful. 90% of the region's population voted for Nakhchivan to remain within Azerbaijan with autonomous status.

The Moscow and Kars treaties also played a major role in granting Nakhchivan autonomous status within Azerbaijan. N. Narimanov's principled stance on this issue and the negotiations conducted by Behbud agha Shahtakhtinski in Moscow influenced the change in Moscow's position on the Nakhchivan issue. In general, Behbud agha Shahtakhtinski rendered great services in granting autonomous status to Nakhchivan. He even wrote a letter to VI Lenin in Moscow, conveying to him the truths about Nakhchivan, Zangezur, and Nagorno-Karabakh. The letter provided information about these territories, which are historical Azerbaijani lands, their historical geography, the national composition of their population, and a number of references were sent to Moscow to prove his points. All this attracted VI Lenin's attention, and as a result, the Political Bureau, on his proposal, adopted a decision on the establishment of the Nakhchivan SSR within the Azerbaijan SSR. The Moscow Treaty signed between the RSFSR and Turkey on March 16, 1921 ( İbrahimzade , 2007, pp. 112-113), followed by the treaty signed in Kars on October 13, 1921, with the participation of representatives from Turkey, Russia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia ( İbrahimzade , 2007, pp. 120-123), confirmed the territorial affiliation and even the borders of Nakhchivan . However, for various reasons,

the establishment of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic was delayed, and by the decision of the III All- Nakhchivan Congress of Soviets on February 27, 1923, the Nakhchivan Autonomous Region was established. Finally, on February 9, 1924, the Azerbaijan Central Executive Committee declared the establishment of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. Thus, Nakhchivan, an ancient Azerbaijani land with a long history and rich cultural heritage, underwent a series of administrative-political changes under the influence of complex socio-political processes, international and regional geopolitical interests in the early 20th century. During this period, Nakhchivan functioned with the status of the Nakhchivan Soviet Socialist Republic in 1920-1923, was called the Nakhchivan Autonomous Region in 1923-1924, and from February 9, 1924, until November 17, 1990, existed as the Nakhchivan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic within the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic. All these stages played an important role in the formation of Nakhchivan as an integral part of Azerbaijan, in strengthening the legal and political foundations of its autonomous status, and at the same time served to preserve the region's historical-national identity, socio-economic, and cultural development. At the first session of the newly elected Supreme Soviet of the Nakhchivan ASSR held on November 17, 1990, chaired by the national leader of our people, Heydar Aliyev, on his proposal, the words "Soviet Socialist" were removed from the name of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. Since then, this ancient land of Azerbaijan has been called the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic.

As acknowledged by the leaders of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, thanks to the bravery, heroism, and patriotism of the Nakhchivan population, the territorial integrity of the region was preserved under very difficult and complex conditions, and the realization of the Armenians' dream of a "Greater Armenia" was prevented. If it were not for this, the Armenians would have captured Nakhchivan, and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, which has left a glorious mark on our history since 1924, would not have been established.

Unfortunately, shortly after gaining autonomy, the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic suffered territorial losses in the early years of Soviet power. Thus, by the decision of the Transcaucasian Central Executive Committee dated February 18, 1929, a number of territories of the autonomous republic, specifically the villages of Gurdgulaq ,

Khachik , Horadiz from the Sharur district, the villages of Oghbin ( Ag Bina ), Aghkhach , Almali , Itqiran , Sultanbey from the Nakhchivan district, Shahbuz area, the village of Gorchevan from the Ordubad district, as well as part of the lands of the village of Kilit , were given to Armenia. In general, at that time, without any justification, grossly violating the terms of the international Kars Treaty, 657 square kilometers of Nakhchivan's territory were given to Armenia by the Soviet government. Shortly after, in 1930, Aldara, Lehvaz , Astazur , Nüvedi , and other settlements fell into the hands of Armenia, and the Meghri region of Armenia was established on that territory ( Nakhchivan encyclopedia , 2005, p. 121).

The Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic underwent a certain path of development during the Soviet era. Its first Constitution was adopted on April 18, 1926, and the second Constitution on September 17, 1937. Like the entire population of Azerbaijan, the population of Nakhchivan went to the front to fight on the fronts of the Second World War, which began in 1939, and a large part of them perished. Abbas Guliyev, Gazanfar Akbarov, and Najafgulu Rafiyev was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union for his distinction in the battles against German fascism. During the post-war reconstruction years and afterwards, especially after the prominent statesman Heydar Aliyev came to power in Azerbaijan in 1969, it experienced a period of progress. On May 30, 1978, the third Constitution of our country was adopted. During that period, the Armenians could not raise territorial claims against Azerbaijan. However, after Heydar Aliyev resigned from his post as First Deputy Chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers and member of the Politburo of the CPSU Central Committee in October 1987, the Nagorno-Karabakh problem, raised by the Armenians, brought great tragedies and disasters to the population of Nakhchivan, as in all of Azerbaijan. Even in January 1990, the village of Karki, part of the Sadarak soviet, was occupied by Armenians.

At such a complex and critical time, the prominent statesman Heydar Aliyev came to Baku on July 20, 1990, and to Nakhchivan on July 22. The great personality was elected a deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the Azerbaijan SSR and the Supreme Soviet of the Nakhchivan ASSR. From the very first day of Heydar Aliyev's activity as a deputy – November 17, 1990 – the struggle he waged for the independence of Azerbaijan attracts attention. At the session of the Supreme Soviet of the Nakhchivan ASSR held on November 17, 1990, chaired by him, the words "Soviet Socialist" were removed from the

name of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, and it was named the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic; the name of the Supreme Soviet of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic was changed to the Supreme Assembly; the tricolor State flag of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic was adopted as the State flag of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. The issue of adopting this flag as the State emblem of the entire Azerbaijan SSR was requested from the Supreme Soviet of the Azerbaijan SSR in the order of legislative initiative.

The activities of national leader Heydar Aliyev, first as an ordinary citizen and later as a deputy, his speeches at sessions of the Supreme Assembly, the adoption of correct decisions thanks to his proposals, etc., further increased the people's sympathy for him. Therefore, at the insistent demand of the people, Heydar Aliyev was elected Chairman of the Supreme Assembly of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic on September 3, 1991. As a result of his leadership, the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic was saved from Armenian aggression, and its population from hunger, misery, and genocide. As a result of the reforms carried out in connection with the transition to a market economy, the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic embarked on a path of development, and international relations were established. One of the greatest achievements at that time was the preservation of Nakhchivan's autonomous status.

Because in the early 90s of the last century, some forces that could not achieve any result in open struggle with Heydar Aliyev, who led the Supreme Assembly of the Nakhchivan AR, and failed, began to work towards the abolition of the autonomous status of Nakhchivan, led by the great personality at that time, under various pretexts to remove the national leader from power and isolate him from political life. However, national leader Heydar Aliyev resolutely prevented all these attempts. Even during his visit to the Republic of Turkey on March 22-25, 1992, he managed to bring to the agenda the treaty signed indefinitely in Kars on October 13, 1921, which none of the signatory states could unilaterally revoke, and at that time, the idea that "Turkey is the guarantor of the territorial integrity of Nakhchivan" was specifically emphasized. At that time, Suleyman Demirel, who was the Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey, declared that according to the Moscow and Kars treaties, if there is any change in the status of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, Turkey has a say in this matter (Hajiyev, 2003, p. 54). By bringing the Kars Treaty, which national leader Heydar Aliyev evaluated as "a very great,

