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## The March Genocide of 1918 in Baku

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### Abstract

This article deals with the massacres committed by armenians in Baku in 1918. On July 15, 1918, the Council of Ministers of Azerbaijan Republic adopted a decree on the establishment of Extraordinary Investigation Commission (EIC), "to investigate the assaults made on Muslims and their property within the entire Caucasus since the beginning of the European war". The materials of Extraordinary Investigation Commission are the unique source for investigating the genocide against Turkish-Muslim population in Azerbaijan from March till September in 1918. These documents are proved arguments show that the genocide against Azerbaijanis is one of the horrible tragedies had been rarely met in the history of humanity. We must give due to the first young Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan, in the most complicated and hardest conditions of its existence and activities as quickly and discreetly reacted to these events and had taken concrete steps.

**Key Words:** genocide, armenians, archive documents, Extraordinary Investigation Commission, Baku, Azerbaijan

### Introduction

The declaration of independence in 1918 enabled Azerbaijan to investigate crimes against Turks and other Muslim population in their homeland. One of the significant decisions of the newly formed government was the establishment of an Extraordinary Investigation Commission June 15, 1918, to investigate crimes committed by dashnak gangs. This is the indicator of national memory to tragic events happened in the life of Azerbaijani people and its state powers. The Azerbaijan Democratic Republic implementing into life the desires of Azerbaijan people were a sweet surprise for them and started practical activities about investigating those events. So, in July 1918, the Council of Ministers of Azerbaijan Democratic Republic considered it necessary to express its attitude to what had been happening in the country, particularly by the facts of violence against the peaceful Azerbaijani population, according to the report of the Minister of Foreign Affairs Mammad Hasan Hajinsky. It was mentioned in the statement:

"It is already four months, Armenian extorters had been committing atrocities against the civilian Muslim population, taking their lives and belongings. At the same moment as a result of misinformation, nations of Europe had a wrong image of the ongoing processes and these factors necessitated the establishment of a special commission" (Azerbaijan Republic State Archive, fund 1061, record 1, case 95, sheet 1). It was mentioned and stressed in the report that it was necessary to create an organization which would "accurate registration of all cases of violence; the circumstances under which committed violence; establishing the perpetrators and losses caused by them as in the national interests and in the interest of affected populations" (Azerbaijan Republic State Archive, f.1061, r.1, c.95, s.1) He argued that the entity should be vested with extraordinary authorities. Documents to be collected by the commission should be translated into the Azerbaijani, Russian, English, French, and German

languages. M.H.Hajinsky especially stressed that it was necessary to organizing Investing Committee immediately “because today it is easy to take interviews, photos and other evidences, that will be more difficult afterwards, maybe will not be available then” (Azerbaijan Republic State Archive, f.1061, r.1, c.95, s.1).

### **Establishment of the Extraordinary Investigation Commission**

At the same meeting – July 15, 1918 the Council of Ministers of Azerbaijan Republic adopted a decree on the establishment of the Extraordinary Investigation Commission, “for the investigation of violence made against Muslims and their property within the entire South Caucasus since the beginning of the European war” (Azerbaijan Republic State Archive, f.1061, r.1, c.95, s.2). It was the first attempt for giving political value to carrying genocide against Azerbaijanis and the processes of occupation Azerbaijan territories more than a century in history. According to the decision signed on the 31 August 1918 by the head of Democratic Republic, at the same time the minister of Foreign Affairs Fataly Khan Khoysky the Extraordinary Investigation Commission consisting of 7 members was organized. It was stated in the decision: “For fulfilling the government’s decision on 15 July, 1918 - lawyer Alakbar bey Khasmammadov was appointed the chairman of the investigation commission (later the chairman of the Azerbaijani Chamber of Appeals), Ismayil bey Shahmaliyev and Andrey Fomich Novatsky became members of the Ganja District Court, Nasreddin Sefikurdski was appointed the assistant public prosecutor of the Ganja District Court, and Nikolay Mikhailovch Mikhailov, V.V. Gudvillo from the Ganja Migration Office and teacher Mirza Javad Akhuzade were also included into the Commission” (Azerbaijan Republic State Archive, f.1061, r.1, c.95, s.3). Though the Extraordinary Investigation Commission was formed within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the commission was attached to the Ministry of Justice by the decision of Prime Minister Fataly Khan Khoyski on September 22, 1918. The assistant public prosecutor of Baku District Court Alexander Yevgeniyevich Kluge, the member of the grand jury Mammad Khan Tekinski, the investigator for particularly important cases of the Ganja District Court Mehdiyeddin Shahmaliyev, the member of the Baku Guberniya District Court Hidayet Sutanov,

