

# Exiled Dreams: The Azerbaijani Diaspora's Struggle for Identity and Power in Iran, 1920s–1940s

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## ABSTRACTS

Although there is a large body of work on the presence and activities of Azerbaijani émigrés in Turkey and Europe, the Persian aspect of their history has received little attention, in spite of the massive wave of Azerbaijani migrants to Persia following the Bolshevik invasion of Azerbaijan in 1920. In this contribution, I examine the role of Azerbaijani émigrés, particularly members of the Musavat Party, under the surveillance of the Soviet Union, in Persia and their relationship with the host country during the 1920s–1940s. I detail the leadership conflict among the Azerbaijani diaspora in Persia, vying for control of the community and its communication with Soviet Azerbaijan. In addition, I explore the idea of "Greater Azerbaijan" that emerged among Azerbaijani émigrés in the 1930s and its ramifications in the 1940s.

Obwohl es zahlreiche Arbeiten über die Präsenz und die Aktivitäten aserbajdschanischer Emigranten in der Türkei und in Europa gibt, wurde der persische Aspekt ihrer Geschichte bisher nur wenig beachtet, obwohl es nach dem bolschewistischen Einmarsch in Aserbaidschan im Jahr 1920 eine massive Welle aserbajdschanischer Migranten nach Persien gab. In diesem Beitrag untersuche ich die Rolle der aserbajdschanischen Emigranten, insbesondere der Mitglieder der Musavat-Partei, die unter Überwachung der Sowjetunion standen, in Persien und ihre Beziehungen zum Gastland in den 1920er bis 1940er Jahren. Ich beschreibe den Führungskonflikt in der aserbajdschanischen Diaspora in Persien, die um die Kontrolle der Gemeinschaft und ihre Kommunikation mit dem sowjetischen Aserbaidschan rang. Darüber hinaus untersuche ich die Idee eines „Greater Azerbaijan“, die in den 1930er Jahren unter den aserbajdschanischen Emigranten entstand, und ihre Auswirkungen in den 1940er Jahren.

## 1. Introduction

After the Red Army invaded Azerbaijan in April 1920 and scattered attempts to fight the Bolsheviks failed to stop them, a large number of Azerbaijanis, including military officers and civilian officials, particularly from the Nakhchivan and Karabakh regions, took refuge in Persia. The appropriate treatment of immigrants, the refusal to extradite, the employment of many refugees in civil and military organizations, and the political chaos in the late Ottoman Empire at that time indicate the importance of Persia in the exodus of Azerbaijanis.<sup>1</sup> The aforementioned topic has not received much attention in the studies and the focus has mainly been on the presence and activities of Azerbaijani émigrés in Turkey and Europe.

Several Persian papers describe the immigrations from Russia to Persia after the Bolshevik rule which were written by Š. Ādārī<sup>2</sup>, K. Bayāt<sup>3</sup>, R. Ādārī Šahrežāēī<sup>4</sup>, and Sādāt, Nūrāēī and Mirj'afari<sup>5</sup>. Among them, Ādārī Šahrežāēī has been specifically involved with the activities of an immigrant community (i.e. Armenians). M. Qasımlı<sup>6</sup>, an Azerbaijani researcher, has mentioned the migration of Azerbaijanis to Iran and the activities of the Musavat Party.<sup>7</sup> In the western-language studies, especially in the documents published by G. Mamoulia, dispersed references to the role of Azerbaijani émigrés living in Persia in the anti-Soviet plans of foreign states such as Poland and Japan can be found. In an article published recently, Atabaki and Volkov discussed the migrations from Russia to Persia after the 1917 revolution. This article is regarded as the first – or at least one of the first – comprehensive studies on the topic published in English.<sup>8</sup> In my article, I try to provide a brief overview of the (political) immigration of Azerbaijanis to Persia after the Bolshevik annexation, as well as the relations between the exiled leaders and the host country during the 1920–1940s.

1 For example, see Kafkas Azerbaycan'ın Muhacirleri Tebriz'de [Immigrants of Caucasian Azerbaijan in Tabriz], in: *Yeni Kafkasya*, 1 Kanuni Evvel 1339 [1 December 1923], p. 14.

2 Š. Ādārī, Mohājerat-e Atbā'e Šowravi be Iran 1297–1317 [Immigration from the Soviet Union to Iran 1918–1938], in: *Ganjineye Asnād* (1993) 9, pp. 2–19.

3 K. Bayāt, Mohājerine Šowravi: Naḡostin tajrobeye panāhandegi dar Iran [Soviet immigrants: The first experience of refuge in Iran], in: *Goftogū* (1996) 11, pp. 7–23.

4 R. Ādārī Šahrežāēī, Mohājerat-e Arāmaneye Dašnaksion be Iran va ta'tire ān bar ravābeṭe Iran va Šowravi [Immigration of Dashnak Armenians to Iran and its impact on Iran-Soviet relations], in: *Tāriḡe Ravābeṭe Ķāreji* (2004) 18, pp. 43–53.

5 M. Sādāt, M. Nūrāēī/H. Mirj'afari, Barrasiye tab'ide Mohājerin az Šowravi be Iran 1305–1320 [A survey on the deportation of immigrants from the Soviet Union to Iran 1926–1941], in: *Ganjineye Asnād* 23 (2012) 90, pp. 22–41.

6 M. Qasımlı, *Azerbaycan Türklerinin millî Mücadele Tarihi 1920–1945* [A History of the National Struggle of Azerbaijan Turks 1920–1945], Istanbul 2006.

7 The Musavat (Equality) Party was founded in 1911 in Baku. Musavat dominated several governments during the independence of Azerbaijan (1918–1920) and continued its activities in exile after the Azerbaijani Democratic Republic collapsed in 1920; see Z. Gasimov, *Historical Dictionary of Azerbaijan*, Lanham 2018.

8 T. Atabaki/D. Volkov, Flying away from the Bolshevik winter: Soviet refugees across the Southern borders (1917–1930), in: *Journal of Refugee Studies* 34 (2021) 2, pp. 1900–1922.

