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TERRITORIAL-BORDER ISSUES IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS DURING THE SOVIET ERA

Abstract. Research Purpose. *The study of the emergence and evolution of territorial and border problems in the South Caucasus during the Soviet period is of a particular relevance today. Considering that the roots of modern territorial conflicts in the South Caucasus originate from the political processes that took place in the early twentieth century, the main purpose of the research is to analyse the historical background of these disputes, to examine the policy of border formation during the Soviet era, and to assess the impact of this policy on the contemporary situation in the region. Research Methodology.* *The study is based on frontier theory, which interprets borders not simply as fixed geographical lines but as dynamic political and administrative constructs shaped by power relations, security strategies, and processes of identity formation. From this perspective, a border is not merely a geographical concept; it is also a socio-political phenomenon closely connected with the construction of national identity, the preservation of collective memory, and the formation of historical and political narratives. Following Etienne Balibar's conceptualization of borders as politically constructed and dispersed spaces rather than fixed territorial lines, this study interprets Soviet border-making in the South Caucasus as a dynamic process shaped by power relations and identity politics. Within the Soviet context, borders in the South Caucasus operated as flexible frontier zones that were repeatedly modified through administrative restructuring and political intervention. The research employs historiographical and comparative analysis, systematisation of archival materials, identification of*

cause-and-effect relationships in political decision-making, analytical generalisation, and spatial and temporal evaluation. Various archival documents, official decrees, and ideological approaches of the Soviet period are examined in order to reveal the mechanisms of Soviet national policy and border formation. **The scientific novelty** lies in the application of frontier theory to reinterpret Soviet border-making policies in the South Caucasus as a dynamic and politically constructed process, supported by newly introduced archival materials. The study systematically reveals the influence of the “temporary” nature of borders after the incorporation of the South Caucasus republics into the Soviet Union, frequent border changes and population relocations on the political map and ethnodemographic structure of the region. The scientific novelty lies in the fact that the transformation of borders in the South Caucasus during the Soviet era is analysed for the first time through a comprehensive approach, combining political decisions, archival materials, ethnic factors, territorial claims, administrative subordination and regional strategies. The research proves that the deliberate maintenance of instability in borders served as a mechanism for deepening tensions among the republics, strengthening political dependence and contributing to the formation of long-term conflicts that continue to this day. **Conclusions.** The results show that the borders within the USSR in the South Caucasus were not formed on ethnic, historical or legal principles, which made them unstable and turned them into a subject of territorial dispute after the collapse of the Soviet empire. The consequences of Soviet national and border policies are considered one of the main causes of ongoing conflicts in the region. Therefore, the scientific analysis of current developments, the study of historical experience and the objective evaluation of past political decisions remain essential for understanding the contemporary geopolitical processes in the South Caucasus.

Key words: South Caucasus, Soviet Empire, regional conflicts, administrative-territorial division, territorial-border issues, national interests, disputed territories.

