

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF ARMENIA

SUMGAIT: THE SILENCE

**A MASTER'S ESSAY SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF
POLITICAL SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
FOR PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS**

BY

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YEREVAN, ARMENIA

DECEMBER 2011

SIGNATURE PAGE

Faculty Advisor Date

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American University of Armenia

December 2011

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe my deepest gratitude to my Faculty Advisor Dr. Khatchik Der Ghougassian for his encouragement, constant support, guidance, patience, valuable advice and keen interest from the preliminary to the concluding level of the study.

I am heartily thankful to my Professor Dr. Lucig H. Danielian not only for the provided analytical skills and knowledge that enabled me to develop an understanding of the field of the Political Science, but also for making me value the Independence of my country.

The successful completion of this Master's Essay was made possible through the invaluable contribution of all the members of the Faculty of the School of Political Science and International Affairs who shared their precious knowledge and skills throughout the two unique years of studies at the American University of Armenia.

Working on my thesis would be a lot different without the love, support, care and belief of my mother, father and sister. I would like to thank these precious persons for making my "American dream" come true even within the borders of my tiny Armenia.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APNM	Armenian Pan-National Movement
EP	European Parliament
NKAO	Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Oblast
OSCE	Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe
RA	Republic of Armenia
SSR	Soviet Socialist Republic
SU	Soviet Union
TASS	The Telegraphic Agency of the Soviet Union
UN	United Nations
US	United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

ABSTRACT

This Master's Essay examines the level of importance attached to the issue of the official recognition of the ethnic cleansings of the Armenian population in the Azerbaijani city Sumgait as genocide on the foreign policy agenda of the Republic of Armenia. The issue is discussed through the prism that the official recognition of genocide is not a singular political project, but a dynamic political stance taken by a subject of international law, e.g. sovereign state. The politics of genocide recognition is shaped by the influence of domestic politics, as well as regional and international relations of the state which sponsor initiatives to obtain official genocide recognition. The case of the Sumgait massacres is examined in the chronological order starting from the politics of the Soviet Union to the policy developed by the Third President of the Republic of Armenia.

INTRODUCTION

The anti-Armenian massacres in the Azerbaijani Sumgait city during the last three days of February 1988 were the trigger that turned the political confrontation around the Nagorno Karabakh into a violent conflict leaving no room for peaceful debates or compromises. The pogroms of Armenians in Sumgait have arguably been the first ethnic cleansing campaign and large scale violence on the territory of the Soviet Union. This outburst of violence came in the light of the series of peaceful demonstrations by Armenians in the Autonomous Region of Nagorno Karabakh, then part of the Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) of Azerbaijan, and SSR of Armenia demanding the implementation of a constitutional procedure for the peaceful secession of Nagorno Karabakh from Azerbaijan.

The official Soviet figures show that the outburst of violence left 32 people dead, 26 Armenians and 6 Azeris. But in the context of the numerous attempts by the Soviet authorities to downplay the ethnic connotation of the violence and represent it as a mere hooliganism these official figures cannot reveal the real consequences of these tragic events. Some non-official sources¹ mention that the numbers of casualties had reached about 115 and 197 victims. In the following years, as the conflict escalated, a chain of massacres occurred throughout the territory of Azerbaijan SSR and Nagorno Karabakh, and as a result the problem of refugees and forcefully displaced people emerged both in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

¹ See Chorbajian L., Donabedian P., Mutafian C. "The Caucasian Knot - the History and Geo-Politics of Nagorno-Karabagh," 1994, p. 150 ; Сумгаит... Геноцид... Гласность? (составители: Г. Б. Улубабян, С. Т. Золян, А. А. Аршакян), 1989, с. 55; Լևոն Մելիք-Շահնազարյան, «Ադրբեջանի ռազմական հանցագործությունները Լեռնային Ղարաբաղի հանրապետության խաղաղ բնակչության դեմ», 1998, էջ 25-26; Լիլիթ Պողոսյան, «Հայերն ապրել են, ապրում են և կապրեն»: Միայն թե՛ առանց հիշողության կորստի. - Ազգ, 28 փետրվարի 1998 թ., թիվ 34 (1537):

The events in Sumgait are analyzed through the prism of two main perspectives. The first perspective discusses the events of February 1988 as spontaneous actions undertaken by uncontrollable masses, whereas the second one stresses the fact that the massacres were deliberately planned and organized. Facts support the latter perspective: a set of provocations were disseminated into the public; the lists of the flats, where Armenians lived were deliberately designed; the telephones were turned off only in the houses where Armenians lived; and the weapons used during the violence were prepared beforehand. Accordingly, different answers were provided to the question who should bear the responsibility for the atrocities and which political forces were interested in the sponsorship of these crimes. However, the crimes went unpunished and Sumgait settled an antecedent for the future massacres in Baku, Kirovabad, Maragha and other parts of Azerbaijan where Armenians lived.

Yet, after Armenia gained independence in 1991, and in the midst of an ongoing war with Azerbaijan, the post-soviet transition process, the challenges of state-building, the devastating consequences of 1988 earthquake and the blockade, the massacres of Sumgait seemed to have been forgotten. Up until today, it is not clear what space they have occupied, or still occupy, on the Armenian political agenda. This paper aims at explaining the reasons why the massacres of Sumgait failed to be included on the Armenian political agenda and, therefore, the international recognition of this tragedy did not become one of the key issues for Armenia's foreign policy. Explaining this is particularly important in the context of the Azerbaijani state policy with regard to the so-called "Khodjali Genocide." This deliberately designed myth shaped the core of the anti-Armenian identity of post-war Azerbaijan, and currently Azerbaijan is actively investing in the worldwide diffusion of Khodjali.

The law enforcement bodies in Sumgait did nothing to defend the peaceful Armenian population and the ethnic cleansings in Sumgait lasted for three days. The official policy pursued by the USSR leadership aimed at downplaying the bloody events and blaming them on not organized hooligan elements. The above mentioned position was later on adopted also by Baku as an official position on the issue. Azerbaijan's authorities have never condemned mass pogroms in Sumgait and no adequate political or legal assessment have been given to the ethnic cleansings of the Armenian population in Azerbaijan. In the framework of this Master's Essay an analysis of the place of Sumgait massacres in the politics of "silence" adopted by the Soviet Union will be conducted.

The new traumas caused a new framework for understanding the past. The atrocities committed against the Armenians in the Azerbaijani city of Sumgait awoke the memory of the Genocide committed by the Young Turks in 1915. A tendency to draw parallels between the events of 1915 and 1988 and revision of the past in the realm of the present situation was recorded. Thus, an attempt will be made to understand the peculiarities of Armenian collective memory with regard to the interpretation of Sumgait massacres and the effect of the drawn parallels with the Armenian Genocide of 1915 on the course of the developments of the Karabakh Movement at large.

Already twenty-three years have passed since the massacres of the Armenians of Sumgait in February 1988. The facts and materials of criminal cases proved that the crimes against civilian Armenians of Sumgait could fall under the definitions of the Convention on Preventing and Punishing the Crime of Genocide adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948. However, till now these mass killings have not been given an adequate political and legal assessment by the international society. The perpetrators of this vicious crime against Armenians

have been punished neither during Soviet era, nor after its dissolution. Moreover, under the present atmosphere of unpunishment Azerbaijan presents itself as a victim, describing the struggle of the people of Artsakh for survival as “aggression,” and the events in Sumgait as deliberately planned provocation by Armenians against Azerbaijan. Taking all the above-mentioned factors into account this paper aims at finding what is the current status and importance attached to the events in Sumgait on the political agenda of the Republic of Armenia.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study proposes the following research questions:

Research Question #1: What is the multidimensional picture of the events in Sumgait of 1988?

Research Question #2: Where is the place of Sumgait Massacre in the politics of “silence” pursued by the Soviet Union?

Research Questions #3: Are there parallels between the Armenian Genocide of 1915 and Sumgait Massacres?

Research Questions #4: Why the Sumgait massacres failed to become part of Armenia’s political agenda after the 1991 independence?

Research Questions #5: What is the current status attached to the events in Sumgait on the foreign policy domain of the Republic of Armenia?

METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this study includes the analysis of primary and secondary data. The primary sources for analysis include materials of the criminal cases, documents and reports adopted by sovereign states and non-state actors, semi-structured interviews with direct survivors of Sumgait Massacres, Armenian intellectuals, experts and officials in the field of concern.² The study is based on the analysis of secondary data, e.g. scholarly literature, researches, journal articles, as well as internet and media sources.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Thomas De Waal described the massacres of Armenians in Sumgait as “the most savage intercommunal violence in the Soviet Union” (2003, p.40). The official news releases by Telegraphic Agency of the Soviet Union (TASS) referred to the atrocities in Sumgait as “disorders provoked by a group of hooligans, where have been incidents of insolence and violence” (Marutyan 2009). Only in May 1988, *Izvestiya* reported that people were killed and tortured in Sumgait since they belonged to another nationality. In July 1988 *The Guardian* published an article entitled “Nagorno-Karabakh is a test that perestroika might not survive” stressing the fact that in February, after the first demands of Nagorno-Karabakh’s session were made, “26 Armenians were murdered in Sumgait by rampaging Azerbaijani crowds in a tribal orgy which shocked the country. Azerbaijani police did nothing to prevent it” (Grigoryan 2011). After 22 years of the massacres in Sumgait an American congressman, Frank Pallone, wrote;

² Based on the request of the interviewed individuals (10) their names will not be mentioned in this paper.

“These crimes were never adequately prosecuted by the Government of Azerbaijan and most of its organizers and executors were simply set free, many of whom are presently members of the Azeri Parliament. Despite the attempt by the Government of Azerbaijan to cover up these crimes, enough brave witnesses came forward to give an accurate account of the offenses.”³

Yet on July 7, 1988, the European Parliament (EP) adopted the Resolution on the situation in Soviet Armenia: Considering, that Nagorno Karabakh was historically a part of Armenia, that currently over 80% of its population are Armenians, that this region was annexed by Azerbaijan in 1923 and that in February 1988 Armenians suffered from a massacre in the Azeri city of Sumgait, Considering that aggravation of political situation, having caused mass killings of Armenians in Sumgait and atrocities in Baku, is dangerous for Armenians living in Azerbaijan, Condemns brutality and pressure used against Armenian protesters in Azerbaijan and calls upon the Soviet authorities to ensure the safety of the 500 000 Armenians currently living in Soviet Azerbaijan and to ensure that those found guilty of having incited or taken part in the pogroms against the Armenians are punished according to Soviet law (Official Journal of the European Communities No. C 235/106).

In recognition of the will of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh to commit to a peaceful and fair resolution to the conflict, United States (US) Congress passed the Joint Resolution 178 on November 6 1989 stating that as the Soviet government considers the February 28-29 1988 mass killings of Armenian population in Sumgait of Azerbaijan as pogroms, the American people express serious concern about the ongoing violence and unrest in the region. Moreover, on February 19 1990 the EP urged the Soviet government to send troops to Azerbaijan to provide

³ “Pallone Commemorates 22nd Anniversary of Sumgait Massacres.” Available at <http://live.armradio.am/news/?part=pol&id=16891>

the security for the Armenian population. In the Resolution on the situation in Soviet Armenia the EP stressed the importance to study all the circumstances related to the massacres against Armenians, and in particular, the mass killings in Sumgait and Kirovabad of Azerbaijan (Official Journal of the European Communities No. C 12/146).

The experts involved in the investigating of the Karabakh conflict, have realized that any solutions to these problems, and, moreover prospective for future post-conflict regional security infrastructure, can be found only in the politico-legal sphere. The legal component of any conflict resolution, including the Karabakh conflict, always suffers from certain stereotyping and conservatism. It is effective only when it is used to consolidate the already existing or achieved political realities. This does not mean that the political component has to be in contradiction to the legal component. On the contrary, the political component to a certain extent must lean on the international-legal component, especially in the sphere of protection of human rights and the rights of those individuals who suffered most in the course of the conflict in Sumgait, Baku and other cities of Azerbaijan and because of the military aggression unleashed in Azerbaijan (Aghadjanyan, Asatryan and Minasyan 2007).

