



ARMENIA, A HISTORICAL BETRAYAL

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This history should never be forgotten. Its roots go back to myths, in it we find Noah, the universal flood, the beginnings of civilization and human culture, [Urartu](#). Many pages of the Bible refer to all of this. Indeed, the southern mountains of the Western Caucasus were the ancestral home of the Armenian people, and very specifically the valleys and mountains where the so-called [Artsakh](#) or Upper Karabakh is located today. It is no coincidence that the Shusha Cathedral, also known as the [Cathedral of Ghazanchetsots](#), was erected by [Simon Ter Hakobyan](#) on the remains of an ancient Armenian chapel. Artsakh is not just any region, it is the place where the founding father of the Armenian people, [Hayk](#), decided that his people should settle forever. The mountains of Artsakh are the symbol of the faith of a people who believe in their destiny.

But let us descend from myths and legends to the harsh reality that the Armenian people are experiencing as they see how their precious cradle is being manipulated in a clear attempt to annihilate historical reality. How could it happen that an essential part of Armenia ended up in the hands of Azerbaijan? What were the motivations and circumstances that, after the Bolshevik revolution, led an ancestral Armenian territory to become an integral part of the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic, and to remain part of that country today? Why did a territory that was Christian to the core, an area where Christianity was established from time immemorial—more than three centuries before the appearance of Islam—come to be dominated by Shiite Muslims? What strange events allowed such a thing to happen? Let us analyze the process.



Nagorno-Karabakh (Credit: The Economist).

From the beginning of the Bolshevik revolution, the relationship of the Supreme Soviet with the Islamic peoples of what had been Tsarist Greater Russia was uneasy, difficult to manage, since the Bolshevik propaganda, Marxist and atheist, seemed to produce any results; not even the creation of the new republics seemed to satisfy the national claims of the various Muslim peoples and their particularities. Communism and Islam have never gotten along, Marxism and Koran are antithetical. Atheism is a declared enemy of Islam, because it denies its own existence. But it was not only the profound differences between the Bolshevik government and the different Muslim peoples of the new USSR. For example, some of the Tatar minorities were Shiites, others were not; while the Chechens were radical Sunnis, the Muslims of the upper Volga were not, and therefore their claims were very different.

But let us analyze the process: in 1918 a committee for the Muslim nationalities existing in Soviet Russia was created, a committee that naturally depended on the Narkomnats, and by a series of circumstances Stalin accepted that the majority of that committee would be in the hands of the Tatars, which would mark his future. Obsessed with securing his power, and as was asserting his will, Stalin tried to manipulate the sub-commissioners, not wanting the internal problem of both sides allying against him.

On the other hand, in those very days, the Armenians had just survived the genocide carried out by the Ottoman Turks, so they were very weakened from all points of view, including politically, since even within Lenin's own circle, it was believed that Armenians would be incapable of carrying on the existence of their own Armenian homeland. It should be pointed out that the recently re-founded Armenian state was economically ruined, defenseless, without an army to defend it, unable to feed its own people, abandoned by the advanced nations, and for all these reasons it was an easy prey for Turkey which sought to put an end to "the Armenian problem" once and for all. It should also be made clear that [Kemal Atatürk](#) did not modify Ottoman policy one iota, and although he assured Europe that he wanted a modern and secular Turkey, he also wanted it to be free of Christians and above all of Armenians.

The Democratic Republic of Armenia, independent from the Ottoman Empire since 1918, was by force of circumstances transformed on November 29, 1920 into the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic, and from that very moment it did not have the slightest autonomous capacity to carry out a process of regulation of its borders based on its historical reality, but became -as all the other Soviet socialist republics- a bargaining chip for the selfish interests of the Soviet protagonists of the revolution, Stalin, Lenin, Trotsky and the other general secretaries, who, as mentioned above, were carrying out their particular strategy for power, while the socialist utopia remained in the background. Lenin asserted that without power, socialist reality could not be built, which was obvious. Stalin, who at that time was a parvenu without a curriculum vitae, was ready to take the plunge. It is more than demonstrated that he used the Commissariat for the Nationalities as a mere lever to achieve his political ends, and that there was not the least coherence in his decision making, although it was the circumstances that finally made him General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, unbelievably against the resounding will of Lenin, of course also of Trotsky and of the majority of the remaining leaders who at a given moment were coerced and had no alternative but to submit to Stalin, and for that reason almost all of them ended up paying for their indecision or their cowardice with their lives.

