

**BAKU STATE UNIVERSITY DURING THE HARD TRIALS OF 1920S-1930S:  
CRITICAL ADMINISTRATIVE CHALLENGES AND RED TERROR****Ziyad Amrahov**

PhD in History, Associate Professor  
Institute of History and Ethnology at ANAS  
Baku, Azerbaijan

[zamrahov@gmail.com](mailto:zamrahov@gmail.com)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6853-3311>

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**Abstract.** This paper focuses on the higher education reforms carried out in the Soviet Azerbaijan in the 1920s and 1930s and their impact on Baku State University.

Beginning from the first years of the Soviet rule, the People's Commissariat of Education in the Azerbaijan SSR concentrated the authority to lead all cultural and educational affairs. The main areas of the spiritual life of the newly established Soviet republic, its education, science, literature, and art, were actually brought under the control of the party and state leadership.

The conducted research shows that by putting an end to the existence of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic with the April invasion of 1920 and establishing their regime in Azerbaijan, the new authorities radically changed the conditions for the operation of Baku State University. Party and state bodies of the Azerbaijan SSR initiated immediate reorganization of the university's work in accordance with the new ideological and political realities. The main directions of education and scientific activity at the university began to be restructured on the principles of class and party affiliation.

All these issues, related to the development of the university, are considered on the basis of archival documents in order to reveal the historical realities of the period under study.

**Keywords:** *Baku State University, higher school, reform, abolition, Repression, Stalin's Great Purge*

**INTRODUCTION**

As a source for national enlightenment and development, Baku State University<sup>1</sup> has benefited significantly to the social, economical and cultural life of Azerbaijan.

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that throughout its existence, the name of Baku State University has been changed several times. By the order of the People's Commissariat of Education of the Azerbaijan SSR on December 6, 1922, the university became known as the Azerbaijan State University (ASU). [Əmrahov Z., İsmayılov S. (2019): 47]. On January 23, 1924, the board of the same commissariat named the university after Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. [Ibid, 51] However, ASU, named after V.I. Lenin, was liquidated in 1930. And after its restoration in 1934, ASU was named after

Embodying the legacy of the first democratic republic in the country, the university is considered as an outcome of national revival. Prime Minister of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic<sup>2</sup> (ADR) Nasib Bey Yusifbeyli and his fourth cabinet, which began its work on April 14, 1919, implemented a program for the creation of educational institutions. [Alakbarli (2023): 17]. After parliamentary approval on September 1, 1919, the university began to operate on November 15, 1919.

Having captured Azerbaijan, the Soviet authorities immediately began to present the country as a springboard for propaganda in the East. On this basis, the Congress of Peoples of the East was organized on September 1-7, 1920. In the 1920s, the Bolsheviks, paying particular notice to the East, established the new institutions and organizations, intending to use them for their propaganda. [Fatullayev (2023): 70]. In light of these changes, the new authorities could not leave the education sector in Azerbaijan and specially Baku State University out of their sight.

### **Soviet Higher School Reforms in Azerbaijan and Baku State University**

After 1923, the People's Commissariat of Education of the Azerbaijan SSR started "radical reorganization works" of higher schools of the Azerbaijan SSR. It has become an urgent issue to fundamentally change the operation of education in Azerbaijan's higher schools, to bring its activities as close as possible to the needs of the state planned economy and Soviet culture development. Although these reforms were carried out with the aim of achieving positive results, in reality the intention was to create a new system typical for the Bolshevik regime. Soon, practical steps were taken to adapt the scientific structure of Baku State University and organization of instruction to the requirements of the time. [Əmrahov Z., İsmayilov S. (2019): 90].

For this purpose, on December 15, 1923, with the participation of the Azerbaijan State University's rector A.D. Gulyaev and the Azerbaijan Polytechnic Institute's rector Smirnov-Loginov, and respectively, their vice-rectors Shakhtakhtinsky and Esman, also professors Bagri, Udintsev and Fridolin, a meeting of the board for the People's Commissariat of Education in the Azerbaijan SSR was held, reviewing the universities' curricula and syllabi and discussing their replacement. [Объединенное заседание Комиссии, v. 16]. The board substantiated the issue with the following considerations and claims:

"A number of faculties of ASU and API do not meet the requirements, put forward by the republican government, they are completely far from the reformed realities. The curricula of the faculties has such disadvantages as multi-subject, and their syllabi are of a theoretical nature to the detriment of the practical aspect. Teaching in a number of subjects does not correspond to the needs and spirit of the times. These subjects are an additional burden for students, cause unproductive expenditure of public funds, and many departments are not provided with scientific resources. As a result, their existence is impractical both from an academic point of view and the interests of students." [Объединенное заседание Комиссии, v. 16-16a].

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S.M. Kirov. Details are provided later in the article. The university returned its original name in 1991.

<sup>2</sup> Also known as the Azerbaijan Republic

The scrutiny on the issue shows that this “reform” was planned after the corresponding reform of universities in the RSFSR, intending to create a kind of continuity between the universities in all republics of the USSR.