The facts and materials of criminal cases, eyewitness accounts of Azeri witnesses and Armenian survivors come to prove that the crimes against civilian Armenians of Sumgait fall under the definitions of the Convention on Preventing and Punishing the Crime of Genocide adopted by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in 1948. For the aim of this study the citation of the below-provided excerpts from the Convention is of relevance:

Article I

The Contracting Parties confirm that genocide, whether committed in time of peace or in time of war, is a crime under international law which they undertake to prevent and to punish.

Article II

In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; ...

Article III

The following acts shall be punishable: (a) Genocide; (b) Conspiracy to commit genocide; (c) Direct and public incitement to commit genocide; (d) Attempt to commit genocide; (e) Complicity in genocide.

Article IV

Persons committing genocide or any of the other acts enumerated in article III shall be punished, whether they are constitutionally responsible rulers, public officials or private individuals.

Though the initiatives seeking official recognition of genocide, meaning those initiatives aimed at obtaining genocide recognition through either relevant international judicial bodies, such as the International Court of Justice (ICJ) or relevant international organizations, namely the UN, are aimed at the restoration of victims of genocide and the prevention of future genocides, they also serve, often explicitly and directly, specific goals in domestic and foreign policies of states which sponsor such initiatives. According to Zertal (2005) genocide, as the embodiment of the total, ultimate evil, has been invoked as political argument for military and security issues and political dilemmas which societies and their elites refuse to confront, resolve, and pay the price for. In this way, genocide is never a past event but a threatening present and a constant option. Horowitz argues that official recognition of genocide has emerged as the central component of the “politics of entitlement” in which moral claims associated with genocide against a given group are invoked to strengthen that group’s claims to a particular resource – for example, a claim to a national state and/or constitutional privileges, like in the case of Ukraine, Bosnia, and Rwanda, or a claim to territories, like in the case of Armenia vis-à-vis Nagorno

Karabakh. Hence, what underlies initiatives for official recognition of genocide is an implicit claim-right: a permission to pursue a particular political goal, plus a correlative obligation, usually of the “international community” to assist the state or a community in pursuit of that particular goal (1985, Chapter 5).

Based on the above-mentioned legal and theoretical grounds it can be stated that the politics of genocide recognition should be viewed from the perspective of domestic politics, as well as regional and international relations of the states which sponsor initiatives to obtain official genocide recognition. Taking into account the insight that the crime and denial of genocide isn't a game, but international relations is a contest, the case of Sumgait genocide and its place on the agenda of the foreign policy of the RA since independence opens a prospect for future analysis.

THE MULTIDIMENSIONAL PICTURE OF THE EVENTS IN SUMGAIT

The Azeri-led pogrom targeting the Armenian population living in the Azerbaijani seaside town of Sumgait in February 1988 was one of the triggers that transformed the political confrontation between Azerbaijan and Armenia over the Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) into a violent one. For a period of three days, 27 - 29 February, Sumgait became an arena of mass and unimpeded killings and tortures of the Armenian population. The atrocities in Sumgait blurred the myth of the multinational state based on the concept of friendship between peoples. The events in Sumgait broke the established old rules of the political games and opened a new page of the Caucasian history without defining a new set of rules. This chapter is going to look at the events in Sumgait from different perspectives stressing the place of Sumgait within the newly designed policies of *glasnost*' and *openness*, the cause and effect connection with the Karabakh Movement unfolded in Armenia SRR, and the Azerbaijani paradigm of assessing the occurrences.

The facts presented by the parties of the conflict are contested and totally different visions of the events of the last days of February are proposed. It is disputable whether the massacre of the Armenian population in Sumgait was a thoroughly planned and implemented political strategy, a reaction to the events taking place in Armenia SSR and NKAO or it was an outburst of violence by uncontrollable masses rooted in the primordial ethnic hatred. Moreover, if the crimes were planned, who bears the responsibility for the conduct of the first ethnic cleansing in the new history of the Soviet states? Totally different pictures of the roots and motivation for the massacres in Sumgait can be presented, but still there is no moral justification for the carnage.

Genocides and massacres never occur in a political vacuum, and the massacres of the Armenians in Sumgait were not an exception. The announced policies of *glasnost'* and *perestroika* provided grounds for freer political expression and revealed tensions in the Soviet political system which formerly had been concealed from public view. Loosening of controls over the mass media, party and government institutions and the freedom to form organized associations have allowed the articulation of a variety of popular concerns. The comparison of the size and scale of popular mobilization of the movements targeting different spheres of societal life reveals that the broadest and most intense movements have been related to nationality. Two lines of nationality-based social mobilization can be distinguished. The first is the emergence of organized movements directed at achieving greater autonomy for the national republics in the political, cultural, economic, and social spheres. These movements aimed to realize the nominal republican sovereignty embodied in the Soviet constitution. The second is the wave of self-assertion by national minorities within union republics for greater status and autonomy, which in many cases has in turn provoked counter-claims by the host nation (Remington 1989).

Armenians interpreted the complementary policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika* announced by Mikhail Gorbachev as a safer and more open atmosphere to take a vocal stance concerning the rights of the Armenian minority living in Azerbaijan. They decided to put Gorbachev's *glasnost* to a test. A petition drive was organized by an informal group, called the Karabakh Committee, and on September 18 1987, half a million people demonstrated in Yerevan. Five months later, on February 13, 1988, large crowds took to the streets in Stepanakert, the capital city of Nagorno-Karabakh. Within a week half a million people gathered

in Yerevan, in Theatre Square, to support the call for unification of Nagorno-Karabagh with Armenia SSR (Miller and Touryan Miller 2003).

On February 20, 1988, the 20th Extraordinary Session of the NKAO Council of People's Deputies, the highest governing body in the autonomous region, adopted a Resolution petitioning the Supreme Soviets of the Azerbaijan and Armenia to transfer the region from the Azerbaijani SSR to the Armenian SSR. The Session petitioned the Supreme Soviet of the USSR for a positive resolution to the situation (Hovhannisyan 1998). The article "A Test of Change Explodes in Soviet" in New York Times (March 11, 1988) called the NKAO Council of People's Deputies decision "a stunning act of independence for a body usually regarded as a Communist Party rubber stamp."

The decision raised a new wave of rallies of support in Yerevan and Stepanakert. Since the news of political rebellion reached also Azerbaijan, unruly crowds took to the streets in Sumgait. In fact, strikes and demonstrations in all these three cities, substantially away from each other in distance, overtook the events with sweeping rapidity. Thus, the long overdue resentment that was cool for decades soon became eruptive. Sumgait, a relatively young township 32 kilometers off Baku, witnessed its worst tragedy (Dash 1989).

The content and intent of riot in Sumgait considerably differed from the mostly peaceful demonstrations in Stepanakert and Yerevan. Armenians in NKAO and Armenia launched a peaceful constitutional battle aiming to redress an old grievance – the separation of the predominantly Armenian Nagorno-Karabakh region from Armenia and unite the separated parts of a single nation via redrawing the internal political boundaries of the Soviet Union. In Sumgait Azerbaijanis rioted in protest against the merger of Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia. But the riot was, beyond all expectations, violent enough.

On the evening of February 27 a rally in Sumgait's Lenin Square attracted thousands of participants, mainly young Azerbaijani men. The theme of the gatherings was Nagorno Karabakh's campaign for unification with Armenia. The mood of the rally was angry, and speakers' dispersed efforts to calm down the gathered crowd were in vain. The messages "transplanted" into the crowd of protestors were venomous and had one main bottom line. Armenians were blamed for misinterpreting the shift in the Soviet state policy and for taking the issue of Nagorno Karabakh to the streets. The false charges of crimes committed by Armenians in Kapan and Askeran fueled calls of "Death to the Armenians!" and served to transform the crowd into a mob (Malkasian 1996).

The following three days – 27-29 February, were marked by hooligans going on rampage, looting Armenian homes, burning houses, and hunting for Armenians. According to the Azerbaijani official paper of March 1, "On February 28 a group of hooligan elements provoked disturbances in Sumgait. There were instances of outrages and violence." Whereas the information under the title "Communique" of the paper was too vague and did not provide any details about the "hooligan" elements, the identity and the number of victims, it stressed the fact that measures have been taken to normalize the disturbed life of the city in (*Bakinskiy Rabochiy*, March 1, 1988 in Cheterian 2008, p.101). On March 3 the article "On the situation in Sumgait" in the same newspaper provided some more information on the illegal actions undertaken by the "unstable and immature people who fell under the influence of the provocative rumors" (*Bakinskiy Rabochiy*, March 3, 1988 in Cheterian 2008, p.101).

The "unstable and immature people" turned virtually all of Sumgait city into an arena of mass, unimpeded pogroms of the Armenian population for a period of three days. There were dozens of deaths; in a significant number of cases, the victims were burned alive after beatings

and torture. There were hundreds of wounded, many of whom became invalids. More than two hundred apartments were ravaged, dozens of automobiles were burned or smashed, and dozens of studios, stores, kiosks, and other public property incurred damage. And there were thousands of refugees (Shahmuratian 1990).⁴

Based on the data presented by the Prosecutor's office of Azerbaijani SSR, the USSR Prosecutor's office stated that the outburst of violence left 32 people dead, among which 26 were of Armenian nationality (Ulubabyan 1991). But in the context of the numerous attempts to downplay the ethnic connotation of the violence in Sumgait and represent it as a mere hooliganism these official figures cannot reveal the real consequences of these tragic events.

Hrayr Ulubabian, the author of the book titled *Sumgait, Genocide, Glastnost* (1989) and the head of the initiative protecting the rights of the Sumgait Armenians, during the conducted interview stated that there is documented evidence supporting the claims that the death toll is higher than the official figures. He possesses several death certificates that have been given to the relatives of the victims in Sumgait. The examination of the registration numbers of the death certificates reveals that the lowest number is 73, Irina Melkumyan's death certificate, while the highest number is 187 and belongs to Igor Melkumyan. The issue date of the both certificates is March 5, 1988. Taking into account the established procedure of registration of corpses in morgues in the Soviet Union (the counting of numbers starts from the beginning of the year), it is obvious that during those days the number of the registered death cases is minimum 115, based on the numbers of the death certificates that Ulubabyan possesses. Since there has been

⁴ Samuel Shahmuratian has conducted 150 interviews with Sumgait survivors. Eyewitness testimonies constitute a counterbalance and a corrective to history which is based solely on written documents and which is biased in favor of the historian's prejudices and the disinformation of official sources. The use of eyewitness accounts is a new method of historical research in the context of Soviet historiography, a tool which can help to reveal the truth about what happened in Sumgait.

registered not more than 72 natural deaths during January and February 1988, the minimum number of 115 deaths during the last days of February till March 5, 1988 proves that official figures provided by the Soviet officials does not reveal the real death toll, and asserts the claims concerning the distorted picture of the events in Sumgait.

There can be distinguished two grounds based on which it is claimed that the massacre of Armenians in Sumgait was not an organized action aiming to suppress the political struggle enfolded in Armenia and NKAO, but in fact a reaction to certain events taking place in Armenia and NKAO. The first articulated opinion considers the atrocities and massacres in Sumgait as a reaction to the political demands raised by the NKAO Council of People's Deputies on February 20 1988 which formally requested to transfer the NKAO from the Azerbaijani SSR to the Armenian SSR. The second framework rests on the myth of the violence undergoing in Armenia and NKAO (Cheterian 2008).

In reality, Sumgait was a demonstrable manifestation and continuation of consequent policy by the Azerbaijani authorities of discrimination, unpunished killings, deportations, and ethnic cleansings of the Armenian population of the Soviet Azerbaijan. Resettlement of ethnic Azerbaijanis into Nagorno-Karabakh led to the shift in demographic balance. In 1979, a census recorded that, of the population of Karabakh 76 per cent were Armenian, whereas in 1921 they composed 94 per cent of the population (Matveeva 2002). During 1959-1979, long before the beginning of the Karabakh movement in 1988, the number of Armenians living in Azerbaijan regions decreased 1.5 to 2 times and almost the same way decreased the percentage of the Armenian people in the general population. On the contrary during the same period the number of Azeris in Armenia increased 1.5 to 2 times and almost the same way increased the specific share of them among the general population. Moreover, the 1926 census data showed that

Azerbaijan had 15 nationalities (more than five thousand people) and by 1979 census data three of them were represented as Azerbaijanis, meaning that they were fully assimilated (Avagian 1994, p.53). Hence, the claims that the Azerbaijanis were intentionally trying to manipulate the demography of the region, and that the roots of the changes could be traced to government policy find their proof in the above-mentioned figures.

