

**THE STRUGGLE OF SOCIO-POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS CREATED BY
SOUTH AZERBAIJANIS FOR THEIR FIRST LANGUAGE (1979-2005)****YEGANA AZIZ HAJIYEVA**<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7922-3394>

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Abstract

The article deals with the policy of assimilation carried out at the state level against non-Persian peoples living in the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979-2005, including the rights of Azerbaijani Turks to their first language. The article notes that after the victory of the revolution, the attitude of the political, socio-political organizations formed by the Azerbaijani Turks in Iran to the options for resolving the national issue at these stages differs depending on events in the world and the region, as well as the existing socio-political atmosphere in Iran. In their opinion, increasing the functionality of the Azerbaijani language and giving it official status is a more pressing issue against the background of other problems.

Key words: Iran, South Azerbaijanis, political organizations, Azerbaijani language, Iranian nationalism

INTRODUCTION

As it is known, a number of lines of the international community's activities aimed at establishing human rights in Iran pass through issues related to South Azerbaijan. The main purpose of studying the struggle of South Azerbaijanis for their first language after the Islamic Revolution in Iran is also to study the essence of the Middle East policy of the great powers. As a result of their struggle, the national demands of South Azerbaijanis in accordance with the legislation of Iran and international documents have gone beyond South Azerbaijan and Iran and become one of the international social problems, democracy and human rights. The problem of the first language, which has become a major socio-political and cultural issue for almost all sections of Azerbaijanis living in the Islamic Republic of Iran, has recently become a topic of discussion among representatives of the ruling structure in Iran.

SOUTH AZERBAIJANIS DURING THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR

Immediately after the stabilization of the Islamic regime in Iran, the Iran-Iraq war began on September 22, 1980. Along with creating favorable conditions for the suppression of democratic forces the war allowed the ruling regime to strengthen its position within the framework of "Islamic ideological principles". Shiism was skillfully used as a means of widespread propaganda in the course of the war, and Shiite traditions were confirmed to be one of the most important factors in ensuring the unity of society within Iran, where the majority of the population is Shiite. And this prevented Azerbaijani activists fighting for national rights from gaining influence among their compatriots at the beginning of the war. The ruling circles of the Islamic Republic, used not only Islamic nationalism, but also Iranian nationalism to save the country from war. And a slogan arose: "I am dying not for Islam, but for the motherland."

In such circumstances, the issue of national identity, born of patriotism, became even more acute for Azerbaijanis. Thus, the participation of Azerbaijanis in the war together with the Persians created conditions for closer communication between the two peoples, and they witnessed how their language was ridiculed by the Persians. This behavior of the Persians played a certain role in strengthening the sense of national pride among the Azerbaijanis, in recognizing themselves as a nation, in short, in the process of national self-awareness. Saddam Hussein's attack on Iran reduced interest in the revolution and strengthened the nationalist mood in Iran. Iran behaved like an ordinary country at war, putting its national interests in the first place. Although the war factor pushed the unresolved national issue into the background, it deepened the problem much more. The second stage of the national movement, covering 1980-88, can be characterized as a sluggish period of political struggle. The limited freedoms declared by the Basic Law (Constitution), in part, provided some opportunities for national forces to fight in a very limited sphere, in the cultural sphere. The struggle, which continued weakly during the eight-year war and carried out mainly within the national-cultural framework, played a certain role in expanding the social base of the national movement and forming a national ideology by providing greater enlightenment of the masses. One of the factors contributing to the deepening of the national problem in South Azerbaijan during the period of sluggishness, which played the role of a transit point for the inflow of political ideas into Iran at various stages of history, was the impulse of changes in the socio-political life of Soviet Azerbaijan. After the Islamic Revolution, the issue of a One Azerbaijan began to rise again in the policy of the Soviets (شاهمرسی, 1385: 116). At that time, we are witnessing the strengthening of cultural tendencies in the relations between both North and South Azerbaijanis, and this is dealt in more detail in the next section. At the VII Congress of the Republic Writers in Baku in 1981, the head of the Azerbaijan SSR H. Aliyev emphasized the importance of cooperation with South Azerbaijani writers and the importance of promoting their works in the Republic and abroad. Pointing to the issues related to South Azerbaijan reflected in the works of Balash Azeroglu, he noted that these are the dreams of millions of Azerbaijanis (Бакинский рабочий, 1981: December 12]. Another factor that made Soviet Azerbaijan attractive to South Azerbaijanis was the wide scope of unemployment in Iran after the revolution. This problem brought Azerbaijanis to the Astara border, which led to the expansion of trade relations between Soviet Azerbaijan and Iranian Azerbaijan and increased traffic, communication between the border population (شافر, 1385: 125). It should be added that when the Soviet Union collapsed, the same problem arose in North Azerbaijan, the population living mainly in the region bordering with Iran began to flow to South Azerbaijani cities, and relations had expanded and intensified. Thus, the economic crisis caused by both the Iranian Islamic Revolution and the collapse of the Soviet Union led to the establishment of economic and trade relations between the two Azerbaijanis, and their contact with each other had increased, which deepened national consciousness on both sides.

