



The Caucasian Émigrés in Iran: The Case of Azerbaijani Refugees (1920s-1940s)

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Abstract

In 1920, when the Red Army conquered the Republic of Azerbaijan, many political and military elements fled to Iran. The appropriate treatment of Iranians with immigrants, the Iranian government's resistance to the extradite of refugees, the employment of many immigrants in Iranian civil and military sections, and Turkey's chaotic conditions at that time, indicate the importance of Iran in the process of migration of Caucasian Azerbaijanis after the Bolshevik invasion. However, for various reasons, the issue above has not been paid much attention in the works conducted so far, and the presence and activities of Azerbaijani immigrants in Turkey and Europe have been most discussed. In the Persian language, there is little research about the migrations that took place from Russia to Persia after the establishment of the Bolshevik regime, among which only one has gone to the activities of one of the immigrant groups, i.e. the Armenian Dashnaks. It is worth mentioning that the available Persian documents also generally contain general information about "Caucasian" or "Russian/Soviet" refugees. It seems that access to detailed information about the activities of each of the Caucasian communities in Iran, especially their organisations and political factions such as Armenian Dashnaksutyun and Azerbaijani Musavat, requires more than anything the examination of the documents of the Iranian military and security departments in the 1920s and 1930s. Among the Azerbaijani researchers, Musa Qasimli (2006) has mentioned the migration of Azerbaijanis to Iran and the activities of the members of the Musavat Party. In the studies in the European languages, there are scattered mentions of the role of immigrant communities living in Iran in the anti-Soviet plans and actions of countries such as Poland and Japan, the most important of which have been used in this paper. Recently, Atabaki and Volkov (2021) have tried to present a general picture of migrations from the Soviet Union to Persia.

Among the few remaining Persian writings of Caucasian refugees living in Iran, the memoirs of Shamil Javanshir, published in Tehran in the early 1950s, are important. While describing his biography and how he became a refugee in Iran in the 1920s, he mentioned the names of several other refugees, the fate of many of whom became uncertain after the occupation of Iran by the Allies and the establishment of the Red Army and Soviet security agents in Iran. The present article is a preliminary attempt to review the (political) migration from the Republic of Azerbaijan to Iran after the



establishment of the Bolshevik regime, as well as the attitude of exiled Azerbaijani activists towards the host country during the 1920s to 1940s. Undoubtedly, the completion of the debate requires more research in archival centres and the study of the publications of Caucasian émigrés in the interwar period.

During the decades of 1920-1940, the community of Azerbaijani émigrés in Iran was plagued by internal rivalries, anticommunist activities by foreign states, and Soviet intelligence penetration. In the 1920's, Rasolzade's Musavat and Khosrow Sultanov (Sultanzade)'s organization entered the conflict over the leadership of the Azerbaijani diaspora. The success for each meant gaining the support of a significant number of the diaspora and taking over the crossroad of communication with Soviet Azerbaijan. In the early 1930's, some news about the restrictions for Musavatists in Iran was spread. There were rumours about the role of an influential Nakhchivani circle, led by Rahim Khan Nakhjavani and Kalb Ali Khan Nakhjavani, in inspiring the Iranian authorities to take these actions. In Iran, the Azerbaijani community's political life was heavily influenced by Reza Shah's government's security approach, the priority Iran placed on de-escalating tensions with the Soviet Union and Turkey, the memories of ups and downs between Tehran and Baku between 1918 and 1920, as well as the Turkist discourse that dominates Azerbaijani political circles, especially among the Musavat party. After the Second World War, a new round of activities of the Egalitarians began; The period when Rasolzadeh's Azerbaijan idea was closely linked with the requirements of Turkey's domestic and foreign policy and the equations of the Cold War. Azerbaijani activists were surrounded by the comprehensive support of Turkey and Western governments, and they no longer saw much need to resolve the old suspicions of Iranians. Iran was also so involved in various domestic issues and problems and was busy with relations with international powers that it had no time to reflect on the fate of the small countries of the Caucasus.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Republic of Azerbaijan emerged as a neighbour with the most affinities and ties in the northern borders of Iran. Nevertheless, the relations between Tehran and Baku, from the beginning, were accompanied by difficulties and complications, which have continued and intensified in various forms until now. Ignoring and forgetting different aspects of the common history of Iranians and Azerbaijanis, affected by identity politics and official historiography, is a part of this process.

Keywords: Azerbaijani émigrés, Republic of Azerbaijan, Iran, Musavat Party, Soviet Union, Turkey, Poland.

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