ТЕРИТОРІАЛЬНО-КОРДОННІ ПИТАННЯ НА ПІВДЕННОМУ КАВКАЗІ У РАДЯНСЬКУ ДОБУ

Анотація. Мета дослідження. Вивчення виникнення та еволюції територіально-кордонних проблем на Південному Кавказі в радянський період є надзвичайно актуальним сьогодні. З огляду на те, що коріння сучасних територіальних конфліктів на Південному Кавказі походить від політичних процесів, які відбувалися на початку XX ст., основна мета дослідження полягає в аналізі історичних витоків цих суперечок, вивченні політики формування кордонів у радянську добу та оцінці впливу цієї політики на сучасну ситуацію в регіоні. **Методологія дослідження.** Дослідження ґрунтується на теорії фронтиру, яка трактує кордони не лише як фіксовані географічні лінії, але й як динамічні політичні та адміністративні конструкції, сформовані під впливом владних відносин, безпекових стратегій і процесів формування ідентичності. З цієї перспективи кордон є не тільки географічною категорією, але й соціально-політичним феноменом, тісно пов'язаним із конструюванням національної ідентичності, збереженням колективної пам'яті та формуванням історичних і політичних наративів. Спираючись на концептуалізацію кордонів Етьєна Балібара як політично сконструйованих і просторово розосереджених утворень, а не фіксованих територіальних ліній, у дослідженні радянське формування кордонів на Південному Кавказі інтерпретується як динамічний процес, зумовлений владними відносинами та політикою ідентичності. У радянському контексті кордони Південного Кавказу функціонували як гнучкі прикордонні зони, що неодноразово змінювалися внаслідок адміністративних реформ і політичного втручання. У роботі застосовано історіографічний і порівняльний аналіз, систематизацію архівних матеріалів, виявлення причинно-наслідкових зв'язків у процесі прийняття політичних рішень, аналітичне узагальнення та просторово-часову оцінку. Різноманітні архівні документи, офіційні декрети й ідеологічні підходи радянського періоду проаналізовано з метою розкриття механізмів радянської національної політики та формування кордонів. **Наукова новизна.** Наукова новизна дослідження полягає у застосуванні теорії фронтиру для переосмислення радянської політики формування кордонів на Південному Кавказі як динамічного та політично сконструйованого процесу, підтвердженого введенням до наукового обігу нових архівних матеріалів. У роботі системно розкрито вплив “тимчасового” характеру кордонів після включення республік Південного Кавказу до складу Радянського Союзу, а також частих змін меж

і переселення населення на політичну карту та етнодемографічну структуру регіону. Новизна дослідження також полягає у тому, що трансформація кордонів Південного Кавказу в радянський період уперше проаналізована на основі комплексного підходу, який поєднує вивчення політичних рішень, архівних матеріалів, етнічних чинників, територіальних претензій, адміністративного підпорядкування та регіональних стратегій. Дослідження доводить, що свідоме підтримання нестабільності кордонів виступало механізмом поглиблення напруженості між республіками, посилення їхньої політичної залежності та сприяло формуванню довготривалих конфліктів, наслідки яких зберігаються й донині. **Висновки.** Результати показують, що кордони всередині СРСР на Південному Кавказі не формувалися на етнічних, історичних чи правових засадах, через що вони залишалися нестабільними і після розпаду радянської імперії перетворилися на предмет територіальних суперечок. Наслідки радянської національної та кордонної політики вважаються однією з головних причин нинішніх конфліктів у регіоні. Тому науковий аналіз сучасних процесів, вивчення історичного досвіду та об'єктивне оцінювання минулих політичних рішень залишаються необхідними для розуміння сучасних геополітичних процесів на Південному Кавказі.

Ключові слова: Південний Кавказ; Радянська імперія; регіональні конфлікти; адміністративно-територіальний поділ; територіально-кордонні питання; національні інтереси; спірні території.

Problem Statement. Since the 19th century, border and territorial issues in the South Caucasus have constituted one of the key geopolitical problems of the region. The resettlement policy of the Tsarist Russian Empire, the contentious delimitation of borders in 1918 – 1920, and the administrative and territorial reforms carried out during the Soviet period laid the foundation for contemporary conflicts. After the collapse of the USSR, the transformation of former administrative boundaries into state borders resulted in armed clashes such as the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict as well as the Abkhazia and South Ossetia crises in Georgia. Today, the unfinished processes of border delimitation and demarcation between regional states and Armenia's continued territorial claims against Azerbaijan and Georgia further aggravate the security environment. This situation necessitates scholarly research into the historical foundations of border formation in the South Caucasus, the essence of Soviet border policy, and its modern geopolitical implications.

The purpose of the article is to provide a scholarly analysis of the historical origins of border and territorial issues in the South Caucasus, to reveal the essence of the Soviet border policy, and to assess the impact of this policy on contemporary political and security realities.

Review of Recent Research and Publications. In the course of the research, both local and foreign scholarly works on the formation of border and territorial policies in the South Caucasus were examined. The studies by Azerbaijani historians – I. Huseynova (Hüseynova, 2004; 2008; 2018), I. Niftaliyev (Niftaliyev, 2010), S. Mustafayeva (Mustafayeva, 2017), R. Mustafazade (Mustafazade, 2006) and Sh. Rahmanzade – provided an important theoretical and methodological basis for understanding the essence of Soviet border delimitation, the regulation of interethnic relations, and the administrative governance system of the USSR. Particularly, R. S. Mustafazade's *“Two Republics. Azerbaijan–Russia Relations (1918–1922)”*, I. V. Niftaliyev's *“The Azerbaijan SSR in the Expansionist Plans of Armenians (1920s)”*, S.O. Mustafayeva's *“Changes of Borders and Territories in the South Caucasus (1917–1922)”* monograph on border policy in the Caucasus, constitute essential academic sources for this study. Furthermore, the works of Western scholars – including Shireen Hunter, Etienne Balibar, James Mankoff, and Ronald Grigor Suny were examined to analyse the ideological foundations of Soviet national policy and its long-term impact on ethnic conflicts in the South Caucasus. As Shireen T. Hunter notes, Soviet territorial and nationalities policies often resulted in the creation