THE IMPACT OF THE LIBERALIZATION POLICY PURSUED IN IRAN IN 1989-1997 AND THE GEOPOLITICAL SITUATION IN THE REGION ON THE ACTIVITIES OF POLITICAL, CULTURAL AND PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS

The third stage in the history of South Azerbaijanis struggle covers the period from 1989 until the "reformers" represented by Mohammad Khatami came to power (1997). The main

issue of H.Rafsanjani's five-year program, which was elected president in 1989, was to ensure economic growth. The government began its work by implementing a course of economic reforms. In the field of national relations, the government acted as a representative of the interests of the Persian nation under the guise of Islam. Under Khomeini, the relatively weakened pan-Farsi approach began to re-strengthen. The number of organizations of pan-Farsi thought was increased. The inability of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which operates under Islamic ideology, to establish social justice, on the contrary, the continuation of the Persian ideology in a new form but in its previous content, caused dissatisfaction among non-Persian ethno-national unities. However, since the Azerbaijanis, members of numerous political and social organizations, represented at home on different wings of the ruling elite and in conflict with each other, who have to fight ideologically against the ruling regime in various organizations of the opposition camp abroad, who acted within this framework, but in reality more quarrelling among themselves, politically weak, but many in number could not give the necessary reaction to the transition from sociality to nationalism in the policy of the regime. Because, as mentioned, although they were represented in all spectrums, they fought for their personal interests and benefits with the ideals of the social groups and political organizations they represented, as well as with the help of those organizations [Mustafayev, 2007: 28].

The collapse of the socialist camp, the revival of the idea of sovereignty again, and the emergence of the political aspect of ethnic processes in much of the world accelerated the gradual transition of South Azerbaijani political forces to ethno-nationalist positions. In the first two weeks of December 1989, Azerbaijanis gathered on both sides of the Soviet-Iranian border, lit bonfires, and tried to communicate with each other by raising the slogans "Unity of South and North Azerbaijan" (شافر, 1385: 155). Azerbaijanis on the Iranian side of Araz responded to the feelings of their brothers in Soviet Azerbaijan by chanting slogans in Azerbaijani Turkish. On December 31, 1989, Azerbaijanis held a Border Movement-National Solidarity Action (first in the part of the USSR-Iran border passing through the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic) and began dismantling border posts. (On December 25, 1991, the Azerbaijani Parliament declared December 31 the Day of Solidarity of World Azerbaijanis). North-South Azerbaijanis, having been separated from each other for decades, reunited on the Araz River. It is noted that more than 5.000 Azerbaijanis crossed the Iranian border on January 18, 1990, and 20.000 on January 20-21 (شافر, 1385: 156, 157).

As a result of being influenced by very different political systems and ideologies, Azerbaijanis in two different political regimes naturally had different worldviews and views on each other. The negative shades in their looks at each other after the borders opened should be considered natural. Northern Azerbaijanis considered southerners more religious and conservative, while southerners saw northern Azerbaijanis as losing their traditions and becoming Russianized. Many southern Azerbaijanis in their interviews considered themselves more secular and modern than northern Azerbaijanis (شافر, 1385: 155). However, the main thing is that Azerbaijanis with different levels of socio-cultural development, social upbringing, different public views and behavior in both sides saw themselves as a nation with the same roots.

The collapse of the Soviet Union, the independence of North Azerbaijan and the occupation of Azerbaijani lands by Armenia gave a strong impetus to the development of the struggle for national rights of southern Azerbaijanis, especially political forces in Iran, on a

new basis and in a new direction. The release of national activists arrested after the revolution, as well as Iran's all-round assistance to Armenia, led to the pass of many politically active Azerbaijanis, especially left-wing and radical circles to national position, which strengthened the composition of national forces both qualitatively and quantitatively. Because these forces were ready-made passionate forces with revolutionary experience. On the other hand, the post-war constructive works provided a relatively liberal environment, avoiding state control over the national and cultural activities of national minorities. This created conditions for national-political forces to expand their activities. Among the factors influencing the strengthening of the Turkic consciousness of Azerbaijani Turks in Iran were individual trade relations with Turkey and the fact that Turkish television programs were mostly watched via satellite (Cornell, 2008: 3). Even now one can see in the mentioned period the influence of Turkic Turkish in the publications and in everyday life talking of the Iranian Turks, and the programs and film series broadcasting on Turkish TV in the behavior and customs of the young generation. Such nuances are considered as official activities of Turkey in official Iranian circles, as well as in Iranian scientific thought, and are considered as activities of pan-Turkists and Kamalists of Turkey in the realization of the slogan "Greater Turkestan" by creating alarm in Azerbaijani settlements (مقصودی, 1380: 154, 155, 343).

Beginning from this period, the issue of Azerbaijani Turkism in Iran emerged again on a national basis, in a stronger form.

Demands for exercise of the right to use first language among Azerbaijanis in Iran became a national target for all strata of Azerbaijanis. Such tendencies were observed even in some Azerbaijani representatives of the clergy, the most conservative social group. High-ranking clerics, originally Azerbaijani Turks, spoke in Azerbaijani Turkish at various ceremonies after the events of January 20, 1990 in Baku. In January 1990, during Friday prayers, Ayatollah Mousavi Ardabili spoke in Azerbaijani at the end of the sermon, expressing that they are companion in distress with Soviet Azerbaijanis (شافر, 1385: 162). Ayatollah Khamenei also used Azerbaijani Turkish during his visits to Azerbaijani provinces (شافر, 1385: 189). Azerbaijanis represented in the upper class also used their native language to express their national identity. Azerbaijanism tendencies were also strengthened in the representatives represented in the state structures. A representative of the parliament from Shabustar in his speech on "Black January" said that the Iranian state pursues a policy of discrimination against the Azerbaijani provinces. On January 23, 1990, two Azerbaijani members of the Islamic Council Majlis expressed their condolences to their compatriots in North Azerbaijan by speaking in Azerbaijani "about January 20 and its victims". Their actions were repeatedly criticized in Tehran. The article "Conversation in Azerbaijani language"?! in "Ettelaat" newspaper said: "If speaking in other tongues in the assembly becomes a rule, it will not end and will continue. If an Arabic-speaking representative speaks Arabic, a Kurdish-speaking representative speaks Kurdish, and defends his oppressed compatriots in this language, it will become a habit. From a political viewpoint, this contradicts the basic law and national unity" (شافر, 1385: 162]. Such tendencies were considered a major threat and high treason by the government.