## 2. Surveillance and Conflict in the Diaspora

The activities of Azerbaijani émigrés in Persia,<sup>9</sup> especially the members of the Musavat Party, the most important political organization of the Azerbaijanis, were, from the very beginning, under the scrutiny of the intelligence services of the Soviet Union. The most important centres of Caucasian refugees, including Azerbaijanis, were the provinces of Gilan and Azerbaijan (Persian: Ādārbāyjān) in the north and northwest of Iran respectively. At the end of 1925, the Secret Service (OGPU) of the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (TSFSR) compiled two reports about the activities of the Azerbaijani émigrés in Persia. In Gilan, the Musavatists were mainly led by Mirzabala Mohammadzade. He was in contact with Mohammad Ali Rasulzade in Tehran, the cousin of the exiled leader of Musavat and the founding father of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Mohammad Amin Rasulzade.<sup>10</sup> Soviet agents believed the Musavat circles lacked operational power and their main activities were limited to smuggling party samizdat to Soviet Azerbaijan and newsgathering.<sup>11</sup> Azerbaijani émigrés living in northwestern Iran were often settled in Tabriz and Khoy. The immigrants living in Tabriz were mostly from the mainland of (Republic of) Azerbaijan and Karabakh, and the refugees living in Khoy were from Armenia, especially Yerevan, and other parts of the Caucasus. The activities of Azerbaijani refugees were seemingly limited to receiving the journal *Yeni Kafkasya*<sup>12</sup> from Istanbul and smuggling it to Soviet Azerbaijan.<sup>13</sup>

In the early fall of 1925, with the arrival of Musa Rafiyev and then Khosrow Sultanov (Sultanzade) from Turkey to Persia, the conflict over the leadership of the Azerbaijani diaspora entered a new phase. Rafiyev, representing Mohammad Amin Rasulzade and the Musavat Party, on one side, and Sultanzade, as the founder of the newly established National Democratic-Republican Party of Azerbaijan (*Natsional-demokraticheskaya respublikanskaya partiya Azerbaydzhana*), on the other side, tried to organize the refugees living in Iranian Azerbaijan. The success for each meant gaining the support of a significant number of the diaspora and taking over the crossroad of communication with Soviet Azerbaijan. In early October, Rafiyev travelled to Khoy and then to Tabriz, and tried to form the committee of the Musavat Party and reach an agreement with the leaders of the Azerbaijani armed groups on the Iranian-Soviet borderland; but with the arrival of Sultanov, all Rafiyev's efforts came to nought.<sup>14</sup>

9 The names "Iran" and "Persia" are used together in this article. While Iranians have called their country by this name for centuries, the term "Persia" was the official name of Iran in the Western world before 1925.

10 Mohammad Amin Rasulzade fled from Russia to Finland in 1922 and then settled in Turkey.

11 G. Mamoulia/R. Abutalibov, *Za svobodu i nezavisimost' Kavkaza: Prometeyevskoye dvizheniye v sekretnykh dokumentakh i materialakh uchastnikov, nablyudateley i protivnikov* [For Freedom and Independence of the Caucasus: The Promethean Movement in secret documents and materials of participants, observers and antagonists], Paris/Baku 2020, pp. 65–71.

12 "Yeni Kafkasya" (The New Caucasus), founded by Mohammad Amin Rasulzade, was a biweekly political and literary magazine which was published in Istanbul between 1923 and 1927.

13 Mamoulia/Abutalibov, *Za svobodu*, pp. 76–78.

14 Ibid., pp. 79–80.

The Sultanov/Sultanzade brothers (Khosrow, Sultan, and Iskandar) settled in Persia after fleeing from the Caucasus in the early 1920s.<sup>15</sup> Despite the insistence of the Bolsheviks to extradite the Sultanovs, the Iranian government refused to do so, and finally, Khosrow and then Sultan went to Turkey; but Iskander stayed in the village of Mote'alleq (Motâlliql) in Arasbārān (or Qaradāgh) region, close to the Soviet borders.<sup>16</sup> Khosrow could meet the leaders of the diaspora in Khoy and Tabriz, having announced separation from the Musavat and introduced his National Democratic-Republican Party of Azerbaijan. According to Sultanov, his party reached an agreement on the establishment of the Caucasus Confederation with the Georgian National Democrats and the leaders of the North Caucasus and had the support of Britain and Poland. He considered the main difference with the Musavat Party to be the reliance on and complete trust of the Musavatists in Turkey. He believed, due to internal problems and good relations with the Soviet Union, Ankara was reluctant to intervene in the affairs of the Caucasus and to allow Azerbaijanis to conduct military activities against the Soviet Union. Instead, Sultanov spoke about Poland's determination to confront the Soviet Union and the possibility of receiving weapons from Poles. Khosrow also had a conversation with the high-ranking members of the Dashnaksutyun<sup>17</sup> in Tabriz. The Soviet agents also received news indicating a meeting between him and Nerses Melik-Tangian, the Armenian Archbishop of Tabriz.<sup>18</sup> He went to Paris in early 1926 to follow up and coordinate these affairs, but the activity of the Caucasus Confederation was hampered by financial woes and personal disputes.<sup>19</sup>

Georges (Giorgi) Agabekov, a prominent Soviet intelligence officer in the Near East, mentioned in his memoirs that Tabriz was central to the Soviet intelligence services' efforts since the leaders of Dashnaksutyun and Musavat resided there. Dashnaksutyun was directing its activities in Soviet Armenia and Kurdish areas of Turkey via Tabriz, and the Musavatists were also trying to connect with Soviet Azerbaijan from there. Since the mid-1920s, with the follow-up of Minassian, the OGPU representative at Tabriz, access to the correspondence of Dashnaks and Musavatists became possible via an official at the post office:

15 For example, see File 566/1921 "Persia: military Attaché's intelligence summaries" [4 v] (17/818), British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/L/PS/10/966; Garegin Nzhdeh, an Armenian guerrilla commander, while talking to the British consul in Hamedan (Iran) in late 1921 and early 1922, mentioned the presence of "General Sultanov", the former governor of Karabakh, in Tabriz, and stated that he was supposed to be in control of Kurdish forces on the banks of Aras river; see File 566/1921 "Persia: military Attaché's intelligence summaries" [280r] (568/818), British Library: India Office Records and Private Papers, IOR/L/PS/10/966.