of administrative units that did not fully correspond to ethnic realities, thereby contributing to long-term instability in the region (Hunter, 2006, p. 113). Some Armenian authors have offered alternative interpretations regarding the geographical delimitation of the South Caucasus. For example, A.K. Shahinyan argues that the southern boundaries of the region were historically shaped by imperial political decisions and associated with the broader concept of the “Armenian Highlands” (Shahinyan, 2022, p. 420). However, the formation of regional borders in the South Caucasus was determined not only by physical geography but also by administrative restructuring and imperial strategic interests, which often overlooked the historical and ethnopolitical realities of the region. The historiographical comparison demonstrates that a comprehensive and systematic analysis of the geopolitical consequences of border formation in the South Caucasus remains highly relevant.

In contrast to earlier studies that concentrated on specific bilateral territorial interactions in the South Caucasus, the present article adopts a comprehensive regional-comparative framework and examines Soviet border-making policies across the South Caucasus as a whole. The analysis moves beyond bilateral perspectives and employs frontier theory to conceptualize administrative-territorial transformations as a dynamic and politically constructed process. In addition, the study incorporates newly examined archival documents and primary sources that were not utilized in the author’s previous publication, thereby expanding the empirical foundation of the research.

Purpose of the research is to analyse the historical background of modern territorial conflicts in the South Caucasus, to examine the policy of border formation during the Soviet era, and to assess the impact of this policy on the contemporary situation in the region.

Research Results. In the history of all states and peoples, problems related to borders and territories are considered one of the most important issues. This problem is of scientific and political interest in our time in the South Caucasus. The urgency of the problem of the formation of interstate borders in the South Caucasus region is due to the presence of border issues and territorial conflicts, which have not yet been resolved. After the collapse of the Russian and Soviet empires, the peoples of the South Caucasus were able to establish their independence twice in the 20th century. The fall of the Russian Empire and the emergence of independent states on the political map of the region in both periods of the collapse of the USSR strengthened the territorial claims of Armenia to Azerbaijan and Georgia. Border problems arose, leading to bloody conflicts in Karabakh, South Ossetia and Abkhazia. In modern times, the delimitation and demarcation of borders between the sovereign republics of the South Caucasus has not yet been fully completed. This issue requires studying the problems associated with the history of the formation of interstate borders in the South Caucasus region.

In Soviet times, the emergence of territorial-border problems in the South Caucasus is an important issue for the study of evolution in many aspects. The roots of territorial-border problems in the South Caucasus were associated with the policy of tsarism. After the declaration of independence of Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia in 1918, territorial-border issues arose sharply (Nəşibzadə, 1989). One of the reasons for the territorial-border problems was the artificial creation of a state for the Armenians who were brought to the region as a result of the resettlement policy of tsarism. Since it was difficult to determine the borders between these states based on the administrative territories of the former governorates, ethnographic, and natural boundaries, all the meetings held ended without results. In later periods, the Armenian-Georgian war and the aggression of Armenia against Azerbaijan took