By the end of 1980s, nationalist forces of Azerbaijan escalated their policy of ethnic cleansings, a model for which was taken from Nakhijevan, already ethnically cleansed of Armenians. Although Armenians made up 40% of Nakhijevan's population in 1917, by 1987 Nakhijevan was virtually devoid of Armenians with only two Armenian villages remaining (Cox and Eibner 1993). On the one hand the Nakhijevan Autonomous Republic under Soviet Azerbaijani jurisdiction was ethnically cleansed of Armenians, and on the other hand the Armenian population in Nagorno Karabakh had significantly diminished. Thus, the statement that the forced migration of Armenians from Azerbaijan is a consequence of the Karabakh movement, and that Sumgait is just a reaction to the unfolded nationalistic movement in Armenia does not withstand the examination based on the official language of “unbiased figures.”

If we assume that massacres in Sumgait came as a reaction to the political demands raised in Armenia and NKAO, particularly to the Resolution of 20 February, 1988 by Karabakh Soviet, the events in the village Chardakhlu and the statement by the First Secretary of the Shamkhor regional committee of the Azerbaijani Communist Party Asadov does not fit into the logical framework of the events. From July to December 1987 Asadov, with the full support of the party leadership of Azerbaijan, was implementing a policy of ousting of native Armenian population from the village of Chardakhlu (Melik-Shahnazarov 2009). Even before the adoption of the resolution on February 20, 1988, Asadov publicly announced that one hundred thousand

Azerbaijanis were ready to storm Karabakh at any time and slaughter the population there (*Golos Armenii*, № 132, 1990 in Ulubabyan 1990). So, based on the above-mentioned facts it can be stated that the decision of February 20 itself was Nagorno-Karabakh's response to the anti-Armenian politics conducted in Azerbaijan over decades and to the direct threats of the use of force in case of disobedience or public revolt in Armenia or NKAO.

While addressing the issue of the responsibility for the conduct of the atrocities in Sumgait, Azerbaijan's propaganda machine has been constantly trying to lay the blame on Armenia. The focus has been on "tailoring the myths" about alleged Armenian-Azerbaijani clashes in Kapan resulting with the first wave of refugees and the incident in Askeran which in the light of the Azerbaijani propaganda served as a trigger to the spontaneous outbreak of mass violence in Sumgait.

Azerbaijani historian Igrar Aliev puts forward the following interpretation of the Sumgait pogroms, "Days-long meetings in Yerevan, eyewitness stories about persecutions and violence against Azerbaijanis living in Armenia, led to a group of rootless elements, who had no relation to the Azerbaijani people, succeeding in provocation of the part of the youth to commit public disturbances..." (Aliev 1989, p.96). The attempts of Azerbaijani intellectuals to justify the horror that took place in Sumgait, to blame Armenians for provoking the violence and not condemning the acts of violence were the one of the reasons why Sumgait was not an isolated single event.

The issues of initial act of violence and first blood have served as an appropriate basis for some Western authors to present themselves from the neutral position by blaming both sides of the conflict for initiating violence. The strategy of balancing the "portions of crimes" committed by the parties of the conflict has been utilized by Thomas De Wall, author of the book *Black*

Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan Through Peace and War. According to De Wall (2003, p.18) yet in November 1987, before Sumgait, “trouble broke out in the southern Armenian regions of Meghri and Kafan,” and as a result of interethnic violence Azerbaijanis fled Kapan. Another “neutral” paradigm of the events prior to Sumgait is proposed by Svante Cornell (2000, p.70), “Following the Chardakli events, the Azeris in Armenia faced increasing difficulties and harassment, as Armenians started driving Azeris out of Armenia. In the end of January of 1988 the first refugee wave reached Baku, and most refugees were relocated in Sumgait, in Baku’s industrial suburbs. Before the end of February, two more waves of refugees were to reach Baku.” According to this interpretation of the events, Sumgait was a reaction and a reaction not to the political demands incorporated in the Resolution of 20 February, 1988, but a reaction to the introduced violence from the Armenian side yet in January 1988.

Without going deep into the details of the chronology of the events, it should be stressed that the narrative according to which the first forced population movements took place in January 1988 as Azerbaijanis fled Kapan, does not have any documented basis. As *The Washington Post* reported on March 21, 1988, “incidents of violence in Gafan (*Kapan*) could not be confirmed by Soviet officials. Armenians have flatly denied that any violence took place in connection with their protests, and the official Soviet media also reported none” (Cheterian 2008). Valiri Kiporenko, a senior investigator in the special department of the Kyiv military district in one of his interviews mentioned that an investigating group under the aegis of the Prosecutor General’s Office was formed and dispatched to Sumgait in 1988. According to their data, several buses with Azerbaijanis from Armenia arrived in Sumgait a couple of week before the pogroms. They were telling that they evicted from their houses in Armenia. Actually, these were just people who did not have a high income in and wanted to grab the apartments belonging to Azerbaijani

Armenians. According to Kiporenko, “At that time, we didn’t receive any information about cases of violence against Azeris in Armenia. This was a propaganda campaign ...”⁵

Since the “Kapan tale” lacked the documented framework and eyewitness accounts to withstand the examination, there was a necessity to highlight something more “substantial,” a really bloody event committed against the Azerbaijani population by Armenians. And the Askeran clash was presented as a sufficient prelude to the Sumgait pogroms.

Two days after the Resolution of the Karabakh Soviet, on February 22, 1988 a group of Azerbaijanis moved to the Askeran District of NKAO “to establish order.” A few miles from the city Askeran the mob was met by a detachment of Azerbaijani and local Askeran police. Since the militia failed to block the marchers, the mob spilled onto the main road passing through the oblast and after ransacking two other factories and demolishing a militia post, the crowd collided with residents of Askeran. Troops from the nearby garrison of the Soviet army were ultimately called in to restore order. The result was two Azeris dead. Later investigations showed that one of the dead had been shot by a Soviet soldier (Malkasian 1996). The story of a deadly clash in Nagorno Karabakh, where two Azeris had been killed, became widely publicized both by Azerbaijani and Soviet press, television and radio.

The deaths at Askeran fanned local tensions, but the real impact came on February 27 when the news of the Askeran incident was broadcast on Baku Radio by the deputy prosecutor general of the USSR, Alexander Katusev. This announcement, particularly the mentioning of the two Muslim surnames of the victims, cannot be attributed to a human error. NK First Secretary

⁵ Interview available at: <http://www.panarmenian.net/eng/interviews/59531/>

Henrik Poghosyan had previously warned of the dangers involved in disclosing the nationalities of the two youths without fully explaining the circumstances surrounding their deaths, but Katusev disregarded the advice. Several days after the killing had taken place and statements issued Katusev decided to focus on the specifics (Shahmuratian 1990).

The symbiosis of the stories of ethnic cleansing in Armenia and the incident in Askeran laid the foundations for the Azerbaijanian propaganda machine to claim that “the first blood” was spilt in Armenia, thus the responsibility of the initiation of the bloody conflict should go to the Armenian side. These myths were elaborated to justify the brutal acts of violence that erupted in Sumgait on the last three days of February 1988. The continuing unrest, which has led to at least 33 acknowledged deaths, presented Mikhail S. Gorbachev with the most severe domestic crisis of his tenure. It also pitted the new policies of more frank public discussion against the traditional passion for civil order.

SUMGAI MASSACRES AND THE POLITICS OF SILENCE

Since 1988 the conflict over Nagorno Karabakh has developed on four different political levels - Moscow, Nagorno Karabakh, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. On each level a distinct set of factors has been put into motion; a power struggle has taken place between different actors involved in the process, and the course of the power struggle between different agents has shaped the Karabakh question. The existence of these layers of the conflict explains the interdependency between the events in Moscow, the center, in Nagorno Karabakh, in Armenia, and in Azerbaijan. On the one hand Armenians, Karabakh Armenians, and Azerbaijanis observed mistrustfully the political events on the other levels and interpreted them according to their respective framework; on the other hand the functioning vertical hierarchies of the Soviet Union (SU) made Moscow an arbitrator in this conflict.

This chapter of the paper aims to reveal the place of the Sumgait massacres in the politics of the SU and to examine the given political and legal assessment by the Soviet leadership to the atrocities carried out in Sumgait. Since this work does not aim at revealing the facts that prove the direct engagement of Azerbaijani authorities or Soviet Central Government representatives in the organization of the massacres in Sumgait, a reference is made to those actions and policies by local and central governments that explain the place and importance of the ethnic cleansing of Armenians in Sumgait in the politics of the SU.⁶

⁶ For a detailed review of specific facts focusing on the organized nature of the crimes in Sumgait a reference can be made to Samvel Shahmuratyan (1990) *"The Sumgait Tragedy: Pogroms against Armenians in Soviet Azerbaijan. Volume I: Eyewitness Accounts;"* Arsen Melik-Shahnazarov (2009) *"Nagorno Karabagh: Facts Against the Lie"* (in Russian).

In recent years there has been an “ethnic turn” in the studies of international relations, security studies, and political violence. Although ethnicity now occupies a central place in the study of collective and political violence, this sudden turn to ethnicity and nationality too often had external and mechanical character (Brubaker and Laitin 1998). Moreover, the concept of violence in studies of ethnic and nationalist conflict has gained a new traction. It is important to address the notion of the violence and seek specific explanations for the occurrence and nonoccurrence of violence in conflictual situations. But these set of questions and explanations should be distinguished from questions and explanations of the existence and even the intensity of conflict. According to Brubaker and Laitin (1998) there is not enough strong evidence proving the hypothesis that higher levels of conflict (measured independently of violence) lead to higher levels of violence. Even where violence is clearly rooted in preexisting conflict, it should not be treated as a natural, self-explanatory outgrowth of such conflict, something that occurs automatically when the conflict reaches certain intensity, certain “temperature.” Violence is not a quantitative degree of conflict but a qualitative form of conflict, with its own dynamics.

Generally speaking, a violent attack might be described as “ethnic” if it involves members of different ethnic groups and either 1) it is motivated by hatred or dislike of ethnic others in general; 2) the criterion for selecting victims is ethnicity, meaning that members of one's own group are exempted and members of the other group are eligible (as it were); 3) it is committed with the idea of being on behalf of or in the name of an ethnic group, or is committed against those who claim to represent or act on behalf of an ethnic group (and because of this status) (Fearon and Laitin 2000).

In Russia, the term “ethnic conflict” came into use late, because the word “conflict” was usually replaced by the term “contradictions.” The first ethnically-driven civic clashes under

Gorbachev, the Sumgait and Fergana pogroms against Armenians and Turks were dismissed by experts as “incidents,” “events,” etc. Until the Ingush–Ossetian conflict and the Chechen War erupted on the territory of Russia itself, the term “ethnic conflict” was seen as an inadequate and humiliating term to describe people who do not normally hate and fight each other. Ethnic entities, it was held, are deliberately driven into conflict by in-group agitators or by outside conspiracies. Conflicts were viewed as carrying political, territorial, criminal, or economic dimensions. Thus, the Soviet leadership, disregarding all the evidence, categorically refused to describe the mass killings in Sumgait as driven by ethnic hatred (Tishkov 1999).

Still the belief persisted that Karabakh was merely a failure of economics and internationalism. The persistence of this argument was rooted in the ideology according to which nationalities were temporal phenomena, likely to fade away as economic development proceeded (Szporluk 1990). The inevitable emergence of *Homo Sovieticus* was supposed to overcome the “phenomena of nationality” but in the 1980s the Communist party leadership failed to appreciate “...that national polarization of the various Soviet peoples [had] advanced faster than their common consciousness of a new Soviet nationhood” (Denber 1992, p.391). The massacres of Armenians in Sumgait proved that there was no Soviet nation and that any discontent can end in bloodshed. Moreover, the Sumgait events vividly showed what can happen to representatives of some civilizations when the suppressing force disappears.