16 Š. Javānšīr, *Man az čangāle Stālin farār kardam* [I escaped from the grip of Stalin], Tehran 2014, p. 129.

17 The Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Dashnaksutyun) was founded in 1890 in Tbilisi. From 1918 to 1920, Dashnaksutyun controlled the Armenian republic government. In the course of the Sovietization of Armenia, the Dashnaksutyun members fled to Persia and eventually settled in Lebanon; see R. P. Adalian, *Historical Dictionary of Armenia*, Lanham 2010.

18 Javānšīr, *Man az čangāle Stālin*, pp. 80–82.

19 A. M. Topchibashi, *Parizhskii arkhiv 1919–1940* [Parisian Archive], 4 vols., vol. 3: 1924–1930, compiled, translated and forwarded by G. Mamoulia and R. Abutalibov, Moscow 2017, p. 418.

*We learned by the intercepted correspondence all about the [Musavat] party's activity in Azerbaijan and at Constantinople; again we learned of the conversations at Constantinople between Moussavatists and representatives of other disaffected elements in the Caucasus. We learned, too, that the Polish Government had been giving moral and financial support to the anti-Communist elements in the Caucasus, but that, owing to the lack of energy displayed by the latter, it had about this time ceased to remit subventions, which had come to total about a thousand dollars monthly.*<sup>20</sup>

Agabekov also mentioned the role of “Efimoff”, a resident of Anzali, in monitoring the activities of the Musavat Party in Gilan: “All the letters of the Moussavatist chiefs in Gilan fell into Efimoff's hands; he knew every detail of their plans”.<sup>21</sup>

### 3. Looking for Foreign Supporters

On 11 July 1927, in a letter to Tadeusz Hołowko, the director of the Eastern Department of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mohammad Amin Rasulzade requested financial support to proceed with the plans to organize the Committee for the Independence of Caucasus (*Komitet nezavisimosti Kavkaza*) in Persia.<sup>22</sup> In another letter to Hołowko on 25 October 1927, he spoke about the good conditions of the organization in Persia and the increasing expansion of its relations with Soviet Azerbaijan.<sup>23</sup> In April 1928, the National Center of Azerbaijan, an organization under the leadership of Rasulzade in Turkey, presented a report on the activities of the Musavat Party to the Polish officials of the “Promethean movement”:<sup>24</sup>

*Outside [the Republic of] Azerbaijan, the Musavat Party is active wherever Azerbaijanis live. For example, the Musavat Organization in Persia is active in Tabriz, Rasht, Anzali, Khorasan, Tehran, Ardabil, Khoy, Maku and all borderlands of Azerbaijan and Persia; In Turkey: in Istanbul, Trabzon, Kars, Erzurum, Iğdır and Ankara; In Europe: in Germany, in Berlin, Munich and Darmstadt; [and] in France, in Paris. Other political parties of Azerbaijan have no clear structure and their members work individually with the National Center [of Azerbaijan] and the Committee [for] Independence [of Caucasus], which are organized by the Musavat Party. The Musavat Party is the only Azerbaijani organization, including underground clusters inside [Soviet] Azerbaijan and branches abroad, that has a press organ. In addition to Yeni Kafkasya and Azeri*

20 G. Agabekov, *OGPU: The Russian Secret Terror*, New York 1931, pp. 99–100.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 108.

22 Mamoulia/Abutalibov, *Za svobodu*, p. 186.

23 *Ibid.*, pp. 195–197.

24 The Promethean movement (Prometheism or Prometheanism) was a political project initiated by Polish officials during the 1920s and 1930s. Through support for nationalist movements among the major non-Russian peoples living within the Soviet Union's borders, it aimed to weaken the Communist regime.

*Türk in Turkish and L'Azerbaïdjan in French, the party has many journals and also publishes articles in Turkish and Iranian periodicals.*<sup>25</sup>

Simultaneously, the Poles were trying to advance their anti-Soviet plans in Turkey and Persia. Captain Mateusz Iżycki, the Polish military attaché in Turkey, in his report from September 1928 about Azerbaijani émigrés living in Turkey, divided them into two groups: a group influenced by Sadiq Bey Akhundzade<sup>26</sup> who had close ties with the Turkish officials, especially the military authorities, and had the complete trust of the Turks; and the Musavat Party under Rasulzade. As a result of good relations between Ankara and Moscow and Turkish officials' suspicions of Rasulzade's affairs with European governments, he had difficulty working with Turks at that time.<sup>27</sup> Iżycki preferred cooperation with Sadiq and his circle to promote anti-Soviet activities and established friendly relations with him. As a result of this cooperation, a unit was formed in Kars and another in Persia called "Tabriz", located in the village of Chumarly in the district of Gorodamskij.<sup>28</sup> A 40-year-old man with a history of fighting against the Bolsheviks in Karabakh was at the head of the 11-member unit of "Tabriz". The task was to obtain information about the activities of Soviet intelligence agents on the borderlands, the activities of Soviet troops and military exercises in the Caucasus, as well as the theft of military booklets and gas masks.<sup>29</sup>

The role of the leaders of the Musavat Party in giving the name "Azerbaijan" to the Muslim Republic of the South Caucasus – which was controversial and provocative from an Iranian point of view<sup>30</sup> – as well as emphasizing the Turkic identity and siding with the Ottoman Empire and its successor state Turkey was always an obstacle to gaining the unanimous support of the Iranians. And the Soviets were fully aware of this aspect: "The Iranian authorities do not fully trust the Musavatists, especially those who have Turkist

25 Mamoulia/Abutalibov, *Za svobodu*, p. 243.

26 Mohammad Sadiq Akhundzade (Aran) was born in 1895 in Karabakh. With the occupation of the Republic of Azerbaijan by the Bolsheviks, Mohammad Sadiq fled to Persia in 1923 and then migrated to Turkey. In Turkey, he became a member of the "National Center of Azerbaijan" and the foreign bureau of the Musavat party. He was a Pan-Turkist activist and died in 1971 in Istanbul; see S. Şimşir, *Mehmet Sadık Aran Yaşamı ve Mücadelesi* [Mehmet Sadık Aran's Life and Struggle], Istanbul 2012.