A.Elchibey, the leader of Azerbaijani Turkism (during his presidency - 1992-93) (Nəsibli, 2013: 98) by putting forward the idea of Whole Azerbaijan brought the problem of South Azerbaijan to agenda (Elçibəy, 2004) and it was perceived as a security issue by the

Iranian government. At the same time, there was formed an opinion in Iran that the Republic of Azerbaijan, since facing economic and political difficulties, uses the slogans of radical nationalists “One Azerbaijan” to divert dissatisfaction with the government in the country (مقصودی, 1380: 213). Western historians also emphasize that the socio-political events in the north of Azerbaijan have a serious impact on Iranian Azerbaijan, and that Iranian President Rafsanjani fears that Azerbaijani nationalism will pose a problem for the Islamic government of Iran. Drawing attention to Iran’s assistance to Christian Armenia in the Karabakh conflict, they note that Iran is not afraid to openly support Christian Armenia, considering the Karabakh conflict as one of the ways to weaken Azerbaijan, as it is interested in keeping its new northern neighbor small and powerless (Cornell, 2008: 2). Even Svante Cornell considers Iran as “one of the theorists for the overthrow of the Elchibey government” (Cornell, 2012: 314). The Islamic Republic of Iran, which claims to raise equal relations with neighboring countries and the principle of non-interference in each other’s internal affairs to the level of a state doctrine, and which attaches “importance” to Islamic values in defining its relations with foreign countries, in order to neutralize the possible “threat” from the Republic of Azerbaijan (in relation with the national issue), defends Armenia, putting national interests before religious one in relation to the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh.

Under the influence of global and regional events, national forces began to strengthen their main activities not in the socio-political direction, but in the national-political, national-cultural sphere. National organizations with more specific ideological goals were created. These organizations reflected the cultural and political demands of different social classes. Similar to the names of political organizations in the North, and sometimes with the same name was created in Iran by southern Azerbaijanis. The Azerbaijan Salvation Organization (ASO), which chose the independence of South Azerbaijan as the main goal of its struggle, was established in 1990 in Tabriz under the leadership of Eldar Garadagli. According to the organization’s charter, its strategic goals were the independence of South Azerbaijan, the unity of the two Azerbaijanis, democratic and national rise, simplification of joint economic, political and cultural activities, expansion of cooperation between all Turkic nations, creation of material and technological foundation with free market economy (شافر, 1385: 200). Members of this organization were closely involved in the enlightenment work, during the election campaign of Chohraganli, in the organization of the symposium on Azerbaijan studies in 1998. In an appeal to Azerbaijanis in late 1997, the Azerbaijan Salvation Organization noted that “December 31 is the day of revival of Azerbaijan and Azerbaijani Turks and the day of the march against separation” and that 30 million Azerbaijanis in Iran were deprived of their national rights and held captive by Persian chauvinism (De Fakto, 1998: 16.01). The appeal states that the determination to work for integrity in the fight against enemy forces is a goal and idea that can unite 45 million Azerbaijanis around the world. Living anywhere in the world, by mastering our history, language, national identity, religion and traditions, we are once again determined to advance our 45 million will of nationalism and always stand against our stronger enemies” (De Fakto, 1998: 16.01). In the late 1990s, most active members of the organization Omid Ergen, Hussein Ahmadiyan and Ashig Gafar Ibrahimli under pressure were forced to emigrate.

Another organization created at this stage was the South Azerbaijan Fada'i Organization, founded in the early 1990s. The goals of the organization are reflected in the program approved