For both Armenian and Azerbaijani people Nagoro Karabakh was to occupy a special place in each other’s nationalist discourse and historical understanding. The openness of *glasnost*’ policy allowed Armenians to criticize what was perceived as an historic injustice and gave them hope that Karabakh’s status might be revised. But these views and hopes were not shared by Azerbaijan. The sum result showed that “what had initially been an apple of discord

transformed into a veritable Gordian knot,” as *glasnost*’ inadvertently revealed that lack of central regulation and the relative autonomy with which nationality policy had been infused, proving that no compromise could be reached (Iskanderian 2006). Thus, the designed policies hatched a crisis that Gorbachev and the USSR leadership were neither able to comprehend nor resolve peacefully.

Up to 1988 the Soviet state had failed to manage the political contradictions inherent in Nagorno Karabakh. According to Thomas De Waal (2005) the heavily centralized system had successfully enforced security through fear, but it had almost no mechanisms to resolve a dispute between two communities by consensus. The legal framework, mainly the Constitutional mechanism of USSR, could not provide the basis for a decision suitable to all involved parties. Moreover, besides the apparent constitutional deadlock the Gorbachev regime made mistakes regarding the nationalities question in general. The General-Secretary had little appreciation for either the intensity or complexity of the animosity between the many ethnic groups of the SU.

The Soviet history comprises a set of bloody episodes, but Sumgait’s significance is difficult to overstate. Thomas De Waal (2003, p.40) described the massacres of Armenians in Sumgait as “the most savage intercommunal violence in the Soviet Union.” Besides revealing the level of the escalation of violence in the region, the Sumgait events intensified the growing disillusionment with Kremlin’s handling of the crisis. The main basis of this discontentment was Moscow’s general tendency to respond to the Karabakh-Armenians’ active stance for self-determination in half-measures, mostly seeking to calm the situation while shying from the search for a permanent solution to the problem suitable to all sides of the conflict. However, such a course of action employed by the Moscow authorities was satisfactory for neither side,

and instead of calming down the situation on the ground, led to the growth of nationalism, separatism and violence (Croissant 1998).

Soviet authorities persistently attempted to downplay the ethnic connotation of the violence in Sumgait, and presented the massacres of the Armenians as an act of mere hooliganism. The Soviet propaganda machine pictured the Sumgait events in the light of spontaneous and sudden actions without any preorganized features. Indeed, the frequent mass demonstrations in Armenia and the NKAO were not perceived as an expression of popular will, but were labelled as “separatist tendencies” and “extremism” aiming to undermine the reforms launched in the country. On the other hand, the acts of violence committed by the Azeris in Sumgait were attributed to the “hooligan elements” and “anti-perestroika” forces (Croissant 1998). Immediately after the events in Sumgait the Kremlin authorities adopted a strategy of concealing the complexity and the organized nature of the mass killings and tried to put on the same platform the demonstration of political will in the framework of the Constitutional rights in NKAO and the mass killings, tortures and acts of violence unleashed in Sumgait.

In one of his interviews Katusev used the concept “mass disorder” to describe both the events in NKAO and Sumgait. Moreover, he stressed the “fact” that the “unrest in NKAO, triggered by the nationalistically inclined elements, heated up the situation in Sumgait” (*Izvestiya*, August 20, 1988). In May *Izvestiya* (May 13, 1988) reported that people were killed and tortured in Sumgait since they belonged to another nationality, but the Soviet leadership persistently labelled the slaughters “hooligans,” “provocateurs,” “gangs,” and did not address the question why representatives of other nationality than Armenian were not killed ((Shahmuratyan 1990).

One of the most often cited and at the same time simplistic explanations of the crimes committed in February 1988 considered that the unrest in Sumgait erupted out of suppressed frustrations and primordial ethnic hatred. Cornell (1999, p.17) assumes that this reference to a “protracted ethnic conflict” was designed to cover up the inability or unwillingness of authorities to prevent the massacres, and thus portrays the accumulated ethnic hatred as “a machine which could not be stopped even by the Soviet state.” But it should be highlighted that in February 1988 the Soviet Union was not a state in dissolution. It was a state with a very strong and, in security matters, relatively effective and resourceful central government (Dash 1989).

Whatever the real level and nature of the involvement of Soviet authorities in the organizing and later concealing the crimes in Sumgait is, the attempts to distort the circumstances of the mass killings committed in Sumgait are doomed to failure. The documentary evidence, witness testimonies and other facts collected to date call for a conclusion that the pogroms had an organized nature and were carried out according to a planned strategy. Certain aspects of the policy carried out by local and central Soviet power centres are of pivotal importance to discuss as these actions or inactions led to the permissiveness during February 1988 and comprised the basis for not giving a proper political and legal assessment to the ethnic cleansings of the Armenians in Sumgait.

Assistant to the Prosecutor General of the USSR N. Yemelyanov described the situation in Sumgait the following way, “Everything is burning, apartments are destroyed, dead bodies, women are raped, and wildly raped – by 20-30 people. The law enforcement bodies never assisted the citizens – those of Armenian nationality” (Grigoryan 2011). As the *Washington Post* reported in March 1988, “Despite the heavy presence of armed militia, the protests and riots

went largely undeterred until March 1, when troops and tanks were dispatched to Sumgait.” The fact that the Soviet army and Interior ministry troops were in and around Sumgait did not change anything. The violent killings and torture occurred and the law enforcement bodies did not intervene until the third day of the riots. Moreover, the Deputy Interior Minister Nikolai Demidov later admitted having been in Sumgait during the unrest (Cornell 2011).

Taking into account the “trigger happy reputation” of SU and at the same time the inaction of the Interior ministry forces in Sumgait, a set of questions arises concerning the involvement of central power in the eruption of the unrest. If not to claim that it was organized by the Centre, at least it was seen as a “tool” supporting the divide-and-rule policy in the Caucasus. According to Nolyain (2007) the Soviet forces did not stay at neglecting to prevent the bloodshed, but deliberately sought to create a conflict between the two communities, both in Armenia and in Azerbaijan. This was done through the control of the media, by spreading exaggeratedly provocative statements on both sides, and by deploying criminals from Soviet prisons in Sumgait to initiate the pogrom. Cornell (1999) states that despite the apparent difficulty of getting troops to Sumgait, troops were flown in to Yerevan on 25 February, the day before Sumgait erupted, apparently only as a preventive measure. This begs the question why troops could not be sent in to Sumgait as promptly as is usual habit in cases of civil unrest in the Soviet Union. He also argues that the reason for the militia’s inaction was that they had simply been ordered not to intervene.

The central Soviet and the national Baku governments through the control of the media designed their own picture of the mass killings of Armenians in Sumgait. Interestingly enough, for several days the Soviet press reported only on the violence on 28 February, whereas the violence obviously lasted for several days. Only by April did the Soviet press begin to refer to

violence occurring on 27– 29 February (Cornell 1999). The Telegraphic Agency of the Soviet Union (TASS) highlighted the “fact” that members of “various nationalities” were among the victims in the most violent outbreak of urban rioting in recent Soviet history (Melik-Shahnazarov 2009). The *New York Times* reported on March 3, 1988, that the telephone links from Moscow to Nagorno-Karabakh were not functioning and that certainly prevented Western reporters in Moscow from talking to Government officials in the region who had provided direct information about the protests during those days. It was also reported that, “the Government did not allow Western reporters to travel to Armenia and Azerbaijan. Mr. Gerasimov said Tuesday that the ban was imposed “because the presence of foreign reporters could only excite extremist elements.” During the implementation of the policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika* the central Soviet press was silent; the foreign media representatives were not allowed to report from the scene of crime and were given only second-hand information. Thus, the real politics adopted by the Soviet Government was simply a mere distortion of the concept “*glasnost*” aiming at the deception and suppression of the information.

Nobel Prize laureate, renown Soviet physicist and human rights activist Andrei Sakharov said, “We need a fair trial for the Sumgait massacre perpetrators not only to save Azerbaijani SSR from disgrace, but we need it to save the future of the whole country.” Unfortunately, it didn’t happen. The few trials that were held in the aftermath of the crimes in Sumgait were part of a “show” aiming to calm sentiments in Armenia and save face beyond the borders of the SU. Yet, it should be stated that immediately after the pogroms, following the orders of the Azerbaijani Communist Party's Central Committee official Ganafayev, the belongings of Armenians, which were thrown out of their apartments to the streets, were hastily removed, yards and building entrances were washed, and mobbed apartments and public buildings were

frantically repaired. Thus, the physical evidence of the crimes was destroyed, which noticeably hampered the investigation. The crime against an ethnic group was broken down into separate and individualized criminal cases and that was a direct continuation of the official policy of concealment (Shahmuratyan 1990).

Division of one organized crime into separate and independent cases testified to the fact that the trial was biased and had an aim to conceal true organizers and perpetrators of the crime. During the trial, the criminal idleness of the soviet structures as well as the law enforcement bodies present in Sumgait was not taken into consideration. At the governmental level the first public discussion of Sumgait occurred at the session of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet on July 18, 1988. The phrase “Sumgait genocide” used in the speech of one of the members of the Armenian delegation provoked a negative reaction from the General Secretary Gorbachev. He stated that genocide is an organized crime, whereas in Sumgait only the dregs of society had been involved (Shahmuratyan 1990, p.8).

The Sumgait pogroms were the first ethnic cleansing campaign and large scale violence in the modern history of the Soviet Union. The policy of silence around the genocide committed in Sumgait as well as the permissive attitude of the international community towards the Azeri perpetrators of the Sumgait genocide allowed the organizers and active participants of pogroms to avoid criminal punishment. The lack of actions and at certain cases the inaction of the Soviet authorities brought to the exercise of a policy of reaction to developments in Armenia and Azerbaijan rather than a policy of a search for a solution suitable for the involved parties.

The created atmosphere of unpunishment triggered a chain reaction of bloody campaign embracing the entire territory of Azerbaijani SSR. A blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh in August 1989, anti-Armenian riots and mass killings in Baku in January 1990, then under Moscow’s

direct control, ethnic cleansings of Armenian villages on Azerbaijan territory in spring 1991 (referred as “Operation ‘Ring’”) organized by the Soviet army troops and Azeri Ministry of the Interior units proved that the Sumgait was not an isolated dramatic phase in the history of the Armenian nation “tailored” by Azerbaijanian nationalist forces. The fair punishment for Sumgait pogroms perpetrators, the proper political and legal evaluation might have prevented the later escalation of the Karabakh conflict not letting it to transform into a full-scale war.

Over 100 leading academics and human rights advocates placed an advertisement in the New York Times on July 27, 1990 titled, “An Open Letter to International Public Opinion on Anti-Armenian Pogroms in the Soviet Union.” The letter, which was signed by professors from Johns Hopkins, Princeton, Brown, Wesleyan, William and Mary, New School for Social Research, Berkeley, UCLA, University of Vienna, and University of Paris, urged the international community to take action to protect the Armenian community in Azerbaijan. They noted that the “pogroms of Sumgait in February 1988 were followed by massacres in Kirovabad and Baku in November 1988” and Baku again in 1990. “The mere fact that these pogroms were repeated and the fact that they followed the same pattern lead us to think that these tragic events are no accidents or spontaneous outbursts,” but that “crimes against the Armenian minority have become consistent practice – if not official policy – in Soviet Azerbaijan.” The letter concluded, “The international community of states . . . must prove the authenticity of its commitment to human rights in order to ensure that, due to indifference and silence bordering on complicity, another genocide does not occur” (Armenian National Committee of America Fact Sheet 2011).

SUMGAI THROUGH THE PRISM OF THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE OF 1915

Austrian social scientist Alfred Schutz (1953) argues that the events never possess meaning. Meaning is something attributed to the events or objects. In his view meaning is based on two things: sedimentations of past experiences and one's intentionality toward the future. In the context of this study, Schutz's theory implies that massacres and deportations of Armenians in 1915 at the hands of the Ottoman Turks became the scheme through which the Armenians interpreted the mass killings of Armenians in Sumgait and other cities on the territory of Azerbaijani SSR. The atrocities carried out from 1988-1990 awoke the memory of 1915 Armenian Genocide. The present was seen through the past, and the new traumas were mixed with the old ones. This chapter of the paper will focus on the peculiarities of Armenian collective memory with regard to the interpretation of Sumgait massacres and the effect of drawn parallels with the Armenian Genocide of 1915 on the course of the developments of the Karabakh Movement at large.

