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## I BAKU TURCOLOGICAL CONGRESS OF 1926 AS AN ATTEMPT TO UNIFY TURKIC NATIONS

Natavan Galib Aghayeva\*<sup></sup>, Huseyn Javanshir Gunashli<sup></sup>

The Institute of Oriental Studies after acad. Z.M.Bunyadov of ANAS,

Baku, Azerbaijan

\*n.agmaeva@gmail.com

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*I Baku Turcological Congress, which took place in 1926, had a great political and cultural significance for the Turkic communities of the former Russian Empire, who went under the Soviet rule in 1922. Being the first ever scientific congress on Turcology it had a curious purpose of creating of a unified spelling of the new Turkic alphabet based on a Latin script for all Turkic societies of the Central Asia and Caucasus, the unification of terminology and the printing of new textbooks with the introduction to the new alphabet.*

*Present article deals with the development of the idea of Turkism within Turkic societies of the former Russian Empire, the first political and cultural congresses held by them and the I Baku Turcological Congress as a climax of the unification intentions of these peoples.*

**Keywords:** Turkic, unification, Baku, Turcology, Turkism.

### INTRODUCTION

The idea of “Turkism” as a political concept emerged in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century initially as a movement of enlightenment and national awakening of the Turks in the cultural field among the enlightened people in the Russian Empire, and only later it turned into a political issue.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Central Asia, home to the majority of Turkic peoples, became one of the arenas of geopolitical competition between the British and Russian Empires. In the world history, this competition gained the name of “The Great Game”. This struggle, mainly for the territories of Afghanistan, Iran, Central Asia and Tibet and the trade routes located on them, was one of the important events that determined world politics in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The two colonial empires used numerous military interventions and diplomatic negotiations to gain land in Central and South Asia. In this regard, in 1878, even the British satirical newspaper called “Punch” published a caricature (Fig. 1.) depicting an angry bear on one side, an angry lion on the other, and the emir of Afghanistan standing between them with his shoulders hunched in fear. Under the title “Save me from my friends!” in its short description this caricature says: “At this moment it has been decided to invade the ameer’s territory. We are acting in persuasion of a policy, which in its extension has been uniformly *friendly* to Afghanistan” [15, p. 247].

During this struggle, the Russian Empire sent border battalions to Turkestan to protect its southern borders and create political influence in the Middle East and Central Asia. Thus, this “Game”, which began in 1722 with the occupation of the western lands around the Caspian Sea, ended in 1890 in Central Asia, i.e., the territories under the name of Turkestan in the official documents of that time went completely under the control of the Russian Empire [12], and India became a colony of Great Britain [14]. Thus, by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century a number of independent states, tribes and monarchies from the coast of the Caspian Sea to the Eastern Himalayas became protectorates and territories of the two empires. The first step taken by the Russian Empire on the occupied territories was a policy went down in history under the name of “Russification”.



**Fig. 1.** Punch magazine, November 30, 1878, “Save me from my friends”.

The policy of Russification is the term used to describe the measures aimed to destroy the languages, cultural and religious traditions of the indigenous peoples on those territories and instead spread the Russian language, Orthodox Christianity and Russian culture: “According to some Russian bureaucrats, this policy aimed to create a better civilized society” [3, p. 538]. In fact, this policy was aimed at rising a new generation of pro-tsarist society, which will serve and be loyal to the tsarist government. As a counteraction to this cunning and aggressive policy the Turkic people tried to figure out the no less effective response measures to preserve their national identity. Thus, the idea of “Turkism” started to spread among Turkic societies.