place. The states of the South Caucasus were occupied by Soviet Russia in 1920 – 1921, and after the establishment of Soviet power between the republics in 1918 – 1920, borders were temporarily established. However, territorial-border issues have not been fundamentally resolved. The territory between states was considered not as a border line, but, on the contrary, as part of the system of the future territorial-administrative division of the proposed state of the USSR. In the first months of Soviet power, the Armenian-Georgian-Russian class played a dominant role in the party leadership of Azerbaijan. Under the name of the Soviet regime, an anti-Azerbaijani policy was carried out mainly, the national interests of the population were not taken into account. This was more clearly manifested in the policy of deprivation of property, confiscation, resolution of territorial disputes. Such a policy would lead to anti-Soviet uprisings in Ganja, Karabakh, Zagatala and other areas. The claims of Dashnak Armenia and Menshevik Georgia to some territories that were an integral part of Soviet Azerbaijan further aggravated the hostile situation in this region. On June 8, 1920, G. K. Ordzhonikidze, allegedly pointing to these “controversial” issues, wrote in a telegram to V. I. Lenin and I. V. Stalin: “Do not consider these issues as issues worth paying attention to, so the counter-revolution speculates with them” (*Azərbaycan tarixi*, 2008, p. 40). In a telegram, V.I. Lenin wrote: “Remind me to talk about this with Chicherin.” There is also a note by I.V. Stalin on the telegram: “He has already discussed” (*Azərbaycan tarixi*, 2008, p. 41).

The Kars Treaty, signed on October 13, 1921, settled the territorial-border issues of Turkey with the republics of the South Caucasus. Nevertheless, instead of resolving disputes between the three republics, the Central Soviet Government created autonomous institutions in its territories in order to make Azerbaijan and Georgia dependent on themselves and prevent their separation (Mustafazade, 2006, p. 194). At the same time, the ancient lands of Azerbaijan were transferred to Armenia by decisions taken in different years. Due to the policy of frequent border changes and population relocation on the eve of the collapse of the USSR, from an ethnic, historical and legal point of view, the borders within the empire were not stable. It is for this reason that the collapse of the multinational Soviet empire turned these borders into a matter of dispute. The conflicts that continue so far are considered the result of this policy and make the study of this problem relevant.

Historical facts prove that the total area of Transcaucasian Seim, created in February 1918, was 210,000 square kilometers. 45,000 square kilometers of this territory were transferred to Ottoman Turkey under the terms of the Brest-Litovsk (March 1918) and Batumi (June 1918) treaties. With the decision adopted by the National Council of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR) on May 29, 1918, a 9,000 square kilometer area, including the city of Iravan, was ceded to the Armenians. 100.6 thousand square kilometers were allocated to the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, and 55.4 thousand square kilometers were assigned to Georgia (*AXC Ensiklopediyası*, 2004 – 2005, p. 149). In general, starting from May 28, 1918, especially in 1920 – 1929, Azerbaijani lands were “included in the Armenian SSR”.

After the formation of the Soviet Federative Socialist Republic of the South Caucasus (Transcaucasia) in 1922, new administrative-territorial changes were carried out due to the inconsistency of the administrative-territorial division existing in this territory with new political and economic requirements. Soviet Russia pursued a policy of creating complex economic regions in the South Caucasus region and artificially equalizing the economic opportunities of the republics, provided that they were fully subordinate to the Baku oil region. The main principles of the administrative-territorial division were the decentralization of industries, the laying of the core of a single future Soviet culture by achieving maximum

convergence of national cultures, ensuring the resettlement of the population in territories close to industrial points, studying the directions and nature of communication lines, determining the number and national structure of the population. In the border demarcation policy carried out by Moscow in the South Caucasus, the primary consideration was the economic interests of Soviet Russia. The national interests of the region's population were not taken into account. The idea of the superiority of national interests in the policy of Soviet Russia and the "concern" of the state for the economic well-being of the peoples of the South Caucasus was purposefully promoted in the public consciousness. On August 15, 1921, the Caucasian Bureau of the Central Committee of the RCP (b), having heard the question of the borders between the Soviet republics of the South Caucasus, turned to the chairmen of the Soviets of People's Commissars of these republics and the chairmen of the Revolutionary committees of the Azerbaijan SSR, the Armenian SSR and the Georgian SSR (Hüseynova, 2018, p. 755). It said here that an agreement defining the borders should be signed between these three republics. However, the signing of such a general agreement did not take place.