According to Harutyun Marutyan (2009) recollection of the past is an active, constructive process, not a simple matter of retrieving information. To remember is to place a part of the past in the service of conceptions and needs of the present. The author indicates that the focus should be not only on the studies of how a certain event happened, but how people recollect it, or what of it they remember. Aiming to perceive present day occurrences, people mentally travel to the not-distant historical past and seek parallels. It is through parallels that occurrences become clear and more easily understood. Hence, it can be stated that the Nagorno Karabakh conflict evolved under the shadow of collective fears rooted in past experiences.

The Armenian Genocide of 1915 at the hands of Ottoman Turks constitutes a particularly powerful reference in the Armenian national conscience. Kaufman (2001) argues that the fact the Armenian people suffered in the past almost complete annihilation and massive extermination conditions Armenian perceptions of their environment and their relationships with other groups. On the one hand, “Turks” were the main victimizers of the Armenian nation, hence any suspicious action on their part must be met with decisive actions and the threat of complete extermination must be avoided at any cost in the future. On the other hand, the Azerbaijani identity formed relatively recently (around the 1930s), in comparison to that of the Armenians who trace their roots to the 4th century when they adopted Christianity. Before developing a more precise definition of their identity, Azerbaijanis called themselves Caucasian Turks, Muslims or Tatars and were more interested in Pan-Islamic, Pan-Turkic ideas rather than nationalist ideologies. Since until relatively recently Azerbaijanis were not strictly differentiated from other Turkic groups, it was easier for Armenians to assimilate Azerbaijanis to their “traditional enemies,” i.e. “Turks” and transpose the image of mass murders to them (Tranca 2008).

The above-mentioned aspects of Armenian national identity resurfaced during the Karabakh conflict and proved extremely powerful in mobilizing popular support in Armenia. Since the conflict led to the emergence of the refugee inflow from Azerbaijan to Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh, the sense that the basic survival of the group was threatened became more “tangible.” Particularly the spread of the ethnic violence against the Armenians in Sumgait and later in Baku, Kirovabad and other cities in Azerbaijan, led to the construction of a new paradigm through which any new killing of ethnic-kin by the “Turks” (meaning Azerbaijanis) was a confirmation of their worst fears that a repetition of past events that threatened group annihilation was taking place.

The theme of genocide was recurrent in the political discourse at mass rallies in Armenia. The events, both of a social or political nature, threatening the existence of the Armenian people, were perceived in the context of genocide. As a result, some notions appeared with the utilization of the term “genocide.” Armenians’ demographic decline in comparison with Azerbaijanis was called “white genocide,” bearing in mind the example of the ethnic cleansing of Armenians in Nakhijevan; the reduced importance of the Armenian language, destruction of Armenian cultural heritage outside Armenia was termed “cultural, spiritual genocide”; while referring to the Armenian Atomic Power station and the “Nairit” giant chemical plant terms “ecological genocide” and “biological, chemical genocide” were used. Hence, it is understandable why Armenians from Azerbaijan called the Baku policies of discrimination and repression “genocide against the Armenian population between 1920 and 1987” (Kaufman 2001, p.56).

Based on the interviews conducted with the Armenian refugees from Azerbaijan Donald Miller and Lorna Touryan in the work *Remembrance and denial: the case of the Armenian Genocide* (1999) highlight the fact that refugees from Azerbaijan have made a direct comparison between the pogroms that they have experienced in Sumgait and Baku and the Armenian Genocide of 1915. Despite the fact that the number of killed persons during these horrific events cannot be even compared, the parallels have been drawn frequently. This interpretative scheme was so powerful that it actually influenced the behavior of other groups directly or indirectly involved in the conflict. For instance, although Turkey was a steady ally of Azerbaijan in the conflict with Armenia, it made a distinct effort not to appear too supportive of the former, because the powerful Armenian Diaspora in the West would take any opportunity to picture Turkey as planning new atrocities against Armenians. These circumstances made it difficult for the Turkish government to be “too anti-Armenian” even in the context of Turkish massive

popular opposition against the Armenian occupation of a part of Azerbaijan and support for a more active involvement in the conflict on behalf of the latter. Prime Minister Demirel actually stated that a Turkish intervention on Azerbaijan's side would only result in putting the whole world on the Armenian side (Cornell 1998).

On the seventh day⁷ of killings in Sumgait the Armenians in Yerevan marched to the Genocide memorial with the photos of Sumgait victims and the photos of the Armenian intellectuals who were killed on April 24, 1915. The Fortieth Day that fell in April was not observed, most likely because there is already a Commemoration Day in April, April 24, the Remembrance Day of the victims of the Armenian Genocide. Thus, the Fortieth Day of those massacred in Sumgait was joined with a more significant Remembrance Day, and the twenty-six victims (official number of killed Armenians in Sumgait) were identified with those 1.5 million fallen in the 1915 Genocide. Moreover, concerning the identification of the old and new victims, the following fact is worth focusing on. The photographs of the victims of both genocides at beginning and end of the twentieth century were put among the flowers around the central flame of the Genocide Monument, thereby, creating a kind of visible connection between the old and recent victims. Another "identification" between the recent and old victims is the fact that the cross stone commemorating the victims of Sumgait was placed right within the territory of Genocide Memorial, and on 24 April.

The posters printed during the Karabkh Movement spoke in a language of their own about the parallels between the massacres in Sumgait and the 1915 Genocide⁸. The posters can be grouped based on the main line of the messages that they aim to address. The posters that the

⁷ It is a commonly accepted tradition in Armenia to remember the dead ones on the seventh and fortieth days after the death, and also after the completion of the first year since the death of a person.

⁸ Harutyun Marutyan tracked the changes in Armenian identity by studying around 1000 posters printed during the years of the Karabakh Movement, 370 of which are about Genocide.

Armenians carried on April 24, 1988 showed that Sumgait was perceived as the continuation of 1915 Genocide: *“The events in Sumgait are the sequence of 1915 Genocide.”*; *“Sumgait is a continuation of the Mets Yeghern.”*; *“Reluctance to acknowledge the 1915 Genocide led to the Genocide of 1988.”*; *“Humanity is obliged to recognize the fact of the 1915 Genocide for Sumgait never to be repeated.”* Sumgait and the year of the events there, 1988, find a place in the range of the already known genocides in certain posters: *“Deir-Zor - Sumgait/Verdict for the Crime,”* *“Deir-Zor, Buchenwald, Sumgait.”* These are attempts at expressing the fact that Armenians viewed the massacres organized by Azerbaijanis in Sumgait on the same platform with the 1915 Genocide of Turks against Armenians and the annihilation of millions of people of various nationalities by the German fascists in their concentration camps. A group of posters, like *“A New Nuremberg for Sumgait and Nakhijevan”*; *“April 24, Sumgait, Baku – It’s the same hand...”*; *“Had the Soviet Government recognized the Genocide of 1915, there would have been no Sumgait in 1988,”* was directed at the Central Soviet Government, questioning the process of trials and the triad of the policies perestroika, glasnost and democratization (Marutyan 2009).

The social and political conditions faced by Armenians living in Azerbaijan paralleled too closely the context of previous massacres at the hands of Ottoman Turks in 1915. More specifically, the following parallels can be drawn between the recent pogroms against the Armenian population and the previous threats to their existence: 1) Armenians were a minority population in both Azerbaijan and Turkey and were thus clearly identifiable as objects of persecution; 2) Armenians were more upwardly mobile than the majority population; hence, they were likely to be the objects of jealousy and envy; 3) the overarching political conditions were unstable in both the Soviet Union and the Ottoman Empire, and it is a truth commonly

acknowledged that revolutionary change is a prerequisite for most massacres and genocides (Miller and Touryan 2003).

Besides the noted set of similarities, there are also substantial differences between the 1915 Genocide and the massacres at the end of twentieth century. In 1915 news on the massacres and deportations in various provinces spread rather slowly, mainly by word of mouth and thus, it was not immediately apparent that a coordinated plan of extermination was launched and carefully implemented. In contrast, at the end of twentieth century technology made the linkage of events in Sumgait, Baku, Yerevan, Stepanakert, and other towns tangible. The level of technological development possesses other effects as well: the functioning airplanes and trains helped refugees to get away from Azerbaijan in a way that was not possible back to 1915. Moreover, the presence of a host country, i.e. Armenia, where the refugees could flee was lacking in 1915. Though it is debated about the role the Soviet government in fostering the recent pogroms in Sumgait, Baku and other cities, it should be stressed that SU authorities also had the power to stop the massacres which was not applicable to any single power during World War I.

To sum up the discussion on the tendency to draw parallels between the mass killings of the Armenians in 1915 and 1988-1990, it should be stressed that collective and historic memory always plays a pivotal role while interpreting the contemporary events. During the Karabakh Movement, the concept of Genocide went beyond the borders of the pain and suffering of the time-frame in which it took place. It forced people to take active measures, and the symbol of a victim pleading for justice and support was replaced by the symbol of a fighter. The huge strength of the historic and collective memory resulted in the change of the Armenian identity, and opened up new prospects for the so much cherished success of the Artsakh liberation movement.

1991 INDEPENDENCE AND SUMGAI

The consequence of the crimeful tolerance of ethnic cleansings of the Armenian population in Sumgait by Soviet authorities led to the exercise of permanent small and large scale acts of genocide perpetrated against the Armenians on the territory of Azerbaijan and Nagorno Karabakh. Sumgait turned to be the first mark on the long list of crimes against humanity committed by Azerbaijani governments in power through the period of last century. Besides the indifference of the Soviet authorities, the international society also didn't make an adequate political and legal evaluation of the act of genocide in Sumgait which took place on the territory of Azerbaijan SSR behind the closed curtains of the SU. Sumgait was viewed through the prism of an internal issue of the Soviet Union, and thus the crimes in Sumgait went unconvicted and unpunished.

After the breakup of the SU and the establishment of the new institutional order in the independent republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan no major shift in the designed policies with regard to the condemnation of the Sumgait massacres was witnessed. This part of the paper aims at understanding the reasons why the Sumgait massacres were not put on the foreign policy agenda of the independent Republic of Armenia. The focus will be on the examination of the main vectors of the foreign policy pursued by the leaders of the independent Armenia and the reasons why the international recognition of this tragedy did not become one of the key issues on Armenia's foreign policy domain along with the Karabakh issue.

The European Parliament and US Congress passed resolutions⁹ condemning the brutality and pressure used against Armenian population in Azerbaijan and called upon the Soviet

⁹ See the extracts from the resolutions in the Review of the Literature part of the study.

authorities to secure the safety of the Armenians living in Soviet Azerbaijan and to ensure that those found guilty of having incited or taken part in the pogroms against the Armenians are punished according to the law. Though these institutions didn't refer to the massacres of the Armenians in Sumgait as genocide, they stressed the importance of taking effective measures to protect the Armenian population. During the period of the gradual fall of the Soviet regime the international society made certain steps to promote the concept of protection of universal human rights on the territory of the SU, but after the collapse of the Soviet Empire the prevailing scheme of the conducted politics vis-à-vis each post-soviet state was based on the segregated interests, implying separate interests with Azerbaijan and separate interests with Armenia. In the realm of the constructed new political reality neither sovereign states, nor non-state actors took a vocal stance and condemned the chain of ethnic cleansings on the territory of Azerbaijan SSR as genocide.