## MAIN PART

### I Baku Turcological Congress as a mean of unification

As it is known, after the Great French Revolution of 1789, the concept of “nation”, whose main principles were formed, soon began to spread throughout the world. In fact, this concept, which caused many philosophical discussions in the European philosophical thought, already found its scientific definition in a number of dictionaries at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. For example, in 1776, the German philologist, one of the most prominent representatives of the German Enlightenment J. Adelung in his dictionary identifies “nation” as “communities that have the same origin, speak the same language, have a special way of thinking (mentality) and behavior, and differ from other peoples due to their national spirit. These societies can form one state or be divided into many” [4, p. 105]. However, as a political concept, this idea was more widespread in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. After the Great French Revolution, the basic premises of the concept of “nation” were determined by the commonality of language and religion, material and spiritual culture, origin, “historical destiny” and mentality, what motivated small peoples living under the servitude of large empires to start various activities in the direction of acknowledging their national culture, the development of the national press and education in the national literary and local spoken languages. This was how the “nationalist” ideas started to penetrate the cultural and philosophical thoughts of the minor peoples in the Russian Empire. And the Turks making the vast majority of the population did not skip the chance to start their own Enlightenment movement. Later, these goals from the cultural field moved to the political level.

The very first chance for the Turkic people to organize their own political party appeared after the Russian Revolution of 1905. That time due to “the October Manifesto” by czar Nicolas II, the second term of which declared, that “in order to participate in the Duma (Parliament) the sections of the population who have been completely deprived of electoral rights have to be involved to the



elections, thereby laying the foundation for the development of general electoral rights for everyone in the future” [13, p. 40], in August 1905 the First All-Russian Congress of Muslims was held.

The significance of this historical event profoundly lays in its nature: this was the first ever political endeavor to unify all Turkic societies of the Central Asia and Caucasus under one concept of common nation and unified political body.

On April 8, representatives of the Caucasus A. Topchubashev, A. Aghaoglu, A. Huseynzade, representatives of the Volga regions - G. Maksudov, I. Ahtyamov, L. Ishakov, as well as prominent Tatar figures of the Turkism such as I. Gaspirali, Y. Akchura, A. Ibrahimov met in A. Ibrahimov's apartment to discuss the organization of the all-Turkic congress. That day the decision was made. After the meeting of public figures held in the city of Chistopol on May 20-22, 1905, preparations for the congress were started and it was decided to use mass media for this event. Thus, A. Ibrahimov published information about the upcoming congress to be held in Nizhny Novgorod in “Hayat” newspaper published in Baku by A. Topchubashev. I. Gaspirali started to publish articles about the prospects of “the Muslim social movement” in his “Tarjuman” newspaper, of which he was the editor. In June 21, 1905 issue under the title “Muslim congress” it was declared, that a meeting will be held in Nizhny Novgorod during the fair to discuss “social issues and needs of Muslims. It is assumed that as a result of this discussion, in addition to the numerous applications, a joint application would be sent to the government. According to the evolutionary law of life, a party of progressive young people has already emerged among Muslims, and its members undoubtedly feel the need to exchange ideas, build a program of action in the areas of people's needs and struggle against centuries-old narrow-minded conservatism” [7]. Thus, in August 1905, the first congress of All-Russian Muslims was held in the city of Nizhny Novgorod.

Although this first attempt managed to reach some significant aims, such as establishing schools in national language, establishing religious self-rule and development of human rights of national minorities, its achievements did not last long: in one year the Duma was dissolved.

In total the Turks of the Russian Empire held four congresses from 1905 till 1914. In February 1917, a coup took place in Petrograd, the capital of the Russian Empire, which went down in history under the name of the Great February Revolution, which overthrew the Russian Tsarist Government and put an end to the monarchy. A new government appeared in October 1917, after the Great October Bolshevik Revolution.

The Bolsheviks who came to power issued a number of decrees. The first decree issued under the name “Appeal to the citizens of Russia!” announced the overthrow of the Provisional government and the establishment of the Soviet government. This decree was followed by “the Decree on Peace”, “Decree on Land”, “Decree on the Establishment of Workers' and Peasants' Government”, “Decree on the Press”, “Decree on Elections to the Parliament”, etc., and the most important “Declaration on the Rights of the Peoples of Russia” [6].

In the Declaration it says: “Only the peoples of Russia who were not liberated, they endured oppression and continue to endure it. Their liberties must be started immediately and must be firmly and irreversibly realized” [6]. It was also stated that during the tsarist period, the peoples of Russia were systematically opposed to each other, and the result of such a policy was massacres and pogroms on the one hand, and the enslavement of peoples on the other. For this reason, the Bolsheviks promised further freedoms to every nation that supported them and their revolution. The promises made by the Bolshevik government included: 1) equality and sovereignty of all peoples lived under the Russian Empire; 2) the right of the people of Russia to freely determine their own destiny, even up to the creation of an independent state; 3) cancellation of all and any national and national-religious privileges and restrictions; 4) The free development of national minorities and ethnographic groups living on the territory of Russia [6] and other rights had to be ensured.

