

Back in the middle of the 18th century, the Azerbaijani khanates began a decisive struggle for the unification and independence of their region. The Polish scientist Tadeusz Świątochowski noted the Sheki, Karabakh, and Guba khanates, located in the northern part of the Azerbaijani region, as the most powerful of them. The historian singled out Fath Ali Khan of Guba among their rulers, as a most capable of uniting the territories of the khanates within the framework of a single independent state. According to the author, he was going to repeat the feat of the Safavids (Tadeusz Świątochowski. *Russian Azerbaijan, 1905-1920. The Shaping of National Identity in a Muslim Community*. Cambridge University Press, 1985, pp. 2-3). However, this struggle was interrupted by the annexation of Northern Azerbaijan to the Russian Empire due to the two Russian-Persian wars. As a result of this annexation, part of the Azerbaijani people in the south was suppressed by the policy of discrimination of Qajar Iran, while the northern part suffered the same policy as a part of the Tsarist Russia until the February Bourgeois Democratic Revolution took place in the Russian Empire.

In May 28, 1918 an independent republic was proclaimed for the first time on the territory of the Northern Azerbaijan, having founded a first and only then parliamentary government in the Muslim East. It lasted only 23 months. The history created during these months, the path traveled, as well as the political and cultural results of the accomplished deeds, became the property of the nation. At the origins of this state was a galaxy of more than 30 prominent thinkers, politicians, diplomats and encyclopaedists. For the Polish reader, this period is especially noteworthy in that along with Azerbaijani democrats, a number of Poles took an active part in the formation of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic government: Stanisław Wąsnowicz (1888 -1937) was a parliament member of Azerbaijan, Walerian Kleniewski served as the Minister of Social Security in the 4th Government of ADR, Maciej Sulkiwicz (1865 - 1920) was the Chief of Staff of the Army of Azerbaijan.

During the short period of the existence of this state, many significant events took place in the field of politics, science and culture. These important events had a historical impact on the entire further development of the Azerbaijani people. It was during this period that the formation of the National Army, the creation of the Baku State University, the establishment of the Azerbaijani diplomatic service, etc. took place.

23 months after the declaration of independence, the existence of the ADR was ended by the treacherous invasion of the 11th Red Army. That time no one could have even imagined that the independent existence of Azerbaijan would again be interrupted for a long 70 years of being under the rule of the Soviet Russia. History has once again proved that it is much more difficult to maintain sovereignty than to gain it. Over the years, Azerbaijan had to continue the difficult and long path to independence, complicated by Stalin repressions, deportation and the threat to the territorial integrity of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Finally, with the collapse of the USSR on October 18, 1991, Azerbaijan restored its independence which became the starting point of the nation's contemporary history as a strong and independent Azerbaijan.

Almost 30 years have passed since Azerbaijan declared its independence. During this time, the country has done a lot towards the formation of its statehood. Many problems have been resolved, and many are being settled. Over the years, Azerbaijan has become a self-sufficient state with a successfully developing economy pursuing its independent policy and has taken its worthy place in the world community.

This issue titled “Path to Independence” of “Studia Wschodnioeuropejskie” journal contains the articles highlighting most interesting historical aspects and events of the history of Azerbaijan for the last two centuries. Most of the materials for this issue were collected and provided by the Faculty of Political Science and International Studies together with the Centre for Azerbaijani Studies (CAS). Embassy of Azerbaijan in Poland together with the University of Warsaw and with the assistance of the Institute of History of the National Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan and with support of the Azerbaijan International Development Agency of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan, founded the Centre for Azerbaijani Studies at the Department of Turkish Studies and Inner Asian Peoples of the Faculty of Oriental Studies of the University of Warsaw. Since its establishment in November 2018, the CAS has been working closely with the Faculty of Political Science and International Studies of UW and has already organized several academic events, including two conferences - the conference entitled “Black January in Azerbaijan - suppression of popular uprisings in the era of communism” and hosted in February 2019 and the conference "Crimes against humanity: the experience of Azerbaijan and Poland in the 20th century" held in June 2019.

I think the issue will arouse great interest of the readership, both of scholars and of those interested in the history and politics of the modern Azerbaijan.

Nargiz Akhundova

Centre for Azerbaijani Studies

Faculty of Oriental Studies

Department of Turkish Studies and Inner Asian Peoples

University of Warsaw