On August 22, 1922, signed by the chairman of the Extraordinary Commission of the South Caucasus, the Extraordinary Commissions of the Azerbaijan SSR, the Georgian SSR and the Armenian SSR were ordered to abolish border posts, guards and checkpoints within 24 hours from that moment. According to this order, the external borders were already considered the borders of Turkey and Iran, and the borders between the republics of the South Caucasus, formed in 1918 – 1920, have actually lost their significance. In June 1921, at the Plenum of the Caucasian Bureau of the RCP (b), a decision was made on the free access of the population engaged in cattle breeding in the republics of the South Caucasus to pastures. According to this decision, the peasants of the South Caucasian republics engaged in cattle breeding received the right to move freely within the limits determined by the decision. The adoption of this decision led to a number of misunderstandings and conflicts between the Azerbaijani and Armenian populations living in the border areas of the South Caucasian republics. To resolve these controversial issues in December 1922, a special commission of the Central Committee of the RCP (b) of the South Caucasus was created under the leadership of N. Narimanov, S. Ordzhonikidze and Myasnikov. According to the certificate on the territory of the Azerbaijan SSR submitted to the Secretariat for Foreign Affairs of the People's Land Commissariat of the Azerbaijan SSR on October 25, 1922, the entire territory of the Azerbaijan SSR is 7,989,105 desyatins (1 desyatyna = 1.09 hectares) (ARSA, f. 379, d. 3, c. 73, pp. 135–136).

According to the agreement reached between the three countries, 379,984 desyatins (4,151 square kilometers) from the former Kazakh district of Azerbaijan were ceded to Armenia, 405,000 desyatins (4,424 square kilometers) from the former Zangezour district were also given to Armenia, and 79,600 desyatins (869 square kilometers) from the former Tbilisi district were transferred to Azerbaijan. In 1922, Azerbaijan lost 784,984 desyatins of its 7,989,105 desyatins of land (379,984; 405,000), gaining only 79,600 desyatins in return. This amounted to a total of 7,283,721 desyatins (79,577 square kilometers) (Mustafayeva, 2017, pp. 180–181).

The undisputed territory of the Azerbaijan SSR with Armenia passed through the old administrative borders of the Gazakh and Borchali regions, from the Gazakh region to the Maral mountains with the Alexandropolsky and Novo-Bayazit regions. From there it descends directly to Lake Geicha, passes 2 versts (1 versta = 1.0668 km) east of the village of Chubuglu. Then it divided Lake Goycha into half and moved along its southern shore in

a westerly direction. On the southern shore of Lake Goycha, the border started between the villages of Zaqali and Godekbulaq, then passed by the villages of Yarnizli, Qizil Veng, and Yuxari Alcali, moving through the mountainous region of the southern shore of Lake Goycha towards Qizil Xaraba, the elevation point of 10,859 metres, and the elevation of Agmahan. It continued westward to Mount Small Agdag, reaching the border of the Iravan and Yeni Bayazid districts, separating the mountainous regions inhabited by Azerbaijanis from the shores occupied by Armenian villages. Then the border extended from Mount Small Agdag first in a northwestern direction towards Lake Toghman, then westward towards the village of Tezekend. From there, it followed the Gerni River towards the village of Yuxari Agbash, ascending five versts (approximately 5.3 kilometers) northward to the elevation point of 3,620, from there, it proceeded southwest towards Uluxanlı, then to the Araz River, and finally moved northward from the village of Rençber. From the village of Rençber, the border went directly west along the Araz River, following the former administrative borders of the Surmalı and Echmiadzin districts and the Kars province, reaching the Tendurek Mountains along the former Russian-Turkish border (Baxşəliyev, 2022). The requirements given for the preparation of the report on Azerbaijani territories hinted at the secret intentions of the Soviet leadership.