Let us see what Trotsky has to say about this, in his biography of Stalin:

"On November 27, 1919, the 11th Congress of Muslim Communist Organizations of All-Russia and the Peoples of the East was held in Moscow. The Congress was opened by Stalin on behalf of the Central Committee of the Party. Four honorary members were elected: Lenin, Trotsky, Zinoviev and Stalin. The chairman of the Congress, [Sultan-Galiev](#), proposed that the Congress salute Stalin as "one of those fighters who burn with a flame of hatred against international imperialism." But it is very characteristic for the gradation of the leaders at that time, that even at this Congress the Sultan-Galiev Report on political revolution in general ended with the salutation: "Long live the Russian Communist Party! Long live its leaders, comrades Lenin and Trotsky!" Even this Congress of the Peoples of the East, held under the immediate leadership of Stalin, did not think it necessary to include Stalin among the leaders of the Party. Stalin was People's Commissariat of Nationalities from the time of the Revolution until the dissolution of the Commissariat in 1923, when the Soviet Union and the Council of Nationalities of the Central Executive Committee of the U.S.S.S.R. were created. It can be considered firmly established that, at least until May 1919, Stalin did not have much to do with the affairs of the Commissariat. At first, Stalin did not write the editorials of *The Life of the Nationalities* [*Zhizn Natsionalnostei*, a weekly newspaper and then a magazine, published from 1918 to 1924]. Then, when the paper began to be published in magazine format, Stalin's editorials began to appear one issue after another. But Stalin's literary productivity was not great, and it decreased from year to year. In 1920-1921 we find only two or three articles by him. In 1922, not a single one. By then Stalin had gone over entirely to machine politics."

In other words, Stalin used the post as Commissar of Nationalities to guarantee his future within the politburo, knowing that until Lenin disappeared nothing was assured. Trotsky dissects in detail Stalin's personality in that exciting and dramatic stage.

On August 10, 1920, the [Treaty of Sèvres](#) was signed in Sèvres, France, in the presence of the Turkish representatives. It was the logical consequence of the Treaty of Versailles, in which the Ottoman Empire, still ruled by Sultan [Mehmed VI](#), accepted the *de facto* situation, and lost Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, Arabia, Iraq, while Asia Minor was cut up according to the demanding criteria of the victors. Armenia, in that treaty, put together as [Wilsonian Armenia](#), became a viable state again with the eastern part of Turkey, recomposing in part—and only in part—the historical Armenia. Naturally Atatürk assured his generals that the treaty would not be carried out, and that they would have to fight to the death to

change things. He was a pragmatic man and referred exclusively to Asia Minor, to Turkey itself, knowing that its own existence as a country was at stake.

Immediately the Turkish army attacked the territories under French, Italian and Greek influence, as well as those assigned to Armenia. France did not wish to lose more men or invest more resources in a distant war. Italy could not continue either, and Greece even less. The Turks focused on expelling the Armenians from their cities, until the situation became impossible for the Armenian government, with no funds, no credit, hardly any soldiers, no weapons, although it is true that the British gave some military aid.

Atatürk, who was a good strategist, had made a pact with the SSR of Azerbaijan, which he considered Turkish, and for that reason in June 1920 the Democratic Republic of Armenia was forced to declare a costly truce with the [Azeris](#), since the Turkish army was besieging them and driving them to exhaustion, becoming at that time the SSR of Armenia. It was the overwhelming situation which forced the Armenian government to sign peace with the Azeris, having to cede [Zangezur](#) and [Nagorno-Karabakh](#) to them, besides recognizing their dominion in [Nakhchivan](#).

But Atatürk's Turks kept up the war pressure on a practically exhausted Armenia, unarmed, without ammunition, without resources, without a real army that could defend its borders. It simply had no one to turn to. There were no resources, much less financial; no provisions, not for the weak Armenian army, not even for the starving and impoverished civilians. Armenian children continued to die of starvation, without hospitals, without medicine. That is why the Turks took advantage of the situation, the extreme state of the Armenian state, and entered Alexandroupolis, forcing peace.