27 A. Szymanowicz/A. Yurdatapan, Intelligence cooperation between the Second Republic of Poland and the Republic of Turkey. Part 1 – the 1920s, in: *Journal of Science of the Gen. Tadeusz Kosciuszko Military Academy of Land Forces* 49 (2017) 1, p. 136.

28 It seems that local names were recorded in Polish script. It is unclear whether the ambiguity is from the original text or whether Szymanowicz and Yurdatapan made a mistake in quoting the toponyms. Maybe it meant the Iranian border village of *Çomârlu* in the Qaradagh region.

29 Szymanowicz/Yurdatapan, Intelligence cooperation, p. 137.

30 Following the establishment of the Republic of Azerbaijan in 1918, Iranian authorities and elites considered the use of the historical name of "Azerbaijan" which was applied to the northwestern regions of Iran since ancient times, as a conspiracy by the Young Turks and their Caucasian allies to advance irredentist plans. Therefore, the use of the name "Azerbaijan" was strongly objected to by Iranians, including political leaders in Iranian Azerbaijan. The relations between the two neighbouring countries are still affected by the choice of this toponym; see K. Bayât, *Âdârbâyân dar mowjike târik: Negâhi be mabâhefe melliyune Iran va jarâyede Baku dar tağîre nâme Arân be Âdârbâyân, 1296–1298* [Azerbaijan in the wave of history: A review of debates between Iranian nationalists and Baku newspapers over the change of the name of Aran to Azerbaijan, 1918–1920], Tehran 2011.

tendencies (*turetskoy oriyentatsii*).<sup>31</sup> The reverberations of Iranian dissatisfaction with some actions of the Azerbaijani leaders during the short period of independence echoed through the following years; An obstacle that the Azerbaijani émigrés, again and again, tried to remove.

Through the memoirs of H. Taqizāde<sup>32</sup> and the findings of I. Afšār<sup>33</sup> and K. Bayāt<sup>34</sup>, the unsuccessful efforts of Rasulzade for reconciliation are known. In May 1926, in a letter to the Iranian embassy in Turkey, he demanded attention to the situation of Azerbaijani refugees.<sup>35</sup> Rasulzade knew that sooner or later the support of the Turks would end, and therefore he expected to receive a sign indicating the support of the Iranian government. Rasulzade's letter dated 26 October 1929 to the Iranian government is significant. In this letter, while rejecting Soviet propaganda about the anti-Iranian attitudes of the Musavatists, Rasulzade demanded Tehran's support: "Our organizations [...] have no doubts that most of their hope and trust lies in the help of the neighbouring Islamic countries and especially Iran."<sup>36</sup> 'Abd-al-Ḥosayn Teymūrtāš, the powerful minister of the Pahlavi court (1925–1932), in response to this letter, harshly criticized the policy of the Musavat Party during their leadership in Baku and called them the Ottoman hirelings: "Inform him that the Iranian government is so busy inside that it does not feel the need to intervene in such political adventures!"<sup>37</sup>

Apparently, Rasulzade still had an eye on changing Tehran's opinion: In an article published in the journal *Odlu Yurt*<sup>38</sup> in 1930 about the suppression of the Qashqai rebellion by the Iranian government, he strongly condemned this uprising, despite mentioning the Turkic origin of the Qashqais, as "the only Turkic tribe in the south of Persia". He called it the crystallization of feudalism's struggle with centralism. According to Rasulzade, the Qashqai rebellion was a chain reaction of the reactionary forces of the region – the clergymen, the Khans, and the nomads – against the modernizing plans of the central governments of Turkey, Afghanistan, and Persia. Congratulating this victory "not only to the freedom fighters of Iran but also to all the liberals of the East", Rasulzade praised "Pahlavism"<sup>39</sup> and wrote: "Wishing for his victory in the way of freedom and democracy is one of the obligations for us who have common interests in the East."<sup>40</sup> The Persian version of this article was replicated in a bulletin called *Aḵbār-nāme-ye Qafqās*

31 Mamoulia/Abutalibov, *Za svobodu*, pp. 70–71.

32 H. Taqizāde, *Zendegiye Tūfāni* [A Tempestuous Life], ed. by I. Afšār, Tehran 1993.

33 I. Afšār, *Se nāme az Moḥammad Amin Rasulzāde be Taqizāde* [Three letters from Mohammad Amin Rasulzade to Taqizade], in: *Āyande* 14 (1988) 1–2, pp. 53–65. It has been republished in Taqizāde, *Zendegiye Tūfāni*, pp. 474–485.

34 K. Bayāt, *Yek nāme az Moḥammad Amin Rasulzāde* [A letter from Mohammad Amin Rasulzade], in: *Goftogū* (2002) 33, pp. 57–70.

35 *Ibid.*, pp. 61–62.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 66.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 68.

38 "Odlu Yurt" (The Land of Fire) a monthly (founded by Mohammad Amin Rasulzade) was published in Turkey between 1929 and 1931 in order to promote the "National Idea of Azerbaijan".

39 The Pahlavi dynasty, the last Iranian royal dynasty, was founded by Reza Shah in 1925.

40 M. A. Rasulzade, *Gozāšte bād!* [It's over], in: *Aḵbār-nāme-ye Qafqās*, 22 January 1930, pp. 1–2.

(The Caucasus Newsletter), which was a selection of anti-Soviet articles published by the Promethean activists in Paris and was sent to Persia.<sup>41</sup> During the early months of 1930, issues of *Aḵbār-nāme-ye Qafqās* were seized one after another at the Tabriz post office upon entering the country. In addition, the police department of Gilan realized that Ali Alizade, a member of the Musavat Party who was working in the Turkish Consulate in Rasht, was trying to persuade Qalil Yusefzāde No'eī, the editor of a local newspaper, to republish the contents of *Aḵbār-nāme-ye Qafqās*.<sup>42</sup> When a new wave of immigration from Soviet Azerbaijan to Iran ensued following Stalin's collectivisation programme, the *Aḵbār-nāme-ye Qafqās* published an essay in its third issue (March 1930) and criticized the treatment of the refugees at the hands of the Iranian border guards. At the same time, the French-language journal *Prométhée*, the main organ of the Promethean movement in Paris, mentioned that the Iranians warmly welcomed the refugees and even committees were formed in Tabriz and Ardabil to help them.<sup>43</sup> In the following issues of *Aḵbār-nāme-ye Qafqās*, the criticism of the Iranian government's treatment of refugees continued and became more intense.<sup>44</sup>