A number of nations used these freedoms and tried to establish an independent state. Among the Turkic nations, only Azerbaijan declared the first independent democratic Republic of the Tur-



tic and Muslim world on May 28, 1918 - the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic. Other Turco-Muslim nations continued to argue and could not yet decide on their future. However, despite all these promises, the Bolshevik government did not want to lose its power over the vast territories of the Russian Empire and by the 1922 it established its power over whole former territories of the Russian Empire. And following the steps of the Russian Empire the first measure taken by the Bolshevik government was an application of the program called "Elimination of Illiteracy - Likbez". A noble goal at first glance this tactic turned out to become the most powerful weapon of the Bolshevik government.

As was mentioned earlier, the education of the population started even during the Tsarist Russia. However, in 1913, according to the Russian Statistical Office, the number of educated men was only about 27% of the population, including the urban population, intellectuals and nobles. The fact that women were not included in this list ensured that the numbers were relatively high. Furthermore, this result was only applicable to the urban population. It can be safely concluded that among the peasants this number was much lower and only one out of every tenth peasant could read and write. Seeing this situation, the Bolsheviks decided to use it for their own purposes. In the revolutionary movement, the issue of educating the population was very acute. The Bolsheviks' plan aimed primarily at teaching the peasants to read and write, as well as introducing them to new socialist ideas. They also tried to combat their illiteracy in order to transform peasants and urban dwellers from subjects to citizens - to inculcate an active life stance and participation in the country's political life. Attempts to independently raise the level of education among the peasants, who make up the absolute majority of the agrarian country, and at the same time to instill revolutionary ideas in them, were defined as the main plan of action. A report sent to the Bolshevik government after the 1917 revolution stated that, in fact, the literacy of the population of the Russian Empire was not an end as a means: mass illiteracy contradicted the political activity of citizens, prevented their full participation in local governance, and made it difficult to transform Russia on the basis of socialism. But the Soviet government needed a new person who fully understands the situation [11, p. 3-10].

One of the most important stages of the process of eliminating illiteracy, which began in the first years after the establishment of the Soviet government was the instillation of "literacy" in the population that uses Arabic, the Old Mongolian and other special scripts of its own. One of the peoples who will suffer the most from this process and the result of which will show itself in their cultural life for many years was the Turkic peoples. By the decision of the Soviet government, all peoples using the Arabic alphabet (80% of the population using this alphabet in the territory of the Russian Empire are Turkic peoples) had to be ensured the transition to the alphabet established on the basis of the new Latin alphabet. For this, scholars from these nations were given the task of preparing projects for such an alphabet. In 1922, the "Committee for the Implementation of the New Turkic Alphabet" was established, and in 1926, the I Baku Turcological Congress was held.

The I Baku Turcological Congress is a significant historical event of great political and cultural importance.

First of all, the choice of Baku to hold the Congress is of great interest.

In 1920, after the collapse of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic and the transfer of Azerbaijan to the Bolshevik regime, Grigory Zinoviev, who was considered the second man of the revolution after Lenin, explained the importance of Baku for the Bolsheviks as follows: "Every old revolutionary knows that in our strikes and demonstrations, uprisings and revolutionary struggle, after Petrograd and Moscow, the names of cities like Baku, Warsaw and Riga are usually mentioned. Comrades, the Communist International was created only a year and a half ago. At the first convention of the international organization, we were still a group of propagandists promoting our ideas. Only a year and a half passed - and at the second congress of the Communist International held in Moscow, we were already represented in 37 countries of the world. And now it's time to take the second step. We clearly understand that there are hundreds of millions of people in the world, not just white pe-



ople, Europeans, but also living in Asia and Africa. Your city (Baku) is the gate through which the Western proletarians will pass to reach out to the peasants of the East. Your city will play the role of an arena for new events that have not yet happened in human history, representatives of hundreds of millions of peasants of the East will gather here” [10, p. 9-13].