The People's Commissariat of Education in the Azerbaijan SSR and its board decided to review and change curricula and syllabi of higher schools. For a detailed discussion of the proposed provisions, it was decided to create two commissions under the People's Commissariat of Public Education, the commissions for the ASU and the Polytechnic Institute. The University Commission consisted of Pepinov, as chairman, and members Gulyayev, Kh. Shakhtakhtinsky, Selikhanovich, Shirokogorov, Udintsev. The University Commission was recommended to be guided by the following instructions: 1) reorganize the Faculty of Physics and Mathematics and the Faculty of Social Sciences, give them a pedagogical orientation, change teaching methods and strengthen seminars, laboratory work and other types of practical classes, as well as cancel or reduce programs of theoretical subjects strengthening courses on social sciences; 2) strengthen practical work (laboratory, clinical work) at the Faculty of Medicine by reducing programs in theoretical disciplines of various departments [Заседания НКП совместно с ректорами, в. 5-11].

The Board of the People's Commissariat of Education of the Azerbaijan SSR defined the tasks of the commission as follows:

- To take into account the vital needs of specialists, available teaching human resources, their qualifications, and limit recruiting new staff;
- To revise faculties and departments for the next 5 years, taking into account the needs of the republic and available qualified scientific specialists,
- An important task should be preparation of a complex plan for the higher education institutions, allowing the number of hours to increase only for practical work and using all pedagogical staff for this purpose...
- Higher schools in Azerbaijan should train local leaders, study and promote local culture. [Заседания НКП совместно с ректорами, в. 11].

As can be seen from the “recommendations” of the Board of the People's Commissariat of Education of the Azerbaijan SSR, it became an urgent task to fundamentally reorganize the operation of education in higher schools of the Azerbaijan SSR, to bring its activities as close as possible to the new ideological principles. Thus, the apparatus of people's commissars began to determine the fate of higher education in Azerbaijan.

The issues of higher education reform initiated by the People's Commissariat of Education of the Azerbaijan SSR deeply interested and worried the research fellows and faculty member of HEI in the Azerbaijan SSR. This was clearly shown by the resolution prepared according to the report of the People's Commissariat of Education. In the resolution adopted at the conference of scientists of the republic held on May 28-30, 1924, it was considered appropriate to unite the faculties of Social Sciences with the Physics and Mathematics into a single Pedagogical Faculty, and the necessity of maintaining the departments (cathedras) of Philology and Mathematics was highlighted there. In the 4th paragraph of the resolution, it was clearly stated that the Eastern Faculty, which is a center for studying the culture, languages, and literature of Azerbaijan and the entire Middle East, should be retained. [Резолюции принятия конференций, в. 9].

Thus, after “broad and comprehensive discussions” in the offices of People’s Commissariat [Заседания Комиссии от 12.01.1924, v. 17; Заседания Комиссии от 05.02.1924, v. 19] a program has been prepared to reorganize the structure of higher education in Azerbaijan, including curricula and teaching methods. On October 14, 16, 18, and 22, 1924, rectors, deans, and students of higher schools, along with representatives of Baku Committee of the Azerbaijan C(b)P<sup>3</sup>, held a meeting of the People’s Commissariat of Education on the results of the commission’s activities. The report of Main Directorate of Vocational Education was heard. From the text of the report, it is clear that the directorate was committed to the “successive relationship between the union republics” in the reconstruction of higher schools and was guided by the experience of the RSFSR [Совещания при агитпроп отделе, v. 2].

One of the distinctive features of the new curriculum was the introduction of historical materialism and the Soviet constitution as compulsory subjects for all faculties of higher schools. Also learning Azerbaijani language and one Western European language was mandatory [Совещания при агитпроп отделе, v. 140].

The work of the commission was considered so “successful” that the board of the Azerbaijan SSR People’s Commissariat of Education abolished the social sciences and physics-mathematics faculties of the university and instead established a pedagogical faculty with social-history and mathematics departments [Из отчета Главпрофобра, v. 24].

Thus, as a result of the reforms carried out by the People’s Commissariat of Education of the Azerbaijan SSR, the new curricula of all faculties of higher schools of the Azerbaijan SSR were approved. In the new curricula, lecture hours were reduced and practical exercises were increased. As a result of the reforms, the university essentially became a semi-pedagogical educational institution.

The report of the Main Directorate of Vocational Education under the People’s Commissariat of Education of the Azerbaijan SSR about the higher education in 1924-1925 shows that the commission, raising the issue of improving the quality of education divided all students into promising and unpromising “elements”. As a result of the academic audit, among 1313 university students, 129 “unpromising” students were identified and excluded from the university. [Из отчета Главпрофобра, v. 24]. Thus, the Council of People’s Commissars of the Azerbaijan SSR, the People’s Commissariat of Education of the Azerbaijan SSR practically exercised the powers of the university’s Academic Council.

However, the reforms initiated by the People’s Commissariat of Education of the Azerbaijan SSR in Azerbaijan higher schools in the 1920s had a certain effect on improving the living conditions of scientists and universities’ faculty members. Thus, on May 12, 1927, in the decision taken by the People’s Commissariat of Education of the Azerbaijan SSR, housing problems were solved by the management in order to improve the living conditions for the higher schools’ staff [Постановление Совета Народных..., v. 3].

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<sup>3</sup> means Azerbaijan Communist (Bolshevik) Party

Shortly after the aforementioned reforms in the Azerbaijan higher education system, the People's Commissariat of Education of the Azerbaijan SSR prepared a new charter of higher educational institutions.