members of the grand jury Aley Adamovich Litovsky, Cheslav Klossovsky, lawyer Abbasali bey Haji Irzayev, and the member of Baku District Court B.Yusifbeyov sat on the commission at various times (Isgenderli Anar, 2011). Extraordinary Investigation Commission materials collected by August 1919 was 36 volumes and 35000 pages, 6 volumes (740 pages) of them reflected violent acts, performed on the Muslim population of the city of Baku and its environs. Azerbaijanis underwent attacks and lootings in Shamakhi, Goychay, Ganja, Nukha, Gazakh, Lankaran, Salyan, Javad, Garabagh, Zangezur, Irevan - in short, in all provinces of Azerbaijan.

### **Documents of the Extraordinary Investigation Commission**

Inhabitant of Baku city A.N.Kvasnikin who was questioned as a witness by Investigation Commission said: “On 17-21 of March of this year (by the old calendar) incidents of Baku may be explained in this way without being conscience-stricken: “It was a bloody attempt of Armenians against to the Muslims for the purpose of annihilating Muslim people firstly in Baku, then around the city, plundering all their properties and assimilating all their properties and political superiority by Armenians.”” (ARSA, f.1061, r.1, c.95, s.2). Unbridled and wild Armenian bandits used severe methods for destroying Azerbaijan people. The member of Extraordinary Investigating Commission A.Y.Kluge wrote in his report “Violence that carried out against to the Muslim people of Baku city”: “Well armed, trained Armenian soldiers attacked accompanying number of machine-guns.....Armenians invaded Muslim houses, destroyed the inhabitants of these houses, cut them by sabre and dagger and punched a hole by using bayonet, threw the children into the burning house, shook three-four days babies on the tip of bayonet, they didn’t take a pity on infants whose parents killed and they committed murder”. (Azerbaijan Republic State Political Parties and Public Movement Archive, fund 277, record 2, case 16, sheet 20). Besides killing Muslims, Armenians destroyed their properties and stole little valuable things. Afterwards only in one place 57 Muslim women and girls’ corpses were found under the ground. Their ears, noses were cut off, their bellies torn open. Armenians tied the women to one another with their plates, carried them bareheaded and

barefoot in the cabs, they bit and crippled them using the butts of rifles on the road. (ARSPPMA, f.277, r.2, c.16, s.18). According to the documents of Investigation Commission within March genocide of 1918 up to 11 thousand Turk-Muslim were killed in Baku city. Most of their corpses were not found. Because according to the explanation of witnesses, Armenians threw corpses into burning houses, to the sea and wells in order to hide the criminal. (ARSPPM, f.277, r.2, c.16, s.18). 400 million manat jewellery and property from Baku people were confiscated. Number of sanctuary and historical monuments of the people were destroyed completely. Tezezir mosque was damaged by long-range gun. Dashnaks burned "Ismailiyye" building that considered one of the world architectural temples. (ARSPPM A, f.277, r.2, c.13-16, s.25-26). In the Investigation Commission materials, it is said about this wildness: "On 18 March 1918 one Armenian officer besides three Armenian soldiers came into side-street among "Kaspi" newspaper Editorial office and "Ismailiyye" Muslim charitable society and entered into "Ismailiyye" building. After a while smoke and flame were in the window of the building. The building, which is not only considered a pride of Baku Muslims but also a beauty of this city was destroyed by fire. There was not any person in order to put out the fire, because the Muslims were not able to go to the street, they were fired by machine-guns and weapons". That officer was Tatevos Amirov, the famous statesman of "Dashnaksutyun". This man was the very Tatevos, whom Soviet historians and press propagated him as "invincible revolutioner", "real fighter for peoples' friendship". Robbers burned the Editorial office of "Kaspi" newspaper and the buildings of "Dagestan" hotel, "Iskenderiyye", "Ismailiyye". (ARSPPMA, f.277, r.2, c.16, s.18). Not only Azerbaijan Muslims, but also all Caucasus Muslims were injured in these massacres. Baku Muslim charitable society and Caucasus Muslim Committees were situated in "Ismailiyye", here money and documents belonged to those organizations were kept, meetings and congresses of Muslims were held here. In editorial office of "Kaspi" newspaper books were published in Azeri. 5 thousand copies of Quran were kept here in "Kaspi" editorial office. All of them were burned. In March pillages besides well-organized military parts, Armenian intellectuals and youths participated here. It is mentioned in the Investigation Commission materials that "representatives who