Thus, Baku, located between Europe and Asia, was seen as a “door” that opened to both sides to the East and West, and was defined as the only place that could unite both societies. The city, transformed into a modern cosmopolitan city as a result of the efforts of Baku’s millionaires, has combined both western and eastern cultures, and thanks to the “founding fathers” of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, the city has a society that was cultivated with democratic values for the first time among all the eastern states and peoples.

Karl Radek, another leader of the revolution, said: “When we thought about the Congress of Eastern Peoples, it was not by chance that we chose the city of Baku. Here, in Baku, where Persians, Turks, Tatars, and Slavs worked for many years, where capitalism oppressed and exploited the workers, the socialist thought was very widely developed. We know how socialism was born here. We have also witnessed how the idea of the revolution, the struggle against Russian tsarism, came from here, and how the workers returning to Iran took with them the ideas of struggle not only against tsarism, but also against capitalism. It is for this reason that we are sure that this workers’ city will be the site of the international revolution, the electric current of political consciousness will flow from here, the flag of the struggle for the freedom of the East will be planted here” [10, p. 9-18].

Here it should be clarified, that with the implementation of oil refining in Azerbaijan in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Azerbaijan turned into a large trade center. The decision of the tsar's government in 1872 to provide long-term lease of oil fields through a tender led to the influx of large capital companies of the world to Azerbaijan. The oil company founded by the Swedish Nobel brothers in Baku in 1879 soon became the largest oil company in the world. Following them, 6 English, 3 French, 2 German, 2 Belgian and 1 Greek companies started operating in Baku from the 1890s [16]. The creation of these companies led to the opening of many new jobs. The opening of workplaces, in turn, caused an influx of workers from the surrounding areas to Baku. Persian, Armenian and Russian workers made up the majority of workers in the oil industry. With the development of the oil industry, the number of workers increased and insurgents and opponents of the Tsarist regime appeared among the workers. Especially among Russian workers, the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP), which split into two under the names of Bolsheviks and Mensheviks in 1903, gained more influence. The Balakhani and Bibi-Heybat Workers’ Organization, founded in 1904 by the brothers Lev and Ilya Shendrikovs, focused on finding solutions to the economic problems of local workers. Armenian workers in Azerbaijan also turned to their Social Democratic Hinchak Party, or the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, known as the more nationalist Dashnaksutyun. As a result of the tension in the political environment in which the Turks (Azerbaijani people) did not participate, the first general strike took place in 1903 and the second general strike in 1904. These strikes, which took place with the participation of RSDLP and Armenian organizations, were able to achieve the signing of a labor contract for the first time in Russia [1, Chapter I]. About the people who created the independent Azerbaijan Democratic Republic in 1918, these insurgents were calumniating, that “Azerbaijani capitalists, khans and beys tried with all their might to isolate themselves from the results of October Revolution without resorting to any means, resorted to the help of British capitalists and the sultan’s troops, and instilled chauvinism and inter-ethnic struggle. The only desire of the bourgeoisie hidden behind statements about the freedom and independence of Azerbaijan - to preserve their property and capital”. By denigration the founding fathers of the ADR, whose only intention was to lead the nation to independence and freedom, the revolutionaries tried to deceive the masses to go to their side [8, p. 10-11]. It was at the hands of these Russian and Armenian Bolsheviks that the genocide of Azerbaijanis took place on March 31, 1918 and the fall



of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, which entered Soviet history under the name “Baku Operation” in 1920 [5, p. 4-6] change the history of the state. On December 30, 1922, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was established as a single state.

Thus, one of the reasons for holding the I Baku Turcological Congress stems from the “unifying” nature of Baku between Europe and Asia, where representatives of a number of nationalities living in multicultural and multinational conditions can make a great contribution to the spread of the ideas learned here after returning to their societies, and in this way, the “world, envisioned by the Bolsheviks revolution” would further increase the power and help spread their rule over a wider area.