On May 18, 1926, the board of the People's Commissariat of Education listened to the report of the People's Commissar M. Guliyev about the need to change the charter of the university, existed from 1923, arguing that it did not meet the "requirements of the time". On April 17, 1926, the prepared project was approved as the Regulation on the State Science Council, which was established instead of the Scientific Council, at the board meeting of the People's Education Commissariat [Маковельский А.О. (1930): 25].

Soon after, on September 28, 1926, the board meeting of the People's Commissariat of Education of the Azerbaijan SSR discussed the Regulation on Higher Schools of the Azerbaijan SSR. On September 29, 1926, the Council of People's Commissars of the Azerbaijan SSR issued a decree on the Regulation. The decision adopted by the government stated:

a) To approve the Regulation on HEI presented by the People's Commissariat of Education.

b) The State Planning Committee should consider the implementation of the decision of the Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars of the Azerbaijan SSR "On pension provision for the teaching staff of higher educational institutions".

c) The People's Commissariat of Education should report on the procedure for nationalization of higher education institutions at one of the nearest meetings of the National Committee of Education. [Маковельский А.О. (1930): 25-26].

The newly adopted HEI Charter of 1926 was significantly different from the Baku State University's Charter of 1923. If, according to the charter of 1923, the university was directly managed by the rector, vice-rector, and faculty deans, and the university council was the supreme governing body for the scientific-educational and administrative parts of the university, then the "management of the higher school" by the charter of 1926 higher schools of the Azerbaijan SSR came under the control of the People's Commissariat of Education. Only the People's Commissariat of Education had the right to make changes in the organization and staff of higher schools [Маковельский А.О. (1930): 26]. On the other hand, in the previous charter, the university was promoted as a research oriented educational institution, while in the charter of 1926 priority was given to educational goals. One of the main innovations was the creation of subject commissions in the faculties. People's Commissar M. Guliyev wrote in this regard that before, there were no subject commissions, each professor drew up his own syllabus, proposed it to the Council and taught the subject according to this syllabus. Now subject commissions were created, and professors were at the head of these commissions. Other organizations, both students and faculty members were involved in subject commissions [Маковельский А.О. (1930): 26]. As can be seen from the information, the main goal was to completely destroy the previous management structure of the university and its internal autonomy.

The Baku State University's charter of 1926 fundamentally changed the previous status of professors, associate professors and assistance professors. The fact is that after

this they were elected to the State Scientific Council, an institution outside the university. The rest of the instructors were selected from the Board of Directors of the higher school or the State Science Council, but on the recommendation of the Main Directorate of Vocational Education. All the newly elected faculty members had to learn the Azerbaijani language.

In the Charter of 1926, the following condition was set that the order of management of the teaching-scientific activity of the Oriental and Pedagogical Faculties of ASU should be defined by a special regulation. In this regulation, it was envisaged that the general management of educational and scientific activity should be entrusted to the deans and assistant deans appointed by the Main Directorate of Vocational Education and responsible for it. The deans of the Oriental and Pedagogical Faculties of ASU were given the right to suspend the implementation of the decisions of the subject commissions. The deans of these faculties presented candidates for the positions of professors and teachers to the State Science Council. These candidates had to be approved by the General Office of Vocational Education [Atakişiyev A (1991): 160-161].

On December 11, 1926, the Main Directorate of Vocational Education of the People's Commissariat of the Azerbaijan SSR sent information to ASU about the approval of dean's office in the following order: Dean for the faculty of Medicine professor I.I. Shirokogorov, Dean of the Oriental faculty associate professor A. Gubaydulin, Dean of the Pedagogical faculty Mammadzade, deputy dean of the Social-History department professor L.A. Ishkov, deputy dean of the science-mathematics department professor V.S. Yelpatyevsky [Atakişiyev A (1991): 161]. Thus, the Charter of 1926, which is the 5<sup>th</sup> charter of Baku State University, somewhat limited its internal autonomy and opportunities to open a window to the world. In addition to this, the requirements of knowledge of the Azerbaijani language by the academic personnel and staff contributed to the preservation of national culture.

Since 1928, the demand for the Azerbaijani language for faculty members and research fellows of Baku State University began to show itself more clearly. This can be seen obviously in the document titled "Practical proposals about Azerbaijan State University" of the Presidium of the Azerbaijan Communist (Bolshevik) Party's Central Committee (AC(b)P CC). According to the practical proposals, it was prepared a plan for the People's Commissariat of Education of the Azerbaijan SSR about the national language. This document stated that the requirement for the knowledge of should not harm the academic life of higher schools. The full implementation of the task requires intensive, consistent work planned for tens years. Also it was noted the following: "The issue of training the scientists who know the Turkish (Azerbaijani) language is the main issue, and without it, we cannot completely fulfill our legal duty - to Turkify (nationalize - Z.A.) higher schools in general..." [Правительственное разъяснение..., v. 4].

The phases of the university's nationalization measures were also indicated in the government's proposal: firstly the Oriental and Pedagogical faculties of ASU, followed by the Faculty of Agriculture at the Azerbaijan Polytechnic Institute, and then the Faculty of Medicine [Правительственное разъяснение..., v. 4].