by the plenum of the organization in Urmia. In the introductory part of the program, the organization declares itself a true successor of the 21 Azer movement and states the main goal of this succession so: "As the true successor of the 21 Azer movement of the Azerbaijani people, the Azerbaijani Fadai Organization will continue its comprehensive struggle for the overthrow of the Islamic Republic and the establishment of the Azerbaijan national state" (GAFT, 1994: 5). The documents obtained in connection with a number of events carried out by the South Azerbaijani Fadai Organization give a certain idea about the program, activities and relations of this political organization with the masses. One of these documents is the statement issued by the Board of Directors of the South Azerbaijan Fadai Organization on August 19, 1994, entitled "Tabriz, a stronghold of the Azerbaijani revolution". The declaration, approved with the organization's seal, describes the riots that took place on August 18 of that year, demonstrating Tabriz's hatred to reaction and chauvinism. It appears from the report that during the football match at Tabriz Stadium on August 18, young fans by chanting slogans "Long live Azerbaijan!", "Death to Persian chauvinism!", "Aren't you the sons of Sattarkhan?" and so on tried to arouse the national feelings of the people, and they were able to turn these protests into street disturbances. The Azerbaijan Fadai Organization issued a statement on the events: "We, the Azerbaijani Fadais, congratulate the young people of Tabriz on this courage and tell the Azerbaijani people that, as the sole heirs of the 21 Azer movement, we will continue our severe and all-round struggle based on the power of the Azerbaijani people and revolutionary cooperation with the representatives of the movement of other Iranian peoples until this regime, which is the anti-people and exploitation center, is overthrown and Azerbaijan gains independence" (GAFT, 1994: 5). Researcher Brenda Shaffer questions the activities of these organizations: "According to the press organs published by the South Azerbaijanis living abroad, as well as operating in the Republic of Azerbaijan, it can be noted that the "Azerbaijan Fadai Organization" and the "Azerbaijan Salvation Organization" were founded in Iran, but at the same time it is difficult to say about the existence of these organizations with certainty" (شافر, 1385). It is possible that the lack of significant activity of these organizations in the South, the lack of sustained activity, led the researcher to this conclusion, and the author was unaware that the activists of these organizations passed to North Azerbaijan and continued their struggle there.

The United Independent Azerbaijan Front (UIAF), based in Tabriz, operated in secret until 1993, had declared its existence after North Azerbaijan gained independence. It also appears from the charter of the UIAF that the organization was founded in 1979 during the Iranian Islamic Revolution. The most active members of the front initially fought within the Muslim People's Party, but after the failure they decided that South Azerbaijan could get its rights only after independence gained by being separated from Iran (VMAC, 1993: 26). The main goal of the front is to create an independent, free, democratic legal state in South Azerbaijan and unite the two independent Azerbaijan within the framework of the law, as reflected in the charter (VMAC, 1993: 28). The activities of the front were mainly reflected in the "Charchi" newspaper, which began publishing on February 18, 1997.

The program of another organization established by South Azerbaijani activists, the Azerbaijan Democratic Party, defends Iran's territorial integrity and independence, and calls for greater autonomy for Azerbaijan. Also, the organization of the Milli Majlis of Azerbaijan, meetings of various levels, the proclamation of the Azerbaijani language as the state language

in Azerbaijan, as well as the use of Persian as an international language is put forward as main goals (Mustafayev, 2007: 29). Along with the organizations established illegally, it is necessary to mention the “Faction of Azerbaijani MPs in the Assembly” created in 1993 by members of the Iranian Parliament, which is legally distinguished by its political, national and cultural activities. The program of the faction focused on the development of issues related to the ostans (administrative unit in Iran) of Azerbaijan, relations with the Republic of Azerbaijan. South Azerbaijani MPs mainly raise the problems of the Azerbaijani provinces, emphasizing the importance of developing relations with the Republic of Azerbaijan (رسالت, 1993: 05.04). Along with the problems of the territories they were elected from, the members of the organization expressed their views on the problems of all Azerbaijanis. In July 1993, deputies elected from the town of Marand began to criticize the appointment of non-Azerbaijanis as ostandar of Azerbaijani ostans, as well as the discriminatory policy of the central government against Azerbaijanis (شافر, 1385: 199). At the same time, they called the government to break off with Armenia and took part in anti-government rallies (رسالت, 1993: 19.04). Azerbaijani MPs prepared a declaration on the need to change Tehran’s Karabakh policy and achieved it to be signed by the majority of MPs. On April 13, 1993, Kamal Abidinzadeh (a member of parliament elected from Khoy) speaking in the Azerbaijani language criticized the actions of Armenians. At the same time, he published articles on this topic in the “Hamshahri” and other newspapers (رسالت, 1993: 14.04). On April 6, 1993, Mahammadali Najafzadeh, a member of parliament elected from Tabriz, read a resolution on behalf of all Azerbaijani deputies condemning the actions of the Armenians and calling Tehran to defend Azerbaijan in the Karabakh issue (Nəsibli, 2014: 74). The activity of this faction was considered by Persian chauvinists as a divisive, treacherous position, and it was subjected to pressure. The faction’s activities were supported by national organizations operating in exile. In 1996, SANLM (South Azerbaijan National Liberation Movement), together with the Azerbaijani Cultural Center in Sweden, issued a statement in defense of the “Faction of Azerbaijani MPs”, which was attacked by both opposition and ruling Persian chauvinists (Turan, 1996: 08.08).

The idea of creating a single center among Azerbaijani Turks in Iran, which would ensure the unity of diverse and potential organizations around fundamental national interests, first emerged in 1994. Establishment of the South Azerbaijan National Independence Front (SANIF) on the basis of a union of four political organizations (South Azerbaijan Fada'i Organization, Azerbaijan Salvation Organization, South Azerbaijan Democratic Party and South Azerbaijan Popular Front) proves a completely new period - the beginning of the consolidation phase in the history of South Azerbaijanis’ struggle for national rights (شافر, 1385: 200). The statement of the Front said: “The struggle of nations under the oppression and hegemony of powerful states, their struggle for freedom, along with the support they receive from the international community, is one of the most significant features of modern times. The increase of nations desire to independence after the collapse of the Soviet empire confirms the above-mentioned fact” (GAMIC, 1995). Apparently, SANIF (South Azerbaijan National Independence Front) aimed at the independence of South Azerbaijan. The appeal of the board of constitutors of the SANIF dated September 23, 1994 gives a certain idea about the need for the establishment of this unity, its future goals and objectives. The appeal stated that the necessary conditions had been arose to start the struggle for the independence of South Azerbaijan: “Currently, individual nations by strengthening their national unity are creating