Border disputes between the Azerbaijan SSR and certain regions of the Armenian SSR in most cases were resolved in favor of the Armenian side. In this regard, there are numerous facts. Between the village of II Shikhli of the Gazakh region of the Azerbaijan SSR and the village of Gulp of the Dilijan region of the Armenian SSR, the disputed area of 940 hectares was given to the village of Chomche. The territory of Karachol between the village of Kotkend of the Dilijan region of the Armenian SSR and the village of Dashsalakhli of the Gazakh region of the Azerbaijan SSR with an area of 700 hectares was transferred to the village of Kotkend of the Armenian SSR. Between the village of Lelekend of the Dilijan region of the Armenian SSR and the village of Chakhmali of the Gazakh region of the MSSR, a disputed area of 69 hectares remained behind the village of Lelekend of the Azerbaijan SSR. The territory of “Gunesh”, which is the territory of 753 desyatins (8.2 km²) between the villages of Ashagi Gizilbulag, Norashen, Moseskend, Dilijan region of the Armenian SSR and the villages of Qacali and Alibeyli, Gazakh region of the Azerbaijan SSR, by the decision of the Land Commission of the South Caucasus CEC (Central Executive Committee) of November 8, 1924, they were divided into two parts. The Dilijan region of the Armenian SSR included a land plot of 4,000 desyatins (43.7 km²) in the Shinikh-Ayrim region of the Gazakh region of the Azerbaijan SSR (Baxşəliyev, 2022). Additionally, the issue of the villages of Berkhudarli, Soflu, and Yukhari Eskipara in the Gazakh district, with a total area of 3,104 desyatins and a population of 577 people, remaining within the Dilijan district was also a matter of dispute. It was revealed that this villages, which were part of the administrative boundaries of the Gazakh district (Ganja region), were separated from it by a narrow strip of land. At a meeting of the local commission of the Central Committee of the South Caucasus, held July 19–20, 1929, it was decided that the expedient form of solution to the liquidation of the strip line was to include all three villages in the Dilijan region. By order of the CEC, the village of Guney-Kheyrimli (100 houses) of the Dilijan region was annexed to the small village of Kheyrimli of the Gazakh region (26 houses) and became part of the Dilijan region of the Armenian SSR. As a result of this decision, 50 percent of the population of the Gazakh district was deprived of their summer pastures. In general, as follows from the report of the Land Commission of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Azerbaijan SSR in 1928 on border

disputes with neighboring republics of the South Caucasian Federation, the Armenian SSR was granted 75,904 desyatins (829.2 km²) of fertile land and 79,208 desyatins (865.3 km²) of “unsuitable” land (Baxşəliyev, 2022).

In early 1921, a special commission was created to prepare a draft administrative division of the Azerbaijan SSR. The new division was to be established based on the project of the commission operating under the People’s Commissariat of the Military Commission. In the “Explanatory note to the draft administrative-territorial division of the Azerbaijan Socialist Soviet Republic” it was proposed to divide the Zangezur region into two regions, since “the specified region is a vast territory through which mountain hills and deep valleys pass and which is completely impassable in winter” (ARSASPD, f. 609, d. 1, c. 2, pp. 97–98). From the administrative center of the district it is difficult, even impossible to manage. By dividing the district from south to north, it will be ensured that each newly formed county includes farmland, forests, and pastures, the population composition will be mixed Armenian and Muslim so that solidarity can be fostered. As a result, the working people of both peoples will become stronger, which is very important. Given that the bulk of the Kurdish population lives in this part, it seems more expedient to divide the west of this region into Zangezur district and the east into two parts called Kurdistan district (Mustafayeva, 2017, p. 169). This proposal regarding the Zangezur region was designed to gradually separate part of the region from Azerbaijan. To prepare a draft of a new administrative division, a special Interdepartmental Commission of the Azerbaijan Temporary Revolution Committee was created, chaired by T. Chikalo. The first meeting of this commission took place on March 12, 1921. At a meeting held on April 2, when discussing the issue of dividing the Zangezur region into two parts, members of the commission Shimanovsky and Hajiyev opposed the division and noted the economic unity of the region. In this regard, the commission decided to leave the Zangezur region unchanged in the old administrative borders. After that, Armenians began to systematically settle in the western part of Zangezur, the local Azerbaijani population was driven out and even forcibly expelled from their territories. The occupation of the western part of Zangezur in July 1921 and its incorporation into the Armenian SSR, along with the administrative changes made to determine the borders of the artificial Armenian autonomy in the mountainous part of Karabakh, further escalated the situation between the lands of the Zangezur district that were given to Armenia and the various regions of the Karabakh area of the Azerbaijan SSR regarding the determination of borders between the two republics (ARSSA, f. 1, d. 31, c. 186a, p. 26). These territorial disputes were never resolved in favor of Azerbaijan. In 1929, the southwestern part of Zangezur was annexed to Armenia (Niftaliyev, 2010, p. 62). The separation of Zangezur from the main part of the country served only one purpose: to prevent direct contacts between Turkey and other Turkic peoples in the East. As a result of the accession of most of Zangezur to Armenia, the Nakhchivan region was isolated from the main part of Azerbaijan.