Taking into account the government's proposals, the People's Commissariat for Education has prepared a plan for giving preference to representatives of local nationality in the national composition of higher educational institutions. The plan indicated that this

process should be completed for six years in the Pedagogical and Oriental faculties [Правительственное разъяснение..., v. 4]. In the document of the People's Commissariat of Education of the Azerbaijan SSR, there was also such a request: "In order to prepare scientists who are not of local nationality, but who can teach in the Azerbaijani language in the future, they should learn the Azerbaijani language during the period of internship in the departments [Правительственное разъяснение..., v. 4]."

Thus, as a result of the measures taken, the number of Azerbaijanis in the faculties began to increase year by year. This can be evidently seen from the following figures by year: "Azerbaijanis at the Medical faculty were 24.5% in the 1924/25 academic year, 31.7% in the 1925/26 academic year, 1926/27 academic year 40.7%, and at the Pedagogical faculty 18.4% for the 1924/25 academic, 11.5% for the 1925/26 academic year, 93.4% for the 1926/27 academic year, at the Oriental faculty was 94.6% for the 1924/25 academic year, 92% for the 1925/26 academic year, and 63.4% for the 1926/27 academic year. This indicator for the university was 39% for the 1924/25 academic year, 26% for the 1925/26 academic year, 68.9% for the 1926/27 academic year [Atakişiyev A (1991): 190]." It should be noted that this indicator increased to 70.9% in the 1929/30 academic year.

In 1930, the organization of the post-graduate level of education, which allows for the training of scientific personnel in all higher and technical schools, gave a significant impetus to the increase of the number of Azerbaijani instructors in the university.

The noticeable increase in the number of Azerbaijani Turks in the Baku State University's admission plan led to a positive change in the attitude towards the Azerbaijani language. The demands made by the People's Commissariat of Education of the Azerbaijan SSR regarding the Azerbaijani language in February 1927 were widely discussed and accepted at the university. In the meeting of Azerbaijan State University, dated November 23, 1927, regarding the study of the Turkish language (Azerbaijani language - Z.A.) it was said that all academic staff are divided into three groups according to the level of language knowledge, the first two groups spend 3 hours a week, the third group spends 2 hours a week. They had to learn the Azerbaijani language [Организационное собрание... , v. 1]." In fact, these steps were not caused by high concern for Azerbaijani education, language, and culture, but the weakness of the Russian language base of the vast majority of newly admitted students to the university, that is, Azerbaijanis, required it. The students admitted from the districts needed personnel to teach in Azerbaijani language, so that the created gap could be eliminated. This "gap" was created after the April occupation of 1920, when some of the national intellectuals were exiled from Azerbaijan, and some were subjected to mass repression. Now the authorities were looking for a way for the solution.

All these steps taken at the university led to the increase of Azerbaijani Turks among the academic staff in terms of national composition. Thus, in the 1924/25 academic year, 42 out of 192 (21.8%) of the university's academic staff were Azerbaijanis, while this indicator increased in the 1929/30 academic year, leading to the fact that 100 of the 255 academic staff were Azerbaijani Turks.

Conducted research shows that these steps taken by the People's Commissariat of Education of the Azerbaijan SSR were not greeted by the non-native faculty members of Baku State University as a positive event, and caused heated controversy. [Отчет общего

собрания..., v. 35]. Loud disputes emerged at a meeting of the People's Commissariat of Education of the Azerbaijan SSR on May 12, 1929 with the academic staff of ASU and API, which showed that there was a difference of opinion between Russian professors and local representatives. During the preparation of the project "Instructions on the procedure for training of ASU's academic staff," the speech of Professor A.M. Yevlakhov created the main controversy. When he called the reason for his speech the low intellectual level of Turkic (Azerbaijani) students, People's Commissioner of Education M. Guliyev interrupted him and said: "If we make such a difference between the Turks and the Russians, then there will be many misunderstandings on this basis. [Отчет общего собрания..., v. 38, 44, 52]. The People's Commissar of Education sharply criticized the Russian professor, showing that there are very talented students among Azerbaijanis, it is unacceptable for Russian professors to treat Turks as an inferior race... [Заседания правления..., v. 48].

As it can be seen, nationalization measures at Baku State University caused sharp differences of opinion among the academic staff. In particular, the non-native representatives in the university described it as chauvinism and their exclusion from the university in the future. However, they did not understand that education in Russian and the lack of resources in Azerbaijani meant undermining the future of Azerbaijani youth. The dominance of a foreign language and culture could not form a generation with a national mindset.

### **Sudden Turn of Events: the Tenth Anniversary Celebration, Followed By the University's Liquidation**

In the autumn of 1929, the leadership of the Azerbaijan SSR decided to celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the university at the level of the entire republic, and this event was solemnly implemented in January 1930. By the decision of the People's Commissariat of Education of the Azerbaijan SSR, a jubilee commission was organized, headed by the chairman of the Central Executive Committee of Azerbaijan and the Supreme People's Commissars G. Musabayov. Professors A. O. Michel, V. S. Yelpatyevsky, A. S. Gubaidulin and doctor M. Huseynov were included in the commission, headed by the rector of the university Taghi Shahbazi.

The three-day jubilee celebrations took place on January 12, 1930 in the building of the Opera and Ballet Theater named after M.F. Akhundov, a joint ceremonial meeting of the university with representatives of the Communist Party, Soviet organizations and public organizations [Десятилетие Азербайджанского... (1930): 3]. Although the leadership of the Azerbaijan SSR opened the event with an introductory speech and emphasized that the university plays an important role in the life of Azerbaijan, they described the university as a child of the proletarian revolution, but in fact, they did not say a word far from the idea that the university is the cradle of the construction of socialism in Azerbaijan.