independent national states. The people of Azerbaijan, one of the most militant nations in the world, have 48 years rich experience in the struggle for independence and the establishment of a national government. But, the world's great colonizers have always sacrificed Azerbaijan under the feet of reaction. Now, at a time when the political geography of the world is changing, in connection with the establishment of the independent state of North Azerbaijan, favorable conditions have been created for the independence of South Azerbaijan and finally for the unification of the two Azerbaijan, a single, independent Azerbaijan" (شافر, 1385: 200). Unlike the declarations of other organizations, the SANIF considered it necessary to unite all national-democratic organizations in order to achieve the above-mentioned goal, ending the divergences caused by minor conflicts. According to the 5-article declaration, the Front "must prepare ideological basis for the unification of organizations, benefit from the experience of world political organizations, choose the most appropriate ways of struggle, establish relations of the Azerbaijani national liberation struggle with Azerbaijani centers abroad and other democratic organizations, and participate in international events as a true representative of the Azerbaijani people" (شافر, 1385: 201). Although the SANIF is a more serious union in terms of intensifying inter-organizational relations, improving programs, and choosing the right way of struggle than the existing political organizations not only in the period of its establishment but also in the following periods, there is no material on the organization's activity and existence towards the end of the 90s.

Thoughts on the independence of South Azerbaijan and the unification of the two Azerbaijan, which were expressed here in the first years (1991-1993) at the level of both official and non-governmental organizations after the independence of North Azerbaijan (Elçibəy, 2004: 18) along with the emergence of strategic goals, it led to the emergence of currents with a strong inclination towards Azerbaijan. The "Vatan" (Motherland) society, which was in contact with Azerbaijani Turks living in different countries, was closely involved in organizing the arrival of southern activists in North Azerbaijan (the "Vatan" society was established on December 28, 1987) (Azərbaycan, 1993: 31.12). At the same time, the state supported the open activities of national activists who came to the Republic of Azerbaijan (Cornell, 2012: 314). During the presidency of Heydar Aliyev, South Azerbaijani activists in Azerbaijan were not limited, on the contrary, wide conditions were created for them. One of the most influential societies created by southern Azerbaijanis from Iran in Baku was the South Azerbaijan National Liberation Movement (SANLM), founded in 1991 by Piruz Dilanchi (Tebrizin sesi, 2005: 9). Although SANFM set a goal to build an independent and democratic state in South Azerbaijan, it pursued the goal in two ways, depending on the circumstances. The first option stated that if the current regime in Iran recognizes the national rights of the Turkish people of South Azerbaijan through peaceful negotiations, South Azerbaijan will be demanded to have the right of an autonomous republic. The autonomous republic will have its own flag, constitution, Islam will be recognized as an official religion, and religion will be separated from the state. Azerbaijani Turkish will be declared the state language. According to the second option, if the above goal is not achieved peacefully, the movement will have to resort to military means, in this case the liberated Azerbaijan will be declared an independent republic (Mustafayev, 2007: 25). The organization used peaceful forms of struggle, such as propaganda, boycotts, pickets, demonstrations and strikes. The newspaper "Voice of Azerbaijan" was the official body of the organization.

Other organizations established in the Republic of Azerbaijan during this period were the “Society of Iranian Political Refugees”, headed by Amreli Lahrudi, and Sarir Azer’s “South Azerbaijan National Independence Front”. These organizations demanded the granting of cultural autonomy to Azerbaijanis, teaching the Azerbaijani language, publishing books and magazines, broadcasting programs in Azerbaijani on Iranian radio and television, increasing the number of Azerbaijani-speaking deputies in the Milli Majlis, complying with Article 15 of the Constitution, and establishing the faculty of Azerbaijani language and literature at Tabriz University. The Turkish Revival Organization, which has been operating in the Republic of Azerbaijan since the second half of the 1990s, the Whole Azerbaijan Union (BAB), founded by former President Abulfaz Elchibey with the close participation of southern Azerbaijanis, and the Committee to Protect the Rights of World Azerbaijanis under Beyuk Rasuloglu were organizations of this kind (مقصودی, 1380: 340). The demonstration of the “Shahriyar” series on Azerbaijan State Television, “Sara” TV channel, which broadcasted programs aimed at the Iranian audience in Baku in 1994-1999 in order to serve the establishment of relations between Iranian Azerbaijan and the Republic of Azerbaijan, various publications, especially during the diplomatic visits of former President Heydar Aliyev, meetings organized to establish spiritual ties with Iranian Azerbaijanis living abroad were assessed by Iran as support for official Baku’s idea of promoting the concept of One Azerbaijan in a wide range (مقصودی, 1380: 342). The notable nuances we mentioned in this direction, of course, were interpreted by Iran as the official activity of the Republic of Azerbaijan. One of the Iranian authors, Mojtabi Maghsudi, writes that the strengthening of the South Azerbaijan National Movement in Iran took place with the establishment of the Republic of Azerbaijan and its support: “Despite the fact that during the Soviet Union, Heydar Aliyev and the leaders of the Azerbaijani Communist Party tried not to show unity and activity with South Azerbaijan, (It should be noted that H.Aliyev, when he was the leader of the Communist Party of Soviet Azerbaijan, regretted the poverty and backwardness of Iranian Azerbaijan at a meeting with foreign diplomats spoke about the desire for the unification of the two Azerbaijan and the struggle of the Iranian Azerbaijani people for their welfare and good fortune (مقصودی, 1380: 340)), after the independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan, these issues became to be spoken openly. Thus, during Heydar Aliyev’s official visit to the United Kingdom on February 22-25, 1994, in response to a question from southern Azerbaijanis in London about the future of our divided country, our nation he said, “The time will come, the divided Unity will reunite!” (Bayramzadə, 2012: 90). Observation of political tendencies related to South Azerbaijan in the official circles of North Azerbaijan in the early 90s, as well as the slogans of radical nationalists about the unification of the two Azerbaijan, did not go unnoticed-nationalism was growing and national consciousness was developing in South Azerbaijan. The reaction of the Iranian government to the strengthening of the Azerbaijani-Turkish consciousness was mainly accompanied by repressions, ideological and ideological-publicist pressures. In the mid-1990s, the Iranian government began to pay special attention to the ideological sphere. Theses on the “Azeri theory” put forward by the Persian nationalists in the Pahlavi era arose again, and books on the subject were published. Even the humiliation of Turkish ethnicity by the official structures began. In an opinion poll conducted by an Iranian radio and television company in May 1995, Turks were described as extraordinary creatures, and the issue of living and marrying them became the subject of public opinion (Məhəmmədi, 2012: 83). In the statement issued on May