According to the report of the head of the land administration of the Shusha district of Rogozin dated July 26, 1923, when resolving the border dispute between the cattle-breeding population of Zangezur and Shusha districts, 20 pastures were transferred to Zangezur district to prevent armed conflict between the parties. There were also unfounded claims to the Alagol summer pastures located on the border of the Kurdistan district of the Azerbaijan SSR and the Dereleyez and Novo-Bayazit districts of the Armenian SSR, around Lake Alagol, with an area of about 12 thousand desyatins (131.1 km²). In 1923, the leadership of the Armenian SSR raised the issue of including these territories into the Novo-Bayazit district.

On June 23, 1926, the Central Executive Committee of the Armenian SSR in a telegram to the chairman of the Central Executive Committee of the Azerbaijan SSR reported that back in 1921 the Alagoller pasture area of 13170 desyatins (143.8 km²) was transferred to the Dereleyez district (Baxşəliyev, 2022). On July 5, 1926, the Secretariat of the Presidium of the CEC of the Azerbaijan SSR informed the Secretariat of the CEC of the Armenian SSR that it should submit a decision on when the decision of the CEC of the South Caucasus was made to transfer the pastures of the Alagol region to the Dereleyez region. Although this request was repeated on December 25, 1926 by the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Azerbaijan SSR, the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Armenian SSR did not give any answer.

Historical facts prove that several villages of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic were also included in the Armenian SSR. So, according to the Kars Treaty, the Armenian SSR officially recognized the autonomy of Nakhchivan as part of the Azerbaijan SSR, but did not abandon its hated intentions. By the decision of the CEC of the South Caucasus of February 18, 1929, the villages of Horadiz, Qurdqulaq, Aghbin, Khachik, Aghach, Almali, Daghalmali, Itgiran, Sultanbey, the adjacent watersheds and pastures to the village of Garchivan, as well as part of the lands of the village of Garchivan and Kilid of the Ordubad region, and by the decision dated March 5, 1938 – the villages of Sadarak and Karki, part of the land around the villages of the Sharur region was transferred to Soviet Armenia (Baxşəliyev, 2022). The total area of these territories was 658.4 km². As a result, from January 1, 1933, the total area of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was 5.329.6 km².

These decisions meant a gross violation of the terms of the Moscow and Kars treaties on the status and borders of the Nakhchivan MSSR. The territorial and administrative changes that arose within the borders between the Azerbaijan SSR and the Armenian SSR after the inclusion of the South Caucasus in the USSR were violated without taking into account the historical natural borders and conditions of Azerbaijan, and the direct intervention of the USSR ensured the expansion of the borders of the Armenian SSR due to the collapse of Azerbaijani lands. The fulfillment of unfounded claims against Azerbaijan throughout history has further distorted Armenians. The fulfillment of these requirements created real opportunities for the realization of Armenian dreams of creating a “Great Armenia”. In subsequent periods, Armenians continued these hateful intentions.

Since the 1980s, the socio-political situation in the Caucasus region increasingly shifted from cooperation toward confrontation. Ethnic and territorial disputes, as well as confessional and geopolitical contradictions, became defining features of the regional landscape (Hüseynova, 2008, p. 102). During the late Soviet period, debates surrounding the status of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) intensified in the context of broader political transformations under M. S. Gorbachev. In his speech at the plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in April 1989, Heydar Aliyev analyzed the socio-economic development of the NKAO and responded to various claims raised in this regard (Hüseynova, 2004, p. 102). Furthermore, in 1945, 1956, 1962, 1967, 1972, 1977 and 1987, the leadership of the Armenian SSR raised the question of transferring the Armenian-populated mountainous part of the Karabakh region from the Azerbaijan SSR to the Armenian SSR. These demands were rejected within the existing Soviet constitutional framework. At the same time, as Shireen T. Hunter notes, Soviet territorial and nationalities policies in Nagorno-Karabakh did not eliminate structural tensions but rather institutionalized contradictions that later escalated into open conflict (Hunter, 2006, p. 116).