represented all classes of Armenian people considered themselves obliged to take part in this "war". There was oil proprietor, engineers, doctors, contour employees; on the whole all the layers of Armenian people realized their "civil debts"". (ARSA, f.100, r.1, c.791, s.791). 10 armed sailors under by the led of pilot Rozenblyumun to Kazim Akhundov, the assistant of commander of steamer "Nikolay Buniatov" on 6 April for defending of Chenberekend upland part of Baku. Akhundov began to collect the corpses in the Nikolayev street on 7 April. Among them there were the corpses of 3 Muslim gymnasium pupils who were cut off into pieces by sword and bayoneted, 11 gymnasium girls, 1 Russian woman, 3 Muslim boys at the age of 3-5, 8 Russian men, 19 Iranian Muslim women and 67 Azerbaijani corpses who were from different professions. Besides this, 6748 corpses of women and children were delivered to the bridge of "Vulkan" society. Akhundov carried his acquaintance Vladimir Sokolov to the place called "Kerpjikhana". Here he took 3 photos. The first photo was of a woman who had a bullet wound in her head, 5 bayonets wound in her body and a sword blow in her right collar-bone. On her right breast there was a baby still alive. There was a bayonet wound on the leg of baby. The second picture was of a child age of 2 who was nailed up to the wall with a big tack. It is clear from the top of nail that he was nailed up to the wall by stone. The stone was still there. The first photo was a corpse of a girl age of 13-14. It seems from the photo that a teenage girl was raped. When Akhundov entered room 4 th together with Sokolov they saw a terrible view: there were corpses of a girl age of 22-23 on the floor of a large room, 2 women, a girl age of 9, a boy age of 8 and infant. Dogs ate the legs and hands of the baby. Described view influenced Sokolov and he was not able to take more photos. Robbers did not take a pity on their acquaintances, for instance on 20 March Stepan Lalayev together with the group of Armenian soldiers invaded into the flat of doctor Beybala bey Sultanov residing at the address of Vorrontsov and killed him by taking revolver. By coming down to the yard Lalayev shot Muslim employee, his wife and his son age of 2. Armed Armenians till thirty invaded Mashadi Ahmad Rahim's son, valuable things in the sum of 34 thousand 840 manat were stolen. Mashadi Ahmad recognized tailor Hayki and shop-keeper Yekhus. Tragic events that took place in Baku damaged the city greatly. Epidemy was

revolted and killed thousands of people; they were not given water and food. It can be called that all food and products in the market and shops were disappeared. Robbers gathered and carried all food. The press was writing: "People were tortured by hunger". The unbridled and savage Armenian gangs used the most brutal methods to kill Azerbaijani civilians. A.Y.Kluge, member of the Extraordinary Investigation Commission, wrote in a report titled "On the Case of Violence against the Muslim Population of Baku: Based on the documents of the investigation commission, approximately eleven thousand Azerbaijanis were killed in Baku in March of 1918 Bodies of many people were missing; according to witnesses' testimonies, Armenians threw corpses into burning houses, the sea, and wells to cover up the crimes. It is also known that well-armed and trained Armenian soldiers attacked using numerous machine-guns (Azerbaijan Republic State Political Parties and Public Movement Archive, fund 277, record 2, case 27, sheet 16-24). The invasion of Baku by the Eleventh Red Army on April 27 and subsequent subjugation of all other parts of Azerbaijan thwarted the accomplishment of the mission of the Azerbaijani government on ensuring territorial integrity of the country. A number of territories, including Zangezour, were annexed to Soviet Armenia. The massacres of the Muslim population in 1918-1920 thus proved to be a policy of genocide deliberately planned and executed by the Dashnaksutyun toward the establishment of "Great Armenia" (Isgenderli Anar, 2011).

### Conclusion

The mass genocide of Azerbaijanis by Armenians and their driving out from their homelands was the most tragic and terrible pages of the XX century history. Many years were spent silently over these events. The March genocide was not only forgotten in the period of Soviets, but it was also announced as the "civil war". Only in 1991 after regaining of its sovereignty Azerbaijan realities kept many years along and circumstances re-establishing of objective history were printed on media. We must give due to the first young Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan, in the most complicated and hardest conditions of its existence and activities as quickly and discreetly reacted to these events and had taken concrete steps. The March genocide of 1918 had been studied from the legal point of view by the

Extraordinary Investigation Commission operating under the government of Azerbaijan Democratic Republic and had officially historical truth in the documents that hadn't got an excuse in any case. These meanly acts were repeatedly carried out for a long time against Azerbaijanis and never received its political-legal assessment in the chain of bloody violence's.

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