In the early 1930s, a large number of refugees from Karabakh, Nakhchivan, Lankaran and Baku – and even some Soviet military forces – rushed to Persia. In addition to the economic and social consequences of immigration, the possibility of the penetration of spies and communist propagandists caused great concern and confusion among the Iranian authorities. However, the criticisms of Musavatists increased in 1931. In an article signed by “Subik Tekin” (Sobaktekin) in *Prométhée*, the condition of Azerbaijani refugees in Persia was compared with that of the slaves in ancient times and the author pleaded for humanitarian intervention by the League of Nations.<sup>45</sup> These positions were not unrelated to the deteriorating relations between the Musavatists and the Iranian government. In a letter from Istanbul to Alimardan Topchibashi<sup>46</sup> in February 1930, Khosrow Sultanov reflected on the news from Tabriz regarding the arrival of refugees:

*Following the collectivization of agriculture, a large number of Karabakhis with their families and livestock went to Iranian Azerbaijan. The Iranian government welcomed them nicely, settled them and provided assistance. The Director of Relief Affairs is Colonel Kalb-Ali Khan Nakhchavanski [Nakjavān].*<sup>47</sup>

41 The mailing address of the bulletin was “161 bis rue de la Convention, Paris 15”. Several issues of this bulletin are available in the National Library and Archives of Iran (NLA).

42 Asnādi az maṭbūāt va aḥzābe dowre-ye Reza Shah [Documents about the press and parties during Reza Shah's reign], Tehran 2001, pp. 94–95.

43 *Prométhée* 5 (1930) 40, p. 28.

44 *Aḵbār-nāme-ye Qafqās*, 28 May 1930, p. 5.

45 S. Tekin, *La Perse et les émigrés* [Persia and the émigrés], in: *Prométhée* 6 (1931) 59, pp. 15–16.

46 Alimardan Topchibashi (Topchibashov), the Speaker of the Parliament of the Republic of Azerbaijan (1918–1920) and the head of the delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the Paris Peace Conference, became one of the leaders of the Azerbaijani émigrés in Western Europe after the Bolsheviks invasion.

47 Topchibashi, *Parizhskiy arkhiv*, vol. 3, p. 671.



Simultaneously, some news about the restrictions for Musavatists in Iran was spread. It was strengthened by Mohammad Ali Rasulzade's departure from Persia to Turkey. Sultanov talked about the possibility of expelling the members of the Musavat Party, like other "anti-Iranian" elements from Iran, and mentioned the role of an influential Nakhchivani circle, led by Rahim Khan Nakhchavanski and Kalb-Ali Khan Nakhchavanski<sup>48</sup>, in inspiring the Iranian authorities to take these actions.<sup>49</sup>

In the spring of 1930, in a meeting with Robert Clive, the British envoy to Tehran, 'Abd-al-Hosayn Teymürtāš, while referring to the Musavat party, considered its attitude toward Iran "unfriendly" and separationist with regard to the Iranian Azerbaijan; However, according to Teymürtāš, the Musavat Party was not a major player.<sup>50</sup> The Musavatists did not have a favourable situation in Turkey either; As in the spring of 1930, the Turkish embassy in Paris refused to issue a visa to Rasulzade, so he had to stay in Europe. Sultanov could not contain his delight at the weakening of the political rivals:

*These people, as you can see, are not only avoided by the Turks and Iranians but they are also hated by them; That is, during these eight years, they could not establish good relations with the authorities of these countries. They have been so reckless that they dreamt of a dictatorship in national affairs by relying on foreign financial aid!*<sup>51</sup>

One of the consequences of the improving relations between Ankara and Moscow was increasing pressure on Caucasian émigrés in Turkey. In 1931, Kemalist Turkey banned all publications of the Musavatists. Could the weakening of the Musavat position in Persia and Turkey provide an opportunity for other Azerbaijani organizations? Perhaps Ali Mardan Topchibashi's letter in June 1931 to the Iranian envoy to Paris was written for this purpose. He first mentioned old relations with Iranian officials, personal contacts with Iranian delegates at the Paris Peace Conference and his efforts to establish the confederation of Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan in 1919.<sup>52</sup> Topchibashi pleaded with the Iranian government for financial assistance in order to be able to pay his debts and pursue political activities. Referring to the treatment of Russian émigrés at the hands of the governments of Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and Poland, he wrote: "The program of any forethoughtful government should include maintaining and strengthening relations with activists and political and cultural figures of neighbouring countries."<sup>53</sup> There is no information available regarding the Iranian authorities' response to Topchibashi's letters.

48 Kalb-Ali Nakhchivanski fled to Persia after the Bolshevik invasion and served as a major officer in the Iranian army. Bolsheviks accused him of supporting Musavat émigrés. During an Iranian army operation against Kurdish rebels near Maku in 1931, colonel Kalb-Ali Khan was killed. Mamulolia and Abutalibov incorrectly stated that Reza Shah ordered his death.

49 Topchibashi, *Parizhskiy arkhiv*, vol. 3, p. 672.

50 K. Bayat, *Şüreşe Kord-häye Torkiye va ta'tire ân bar ravâbeşe kârejiye Iran 1307–1310* [Kurdish revolt in Turkey and its effect on Iran's foreign relations 1928–1932], Tehran 1995, pp. 205–206.

51 Topchibashi, *Parizhskiy arkhiv*, vol. 3, p. 673.

52 Topchibashi, *Parizhskiy arkhiv*, vol. 4, 1931–1940, pp. 40–42.

53 *Ibid.*, p. 43.

#### 4. Zalewski in Tehran

The death of Józef Piłsudski in May 1935 was a wretched event for the Caucasian members of the Promethean movement who were fighting against the Soviet Union with the support of Poland. The stabilization and consolidation of the Bolshevik regime and its acceptance into the League of Nations in 1934, as well as Moscow's success in crushing the opposition groups and activists, gradually weakened the anti-Bolshevik struggle. The formation of the anti-communist bloc consisting of Nazi Germany and Japan in the mid-1930s and the signing of the Anti-Comintern Pact in November 1936 raised new hopes among the opponents of the Soviet regime.