10, 1995, by SANIF, which was known for its relatively objective position in the struggle for national rights, based on democratic values, and standing upon the ideological, theoretical and tactical differences, in response to the opinion poll that humiliated Azerbaijanis, this step of the Persian chauvinists was considered as a goal to turn it into a Turkish-Persian conflict in order to stain the national-progressive struggle. It said :“We need to be more vigilant and prove it. We are not the enemy of any nation. We must fight only against the colonial central state that enslaves peoples. The lands of Azerbaijan have been occupied by the central reaction, and the people of Azerbaijan live in these lands as foreigners, captives... The captive nation can have no choice but to choose two ways. Either slavery, humiliation, torture, filthy life, or a fierce struggle against the invading enemies with all our might. We have no other choice” (Nəsibli, 2014). The fear for the spread of Turkism was also reflected in the attitude of the Iranian government to the Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan in Iran. An appeal to the Iranian Foreign Ministry to open a primary school for the children of embassy staff in Tehran was rejected. Whereas, there were schools in the official language of the embassies of a number of countries in the capital (Səfərli, 2010: 23).

One of the measures taken by the Iranian government to prevent ethnic threats from North Azerbaijan was the redivision of administrative territory aiming to remove the name of Azerbaijan from the border areas, and this policy was implemented in 1993-94.

However, the efforts of the Iranian government against the movement were ineffective and did not prevent the rapprochement of the two Azerbaijanis in the current socio-political situation. Such a situation led to the formation of different political views among the southern Azerbaijanis and the emergence of a new national awakening movement. Until recently, the issue of the first language was part of the idea of independence, but in response to the government’s afore-said policy, the issue of integration and unification has arisen since 1995.

Another organization founded during this period is the South Azerbaijan National Awakening Movement (SANAM). This organization was established in 1995 in secret by Mahmudali Chohraganli, a professor at Tabriz University, and his colleagues. SANAM was a democratic, socio-political movement uniting around 100 scientific-literary, national-cultural and socio-political organizations based on Turkism and modernity. The headquarters of the SANAM was located in South Azerbaijan. Later, its branches began to operate in other regions of Iran. SANAM’s program states that it is “fighting for the restoration of South Azerbaijan’s right to self-determination based on international law and principles”. This organization also put forward a program in two versions. In the first option, the idea of establishing a federation or confederation of nations in Iran was put forward, and if this plan could not be implemented, the second option was to establish an independent state (Mustafayev, 2007: 26).

Political and ideological demands for national culture and language were openly put during the spring 1995 parliamentary elections and met with strong resistance. Mahmudali Chohraganli putting forward his candidacy in the parliamentary elections in Tabriz had announced on his pre-election platform that he would make efforts to teach the Turkish language in Azerbaijan and develop the Azerbaijani economy. Raising the issue of national rights by Azerbaijani candidates was a new event for both Iran and the Azerbaijan national movement. In his election platform M.Chohraganli mostly made the following demands:“Restoration of national and public culture of Azerbaijan, strengthening of Azerbaijani language and literature; acquisition of official status of the Azerbaijani language”

(شافر, 1385: 200). The organization established the radio “Voice of South Azerbaijan” in 2003. But, Iranian security forces raided the radio station abroad and had suspended its activities (ایزدی, 1383). It should be noted that the ideology of Turkism has been the main ideological line in the struggle since 1995. The actions in support of Dr. M.Chohraganli became a wave of protests for the national language-Turkish language, national identity-Turkish identity.

It should be noted that if in the early 1990s the socio-political organizations created by southern Azerbaijanis in Iran were based on a somewhat limited framework - the provision of national and cultural rights and the demand for autonomy, then in the next stage - in the mid-90s it seems that the scope of demands has expanded and radicalized, the struggle for national rights has been transferred to a purely political level, and the idea of independence and the Whole Azerbaijan has come to the foreground. Until this period, the struggle of national forces, operating mainly in the form of small groups and organizations with basic socio-cultural demands, began to take a mass character, to be concentrated and became organized from the 1990s. On the whole, what happened in the region created great enthusiasm in national forces in South Azerbaijan. The processes taking place in North Azerbaijan gave great hopes to South Azerbaijanis to achieve national independence.

