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ARMENIA AND AZERBAIJAN
THROUGH PEACE AND WAR

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Shardakh's work with Party figures was only the outer layer of his activities. At the same time he was also working on another far more extensive work. He made contact with members of the banned national communist (Chadakhnatsion) Party known as the Chadakh in their underground cells in Yerevan and abroad. And he even procured weapons. Shardakh said that the activities involved a first correspondence of needs were first directed to the members of cells with the help of the Chadakh. Then there came in at regular intervals, among which "for some reason there were a lot of Czech weapons." Most of these weapons went straight on to Hrantiny Karabakh. "All the organizations in Karabakh were armed. The whole of the Armenian [the Communist youth organization] was under arms." This extraordinary statement confirms that one Armenian activist at least fully expected that the dispute could turn into an armed conflict.

International Relations

The beginnings of the modern "Karabakh dispute" between Armenia and Azerbaijan are usually dated to February 1988. But the first incidents, little recorded even in the region itself, occurred several months before that and elsewhere in Armenia and Azerbaijan. In the mid-1980s, there were roughly seven Armenians in Azerbaijan (not including Hrantiny Karabakh) and around 100 Azerbaijanis in Armenia. In the fall of 1986, international relations in both republics took a marked turn for the worse, as if both sides were picking up a high frequency radio signal.

In October 1986, a dispute broke out in the village of Chardakhli, in the north of Azerbaijan, between the local Azerbaijani authorities and Armenian villagers. The Armenians objected to the appointment of a new collective farm director. They were beaten up by the police and in protest sent a delegation to Moscow. Chardakhli was a famous village in the Armenian because it was the birthplace of two marshals of the Soviet Union, Ivan Bagratian and Hrantiny Badakyan. A small press demonstration about the Chardakhli events was held in Yerevan in 19 October.

Some other trouble broke out in the southern Armenian region of Aragats and Kotayk, which had many Azerbaijani villages. In November

1987, two freight cars arrived at the Baku train station containing Azerbaijanis who had just fled Kafan as a result of interethnic violence. Very little is known about the incident, and it was not reported at all in the

media, but there are witnesses to what happened. Sveta Pashayeva, an Armenian widow from Baku, told the story of how she saw the refugees arrive in Baku and brought them clothes and food:

People came and said that two carriages had come from Kafan with naked unclothed children, and we went there to look They were Azerbaijanis from Kafan. I was at the station. There were two freight cars. The doors were open and there were two long planks, like floorboards, nailed over them so that people wouldn't fall out. And they said that people should bring what they could to help. And I—not just me, lots of people—collected together old children's dresses, things like that. I saw it myself. There were men, dirty country people, with long hair and beards, old people, children.¹⁵

Arrived in January 1988, the Armenian-led "Committee" was going to work in the Academy of Sciences in Baku where he saw some evidence of Azerbaijanis leaving that region. Some old houses were standing outside the government headquarters on the top of the hill. "They were in a terrible state. On the whole it was women, children and old people. There were few young people. Many of them had been beaten. They were starving."

The full story of these early refugees from Nagorno Karabakh is largely because the Azerbaijan authorities did their best to suppress information about them. In Armenia, Armenian politician, who was second secretary of Nagorno Karabakh Party committee at the time, says that he did not recall any Azerbaijanis leaving the region before February. He did, however, confirm that on one night in February 1988, two thousand Azerbaijanis had left the Karabakh region—as reported by thousands of mothers and "grandmothers." Politician declares that on one occasion he crossed into Nagorno Karabakh to try to persuade the Azerbaijanis who had left to come back to Baku. "Baku we had reached finally. My vehicle was stopped in the next village. In the next village, Karabakh, people with blood on their faces were picking up stones. Anything was possible." Politician turned back and none of the Karabakh Azerbaijanis ever came back to Armenia.¹⁶

Politics and Delegations

In 1988 the Nagorno Karabakh Armenian movement gradually established itself. Armenian moved from and returned to Nagorno Karabakh and having negotiations for what they called a "referendum" on unification with