Masatane Kanda, the Japanese military attaché in Turkey from 1932 to 1934, before the end of his mission, explained the possibilities available to target the Soviet Union. According to him, "At the present moment, the best chance to organize illegal communication networks within Soviet territory is through Azerbaijani groups across the Soviet-Persian borders."<sup>54</sup> Therefore, the possibility of using Khosrow Sultanov, called "Doctor Polad", was raised, whose "relatives and his former subordinates live in Persia near the Soviet-Persian borders".<sup>55</sup> In this report the possibility of mobilizing of about a thousand combatants in Persia was mentioned.<sup>56</sup> Kanda tried to establish relations with Soviet Azerbaijan through Persia, and following the appointment of Masao Ueda as the Japanese military attaché in Tehran in 1933, he was entrusted with this task.<sup>57</sup> In May 1935, Ueda mentioned Azerbaijanis as the best option to advance Japan's anti-Soviet plans; especially considering that "the treasure of the Soviet Union, the Baku oil fields" was located in their land.<sup>58</sup> Ironically, both of the above confidential reports were intercepted by Soviet intelligence agents and a copy of them was sent to Moscow.

When a Polish diplomat arrived in Tehran in 1937, he started activities to strengthen the anti-Soviet activities in Iran. Ksawery Józef Zalewski, a war veteran, joined the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the second half of the 1920s. In 1935, Zalewski was entrusted with one of the most important Polish consular posts in the Soviet Union, i.e. Tbilisi. Two years later, he was appointed as the first secretary of the Embassy of Poland in Tehran. Zalewski wanted to communicate with Caucasian and Central Asian émigrés in Iran and estimate their capacities, and for this purpose, he made at least a trip to the northwest of Iran.

In June 1938, he sent a detailed confidential report to Warsaw about the conditions of Caucasian immigrants and refugees in Iran and their capabilities in order to plan political

54 H. Kuromiya/G. Mamoulia, *The Eurasian Triangle: Russia, the Caucasus and Japan 1904–1945*, Warsaw/Berlin 2016, p. 141.

55 *Ibid.*, p. 140.

56 *Ibid.*, pp. 140–141.

57 *Ibid.*, p. 141.

58 *Ibid.*, p. 142.

and military activities against the Soviet Union.<sup>59</sup> According to him, Iranian Azerbaijan and the nomads of this region could play an important role in advancing the operations against the interests of the Soviet Union in the Caucasus. Zalewski's efforts to activate the Promethean network and advance anti-Soviet measures in Iran definitely did not go unnoticed by Tehran authorities. Apparently, this led to a disagreement between him and Hempel, the – Polish ambassador in Tehran at that time.<sup>60</sup> Stanisław Hempel, the adjutant of Józef Piłsudski during World War I, joined the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1919 and was sent to missions in Bucharest, Istanbul, and Prague. His appointment as the first envoy of the Republic of Poland to Tehran (from 1925 as *chargé d'affaires*; from 1928 as ambassador),<sup>61</sup> and the continuation of his mission until the end of 1938, is noteworthy. Hempel, who had an influential role in the formation and promotion of Warsaw-Tehran relations, was well aware of the sensitivities of the Iranian officials. Turkey, depending on its relations with Moscow, adopted different and sometimes contradictory position towards anti-Soviet activities on its territory, and the Poles even co-operated with some Turkish officials in this regard. For example, in September 1932, during the trip of Major Stanisław Gano to Turkey, he met with some military officials regarding cooperation against the Soviet Union. Gano was later appointed as the head of the Eastern Division of the Polish Army. In one of the meetings, the idea of establishing a joint operation centre in Tabriz was proposed by the Turkish side.<sup>62</sup> In negotiations with high-ranking officials of the Pahlavi government, such as Teymūrtāš, Hempel tried to get Tehran's approval towards the activities of the Promethean movement in Persia. The response of the Iranians was negative.<sup>63</sup> Now the newly arrived Zalewski wanted to design and direct a new round of anti-Soviet actions in Iran. He realized that due to the Iranian government's suspicion toward any political activity and Moscow's pressure on Tehran, there was no favourable ground for the operation against the Soviet Union through Iranian territory. However, "the Iranian government treats the immigration and presence of these refugees in its territory with condescension and has even repeatedly rejected the requests of the Soviet embassy to put pressure on prominent figures of the *émigrés*".<sup>64</sup> Zalewski's assessment was that the Caucasian refugees in Iran could provide an opportunity for the secret activities of anti-Soviet organizations based in Europe and Turkey.

59 I greatly appreciate Shahla Kazimova (University of Warsaw) who provided me with this valuable document. I am very grateful to Stanisław Jaśkowski (University of Warsaw) for the translation of the document.

60 J. Zalewski, *Przepowiednia częściowo spełniona* [Prediction partially fulfilled], Kraków 2017, pp. 34–36.

61 A. Wasilewski, *Polska – Iran: Stosunki dyplomatyczne, konsularne, handlowe i kulturalne, 1918–1939* [Poland – Iran: Diplomatic, consular, commercial and cultural relations] [with Persian and English translations], Warsaw 2020, p. 17.

62 A. Szymanowicz/A. Yurdatapan, Intelligence Cooperation between the Second Republic of Poland and the Republic of Turkey. Part 2 – the 1930s, in: *Journal of Science of the Gen. Tadeusz Kosciuszko Military Academy of Land Forces* 49 (2017), p. 186.

63 Thanks to Iurii Chainskyi for sharing this data with me.

64 K. J. Zalewski, *Imigracja Zakaukaska w terenie Iranu* [Transcaucasian immigrants in Iran], 11/P/3 (17 czerwca 1938) [17 June 1938], *Centralne Archiwum Wojskowe* [Central Military Archives], unpublished document, p. 1.