Genocide is an international crime which violates the very principles of humanity in the civilized world. Ethnic cleansing, accompanied with mass acts of murder, rape and assault against people of particular nationality, mass plundering and destruction of property aims to physically annihilate representatives of particular nationality from the territory of a given state. A state which carries out a genocide, acts not just as a subject of international law, violating international norms, but also as a political organization acting as a source of genocide and its immediate perpetrator. When genocide is viewed as an international crime, the universal obligations come into force: not only the obligations towards the victim, but also obligations towards the international community at large. This is about the violation of universal liabilities *ergo omnes* – between everyone (Moshenskaya 2004). In this case each subject of international law, i.e. independent Republic of Armenia, has the right to demand the infringer of the law to

stop the criminal acts and eliminate the consequences. Hence, it can be stated that the adequate political and legal evaluation of the acts of genocide committed on the territory of Azerbaijan SSR and Republic of Azerbaijan at the end of the previous century hinges not only on the legal component, but also to a certain degree depends on the course of developments on the political agenda on national, regional and international domains. The principles of international law are quite abstract and they do not resolve the present issue by themselves, especially if there is no interested power standing behind them. But these principles are recognized by the whole world and no state can ignore them. These principles should constitute the legal and moral foundation for the political stance adopted by Armenia.

It should be stated that the official recognition of genocide is not a singular political project but a dynamic political stance taken by a subject of international law, e.g. sovereign state, in the pursuit of justice for the committed crimes against humanity. Maja Catic (2008) stresses several elements which are characteristic of this stance: 1) The assertion that the event involving mass death or mass murder constitutes genocide in accordance with the Genocide Convention; 2) State-sponsored initiatives to obtain official recognition of genocide; and, 3) The assertion of the claim-right: a permission to pursue a particular goal by the group that has been a victim of genocide, plus a correlative obligation of the international community to assist the community in pursuit of that particular goal.

Based on the above-mentioned elements, comprising the foundation of a political stance with regard to the pursuit of official recognition of genocide, the analysis of the possibilities in the context of foreign policy of independent Armenia to utilize the genocide discourse to strengthen Armenia's geopolitical position vis-à-vis her neighbors has the following characteristics.

As it has been mentioned, the crimes against civilian Armenians of Sumgait fall under the definitions of the UN Convention on Preventing and Punishing the Crime of Genocide. In the context of the Sumgait massacres the adding of one important definition made in the introduction to an important Soviet publication is of pivotal importance.

...The quantitative aspect is not definitive regarding the crime of genocide. The killing of several representatives of a national group is genocide if the killings are done with the intention of destroying the national group as such (Human Rights; A Collection of International Documents, 1986, 12).

Thus, one of criterion for taking the political stance with regard to the official recognition of Sumgait massacres as genocide was present at the time when Armenia began to construct and design her foreign policy after gaining independence. For the analysis of the possibility to fulfill the criterion concerning the assertion of the claim-right the below-mentioned norms of international law should be cited.

Article 8 of the Convention on Prevention and Punishment of Genocide states: “Any contracting party may call upon the competent organs of the United Nations to take such action under the Charter of the United Nations as they consider appropriate for the prevention and suppression of acts of genocide...” Whilst the Article 55 and 56 of UN Charter indicate that each and every member of UN has an obligation “to undertake joint and independent actions in cooperation with the Organization aimed at universal respect and protection of human rights and freedoms for all.”

Moreover, in 1951 ICJ Reservations to the Convention on Prevention and Punishment of Genocide the ICJ clearly stipulates that “underlying principles of the Convention are principles recognized by the civilized nations and obligatory to all the states outside of any Convention.” Based on the ICJ Reservations genocide constitutes crime prevention and punishment of which is

an obligation of any state despite its participation or non-participation in the convention, and despite the fact whether the acts of genocide were carried out before or after the signature of the Convention and it coming into force (Barsegov 1990, p.11). On July 11, 1996 in the case on application of the Convention on Prevention and Punishment of Genocide the ICJ noted: "... the underlying principles of this Convention are recognized by the civilized countries as legal liabilities of states even without any agreement-based liability; ... just like the condemnation of genocide, so is the cooperation necessary for the rescue of humanity from this repulsive crime."

Thus, the Republic of Armenia a sovereign state with an independent foreign policy, is an independent subject of international law, enjoying full rights of the international community, is a member of universal and regional international organizations, and has full rights on application of individual and collective measures (in cooperation with other states) in order to condemn and prevent Azerbaijan's policies of genocide against the Armenian people.

According to Maja Catic (2008) initiatives to obtain official genocide recognition involve three identifiable, though not singular groups – the victims, the perpetrators, and the international community. On the very basic level, acknowledging genocide against a given group is aimed at redeeming the victims and survivors from oblivion and from vanishing from the annals of history. In this context, initiatives seeking official genocide recognition serve as the verbal and legal framework for victims' claims and charges, as well as the reminder to the bystanders of what was done to the victims by the perpetrators, accompanied by the indifference, or even hostility, of the larger world. But the most important aspect of initiatives seeking genocide recognition is the argument of corrective justice embodied in those initiatives, regardless of whether such initiatives are designed to explicitly seek retributive and/or restorative justice (namely punishment for perpetrators and some form of compensation for the victims). This

argument of corrective justice is relatively straightforward: the group against which genocide was committed is entitled to a given resource, i.e. its own national state or new territory as the only adequate reparations for the injustice suffered, and the international community which behaved shamefully during the genocide, should assist the group in obtaining that to which it is entitled.¹⁰

Taking into account the argument of corrective justice it can be stated that the acts of genocide against the Armenians on the territories of Azerbaijani SSR and Azerbaijan Republic, where the Armenian population did not have the necessary means for effective self-defense against the “aggression from inside” and further realization of its legal right for self-determination, proved to the Armenians of the former NKAR that it was crucial for them to create their own state. This state would be the only guarantor of security for Armenians of NK, unlike the destinies of the Armenians on other territories of the aggressor state (Aghadjanyan et al. 2007). Hence, because the policy of pursuing justice for the acts of genocide on the territory of Azerbaijan SSR became highly correlated with Karabakh issue within the course of the developments both under SU control and after the gaining of independence, the official recognition of those massacres as genocide opens new opportunities to strengthen the position of NKR with regard to the recognition of NKR by other states.

Having analyzed the legal and political grounds sufficient for taking an active political stance towards the official recognition of Sumgait massacres as genocide, the place attached to this issue on the foreign policy agenda of the independent Republic of Armenia from 1991 till the moment will be further discussed.

¹⁰ This is well illustrated by Ben Gurion’s harnessing of the Holocaust in his plea for Israel’s right to define its own security needs and to develop the nuclear bomb. As Zertal argues, “the Holocaust and its appropriated survivors had become the supreme sanction for the deployment of Israeli power, its interpreters, apologists, and justifiers.” Quoted from Zertal’s *“Israel’s Holocaust and Politics of Nationhood,”* p. 99.

After gaining independence the young Republic had to define the main directions and principles of its foreign policy. The government of RA had to start from the scratch as during the 70 years of Soviet rule the predecessor of the RA, Soviet Armenia, did not have the right to pursue its foreign policy and thus could not transfer any worthy experience in this field. Moreover, the new leadership had no experience in this particular field and there were not sufficient professional diplomats in Armenia. On the other hand, the problems of the foreign policy were closely interconnected with the problem of national security of RA (Hovhannisyan 1998). The design of the main directions of the foreign policy was correlated with a set of issues some of which had their roots in the Soviet era.

Several factors influenced and changed the trajectory of the new foreign policy of the RA. The earthquake that struck the northern parts of the Armenia on 7 December 1988 brought to a halt about twenty-five percent of Armenia's economy. In February 1989 a decision was made to shut down the Medzamor nuclear power plant, producing about thirty-six percent of Armenia's electricity, as a precaution against a new earthquake of similar magnitude. Then, at the beginning of summer 1989, the Azerbaijan Popular Front, the opposition to the Communist regime in Azerbaijan, organized a blockade of Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh. The impact of the blockade was aggravated when the Turkish government decided to blockade transit across its Armenia border. In March 1993 it joined Azerbaijan in suspending both aid to Armenia and Armenian access to transit routes. After the massacres in Sumgait, Baku, Kirovabad and other parts of Azerbaijan the whole Armenian population was forced out of the territories of Azerbaijan SSR (which later on constituted the territorial basis of Azerbaijan Republic), and about 350,000 of them found a shelter in Armenia. Moreover, the Republic of Azerbaijan imposed a full-fledged war on the Armenians in 1992 (Astourian 2001). Hence, in the midst of

an ongoing war and fragile economy the issue of pursuing of justice for Sumgait massacres was overshadowed by more urgent political tasks. The defense of the Armenians against “a second Sumgait” became a national priority.

The reasons for not making the official recognition of Sumgait massacres a key element on the foreign policy domain during the first years of the independence are not rooted only in the economic hardship and the continuing human loses on the battlefield. Some of the answers to this question can be found in the ideology and policies of the Armenian Pan-National Movement (APNM), the ruling party of independent Armenia and its leader, President Levon Ter-Petrosian. APNM propounded a new approach to Armenia’s national security based on a critical reinterpretation of the Armenian past, particularly a step forward to direct and normal relations with Turkey. But the main challenge was the touchy issue of the Armenian genocide and its consequences. The ideologists of the APNM argued that, for the sake of independence and state building, the Armenian genocide should be left off Armenia’s political agenda (Astourian 2001).

This “realistic and pragmatic” vision of the normalized relations with Turkey confronted the main lines of the program upon which APNM had been founded, and thanks to which had won the popular support. Moreover, APNM failed to assess the fact that the shift in their position may not reflect the feelings of its popular base especially taking into consideration in the fact that Azerbaijani pogroms against the Armenians of Sumgait, Kirovabad and Baku had been met by widespread revulsion in Armenia and direct comparisons had been made between the Armenian Genocide of 1915 and the chain of acts of genocide at the hands of Azerbaijan. This mobilizing factor of Armenian national identity and collective memory had figured prominently in the popular discourse of the Karabakh mass demonstrations staged in Yerevan from February 1988

on, and thus highly contributed to the mobilization of the Armenian masses first around the Karabachos Committee and then the APNM (Astourian 2001).

The later developments proved that all the assumptions upon which the views of the APNM and Ter-Petrosian's subsequent foreign policy toward Turkey were based were unrealistic. After the collapse of SU the emerging new states populated by Muslim ethnic cousins "granted" Turkey with an opportunity to become a major regional power. Thus, Turkey started to construct its new "active foreign policy", also referred to as "neo-Ottomanism" (Dagi 1993). The new leadership of Armenia failed to understand that Azerbaijan was playing a central role in the new foreign policy of Turkey, and the latter would not allow the consolidation of Armenian victories in Nagorno Karabakh, nor would it be inclined to normalize relations with Armenia. On the contrary, by the turn of 1994 Ter-Petrosian was arguing that the Mountainous Karabakh conflict "constitutes the main obstacle to the creation of a normal state and a healthy economy"¹¹ (Astourian, 2001).

Often Diaspora groups are the initiators of certain actions that lead to the state-sponsored policies to attain official genocide recognition. Even taking into account the privileged position enjoyed by states in the realm of international relations and the sphere of international law (meaning that only states can sponsor resolutions in the UN or bring cases to the ICJ) Diaspora groups play an extremely important role in efforts to obtain official recognition. When the state emerges as the leading actor in designing policies aimed at official genocide recognition, the basis of those policies and initiatives are the joint efforts of states and Diasporas associated with those states. The administration of Levon Ter-Petrosian, engaged with normalization of relations with all the neighbors, mismanaged to understand the crucial importance of Diaspora in the

¹¹ As he is quoted in Jean Gueyras, "L'Arménie piégée par la guerre du Karabakh," *Le Monde diplomatique* 479 (February 1994): 3.

political life of Armenia and later possible involvement of Diaspora in seeking justice for the acts of genocide committed against the Armenians in the end of the twentieth century. As Stephan Astourian (2001, p.38) stresses “in the view of the APNM, Diaspora Armenians should not meddle in the political life of Armenia; rather, they should content themselves with providing financial aid and “strengthening statehood,” which meant more or less supporting the policies of the government.”