Conclusion. Regional conflicts, which are one of the most important problems of our time, arise directly or indirectly, on the basis of a conflict of interests of two or more countries, due to the presence of territorial claims between them. Since 1988, Armenians had argued that the declaration of Nagorno-Karabakh as an autonomous part of Azerbaijan is a “historical mistake,” believing that the Moscow and Kars treaties had lost force. Without any legal and historical grounds, they made territorial claims against Karabakh and Nakhchivan. Armenian claims were not limited to the territories of Azerbaijan, Armenians made territorial claims to almost the entire South Caucasus. As a result of the Armenian-Azerbaijani Karabakh conflict, one of the most tragic conflicts in the history of the 20th century, Azerbaijanis were displaced from their ancestral lands. Armenia took advantage of the internal instability in Azerbaijan and as a result of the occupation of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region (territory of 4388 km²) and adjacent areas, a mass of more than 1 million refugees and internally displaced persons was formed, as a result of the destruction of the only transport road connecting Nakhchivan with Azerbaijan, the territory of Nakhchivan separated from Azerbaijan. The 44-day war, which began on September 27, 2020 with another violation of the ceasefire by Armenia and a counterattack by the Azerbaijani army, ended with the victory of Azerbaijan. The absence of a statement on the status of Nagorno-Karabakh in the trilateral statement on ending the war, signed by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the President of Russian Federation and the Prime Minister of Armenia on November 10, 2020, is a glorious victory for the Azerbaijan Army. The construction of new transport links connecting Nakhchivan and the western regions of Azerbaijan is a historic step towards connecting the territory of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic with the main part of Azerbaijan by land roads. After the war, the Armenian side refused negotiations every time, continued its armed provocations in our sovereign territories. In 2021, working groups on border delimitation were created in Azerbaijan and Armenia, and negotiations were accompanied by periodic armed clashes in the region. In November 2021 and September 2022, armed clashes took place at the border. In March 2023, illegal Armenian armed formations deployed in Karabakh committed provocations in the direction of Shusha, in April and May the positions of the Azerbaijan Army in the direction of the conditional state border were fired upon. On September 19, after the Armenian armed forces committed a number of large-scale military provocations and terrorist attacks in the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan, in order to prevent them, ensure the implementation of the provisions of the Trilateral Declaration, and restore the Constitutional System of the Republic of Azerbaijan in the region, a local anti-terrorist operation was launched. In just 23 hours 43 minutes, the Armenian separatists were defeated. Taking into account the appeal of representatives of the Armenian residents of Karabakh through the Russian peacekeeping contingent, on September 20, 2023 at 13:00, anti-terrorist measures of a local nature were suspended and an agreement was reached on a complete ceasefire. According to the agreement, the Armenian armed forces, illegal Armenian armed formations deployed in the Karabakh region of the Republic of Azerbaijan, must leave combat positions and military posts and be completely disarmed (Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Official website).

The persistence of frozen conflicts in Georgia, one of the other states of the South Caucasus region, creates security problems, hindering the development of the region. There are conflicts such as Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the region. In these conflicts, the Armenians living in Georgia fought against Georgia on the separatist side. The Armenian population living in the Armenian-directed Samtskhe-Javakheti provokes riots from time to time, and Armenia considers

Samtskhe-Javakheti to be part of the fictitious “Great Armenia”. It can be concluded that as early as the 19th century, during the administrative and territorial division carried out by the Tsarist government in the South Caucasus region, historical, ethnographic and geographical features and realities of the region were not taken into account, which led to the emergence of many ethnopolitical and ethnosocial disagreements. With the advent of new states in the South Caucasus, the former administrative borders became state, but during the establishment and subsequent existence of Soviet power, territorial-border problems were not completely resolved. It is these issues that underlie the problem of the formation of interstate borders in the South Caucasus in modern times. Recent policy analyses highlight that the persistence of unresolved conflicts in the South Caucasus remains a central factor affecting regional stability and external engagement in the post-Soviet space (Rumer, Sokolsky, & Stronski, 2017, pp. 3–4).

The current strategic landscape of the South Caucasus illustrates that the territorial arrangements established during the Soviet era continue to shape patterns of regional interaction and political stability (Mankoff, 2024, p. 13). Contemporary assessments emphasize the region’s renewed strategic relevance, particularly in terms of connectivity and geopolitical positioning. These developments highlight that Soviet administrative-territorial restructuring produced long-term structural effects that extend far beyond the historical period in which they were created.

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