At the tenth anniversary of Baku State University Gazanfar Musabayov, speaking on behalf of Azerbaijan Central Executive Committee and Council of People's Commissariat, said that the government has made a firm decision to build a special



university campus in Baku on the occasion of the jubilee. The foundation of the main building of the future town will be laid this year [Əmrahov Z., İsmayılov S (2019): 101].

A large number of congratulatory letters were sent to the university on the occasion of the anniversary [Приветственная телеграмма... (1930): 3], many of its professors were awarded academic titles. Among those awarded, M. Topchubashov, A. Perelman, Stolyarov, H. Shakhtakhtinsky, F. Rizabeyov, B. Aslanzade, Dr. M. Mirgasimov were promoted to the position of associate professor. Moreover, by the decision of the Council of People's Commissars of the Azerbaijan SSR, dated June 14, 1930, three professors of the university, N.G. Ushunskiy, A.O. Makovelskiy and A.O. Gulyayev, were given the title of "Honored Scientist" [Справка..., v. 41].

Rector of Azerbaijan State University M. Mammadov in his article dedicated to the tenth anniversary of the University wrote:

"Today is the tenth anniversary of Azerbaijan State University. Currently, the teaching staff has increased to 311 people. Of these, 52 are professors, 30 are associate professors and assistants. The budget of the Azerbaijan State University from 50 thousand manats in 1919 increased to 267 thousand manats in 1923/24, and in 1929/30 to 2 million manats... Currently, more than 2,400 students study at the state university. Half of them are Turks. Over 10 years, 1,500 people graduated from Azerbaijan State University. Of these, 1200 belong to the Faculty of Medicine, and 300 to other faculties. One of the fundamental issues that will not be postponed for the university is the issue of a special building. There is a construction project, and the foundation of the building will be laid at the anniversary ceremony..." [Статья ректора... (1930): 1-2].

Soon after the solemn jubilee events, complex and dark events began in the life of the university. The Ministry of Education and Culture of the USSR made a number of decisions on education management. Based on these decisions, the People's Commissariat of Education held a meeting on the reorganization of the university on January 28, 1930, on the instructions of the Sixth All-Azerbaijani Congress of Soviets [Протокол совещания..., v. 11] and from February 1, 1930, the project of implementing fundamental changes in the university was discussed. The rector of the university, M. Mammadov, commented on the prepared project as follows that the proposed reorganization of the university is going in 4 directions:

- 1) The teaching issues;
- 2) The structure of the university and its faculties as a whole, their goals and curricula;
- 3) The management of the university and its faculties;
- 4) Financial support for students [Протокол совещания..., v. 11].

According to the protocol of the meeting held under the People's Commissariat of Education of the Azerbaijan SSR regarding the reorganization of the Azerbaijan State University, it is known that in order to shorten the duration of education and bring them closer to the "new requirements", the curricula of all faculties were reviewed and changed, some subjects were removed, and on the other hand, the number of practical programs was intended to be increase [Протокол совещания..., v. 11].

The second paragraph of the meeting's minutes defined the functions of the faculties and the goals of each of them in preparing the project for the reorganization of the

university, and also provided for the creation of a new faculty of Economics, for training personnel urgently needed in the national economy of the Azerbaijan SSR from February 1, 1930.. [Протокол совещания..., v. 11]. It was further stated that the Directorial Board of ASU should be instructed to check the extent to which the directives of the People's Commissariat of Education on Turkification have been fulfilled within 2 weeks, to develop measures for the full implementation of these tasks [Протокол совещания..., v. 11]. In paragraph 4 of the meeting minutes, Sultanov, Ahmadov, M. Mammadov, P. Gasimov and P. Fridolin were ordered the creation of a commission and the preparation of the issue of the merger of the Higher Pedagogical Institute with the pedagogical faculty of ASU within a week [Протокол совещания..., v. 11]. In the tenth point, it was emphasized that the ASU proposal to accelerate the graduation of the fourth year students of the Pedagogy Faculty was approved, and all students, whose study period was extended, were instructed to complete it from July 1, 1930, otherwise they would be expelled from the university [Протокол совещания..., v. 11].

On February 1, 1930, the university's reorganization plan was discussed at the meeting of the People's Commissariat of Education of the Azerbaijan SSR. On February 25, the Council of People's Commissars of the Azerbaijan SSR approved the new Regulation on higher schools proposed by the People's Commissariat of Education of the Azerbaijan SSR.

On February 20, 1930, the Presidium of the Azerbaijan Communist (Bolshevik) Party's Central Committee (AC(b)P CC) listened to the rector's report on the reorganization of the university. Based on the report, the project of reorganization of ASU was prepared. In this project, all the main rules for the reorganization of the university were reflected.

On May 5, 1930, the Council of People's Commissars of the Azerbaijan SSR issued an order "On the reorganization of higher schools and technical schools" [Из постановления..., v. 1-2].