Let us analyze the circumstances. A few days later, in fact four days later, on December 2, 1920, the [Treaty of Alexandropol](#) was signed between the recently created Armenian SSR and Turkey and what is today Gyumri, the beautiful city that during Tsarist Russia had been christened as [Alexandropol](#). Supposedly this treaty was an agreement to end the Turkish-Armenian war, and it dismantled the Treaty of Sèvres, since Turkey demanded Armenia's renunciation of all the territory that before the Great War had belonged to the Ottoman Empire, besides forcing it to recognize the independence of Nakhchivan.

A few months later, in mid-March 1921, within the framework of the Treaty of Moscow, Lenin decided to reach an agreement with the Great National Assembly of Turkey, whose undisputed leader was now

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the victor of [Gallipoli](#), the only Turkish leader who could face the victors of the Great War on equal terms. It must be emphasized that neither the USSR nor the Republic of Turkey yet existed. The "Turkey" of that time was that of the [National Pact](#), according to the resolution adopted by the Ottoman parliament on January 28, 1920. It should be noted that the northeastern borders of Turkey and those of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan were defined without the participation of Armenian and Georgian representatives, while the interests of Azerbaijan were well represented by Turkey, which considered the Azeris as Turkish allies in Atatürk's [Pan-Turkist](#) policy. Therefore, in the Treaty of Moscow it was unilaterally decided that the [Kars Oblast](#) would be assigned to Turkey, and at the request of the Turkish leader the autonomous region of Nakhichevan was also created under the protection of Azerbaijan. In compensation, at the demand of Russia, supposedly at the will and discretion of Lenin, Turkey ceded [Batumi](#) and the adjacent area to [Georgia](#), and in such a way that the Armenians lost an essential part of their territory, and above all they were deprived of the vital possibility of having an exit to the Black Sea, that is to say, a limited and dependent Armenia was left for strategic purposes, while the Turks guaranteed their relationship based on stability with the future USSR.

At the same time, the [10th Congress of the Communist Party](#) was taking place, where decisions of great importance were taken:

"Every group, fraction or tendency within the Party was suppressed, tendencies that arose as a consequence of the post-war crisis. Everyone had to accept the official orthodoxy under penalty of being expelled. The aim was to achieve loyalty and uniformity. Authority was concentrated in the central organs of the Party. The idea was Lenin's and was supported by the entire Bolshevik leadership.

"In order to achieve strict discipline within the Party and in all Soviet activity and to attain the highest degree of unity possible with the suppression of all factionalism, the Congress grants the Central Committee full powers in the case or cases of any breach produced in discipline by resurgence or toleration of factionalism, to apply all measures of Party sanction, including expulsion."

Galiev and Stalin openly confronted each other during the congress. The false, impossible friendship between the two leaders was over, and both were well aware of it. Stalin branded as reactionary the proposal that the Islamic autonomous territories should be incorporated into the Soviet Union as

independent republics—in fact the claim of the Muslims not to be linked to the USSR, since Galiev was in fact very suspicious about what the future would hold for the Soviet republics, and feared that Islam would be diluted in the Marxist atheism of the Bolsheviks. Time proved him right.

Recent history has not been consistent with historical reality. Barely three months later, on July 5, 1921, Stalin's boundless ambition prevailed. It should be remembered that it was Stalin who, without any grounds or historical basis, unilaterally, capriciously, dictatorially, decided to create the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) and transfer it to the newly created Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic without any justification for his decision. Why did he carry out such an incoherent act? He was well aware of what could happen with that capricious and absurd decision.

It should be emphasized that at that time Stalin held the post of [People's Commissariat for Nationalities](#), (*Narodny Komissariat po delam natsionalnostei*, or *Narkomnats*). Researcher Stephen Blank maintains that this commissariat was created by the Bolsheviks to control the participation of those non-Russian ethnic groups, supposedly to give voice to the minorities, which were politically grouped in sub-commissariats for each of them: Jewish, Georgian, Armenian, Azeri or Tatar, Latvian, Polish, Buryat, Lithuanian, Estonian, and many others. In reality, what mattered to Stalin was how he could use his strategic position to climb politically and establish himself in power. For [Levon Chorbajian](#), "the creation of Nagorno-Karabakh" was a challenge to history. Stalin, who knew very well the bitterness between Turks and Azeris on the one hand, and Armenians on the other, bet on the former "for political convenience," that is to say within the context of Soviet-Turkish cooperation, trying to keep the influence of the Bolsheviks in the Caucasus.