After examining the situation of Georgian and Armenian émigrés, as well as the remnants of the Musavat Party, Zalewski found them ineffective and unreliable and finally went to Mohammad Sadiq (Akhundzadeh), who at that time was operating in Iran, undercover as a correspondent of Turkish state newspapers, *Ulus* and *Cumhuriyet*.<sup>65</sup> Zalewski admitted that despite the lack of ethnic consciousness among the Turkic-speaking Iranians, the sensitivity of the Iranian authorities towards any political activism in the Azerbaijan province would be aroused; especially if members of the Turkist Party of Musavat were involved. However, compared to their Georgian and Armenian counterparts, the Azerbaijani refugees in Iran were more effective tools against the Soviet Union.<sup>66</sup> The Georgians were few and ineffective and the Armenians, despite their significant population, had a mixed attitude towards the Soviet Union. When the Iranian authorities were informed a large number of members of the Dashnaksutyun party leaning towards Moscow and expanding their connections with the Bolsheviks, they did not hesitate to suppress them.<sup>67</sup>

Finally, Zalewski introduced the organization that he intended to help Mohammad Sadiq in creating as follows:

*The basis of the ideology of this organization is the Pan-Turanian idea. The aforementioned organization strives for the complete independence of [the Republic of] Azerbaijan, which is supposed to be a member of the Union of Turkic-Muslim Republics in the future, which will be built on the ruins of the Soviet Union.*<sup>68</sup>

This was not the first time (and certainly not the last time) that a European state used pan-Turkism to weaken and divide Russia. The indirect consequences of this policy affected Persia, but unexpected events were ahead. In February 1939, Zalewski suddenly fell ill and died in Tehran after a few days.<sup>69</sup> A few months later, the Second Polish Republic was invaded by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union.

## 5. Dreams in a Time of War

In the second half of the 1930s, when the fight between National-Socialism and Communism seemed inevitable and the collapse of the Soviet Union as well, there were whispers among the Caucasian émigrés' dreams of forming "Greater Georgia", "Greater Armenia", and "Greater Azerbaijan". For that, the collapse of the Soviet Union was not enough, but the disintegration of parts of Iran and Turkey was necessary as well. Claims like this were met with the reaction of Haider Bammatt, a Dagestani political activist

65 Ibid., p. 10. In Zalewski's report, the records of Mohammad Sadiq's cooperation with the Poles are not mentioned.

66 Ibid., pp. 5–6.

67 Ibid., pp. 4–5.

68 Ibid., pp. 10–11.

69 Later, Zalewski's son suggested his father may have been assassinated; see Zalewski, *Przepowiednia częściowo spełniona* [Prediction partially fulfilled], p. 45–51.

and the leader of the émigré organization known as the “Caucasus Group”, and he emphasized the importance of maintaining friendly relations with Tehran and Ankara and refraining from creating suspicion among the two southern neighbours. Bammāt’s insistence on introducing the Aras River as the southern border of the Caucasus, which was against the idea of Greater Azerbaijan, provoked the displeasure of the Musavatists, and as a result, they tried to prevent the publication of the organ of the Caucasus group in Turkey, *Kafkas Almanagi*.<sup>70</sup> When Zorab Avalishvili, a member of the Caucasus Group, criticized the approach of the journal *Kurtuluş*, which was published by Rasūlzade in Berlin in the 1930s, in involving the fates of Caucasus Azerbaijan with Iranian Azerbaijan and the Turkic world, he was accused of Turkophobia by the Musavatists. Avalishvili wrote in response:

*From the Caucasian perspective, it is very important to understand how the national consciousness of Caucasian Azerbaijan will develop. Apparently, Kurtulusch has little interest in the Caucasian nature of the country: he sees Azerbaijan in the broad sense, and he also sees the whole Turkish world from China to the Mediterranean.*<sup>71</sup>

Following the invasion of Poland by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union in 1939, Mohammad Amin Rasūlzade went to Romania. During this period, he cooperated with the Nazis in the establishment of the National Committee of Azerbaijan, and followed Germany’s anti-Soviet plans; But finally, he returned to Bucharest due to some disagreements. In the same period, Rasūlzade, in response to the decision of the Soviet authorities to commemorate the 800th anniversary of the birth of the great Persian poet, Nizami of Ganja, started writing the book *Nizami, the poet of Azerbaijan*. This work was completed after Rasūlzade emigrated to Turkey in 1947 and was published in 1951 by the Turkish Ministry of Education.

Rasūlzade’s attempt to introduce Nizami as the national poet of Azerbaijan required formulating a different narrative of the historical and cultural relations between Azerbaijan and Persia, and therefore it was expected that his act of introducing Nizami as an Azerbaijani would cause dissatisfaction and protest among Iranians.<sup>72</sup> According to Rasūlzade, Nizami had nothing to do with Iranian (Persian) nationalism; on the other hand, in his poems, he praised Turks, he belonged to the Caucasian milieu and had a permanent linkage with the historical and geopolitical destinies of his homeland.<sup>73</sup> In dualizing the Iranian and Turkish identities and emphasizing the Turkic nature of Azerbaijan, the Musavati émigrés in Turkey adopted a tougher position.

Following the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 and the German efforts to persuade Turkish authorities to cooperate, Pan-Turkism found a new opportunity to

70 G. Mamoulia, L’histoire du groupe Caucase (1934–1939), in: Cahiers du monde russe 48 (2007) 1, pp. 60–62.

71 Ibid., p. 55.

72 M. ə. Rəsulzadə, Azərbaycan şairi Nizami [Nizami: the poet of Azerbaijan], Baku 2011, p. 24.

73 Ibid., p. 53.

show off in the Turkish political arena.<sup>74</sup> In August 1941, Franz von Papen, the German Ambassador to Turkey, quoted one of his sources that in view of German victories in Russia, Turkish officials are showing growing attention to the fate of the Turkic brothers beyond the borders, especially the Azerbaijani Turks.<sup>75</sup> von Papen's source considered the employment of Mohammad Amin Rasulzade, based in Europe, and his representative in Turkey, Mirzabala Mohammadzade, valuable for using the capacity of the Azerbaijanis against the Soviet Union. Von Papen was completely aware of the sensitivity of Iranians towards the activity of Azerbaijani circles and its consequences for Persia.<sup>76</sup>