Another reason for holding the I Baku Turcological Congress in Baku is hidden in its purpose. At the first meeting of the Congress held on February 26, 1926, the chairman of the event Samad Bey Aghamalioglu announced the main purposes of the Congress. In his speech, he emphasized that the event was of a scientific nature, and for the first time in history, the representatives of the Turkic peoples gathered for a scientific conference, not for a political reason: “First of all, comrades, let me convey my sincere greetings to you on behalf of the workers and peasants of Azerbaijan, the entire people of Azerbaijan. Azerbaijanis understand very well the happiness that has come to them and the value of opening the first congress of Turkic studies in the world and in history in their homeland. But this is not all: representatives of the Turko-Tatar peoples came here for the first time in history, and we had the opportunity to meet them” [9, p. 6].

It should be mentioned here that all the Turkic-Muslim congresses mentioned before were never held in Azerbaijan. The main questions of the congress were the transition from the Arabic alphabet to the new Turkic-latin alphabet, the creation of a unified spelling of the new alphabet, the unification of terminology and the printing of new textbooks with the introduction to the new alphabet.

Since 1924 S. Aghamalioglu tried to convince the Turkic people to accept the new alphabet. That year he undertook a long trip to the Turkic communities of the USSR with the presentation of the initial project of the new Turkic-latin alphabet. Within the framework of the visits, the delegation visited the cities of Simferopol, Tashkent, Orenburg, Ufa and Kazan, where they met both opponents and supporters of the new alphabet. Later, answering the questions about this trip, he always stated that during his trip he got the impression that if a congress of representatives of the Turkic-Tatar peoples was called, the issue could be resolved positively. Thus, gathering all these experiences, on the initiative of S. Aghamalioglu, on February 26, 1926, the first meeting of the I Baku Turkological Congress was announced in the hall of the Ismailliya building in the center of Baku city. In his opening speech, S. Aghamalioglu emphasized: “I don’t think and I’m sure I’m not wrong when I say that no scientific congress held so far has attracted the attention of such a large number of workers. Of course, all congresses attracted the attention of a number of scientists and partly educated people, and were held under their accompaniment. However, this is the first time we have observed the interest of the masses in such a congress. This means that all the issues set for consideration and resolution by the congress are practically important for the Turkic-Tatar peoples. Therefore, in order to properly respond to such a congress, it is necessary to show a perfect structure and maximum productivity. And this, of course, will be possible if it is thought out. All the participants would be given the opportunity to make a speech, and for the effectiveness of the congress, it is important to voice thoughtful criticisms prepared on scientific grounds. However, words spoken just for the sake of criticism, speeches made for the sake of speech, aggressive and intent to forcibly accept ideas will spoil the work of the congress... I want to conclude my speech by saying that I am sure that every participant of the congress should express their opinions at a high level. It will help to solve the difficult problems that he has set before him. Long live the First Turcological Congress!” [9, p. 8]. In this congress, most of the Turkic peoples of the USSR, namely Tatars, Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Chuvash, peoples of the North Caucasus, Azerbaijanis, Turks of Siberia, Yakutia, as well as scientists and representatives of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, the Scientific Association of Oriental Studies, the Association of Transcaucasian Oriental Studies, and the Ukrainian Academy, participates in the meetings. In addition, using the “unifying of Europe and



Asia nature of Baku” in order to give greater importance to the Congress and to expand the geography of Bolshevik propaganda, representatives of Turkey, Germany, Austria, Hungary and Iran were also invited here. A total of 131 representatives participated in the congress. The main outcome of the event was acceptance of a new mutual Turkic-latin alphabet, which was seen as a first step and solid foundation for the further unification of the Turkic nations.