irreplaceable document to ensure the integrity, security, statehood, and autonomy of Nakhchivan in the future" ( Aliyev , 2007, p. 249), back to the agenda, it was stated to the aggressive Armenia, whose territorial claims were growing stronger, and to some internal forces seeking to abolish Nakhchivan's autonomous status, that the Kars Treaty, the guarantor of Nakhchivan's autonomous status, was in force and that changing or abolishing this status by any force was unacceptable and impossible. Thus, as a result of the far-sighted and purposeful policy, principled stance, and decisive activity of national leader Heydar Aliyev, these and other important and successful measures ensured the preservation of the autonomous status of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. It was thanks to his political will that Nakhchivan's position as an integral part of Azerbaijan, historically, legally, and politically, was strengthened, and any threats related to the abolition of autonomy were prevented in a timely manner. In general, national leader Heydar Aliyev attached special importance to the autonomous status of Nakhchivan, evaluating it as one of the important guarantees of the region's security, political stability, and socio-economic development. He considered the preservation of this status extremely important not only as an administrative matter but also from the perspective of Nakhchivan's historical fate, national identity, and strategic interests, and pursued a consistent and thoughtful policy in this direction. Heydar Aliyev's position created a reliable basis for the development and strengthening of Nakhchivan's autonomy in subsequent periods. On this occasion, he said: " Nakhchivan's autonomy is a historical achievement. We must preserve it. Nakhchivan's autonomy is a very great factor serving to return other lost lands of Nakhchivan. We must preserve this factor" (Azerbaijan newspaper, January 17, 1998). The autonomous republic continued its development on an upward trend even after the worthy successor of national leader Heydar Aliyev, Ilham Aliyev was elected President of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev signed a number of Decrees and Laws concerning Nakhchivan. On May 12, 2004, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev visited Nakhchivan and on May 14 participated in and spoke at the solemn event dedicated to the 80th anniversary of the establishment of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. Speaking about the improvement and construction work carried out in Nakhchivan with high state care, he expressed his satisfaction (Nakhchivan history, 2015, p. 381).

This development in the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, the conditions created, and the infrastructure made it possible to hold a number of international events here. On October 2-3, 2009, the IX Summit of Heads of State of Turkic-Speaking Countries was held in the city of Nakhchivan. At the summit, the presidents of the countries signed the Nakhchivan Agreement on the establishment of the Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking Countries, and as a result of the IX Summit, the Nakhchivan Declaration was adopted (East gate, October 4, 2009).

The President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, signed a Decree "On holding the 90th anniversary of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic" on January 14, 2014, and visited Nakhchivan on April 7-9, 2014, on this occasion. On April 8, 2014, a solemn event was held for the 90th anniversary of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. Speaking at the event, President Ilham Aliyev noted, "Nakhchivan is developing rapidly. All issues in Nakhchivan are being successfully implemented. This visit is my 11th visit to Nakhchivan in the last 10 years. I can say that I come to Nakhchivan every year, get acquainted with the development here, and I am very pleased. I am pleased that today Nakhchivan is a flourishing land" (Shark door, April 9, 2014). According to the Decree signed by President Ilham Aliyev on December 30, 2023, who always approaches the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic with attention and care, the 100th anniversary of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic was solemnly celebrated in 2024 (Azerbaijan newspaper, December 31, 2023).

### 3 CONCLUSION

The listed facts show that Nakhchivan's acquisition of autonomous status took place in the very complex political conditions of the early last century. In this matter, the progressive people of Azerbaijan, the persistent struggle of the region's population, and the Moscow and Kars treaties signed in 1921 played an important role. As a result, the establishment of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic was declared on February 9, 1924. During the Soviet era, although the autonomous republic faced certain difficulties and even suffered territorial losses, it still developed.

This development became more intensive during the independence period. All this was achieved thanks to high state care for the autonomous republic. The fact that the

Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic has reached its current level of development is a brilliant indicator of how much importance the founder of the independent Azerbaijani state, national leader Heydar Aliyev, and the current head of state, Ilham Aliyev, attach to the autonomous status of Nakhchivan. As a result of all this and high state care, in the last 30 years, the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic has achieved comprehensive development, and very great changes have occurred in all areas of life – economic development, social life, and cultural construction. Thus, the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic has become one of Azerbaijan's highly developed industrial, agricultural, scientific, educational, and cultural centers.

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### Authors' Contribution

All authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

### **Data availability**

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

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