So, despite of the fact that the political organizations created by southern Azerbaijanis under the influence of internal and external factors in 1989-1997, were formed without any serious training and large organizational base, demonstrated the practical and theoretical importance of uniting Azerbaijanis around their first language, the idea of Azerbaijanism. Although there were disagreements over the solution of the national question in the struggle of these organizations, the issue of the first language became one of the main objects of their political activities.

THE ISSUE OF THE AZERBAIJANI LANGUAGE IN THE ACTIVITY OF POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS IN 1997-2005

During the 7th presidential election in 1997, there were clashes between conservatives and reformists over the election of candidates. Hojjat-ul-Islam Sayyid Mohammad Khatami, a reformist and somewhat “dissatisfied” with the regime (he was forced to resign from the post of the Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance), was elected president. The election of S.M.Khatami as President was considered an important victory of democracy in Iran. Along with a number of democratic, social and other changes in his election platform, S.M.Khatami won the sympathy of Azerbaijanis by promising to ensure the rights of national minorities under Article 15 of the Iranian constitution. An average of 70 percent of Azerbaijanis, who make up the majority of voters, voted for Khatami (Yeni Mūsavat, 1997: 08.06). With coming of Khatami to power, a movement called “reformers” began in the country. The “reformers” tried to interpret the concepts of civil society, law, freedom and independence in an Islamic context. According to this policy, there was a different approach to the issue of national and ethnic affiliation in Iran: national affiliation should remain within the Persian language, and ethnic affiliation should remain in the cultural sphere and not enter the political arena. According to Khatami, Iran is a country of ethnic, linguistic and religious differences. Iranianism is a fact above all these differences. Iranianism retains Sunni, Shiite, Persian and Turkish elements. In other words, “Iran belongs to all Iranians” (Kəskin, 2005: 38). Khatami had to carry out political reforms within the framework of “civil society”. According to this

project, the individual and social rights of individuals in society were officially recognized, and their activities in all spheres (economic, political, cultural, etc.) should be allowed without affecting their ethnicity. This project was not materialized. The domestic policy pursued by the “reformers” led by Khatami in 1997 relatively softened the climate, and the revival in the political environment created conditions for the strengthening of the political activities of the national forces of South Azerbaijan. The period from the coming of the “reformers” to power up to 2005 can be considered the 4th stage of the struggle of the southern Azerbaijanis. The current situation has had a significant impact on the direction and content of the activities of political forces. From the beginning of this stage, the political structures in which the national forces were concentrated gradually passed to legal activity. The ideology of Turkism was the main ideological line in the struggle. The number of organizations with Azerbaijani-Turkish words in their names began to increase. South Azerbaijan Turkish Revival Organization, Young Turks Organization, Bizim Yol South Azerbaijan National Liberation Organization, National Movement Organization (MOHEQ), National Islamic Movement (NIM) and others were among these organizations (Cavadbeyli, 2014). These organizations fought for the state status of the first language, federation and independence.

In 1998, the Committee For Protection the Rights of World Azerbaijanis was established in the Republic of Azerbaijan. The founder and leader of this organization, which is based on the principles of human rights protection, is Beyuk Rasuloglu, who currently lives in Norway and works to make the issue of South Azerbaijan an international issue (Isalı, 2012).

In 1998, another attempt was made to centralize large-scale socio-political activities for the fundamental national interests of the Azerbaijani Turks. On April 28, 1998, the South Azerbaijan Turkish Revival Organization, Bizim Yol South Azerbaijan National Liberation Organization, the United Independent Azerbaijan Front, the Azerbaijan Salvation Organization, the South Azerbaijan Young Turks Organization and the South Azerbaijan Democratic Front issued the following statement about their unification: “It was decided to fight ruthlessly against those who question the existence of our people, our territorial integrity, language and culture. These organizations will operate under the name “South Azerbaijan Turkish Liberation and Independence Council” (also called the National Council - Y.H.). Along with fighting for the independence of South Azerbaijan the National Council declares that it is the protector of the independence of North Azerbaijan within the unshakable belief in the unity of the motherland” (Yeni Müsavat, 1998: 28.04). The organization adopted an appeal on December 31, 1999 on the occasion of the Day of Solidarity of World Azerbaijanis. The appeal said: “About 30 million unfortunate people living in the southern part of our country are not only deprived of their human rights, but are losing their national identity and being assimilated under the open and secret insults of Persian chauvinism. We must move towards the creation of a strong Azerbaijani state of 40 million people. In order to convey the tragedy of our nation to the whole world, to achieve the goal in South Azerbaijan, Azerbaijanis – in the north-south, the ruling-opposition, the rich and the poor, all classes should join. In all their speeches, they should promote our national integrity, our national existence, and convey to our people that our liberty will cross the bridge of democracy through national unity and Turkism” (Azadlıq, 2000: 8-10.01). Even if we approach the establishment of the National Council from the viewpoint of minimal effect, it should be considered useful. This should be assessed as a step towards bringing the activities of organizations to a wider range of socio-political activity,

as well as uniting the bearers of different views in one center and clarifying their positions on the issue of first language, which is equally relevant for all.