Both Stalin and Kemal Atatürk were urged to resolve the burning issue of the South Caucasus, an open ulcer that bothered and harmed both sides, and which generated continuous frictions. For Stalin it was not an unknown or very distant issue; on the contrary, it was something close to him, something he had known well since his youth. No one had to explain to him about the Caucasus and its peculiarities, nor about what had just happened with the Armenians for whom he had never felt sympathy. In Georgia the Armenians had a reputation for being pragmatic people, ambitious, businessmen and good merchants; they were not empathetic with their hosts the Georgians. In Azerbaijan the same thing happened to them. In Baku they ran the main oil companies, import and export warehouses, financial institutions. They did not bother about being nice.

On the other hand, Atatürk had too many open fronts, including the very future of Turkey as a country;

and Stalin was also playing for his political prestige—in short to be or not to be. It was evident to the unstable Bolshevik government that Lenin's distrust of Stalin had already begun. Even so, Lenin allowed Stalin and Atatürk to reach an agreement and take the decision to modify and adjust the Treaty of Moscow in a new agreement to be concluded in one of the towns with the largest Armenian population eliminated during the genocide: the [Treaty of Kars](#), to be signed on October 13, 1921, an agreement that would tie up and finalize all pending issues, especially the borders of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Not even three months had passed since the unexpected cession of [Upper Karabakh](#) to Azerbaijan, which the Armenian government hoped to reverse and return to the previous situation.

In the new Treaty of Kars, the Georgians were content with the port of Batumi, not because of political sense, nor because of the Bolsheviks' responsibility towards Georgia, but because Stalin had his own commitments. To the Azeris, Stalin—it had been a personal decision because the commissar of nationalities did not agree on anything—had granted Upper Karabakh, and also Nakhichevan, so the Azeris had nothing to object to, and besides, it was the Turks who were pressing to sign such an agreement.

On the other hand, everyone was well aware that at that very moment razzias and pogroms were being carried out in Baku and all the eastern part of Azerbaijan to eliminate the Armenians and their strong interests in the oil market with Europe. It was not something concealed—that the Turks wanted to annihilate not only the Armenian population in Turkey itself, but also in those nearby countries where Turkish influence was decisive, as was the case of Azerbaijan. The relationship between Istanbul and Baku was already akin to colonialism. But at that time the British, who had troops stationed in the Caucasus, looked the other way, among other things because the Bolsheviks, led by Stalin, allowed all this. There were too many economic and political interests involved.

The situation needs to be told in detail. From the very moment Stalin awarded Upper Karabakh to the Azeris—to their surprise since they were not expecting the present size—the latter decided to carry out an ethnic and cultural cleansing of the oblast. The Armenians protested the decision as incoherent, unjust and sectarian. It was futile. At that time the strong relationship of common interests between the Tatar leader Mirza Sultan-Galiev and Joseph Stalin prevented the incomprehensible decision from being carried out. Both of them needed each other politically; their relationship was based on a false friendship. In reality they were two strong personalities who aspired to achieve their goals at any cost.

However, the pogroms against the Armenian population of Upper Karabakh, the destruction of

churches, monasteries, khachkars, of any Armenian vestige existing in the ancestral settlement, were on-going. In spite of this, the stubborn reality of the facts could not be dismissed, since near ninety percent of the population settled in the valleys and mountains of the Upper Karabakh was of Armenian origin, all of them with deep roots that came from many centuries and millennia, in which the Armenians had modeled the hard landscape of what for them was their precious Artsakh. A harsh and difficult land; unkind, yet for them it signified the roots of their ancestral homeland, the place from which Hayk's descendants came.