In the first paragraph of the order, it was decided to reorganize the Pedagogical faculty of ASU in the form of a Higher Pedagogical Institute, to start work no later than September 1, 1930 [Из постановления..., v. 1-2]. The second paragraph of the order provided for the reconstruction of the Medical faculty of ASU into the Azerbaijan Medical University with the 4-year training under the People's Commissariat of Health of the Azerbaijan SSR and the completion of its reorganization on July 1, 1930. The third paragraph of the order stated that the Faculty of Law of ASU will be consisted of two departments: administrative, preparing employees for Soviet construction, and legal, preparing lawyers, and the Faculty of Economics will be composed of three departments, trade-cooperative, industry, financial-budgetary. [Из постановления..., v. 2].

On November 19, 1930, the Council of People's Commissars of the Azerbaijan SSR adopted a decision "On rebuilding, regionalizing the higher schools and higher technical schools of the Azerbaijan SSR and handing them over to the relevant economic bodies and people's commissariats" [Постановление Совнаркома Аз. ССР (1978): 191].

Thus, in June 1930, by the decision of the Council of People's Commissars of the Azerbaijan SSR, the activity of the Azerbaijan State University was suspended, and new independent institutes were created on the basis of its individual faculties. Although the opening of new institutions in the republic was considered as a step forward in the

development of higher education in the life of the country, in fact, there were deeper problems behind it. These measures could be implemented without closing the university. The Soviet imperial authorities took this step because they were afraid of Azerbaijan's thinking minds and open-minded intellectuals with a national spirit. It was one of the measures taken on the eve of the bloody Stalin's Great Purge of 1937. However, the empire could not close the university, which is the flagship of education and science, forever.

### Reopening the University

Baku State University, the first institution of higher education of Azerbaijan, the greatest memory of the Azerbaijani Democratic Republic, was closed to the Azerbaijani society in 1930. After 4 years, from its closing date, on October 22, 1934, it was reopened by the decision of the Baku Committee of the Communist (Bolshevik) Party of Azerbaijan [Об открытие Азербайджанского..., v. 5].

The issue of re-opening Baku State University was raised in the letter entitled "Proposals from the Higher Pedagogical Institute of November 15, 1932 on the organization of Azerbaijan State University" and the letter was sent to the Culture and Propaganda department of the AC(b)P CC and the board of the Azerbaijan People's Commissariat of Education. The letter stated that Azerbaijan State University should be the center of scientific-pedagogical thought in Azerbaijan, implement ideological-pedagogical leadership of pedagogical education and become a scientific research laboratory for developing the most pressing problems of the theory and practice of building socialism in Azerbaijan. [Предложения АЗ ВПИ..., v. 14-17]. It is clear from the text of the letter that the Higher Pedagogical Institute "recognized" the limitations of its capabilities. In fact, this "initiative" was not a proposal put forward by an ordinary university, all decisions are implemented based on the instructions of the superiors, and the need to train a new generation for the construction of socialism in Azerbaijan was expressed as the main goal of reopening the university.

Taking this into account, the People's Commissariat of Education of the Azerbaijan SSR sent a letter to the State Planning Committee of the Azerbaijan SSR on November 10, 1933 about the organization of the university. The letter stated that the republic has a Higher Pedagogical Institute, which trains teaching staff for secondary schools, technical schools and workers' faculties, and a number of higher educational and technical schools. However, all research areas, highly qualified scientific personnel and general scientific disciplines are in an unsatisfactory condition. Currently, there is an urgent need to resolve the issue of ensuring this area's work by opening a state university in the Azerbaijan SSR, following the example of the RSFSR, Ukrainian SSR, BSSR and other republics. [Докладная записка Наркомпроса..., v. 19]."

The letter further stated: "Higher pedagogical schools prepare staff for secondary schools, and universities for higher schools [Докладная записка Наркомпроса..., v. 19]."

Thus, the People's Commissariat of Education of the Azerbaijan SSR discussed and decided on the preliminary proposals regarding the reopening of the university. The decision stated: "The University should be located at Communist Street 6, in the building

of the Pedagogical Faculty of Workers. The student quota for the first year should be determined at 210 people (7 groups) [Докладная записка Наркомпроса..., v. 19].”

The People’s Commissariat of Education of the Azerbaijan SSR asked the State Planning Commission for permission to open the university from January 1, 1934, consisting of 4 faculties - physics-mathematics, chemistry, biology-geology and history-linguistics [Докладная записка Наркомпроса..., v. 19].

In this regard, on April 14, 1934, a meeting was held by the Commissioner of Public Education of the Azerbaijan SSR M. Agayev. The meeting mainly focused on the following issues:

1) The institute’s proposal to organize the University on the basis of the Higher Pedagogical Institute;

2) The People’s Commissariat of Education’s proposal on establishing the University independently of the Higher Pedagogical Institute;

3) Proposal not to restore the university, but, if necessary, to create another pedagogical institute [Докладная записка Наркомпроса..., v. 19].

The meeting ended with the final speech of People’s Commissar M. Agayev, and a letter was addressed to the Council of People’s Commissars of the Azerbaijan SSR based on the proposals. It was said: “A higher pedagogical school should live, develop and rise to the necessary peak. The party line is clear here. We will fight for this line.”

The letter sent to the Council of People’s Commissars of the Azerbaijan SSR further stated: “The university should be organized in 5 faculties-1) physics-mathematics; 2) chemistry; 3) biology; 4) history; 5) literature and linguistics”.