The regime of the first president of RA eventually won the war launched by Azerbaijan, but it made certain drawbacks during the second challenging phase, i.e. winning the peace time. The Karabakh problem went under the authority of Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and its Minsk group. Without presenting the details of different proposals concerning the settlement of Karabakh issue, a reference should be made to the plenary session of OSCE in Lisbon on December 1, 1996. On the table of discussion was a project which was presenting the interests and position of Azerbaijan ignoring the results of the war. The proposals of that particular project were not acceptable for NKR and Armenia. The Armenian delegation in Lisbon summit used its right of veto and the project was rejected. But the statement of the president Levon Ter-Petrosian at the Lisbon summit deserves a special attention. Ter-Petrosian stated that the facts of the genocide of Armenians in Sumgait, Ganja and Baku in 1988-1990 proved that Azerbaijan was not capable of preventing the genocide of Armenians on its territory and guaranteeing the secure existence of the Armenian people there (Hovhannisyan 1998). According to the results of the conducted interviews for the purposes of this study it can be stated that this statement shows that Sumgait massacres alone do not constitute a special part of the foreign policy pursued by the independent Armenia. The ethnic cleansings in Sumgait should be observed in the context of the chain of the acts of genocide targeting the Armenian population

on the territory of Azerbaijan and are keenly correlated with the Karabakh issue. Hence, the case of Sumgait genocide has been incorporated into the “file” of a set of massacres against Azerbaijani Armenians, and along with other convincing arguments was used as a “bloody proof” to claim that NK cannot be the integral part of Azerbaijan because of the security reasons and the incapability to protect its own citizens.

The first president of RA demonstrated a willingness to accept a May 1997 Minsk Group proposal for the Karabakh’s conflict settlement, named “Step by step solution.” This plan was calling for the recognition of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity as a vital component of the conflict's resolution. Ter-Petrosian's position was unpopular not only among some members of his government, but also among Armenian refugees, and members of the Diaspora communities. Growing resistance to Ter-Petrosian's Karabakh policy based on too many concessions ultimately led to his resignation in February 1998 (Petros 2003).

On March 30, 1998 Robert Kocharian, the prime-minister of Armenia and former president of NKR, was elected a new president of the RA. Some foreign statesmen, mass media, etc., announced that the hard-liners came to power in the RA, and that the danger of a new war increased. *The Washington Post* (February 7, 1998) stated that the downfall of the first president of the RA “has strengthened most of all a party of war veterans who show little inclination to compromise.” Though some corrections took place, the foreign policy doctrine of the RA was not changed principally after the resignation of Ter-Petrosian. The second president of the RA charted a new course in the foreign policy. He reaffirmed the tendency to normalize the relations with neighboring countries and asserted that with regard to Karabakh conflict the principles of peaceful resolution based on negotiations and mutual compromises were preserved (Hovhannisyan 1998). Kocharian revised Ter-Petrosian's policies vis-à-vis Turkey, while still

aiming at establishing relations and opening the border without preconditions, he introduced the international recognition of the Armenian genocide as the cornerstone of Armenia's foreign policy agenda. He spelled out his adopted policy line during the UN General Assembly in September 1998, on occasion of the 50th anniversary of the UN Genocide Convention.

Following September 11, 2001, Armenian President Robert Kocharian introduced the new foreign policy doctrine of the RA, based on the principle of “complementarity.” “Complementarity” was a framework promoted by Armenia aiming at the creation of conditions in the Caucasus in which the interests of Russia and the West overlap rather than contradict (Sargsian, Grigorian, and Novikova 2002).

With regard to the policies aiming to attain an official recognition of Sumgait as genocide no particular shift has been made compared to the pursued foreign policy of Levon Ter-Petrosian administration. Sumgait massacres along with the other acts of genocide were used to support the argument that if a state launches ethnic cleansings against people belonging to the national minority and possessing equal rights of the citizens of the aggressor state, it loses all moral, political, and most importantly legal grounds to prevent these people, against whom the genocidal acts were perpetrated, from implementing their right to create a separate statehood, outside of the politico-legal framework of the aggressor state (Aghadjanyan et al. 2007).

On the 16th anniversary of the massacres in Sumgait the President Kocharian condemned the non-adequate political and legal assessment of the genocide in Sumgait by the Soviet officials and international society at large. He stressed that the atmosphere of impunity and the

state designed anti-Armenian propaganda take another dimension in Azerbaijan and led to such crimes as the murder of the Armenian army officer Gurgen Margaryan.¹²

The minister of foreign affairs of the RA Vardan Oskanian, with regard to the 20th anniversary of the Armenian massacres in Sumgait, stated that Sumgait is highly important because the military component of the settlement of the Karabakh conflict originated there, the first attempt of ethnic cleansings took place in Sumgait and led the people of Karabakh to the irreversibility of the idea of self-determination. Moreover, he asserted that on the 20th anniversary Armenia will bring up the issue of Sumgait more actively to explain to the international community why Karabakh cannot return to Azerbaijan.¹³

Hence, it can be stated that though there were considerable changes in the designed foreign policy of the RA under the administration of the second president of Armenia, there was not witnessed any change in the political stance towards the international recognition of Sumgait massacres as genocide. No state initiated policy was designed with regard to the attaining justice for the acts of genocide in Sumgait.

¹² Armenian citizen Gurgen Margaryan, 26 years old, was hacked to death while asleep by Ramil Safarov, a Lieutenant of the Azerbaijani Army in February 2004 in Budapesht, Hungary while participating at a training course within the framework of the NATO-sponsored “Partnership for Peace” program.

¹³ The press conference available at http://www.armenianow.com/news/8047/nkr_comparison_to_kosovo

SUMGAIT ON THE FOREIGN POLICY AGENDA OF THE RA

The track of the history shows that since independence the problem of the recognition of Armenian Genocide of 1915 and its condemnation has been one of the most significant issues on the Armenian foreign policy agenda. It also has a serious domestic political and all-national meaning (in terms of functioning of the whole Diaspora-Homeland system), as well as an important foreign political resonance. According to Ruben Safrastyan (2005) the 1915 Genocide affirmation issue is the only vector of Armenia's foreign policy, which reaches far beyond the regional context and enters modern global politics being widely debated in political and public circles of many countries, including world powers. The global political processes have recently been targeted at strengthening their moral component via focusing on issues that fall under the category of protection of human rights. In this context, Armenia's policy of promoting the universal recognition of the 1915 Genocide and its condemnation as a crime against humanity takes a pivotal place.

The main peculiarity of the process of the official recognition of the genocide is that the intensity level of its foreign political manifestation can basically be set only by the authorities of the RA. With the shift of the power to the second president Robert Kocharian, the most significant adjustment that the new Armenian leadership made to the foreign policy domain was the official acknowledgment of the Genocide factor as a priority issue compared to the pursued policy of the first president of the RA, Levon Ter-Petrosian.

Taking into account the "experience" of designing a foreign policy aimed at the condemnation of a genocide against Armenians, an insight into the RA third president's actions or inactions aimed at reaching an adequate legal and political assessment for the acts of genocide

against Armenians at the end of the twentieth century on the territory of Azerbaijan will follow. This part of the study aims at understanding the current place and importance attached to the ethnic cleansings committed in Sumgait, and the state policy targeting the possibility of an official recognition of the massacres as genocide.

At the beginning of his term in 2008 while addressing the Armenian foreign policy agenda the third president of the RA Serzh Sargsian stressed the fact that in the coming years the foreign policy of Armenia while maintaining complementarity should become more proactive, meaning that Armenia should become more engaged in the international affairs, continue to deepen relations with the friendly countries as well as with the international organizations. With this regard he focused on the importance of creating favorable conditions for the peaceful and fair resolution of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict. President highlighted the fact that “the existence of the Republic of Nagorno Karabakh is an irrefutable fact and irreversible reality.”¹⁴ Thus, the main task of the foreign policy of Armenia under the administration of the third president is peaceful and fair settlement of the Karabakh issue, based on the self-determination of the people of Artsakh.

Although the collapse of the SU, the challenges of state building and the Karabakh conflict pushed the topic of Sumgait genocide to the background, the course of the developments on the political arena shows that it does not imply that the issues of Karabakh conflict and Sumgait massacres are unrelated. Armenian authorities argue that by perpetrating violence against its own citizens, Azerbaijan lost the moral right to custody over Armenian Azerbaijanis. Karabakh Armenians accuse the Soviet-era Azerbaijani government of economic and social

¹⁴ Press Release, “*President Serzh Sargsyan Addresses Armenian Foreign Policy Agenda*” available at <http://www.armeniaemb.org/News/EmbassyPressReleases/Releases/serzh-sargsyan-armenian-foreign-policy-address-2008-04-16.htm>

discrimination and political repression that made life intolerable. Thereafter when Karabakh Armenians sought self-determination peacefully, Azerbaijan tried to suppress them by force. Karabakh Armenians reason that having suffered fundamental injustices, including threats to life and ethnic cleansing, they have the remedial right to secede (International Crisis Group 2005). Based on the conducted interviews with the experts in the field of concern it can be stated that this policy of viewing the acts of genocide on the territory of Azerbaijan as one of the reasons to refuse the forcible inclusion of Nagorno Karabakh into Azerbaijan still prevails within the state policy under the administration of the third president of Armenia, Serzh Sargsian.

The Republic of Azerbaijan consistently represents its own picture and the vision of the Nagorno Karabakh problem on the international arena. Azerbaijan tries to conceal the policy of the ethnic cleansings and violence applied against the people of Nagorno Karabakh from 1988 to 1991. This policy of exterminating the Armenian population of Azerbaijan eventually has developed into open aggression and large-scale hostilities against the self-determined people of the Republic of Nagorno Karabakh and blockade which lasts till today. The conflict still remains unresolved. Since the years of the atrocities, despite losing the launched war and “openly” committing itself to the peace negotiation process through the OSCE Minsk Group, Azerbaijan pursues the politics of violence via threats to renew the war and the frequent cross-border attacks. Moreover, the development of information technologies has opened a new platform for Azerbaijan to pursue an active propagandistic campaign with respect to certain aspects of the conflict.

On the one hand the conducted interviews with the experts bring to the conclusion that the active propaganda machine launched by the government of Azerbaijan within and beyond the borders of Azerbaijan influences the public opinion concerning the chain of massacres

throughout Azerbaijan and Nagorno Karabakh issue at large. Azerbaijan carries out a state influential propaganda on pogroms of Armenians and via the control of media in the country pursues a policy of “whitening the pogrom-makers” focusing on the “facts” that Armenians themselves are to be blamed for organizing and carrying out the pogroms. On the other hand, unlike Azerbaijan, the state policy of Armenia does not base itself on the dissemination of false and non-valid information. The historic facts stand for themselves and there is no need to pursue a policy of contesting the historic facts concerning the Karabakh issue. Moreover, it is not a secret that there is an information war between Azerbaijan and Armenia, but the approaches of the involved parties differ dramatically. From 1988 till 1994 the Armenian side was carrying out a well-designed information dissemination policy despite the scarcity of the available resources. 1994 was a turning point since the Armenian side gained the war and underestimated the necessity to “win the peace.” Azerbaijanian perception of the reality differed dramatically from the Armenian one mainly because they still consider themselves as a country engaged in a war. Thus, the type of the propaganda utilized by the state policy of Azerbaijan bases itself on the type of a propaganda which suits the logic of an ongoing war.

According to Samvel Martirosyan, a blogger and independent expert on information security affairs, Azerbaijan spends huge funds to produce and disseminate content that misinforms the public on the late 1980s and early 1990s events. He states that some of the dozen or so websites created in Azerbaijan targeting the anti-Armenian sentiments, continue to be further updated and advertised through large state foundations. But this fact does not lead to the conclusion that the Armenian authorities should follow the example of the active propagandistic campaign launched by the Azerbaijani authorities. So far the Armenian side has deliberately

designed a small number of projects¹⁵ aimed at presenting an evidence-based Armenian perspective. So even though fewer websites have been created in Armenia, “they are targeted and, unlike Azerbaijani websites that turn into spam, they are built in a more competent and influential way.”¹⁶ Thus, the more active is the Armenian propaganda the more absurd and vague are the “arguments” disseminated by the Azerbaijani propaganda machine.