On the other hand, the Azerbaijani authorities found it unfeasible to move the Azerbaijani population there and force them to settle, although in certain places of Artsakh there were occasional Azeri settlements representing about 15 percent of the population. Among other reasons, the Azeris moved there considered it a punishment, because a deep knowledge based on hundreds of generations was necessary to survive and prosper in those harsh mountains of the southern Western Caucasus.

But the Armenians resisted pogroms and threats, political coercion, attempts at physical elimination, the destruction of their cultural references. If a hermitage or a monastery was demolished, the inhabitants raised it again, showing a strong will to remain. When the Azerbaijanis decided to destroy even the stones of the resulting ruins, the Armenians returned to the old quarries to carve the necessary stones. The elders remembered even the smallest ornamental and symbolic details of their monasteries and churches, and the skilled stonemasons patiently rebuilt what had been demolished and turned to dust, in an attempt to destroy and change the true history.

It should be remembered that the policy agreed to between Galiev and Stalin was one of selective application of anti-religious propaganda. For Galiev, in those days apparently a very close and loyal friend and protégé of Stalin, who cunningly used him in his service, the religion professed by the Armenians was only a demonstration against the interests of the Bolshevik party, while the Islam of the Tartars—their Islam—was nothing other than the expression of the will of Almighty God.

In the background, Galiev's political ambition in those days was the creation of a great [Tatar-Baskir republic](#) in which Christian Armenia had no place. His secret, unspoken will was to finish what the Ottoman Turks had attempted: the definitive elimination, the disappearance, the expulsion of every last Armenian from the Armenia that had been allotted to them—in the end barely twenty percent of Wilsonian Armenia, of which neither Galiev, nor the administration of the Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan, nor Stalin himself wanted to know anything about.

We say here that the Wilsonian Armenia contained in the Treaty of Sèvres remains intact—intact, complete, no matter how much people try to throw dirt on it, no matter how much they try to erase it from memory, no matter how many intermediate treaties have been signed—for the simple reason that that process was closed falsely. The political representatives of the Armenian people did not sign the [Treaty of Lausanne](#) in which an attempt was made to hastily modify the previous Treaty of Sèvres, without the necessary valid agreements, which did include precisely everything agreed upon and signed, including by the authorized representatives of the State of Turkey.

As for the Armenian participation in the [Treaty of Moscow](#), it was null and void; and in the Treaty of Kars, the Armenian representatives were coerced and forced to sign it. However, two years later, in 1923, Galiev was tried and convicted for nationalist deviationism, and although Stalin carried out a series of purges against the [Bashkir](#) and [Tatar](#) followers of Galiev, he did not want to change his decision to award Upper Karabakh to the Azeris. In 1940 Galiev's drama ended when he was shot in Moscow on Stalin's orders, like the vast majority of those who opposed him for whatever reason. However, an essential matter, such as the allocation of an essential part of the historical Armenian territory, such as the Upper Karabakh to Azerbaijan, was not annulled, in spite of energetic Armenian protests.

Many years later—an eternity for the great majority of the peoples subjugated under the USSR—in 1991, the USSR was dissolved and, like all the other republics that made it up, the Soviet Muslim republics of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan were transformed into independent republics, as had been Galiev's intention seventy years earlier. Within the current Russian Federation itself, we still find the Muslim republics of Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachai-Cherkessia, which had no other choice, or which for their own reasons preferred to remain linked to Russia. In spite of everything, Galiev was not wrong. However, against common sense and logic, producing terrible damage to two peoples who should bury their quarrels forever, Stalin's spurious decision is still remains, defying historical justice, like a festering ulcer that will only heal definitively with determination and intelligence.

G.H. Guarch is one of the leading writers of historical novels in Spanish. He received the 1997 Blasco Ibáñez Narrative Award for his novel, *Las puertas del paraíso* [*The Gates of Paradise*], and in 2007, he received the prestigious AGBU Garbis Papazian Award, for his trilogy of novels about the Armenian genocide: *El árbol armenio* [*The Armenian Tree*], [The Armenian Testament](#), and *La montaña blanca* [*The*

White Mountain]. He has recently been awarded the Movses Khorenatsi Medal, the highest cultural distinction in Armenia. [This article appears through the kind courtesy of [El Manifesto](#)].

[Featured](#): Church of Varazgom.