The letter contained the following reasoned opinions about each faculty. Physics-mathematics faculty - this faculty arises from the acute shortage of qualified mathematics and physics teachers, as well as teachers who are able to expand scientific research work, in higher schools and higher technical schools of the republic.

The Faculty of Chemistry is related to the demand for chemists for the developing oil refining and chemical industries, agriculture and fish canning, oil, soap, and tobacco production.

The Faculty of Biology should play a role in the cultivation of technical plants for the second five-year plan of USSR and the transformation of Azerbaijan into the 2nd cotton-growing base of the Soviet Union, and at the same time should help in the development of the subtropical plant zone.

Faculty of History - to expand research studies of civil history and party history, to train museologists and archaeologists for the faculty.

The Faculty of Literature and Linguistics was supposed to train specialists in the Turkic language, modern Turkic literary language, Azerbaijani literature, Russian literature, and the literature of the peoples of the USSR [Докладная записка Наркомпроса..., v. 19].

Thus, the Council of People’s Commissars of the Azerbaijan SSR, which examined the “explanatory letter”, decided to accept the decree No. 519 on the “Opening of the Azerbaijan State University” on May 25, 1934 [S.M.Kirov adına Azərbaycan Dövlət... (1971): 111]. In accordance with the decree of the Ministry of Education and Culture of the USSR dated September 19, 1932, in order to train high-level specialists in teaching general scientific subjects, such as the Soviet Constitution, party history, political

economy and others, it is necessary to open a 5-year university in Baku from September 1, 1934, consisting of the following faculties: 1) Physics and Mathematics; 2) Faculty of Biology; 3) Faculty of Chemistry; 4) Faculty of History.

The university admission quota for 1934 was determined at 210 people. The State Planning Committee was instructed to include the construction of a building for the university in the 1935 plan. At the same time, the order reflected the provision of the empty building of the State Bank to the People's Commissariat of Education for use in connection with the organization of the university. In addition, the State Planning Committee and the People's Commissariat of Finance were instructed, together with the People's Commissariat of Education, to work out the issue of financing the organization of the university, and the Council People's of Commissars of the USSR was asked to allow the creation of the Azerbaijan State University in Baku. [S.M.Kirov adina Azərbaycan Dövlət... (1971): 112]

Shortly after this decision, on October 7, 1934, Mammadkazim Alakbar oglu Alakbarli, Rector of University, Professor Y.B. Lopukhin of the Faculty of Physics and Mathematics, Associate Professor M.A. Efendi of the Faculty of Chemistry, Professor V.S. Yelpatyevsky of the Faculty of Biology, Professor B.N. Tikhomirov, the dean of the History faculty were appointed [О назначении декана..., v. 1]. Thus, the Baku State University, which the leadership of the Azerbaijan SSR often proclaimed as the harbinger of the construction of socialism in Azerbaijan, considered as a scientific research laboratory for the development of the most pressing problems of the theory and practice of the construction of socialism in Azerbaijan, was re-qualified for life after great difficulties. And it was on the occasion of the 17th anniversary of the Bolsheviks coming to power in Russia through a coup d'etat that the grand opening of the university was organized. [Об открытии Аз-го..., v. 5]. U. Rahmanov, chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the Azerbaijan SSR, spoke at the ceremonial opening [Из выступления председателя, v. 4-11].

Regarding the re-opening of Baku State University, a large number of congratulatory letters from the then union republics were sent to the address of the university. In congratulatory letters, the opening of Baku State University is remembered as a great historical event, and it was hoped that it would serve the political conjuncture of the time [Агаев М. (1934): 3].

As in the entire USSR, the Baku State University, which was restarted on the eve of Stalin's Great Purge, received a large number of applications for the academic year 1934-1935 in the Azerbaijan SSR. Thus, 444 applicants were admitted to the enrollment exams, 218 of them successfully passed the exams. Among those admitted were 127 Azerbaijanis, 28 Russians, and 63 representatives of other nationalities [Алекберли. (1934): 3].

Specialists and professors from Moscow and Leningrad were invited to strengthen the personnel potential of the university. The conducted studies show that the majority of academic staff conducts classes in Azerbaijani language, the transcripts of lectures in Russian are written and translated into Azerbaijani [Выступление председателя Совета..., v. 33].

Baku State University which was being of named after Lenin till 1930, after its re-opening in 1934, the People's Commissariat of Education of the Azerbaijan SSR started a

wide-ranging campaign to name the university after S.M. Kirov. In this regard, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Azerbaijan SSR issued a decree on April 16, 1939. The decree stated: "The request of ASU students, academic staff and employees should be fulfilled and Azerbaijan State University should be named after S.M. Kirov". [Алимирзоев Х.О (1969): 127]. Of course, all these "requests" were instructions from M.J. Bagirov to please the leadership at a time when Stalin's repressions were raging, and they were instilled in the population under the name "workers' initiative."