In late August 1941, the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union invaded neutral Iran in Operation Countenance following Nazi Germany's attack on the Soviet Union. In this period, the Iranian central government was in crisis and foreign armies seized control of parts of the country. After Soviet forces deployed along Iran's northern half (including Azerbaijan province), persecution and murder of émigrés and anti-communist activists began.<sup>77</sup> At the same time as the Wehrmacht was advancing into Soviet territory, which, if successful for a longer time, would have made a change in the political map of the region possible, Mohammad Sadiq Akhundzade, by publishing the book *İran Türkleri* (The Turks of Iran) in Istanbul in 1942, openly spoke about the disintegration of Iran and the separation of Azerbaijan. Mohammad Sadiq, who chose the surname "Aran"<sup>78</sup> for himself in Turkey, was among those involved in Pan-Turkist circles and periodicals. The author of the book *İran Türkleri* was introduced as an Iranian immigrant living in Turkey named "San'an Azer", which was actually Aran's epithet. He spoke about the continuous exploitation and oppression of the Turks by the Persian people and the state. He announced: "The Persian government in Iran is over. We, the Turks of Iran, will not carry the rotting coffin of that country. Now that there is no news of the Iranian government anymore, the time has come to assert our rights [...]. Our goal is to assert our rights."<sup>79</sup> Criticizing Turkish intellectuals and journalists who did not want to address the issues of Turkic minorities and considered Turkey's national interests superior, he wrote:

*Are you right to sacrifice us, the Turks of Iran, for your friendship with the Shah? Instead of fulfilling Turkey's responsibility toward the national awakening among the oppressed Turks, including Iranian Turks, you are handing it over to the enemies!*<sup>80</sup>

74 K. Bayât, Pântürânizm dar jange Dovvome jahāni [Pan-Turanism in the World War II], in: Goftogū (2014) 66, pp. 111–132.

75 Ibid., p. 115.

76 Ibid., p. 117.

77 For a first-hand report, see Javānšīr, Man az čangāle Stālin.

78 Arān/Arrān (Albania) was an Iranian geographical name for a region of eastern Transcaucasia.

79 S. Azer, *İran Türkleri* [Iranian Turks], Ankara 1942, p. 3.

80 Ibid., p. 4.

In a very short description of Soviet activities in Iran, Aran ethnocentrically referred to the killings of 650 “Turkic” intellectuals (*Türk münevverî*) in Tabriz and 150 “Turkic” youths (*Türk genci*) in Tehran by “the Red domineering gangs”.<sup>81</sup>

The failure of Operation Barbarossa and the change of the course of the war put an end to the dreams of Caucasian activists, including the Musavatists. Interestingly, part of the goals and plans that Mohammad Sadiq Aran and his comrades had for Iranian Azerbaijan was realized not by the Nazis, but by their communist nemesis. The threatening nature of the establishment of the autonomous government of Azerbaijan in Iran with the full backing of the Soviet Union in September 1945 was so great for Turkey that in some cases it even led to the support of the territorial integrity and national unity of Iran in the Turkish press.<sup>82</sup> But Musavatists tried to prevent overlooking the demand for the separation of Azerbaijan from Iran while fighting against the Soviet Union. Simultaneously with the collapse of the Soviet-backed autonomous government of Iranian Azerbaijan on 13 December 1946, Mohammad Sadiq Aran, wrote in the journal *Şark Yolu* about the damages of the Soviet Union, Great Britain, and the Pahlavi government to Iranian Azerbaijan and emphasized the need to enlighten the international community about the Azerbaijani question in Iran.<sup>83</sup> Additionally, Mirzabala Mohammadzade wrote in the newspaper *Tasvir* that “both in terms of archaeology as well as population and language, Iranian Azerbaijan complements Soviet Azerbaijan”.<sup>84</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

The formation of new political entities in the former territory of the tsarist empire, especially the emergence of the three republics of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan in the South Caucasus in 1918, faced Iranians with new challenges in the long-time familiar areas, which were considered part of the territory of the Shahanshahs a hundred years ago. As a part of the efforts of Iranian officials and elites in those stormy years, they engaged in managing relations with the young Republic of Azerbaijan. The establishment of the Soviet Union in 1922 created a new order that led to the restriction and breakup of relations between Persia and the neighbouring areas in the Caucasus and Central Asia until the early 1990s.

In the meantime, despite the large-scale immigration of Azerbaijanis to Persia after the Bolshevik invasion, little attention has been paid to this issue and the presence and activities of Azerbaijani émigrés in Turkey and Europe has remained central. The approach of Reza Shah's government to the refugees as a security threat, the priority of Iran's for-

81 Ibid. In 1942, Aran's book was introduced by Nihâl Atsız, a prominent Turkish ultranationalist thinker, in the Turkist journal “Çınaraltı”.

82 M. A. Bahmani Qājār, *Negarānihāye Torkiye: āmad va nayāmade Pāntorkizm* [Turkey's concerns: Opportunities and threats of Pan-Turkism], in *Goftogū* (2007) 48, pp. 109–121.

83 S. Şimşir, *Azerbaycan'ın İstiklal Mücadelesi* [Azerbaijan's Struggle for Independence], Istanbul 2002, p. 132.

84 Bahmani Qājār, *Negarānihāye Torkiye*, p. 118.

eign policy in de-escalating relations with the Soviet Union and Turkey, the memory of tensions between Tehran and Baku in the years 1918 to 1920, and the prevalence of the Turkist and pro-Turkish discourse among Azerbaijani politicians, especially Musavatists, resulted in neglecting the Azerbaijani exodus to Persia. After the Second World War, a new round of activities of the Musavatists began; The period when Rasulzade's idea of "Azerbaijan" was closely linked with the necessities of Turkey's domestic and foreign policy and the Cold War issues. Azerbaijani activists were supported by Turkey and the West, and they no longer saw much need to remove the old suspicions of Iranians. Moreover, Iran, at the forefront of the confrontation between the West and the Soviet Union, was so involved in various domestic issues and problems in the 1950s and 1960s. Undoubtedly, due to the nationalist approach of the Pahlavi government and the emphasis on the Aryan spirit of the nation-state of "Iran", there was no desire to cooperate with Turkist circles, even if they were against communism as the common enemy.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Republic of Azerbaijan emerged as a neighbour with the most kinship and connections in the northern borders of Iran. Nevertheless, the relations between Tehran and Baku, from the very beginning, were accompanied by difficulties and complications, which have continued and intensified in various forms until now. Disregarding and disremembering the different aspects of the shared history of Iranians and Azerbaijanis, according to the goals of identity politics and official historiography, is part of this process.