While assessing the current situation concerning the level of importance attached to the issue of Sumgait massacres, in the context of other ethnic cleansings undertaken by Azerbaijani governments, an observation of some aspects of the state propaganda launched by the Republic of Azerbaijan is important. Aiming to conceal and to erase from the memory of humanity the horrific acts of genocide in Sumgait and Baku, as well as the mass killings of Armenians in Maragha and Khramorth villages in summer 1992, a thesis about the “Azerbaijani Genocide” implemented by Armenians in Khojalu has been designed by the Azerbaijani authorities. Azerbaijani leadership undertakes attempts to put the massacre of peaceful population in Sumgait on the same footing with the events in Azeri-populated village of Khojalu, Askeran region of NKR, which was turned into a firing point for shelling peaceful population, civilian and humanitarian objects in Stepanakert and surrounding Armenian villages. Moreover, a policy of distorting the facts concerning the true causes of the events in Khojalu, which have become a ring of domestic political struggle for power in Azerbaijan, is actively utilized (Demoyan and Melik-Shakhnazaryan 2002). Such an attitude towards the modern history hampers the efforts by international mediators for peaceful settlement of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict and distracts the minimal conditions required for a dialogue between the parties of the

¹⁵ <http://www.xocali.net>; <http://www.karabah88.ru/>; <http://sumgait.info>; <http://www.press.karabakh.info>

¹⁶ Interview with Samvel Martirosyan available at http://www.armenianow.com/news/26640/armenian_pogroms_azerbaijan_prosecutor_s_office_webpage

dispute, but at the same time in the eyes of the international society this active propaganda campaign puts the events in Khojalu (wartime) and in Sumgait (peacetime) on the same grounds.

The ethnic cleansing and deportation of Armenian population from the former Azerbaijan SSR, which followed by Azerbaijan's direct aggression aimed against the people of Nagorno Karabakh, who strived for self-determination and realization of their legal right for establishment of statehood, also brought to certain legal consequence. The legal consequences of Armenian deportations from the territories, where today Azerbaijan exercises its state sovereignty (internal aggression); as well as the subsequent planning, preparation and unleashing and carrying out of open military activities against NKR, in violation of norms of international humanitarian and of international law at large (external aggression), rather obviously prove that the first priority in the conflict resolution process is the restoration of rights of those individuals who suffers the most due to the abovementioned activities and their consequences. Azerbaijan's internal aggression caused suffering to people who today find themselves in an indefinite legal status, grave socio-economic conditions and are deprived of means to legally defend them and fight for those rights and freedoms of which they are disposed (Aghadjanyan et al. 2007). Thus, this issue constitutes an important aspect in the process of the recognition of the ethnic cleansings as genocide since the Azerbaijan Republic refuses to compensate for the damage perpetrated against the Armenian refugees and forced migrants.

According to Ruben Safrastyan till now the authorities of RA have failed to raise the issue of Armenian refugees from Sumgait and other spots where ethnic cleansings had taken place properly on the foreign policy domain, and in the present format of negotiations on

Karabakh issue only the rights of Azerbaijanian refugees are stressed.¹⁷ The interviewed experts stated that the issue of refugees is another “political card” and part of the state propaganda in Azerbaijan, and the conducted state policies with regard to refugee rights in Armenia and Azerbaijan are totally different. The citation of several figures concerning the refugee status in Armenia and Azerbaijan is of great importance. The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has reported that at the beginning of 2011, there were only 3,300 people considered refugees or displaced persons in Armenia. Armenia has granted citizenship and acted to permanently house most of the ethnic Armenians who fled Azerbaijan. Unlike the present situation in Armenia, there were still about 595,000 people considered refugees or displaced persons in Azerbaijan at the same period of time (Nichol 2011). It can be stated that Armenia carries out a policy aiming at the integration of these people into the Armenian society. Azerbaijan, on the contrary, “manipulates” the rights of this group of people and uses them as a “tool” of its state propaganda.

There are still considerable drawbacks in the designed policy towards the protection of rights of Azerbaijani Armenian refugees by the RA and NKR. The continuous evasion of the Azerbaijan Republic from compensating for the damage perpetrated against the Armenian refugees and forced migrants gives the authorities of NKR – the only state subject on the territory of former Azerbaijan SSR, that can take the responsibility of restoring rights of those who suffered most in the conflict – all the grounds to undertake all the necessary actions aimed at compensating for the harm incurred by these people. In this context the present day control of the territories in the Lower Karabakh and the state-legal effect of NKR’s sovereignty there must

¹⁷ <http://www.aysor.am/ru/news/2010/03/13/ruben-safrastyan3>

be understood as necessary politico-legal measures which are to ensure the compensation of the losses of the Armenian population in Azerbaijan SSR (Aghadjanyan et al. 2007). But this “arsenal” of arguments is not yet set into motion by the Armenian side. Along with certain steps aimed at the official recognition of the ethnic cleansings this aspect of the concept of “politics of entitlement” needs to be carefully elaborated and presented to the international society.

State-sponsored initiatives to obtain official genocide recognition are preceded and/or accompanied by heightened public memorialisation of genocide by the means of remembrance days, construction of memorial sites and monuments, and genocide-centered research institutes and projects. All these attributes are present in case of the policy aiming to restore justice for the 1915 Genocide, but in case of Sumgait except the constructed memorial cite, none of the state-sponsored initiatives has been carried out so far.¹⁸ The fact that the RA National Assembly (Parliament) has not yet recognized Sumgait massacres as genocide implies that the Sumgait issue has not been taken up by the Armenian authorities till now and the pursue of justice concerning this crime does not constitute a part of a state policy.

With regard to the state-sponsored initiatives and the role of the national Parliament in setting a solid ground for the official recognition of a genocide by other sovereign states and non-states actors, the precedents of Ukraine with regard to Holodomor in Ukraine of 1932-1933 and Georgia concerning the massacres of the Circassian people (Western Caucasus) by the Russian Empire from 1860 to 1870. It should be stated that the Parliaments of both republics played a key role in the process of official recognition of the crimes as genocide by some

¹⁸ February 26 is designated as a National Day of Mourning in Azerbaijan with regard to “Khojalu Genocide.”

sovereign states and non-state actors.¹⁹ Moreover, the bills adopted by the national Parliaments were part of a strategy developed by the official administrations of Georgia and Ukraine, and this vocal stance was rooted rather in current relations between these two states and Russia than in the condemning the historical injustice. Thus, two post-Soviet states have already shown by their practice that an active and well-designed political program aiming at addressing a crime as genocide can have a success even despite the fact that the crimes have been conducted in a distant past and by already non-existing subjects of international law, i.e. Russian Empire and Soviet Union.

Despite the fact that still no state-sponsored initiative has been undertaken on the international level to raise the issue of the official recognition of the ethnic cleansings in Sumgait, the interviewed experts stressed the fact that the authorities under the leadership of the third president of the RA took serious steps to counteract Azerbaijan's propaganda and utilized such "tools" that had never been circulated by the previous administrations.

The Armenian Prosecutor General's Office has started a new section on its official website where it presents thousands of documents and materials regarding the criminal cases initiated on pogroms of Armenians in Azerbaijan at the height of ethnic tensions in the late Soviet and early post-Soviet periods. The testimonies of the eye-witnesses, victims, their relatives and successors, exhibit photos and documents, list of the killed, kidnapped and missing people were placed on the webpage (www.genproc.am/sumgait). The new database names Azerbaijani law-enforcement who are now wanted by Armenia on charges of committing the extermination of Armenians in Armenian villages. This was the first time that such an initiative

¹⁹ "The Politics Behind The Georgian Parliament's Recognition of the Circassian Genocide," Available at <http://www.international-alert.org/our-work/caucasus-dialogues-perspectives-region/politics-behind-georgian-parliament%E2%80%99s-recognition-circassian-genocide>

had been pursued through the efforts of the State, mainly the prosecutor's office and interested organizations and individuals.²⁰

One of the most important initiatives aimed at raising the awareness about the acts of genocide against the Armenian population of Azerbaijan and Armenians of NKR is the long-term project "Ordinary Genocide" launched in 2010. The project is implemented by the initiation and support of the Center of Information and Public Relations of the President of Armenia. Within the framework of the project already four documentaries have been shot: "Baku, January 1990," "Sumgait, February 1988," "Maragha, April 10, 1992," "Operation "Koltso" (Ring)." The films are translated into Russian, English, French and Arabic. They are available on the Internet and are widely distributed in DVDs.

²⁰ <http://genproc.am/en/121/item/6492/>

CONCLUSION

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991, the Republic of Armenia, having regained its sovereignty, was for the first time given the opportunity of having an independent foreign policy. Based on the main strategic interests of the country, during the twenty years of independence Armenia embarked on a policy of cooperation with the neighboring and world states taking into account the transformations on the geopolitical and geostrategic platforms.

The period of the independence has shown that the regional and world powers have their own interest in the Caucasus region and in Armenia and are designing their foreign policy with regard to the region pursuing their own interests and principles. In order to develop and implement an appropriate foreign policy doctrine, Armenia has clarified and continues to “update” its position in regional processes. Moreover, certain efforts were directed and currently are developed toward understanding the role that the world and regional states are expecting from Yerevan regarding the fulfillment of its own strategic goals.

This quite challenging task became more complicated because the Armenian people came out of the former Soviet Union in political-military conflict with Azerbaijan over the unsolved issue of Nagorno Karabakh. Right from the start, this fact complicated the fulfillment of the chosen Armenian foreign policy, because the unregulated nature of the conflict had predetermined the inevitability of the joint opposition of a number of states in the region. These states have persistently tried to materialize their strategic goals in the region, using the problem of Nagorno Karabakh as a geopolitical and economic instrument.

The Nagorno Karabakh conflict has a twofold dimension on the construct of the foreign policy of Armenia. On the one hand, the problems of the foreign policy are closely interconnected with the problem of national security of the RA, and one of the main tasks of the foreign policy is a peaceful and fair settlement of the Karabakh issue, based on the self-determination of the people of Artsakh. But the fact that the Karabakh conflict still remains unregulated noticeably restricts the diplomatic mobility of official Yerevan. On the other hand, it strengthens the capacities of world and regional states to influence Armenia for the benefit of their own policies. This means that the factor of the unregulated issue of Nagorno Karabakh, as well as the presence of other unresolved ethnic political conflicts on the southern borders of the post-Soviet territory, provides opportunities to influence the shaping and disposition of regional forces, leading to a new division of spheres of influence for global and regional powers.

Twenty three years have passed since the horrific massacres targeting the Armenian residents of Sumgait, and the fact that Sumgait genocide became a precondition for violence and armed conflicts unfolded around the status of Nagorno Karabakh is beyond any doubt. During the twenty years of independence three presidents of the RA have charted a new course in the foreign policy of Armenia aiming to strengthen the country's external security, maintain external favorable conditions for the development of the country, present the positions of Armenia on the international scene and deepen the engagement in the international organizations, strengthen cooperation with the partner states, as well as resolving regional problems and creating an atmosphere of cooperation. Still none of them has launched a state-sponsored initiative aiming to reach the official recognition of the genocide committed against the Azerbaijani Armenians. The created silence around the Sumgait massacres created atmosphere of unpunishment at the end of the twentieth century and triggered a chain reaction of bloody campaign embracing the entire

territory of Azerbaijan. Till now the prospects for reaching a proper political and legal evaluation for the Sumgait Genocide have not been envisaged on the foreign policy agenda of the RA.

The main peculiarity of the process of the official recognition of the genocide is that the intensity level of its foreign political manifestation can basically be set only by the authorities of the RA. Several factors have influenced and changed the trajectory of the foreign policy of the RA with regard to the official acknowledgment of the 1915 Genocide. With the second president of the RA this issue was set as a priority on the foreign policy domain. So far the policy aimed at the international recognition of this horrific crime constitutes one of the anchors of the foreign policy of the RA proving that the condemnation of the genocide by the international community hinges on not only the legal component, but also depends on the course of developments on the political agenda on national, regional and international levels.

The pursuit of the justice for the crimes against the Armenians in Azerbaijan comprises not only the important factor of the restoration of justice, but also has the pivotal importance for the future developments around Nagorno Karabakh. This issue can be put on the spectrum of the political agenda of the RA as soon as all the payoffs are calculated, the invested time and efforts are proved to be worth the required investments. But the fact that this political stance can one day simply convert into a reaction to the actions by the Azerbaijanian peers opens prospects for deliberate consideration. By taking up the issue of Sumgait the RA authorities will make an indispensable political act, and this act will be a necessary action on behalf the Armenian nation.

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