### **The University and Stalin's Great Purge**

Baku State University, recreated in 1934 with 4 faculties, experienced one of the most difficult periods of its existence in 1930-1940. The merciless punitive and repressive machine of the Soviet totalitarian regime of the last century destroyed the university's human resources. Baku State University not only failed to stop this repressive policy of the authorities, but also was not even able to bypass these repressions. Up to 60 professors, researcher fellows and instructors, up to 20 students from the leading higher educational institutions of the republic, who were in one way or another connected with the university, were subjected to persecution, harassment, and were arrested and shot. Rectors of the Baku State University in those difficult years were Tagi Abbas oglu Shahbazi (1926-1929), Magsud Mamed oglu Mamedov (1929-1930), Mamedkazim Alakbar oglu Alakbarov (1934-1935) and Balabek Jabbar oglu Hasanbekov (1935-1937), who were subsequently arrested and shot. During this period, the deans of the university's Oriental and History faculties were also victims of Stalin's Great Purge.

Among the victims of Stalin's repressions were university professors Bekir Chobanzade and Gaziz Gubaidullin. Interestingly in the 1920s the People's Commissariat of Education of the Azerbaijan SSR took positive steps towards these intellectuals in order to increase the teaching staff of the Eastern Faculty of the University and train highly qualified personnel. Thus, on March 8, 1925, by decision of the board of the People's Commissariat, Professor Bekir Chobanzade was invited from Crimea to give lectures on Oriental Studies at the university. The decision particularly emphasized the importance of the Faculty of Oriental Studies in Azerbaijan, and also noted increasing the number of staff consisting of Turks. [Выписка из протокола..., f. 57, siy.1, sax. vah. 342, v. 13]. On April 7, 1925, the People's Commissariat of Education of the Azerbaijan SSR approved the appointment of Bekir Chobanzade as a professor at the Department of History of Turkish Literature.

B. Chobanzade began working as a dean soon after being invited to the university. After this November 1926, Prof. was appointed to the post of dean of the faculty. A. Gubaidulin. A little earlier, on April 7, 1925, the People's Commissariat of Education of the Azerbaijan SSR approved the appointment of A. Gubaidulin as a private associate professor at the Department of History of North-Eastern Turks. [Ibid, f. 57, siy.1, sax. vah. 342, v. 13]. In 1927, the dean of the Eastern Faculty of the Azerbaijan State University G.S. Gubaidulin was awarded the academic title of professor of Azerbaijani-Tatar history. This was even reported in the 276th issue of the Kommunist newspaper dated November 27, 1927, where an article on this topic was published.[О присвоении звания профессора... (1927)]. Both deans of the Faculty of Oriental Studies, Bekir

Chobanzade and Gaziz Gubaidulin, were subsequently arrested and shot as the “enemies of people”.

Boris N. Tikhomirov, the dean of the Faculty of History at the University, was among the victims of Stalin's Purge, who was approved as the dean of the Faculty of History on October 7, 1934. [О назначении декана исторического..., f. 1640, siy. 2, sax. vah. 1, v. 1]. It should be noted that the faculty of history was the most repressed in BSU. In addition to the dean of the institution, professor B.N. Tikhomirov, the deputy deans, associate professor Baba Askerov and associate professor H. Bilandarli, were shot innocently. The lives of professors A. Bukshpan, Nikolayev and others from the staff of the faculty were also among the victims of the totalitarian regime. [Əziz, Boran (2009):7] In 1937, after the rector of BSU, professor B. Hasanbeyov, was arrested, the dark days of the Political Economy Department headed by him began. Among the faculty members professors Chichikalov and Safranovich, associate professor Ali Mammadbayov, Israfil Akhundov and others became victims of the punishment machine.[Ibid]

These years were terrible and horrific for the university life. Many national cadres and front runner intellectuals of Baku State University became victims of imperial policies. During this period, hundreds of professors, researchers and students were dubbed as “enemies of the people”, Turanists, Pan-Turkists, and Pan-Islamists. Among the victims of repression were such prominent intellectuals as Ali Nazim, Veli Khulufli, H. Shakhtakhtinsky and others. In 1937 alone, 2 deans, 2 deputy deans, 4 heads of departments, the director of the library, the academic secretary, the head of the special department, the leaders of party and Komsomol organizations of the university, 8 professors, and also, as indicated above, 4 rectors of the university, Tagi Shahbazi, Magsud Mamedov, Mamedkazim Alekperly, Balabek Hasanbekov, outstanding intellectuals of our country, were sentenced to the most severe punishment, execution. [Məhərrəmov A. (2009): 30]

## CONCLUSION

The conducted research shows that Baku State University, the first institution of higher education in Azerbaijan, the historical legacy of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, experienced a period of difficult trials after the occupation of April 1920. The establishment of a new regime in Azerbaijan, the Azerbaijan SSR, radically changed the conditions for Baku State University. The face of the university was changed in every way. The party and state bodies of the Azerbaijan SSR began to lead the immediate reconstruction of the work of the university in accordance with the new ideological and political realities. The People's Commissariat of Education of the Azerbaijan SSR made it an urgent task to fundamentally change the organization of teaching work in higher schools of the Azerbaijan SSR, to bring its activities as close as possible to the new ideological principles. The fate of Azerbaijan's higher education began to be decided in the offices of people's commissars. Since 1927, necessary steps were taken regarding the Azerbaijani language at the University, although a significant increase in the number of Azerbaijani personnel and students was noticeable, but this situation did not last for a long time. In June 1930, the activity of the Azerbaijan State University was suspended by the decision of the Azerbaijan SSR, and new independent institutes were created on the

basis of its individual faculties. After a four-year break, the university resumed its activities on October 22, 1934, by the decision of the Baku Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan.

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