## CONCLUSION

The I Baku Turcological Congress, which has an immeasurably important influence on the history and culture of the Turkic people, had an equally great impact on the future development of the Turkic people and societies with its results. When talking about the I Baku Turcological Congress, Prof. Dr. Ahmet Buran writes that this congress is of great importance not only for the Turkic peoples living in the Russian Empire, but also for the Turks who were in the transition stage from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic of Turkey. The creation of scientific institutions such as the Turkish Historical Society, the Turkish Language Society and the Faculty of Language and History and Geography in Turkey, and the periodicals published since 1932 by these institutions under the name of History and Language Conferences, were the factors that showed the intention to turn Turkey into the center of Turcology: “The idea and desire to research and scientifically present the Turkish language, literature, history, geography, folklore and art has turned into action under the influence of the I Baku Congress. Atatürk, who followed the I Baku Turcological Congress with a great interest, while creating these institutions, on the one hand, wanted to ensure the research of the Turkish language and history with scientific methods, and on the other hand, he wanted to remove Turcology from being a branch of science that serves the purposes of orientalism and imperialism, and bring it to a national and local ground” [2, p. 301]. In 1928, the Republic of Turkey switched to the Latin alphabet. Perhaps, precisely after this event, starting from 1930, movements against the transition of the Turkic peoples to the Latin alphabet were started in Soviet Russia. The Soviet society, which previously considered the Latin alphabet to be the alphabet of the world proletariat, now began to search for a single alphabet that would “unite the Soviet people”. And since the 1930s, the Cyrillic alphabet began to be used in the territory of the USSR under various pretexts: instead of learning two different alphabets and two different languages, learning just one single alphabet will make it easier to spread knowledge; having all documents written in Russian makes it easier for local representatives to participate in the management process; Cyrillic alphabet will reduce the influence of the capitalist West; and, in this way, it will break away the Turkic peoples from Turkey. Thus, after the death of S. Aghamalioglu in 1930, the achievements of the I Baku Turcological Congress, which he worked on and which he was able to maintain for years due to his influence, were erased and new political games began to emerge.

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## 1926-cı il I BAKI TÜRKOLÖJİ QURULTAY TÜRK MİLLƏTLƏRİNİ BİRLƏŞDİRMƏ CƏHDİ KİMİ

N.Q. Ağayeva, H.C. Günəşli

1926-cı ildə keçirilən I Bakı Türkoloji Qurultay 1922-ci ildə sovet hakimiyyətinə keçən keçmiş Rusiya imperiyasının türk icmaları üçün böyük siyasi və mədəni əhəmiyyət kəsb edən mühüm tarixi hadisədir. Türkologiya üzrə ilk elmi qurultay olması Orta Asiya və Qafqazın bütün türk cəmiyyətləri üçün latın qrafikası əsasında yeni türk əlifbasının vahid orfoqrafiyasının yaradılması, terminologiyanın ümumiləşdirilməsi və yeni əlifbaya girişlə yeni dərsliklərin çapı kimi maraqlı məqsədlərə xidmət edirdi.

Təqdim olunan məqalədə keçmiş Rusiya imperiyasının türk xalqları daxilində türkçülük ideyasının inkişafından, onların keçirdiyi ilk siyasi-mədəni qurultaylardan və bu xalqların birləşmə niyyətlərinin kulminasiya nöqtəsi kimi I Bakı Türkoloji Qurultayından bəhs edilir.

**Açar sözlər:** *türk, birləşmə, Bakı, türkologiya, türkçülük.*

## I ВСЕСОЮЗНЫЙ ТЮРКОЛОГИЧЕСКИЙ СЪЕЗД 1926 ГОДА В БАКУ КАК ПОПЫТКА ОБЪЕДИНЕНИЯ ТЮРКСКИХ НАРОДОВ

Н.Г. Агаева, Г.Дж. Гюнешли

I Всесоюзный тюркологический съезд, состоявшийся в 1926 году в Баку, имел большое политическое и культурное значение для тюркских народов бывшей Российской империи, перешедших в 1922 году под советское руководство. Будучи первым в истории региона научным конгрессом по тюркологии, он преследовал любопытную цель создания единой орфографии нового тюркского алфавита на основе латиницы для всех тюркских обществ Средней Азии и Кавказа, унификации терминологии и печатания новых учебников с введением нового алфавита.

В настоящей статье исследуется развитие идеи тюркизма в тюркских обществах бывшей Российской империи, проведенные ими первые политические и культурные съезды и I Всесоюзный тюркологический конгресс в Баку как кульминация объединительных намерений этих народов.

**Ключевые слова:** *тюркский, объединение, Баку, тюркология, тюркизм.*