Organizations based on the Turkish consciousness and uniting politically active forces in their ranks, as in previous years, for various reasons - lack the perfect mechanism, inexperience and so on, could not become an important and serious event in the national movement.

The ideas of political organizations with different approaches and views on the solution of the national problem can be grouped as follows:

- One group believed that Iran has been ruled by Turks throughout history, and this tradition should be continued. It is just necessary to fight for the state support and opportunities of Azerbaijani Turkish in Iran as much as Persian. That is, Iran should be a country with two national languages - Persian and Azerbaijani. They struggled in favor of raising the status of Azerbaijani Turkish and declaring it the state language.

- Another group was in favor of reorganizing the administrative-territorial structure of Iran on a federal basis.

- There were many organizations that considered the struggle for independence important.

The position of foreign authors on the prospects of resolving the issue is also interesting. According to such authors as Byron Good and Mary Good, Azerbaijanis will continue to lead the struggle for more democratic forms of government in Iran. Azeris (the statement of authors) will continue their initiatives to play a central role in the central government instead of leaving Iran” (Mustafayev, 2002: 107). Rajab Safarov, director of the Center for the Study of Modern Iran in Russia, believes that nationalist mood is fueled by the West, as well as the Republic of Azerbaijan. However, the Republic of Azerbaijan and the West cannot get the support of southern Azerbaijanis. If the Republic of Azerbaijan pursues an anti-Iranian policy and a confrontation arises, Iranian Azerbaijanis will be the bright defenders of IRI. If we consider the events that took place in Iran during the period under investigation, we can see that there is truth in opinions of the first authors. There are enough South Azerbaijani activists who want change of the regime while maintaining Iran’s territorial integrity. However, it is impossible to agree with the claim of R.Safarov, known for his bias position against the national movement of South Azerbaijan. Because both in the mentioned period and now we have repeatedly witnessed mass actions of support of our southern compatriots in connection with the problems faced by the Republic of Azerbaijan in the system of international relations, including in the region. Moreover, the author ignores the discriminatory policy of the Iranian regime against the southern Azerbaijanis and the natural protests against this policy, and “forgets” the history of the national and democratic movement of the South Azerbaijani Turks. These movements were not instigated from abroad, on the contrary, a major part of the history of the national and democratic movement of the Iranian Turks was the struggle against foreign imperialism.

From the late 1990s, the struggle of national forces began to take a mass character and took an organized form. One of the new mass forms of the national movement was the organization of marches to the “Babek Fortress”. Since 1999, every year, on July 4 -5, hundreds of thousands of people gathered at the Bazz fortress, distributing notifications [9, No.208, 22.11.2001]. In these notifications, the issue of language attracted attention in particular: “Where do you see the disappearance of national identity and culture? Let’s start with Articles

15-19 from our own families. Let's give the hand of unity and love to each other, let's be Azerbaijani" (Ana dili, 2001: No.208, 22.11). The mightiest march took place in 2002. That year, for the second time in history, a grand march was held. Slogans about national and cultural rights were sounded, poems and music were recited in Azerbaijani during the march, which was attended by about a million people. The national flag of South Azerbaijan was adopted by tens of thousands of Azerbaijanis as a symbol of the national movement during the march of 2003 to Babek Fortress.

In those years, there was a growing demand for national rights to be provided within the borders of Iran. In the movement, which was previously based on radical speeches, moderate tendencies intensified, and the demands for independence and unification decreased. Their demands was not more than the granting of independence to the South Azerbaijan. During this period, it is difficult to claim that the issue of the Whole Azerbaijan was a priority for South Azerbaijani organizations, with the exception of some organizations. Mainly, the protection of the Azerbaijani-Turkish identity, acting within the Constitution, the opening of the press, radio, television and schools in the native language, fair treatment, other demands were made. The struggle for the national language-Turkish language, national identity-Turkish identity had turned into a wave of protests. During this period, the common feature that united the organizations of southern Azerbaijanis with different platforms and tactics was the struggle for national identity. Sociocultural self-identification, one of the forms of collective self-promotion, being identified with exclusive Turkism, was the basis of the struggle for national rights. The Turkish basic component, identified as a priority in the process of self-identification, was proposed as the only form of the national idea, and all subsequent steps in both domestic and foreign policy were based on this factor alone. This common feature in the nature of the movement also attracted the attention of European authors. Some European authors consider that Iran is concerned about Azerbaijani nationalism. Tehran considers the Turkic movement to be the greatest threat to all and therefore the development of the Turkish language is considered a potential betrayal (Heradstveit, 2008: 122). In our opinion, the above mentioned conclusions are true. Even Iranian authors shared the opinion of European researchers and considered the Turkish ethnoidentification process a serious and major threat to the regime. For example, the Iranian author Sayyid Reza Salehi Emiri stated that the main threat was not the strengthening of the wave of protests, but the strengthening of ethnic identity and the failure to form a single national identity" (امیری, 1385: 445).

Concerned about the threat of the Turkish-based self-awareness process, the Khatami government intensified the wave of repression (Riaux, 2012: 53). Politicians and progressive intellectuals were arrested and, in some cases, killed. When elections to local councils were held in 1999, it became clear that the true nature of the "reformist" government, which had made various promises to southern Azerbaijanis and received their votes, was no different from the previous ones. This government also did not take any measures to realize the national rights of the South Azerbaijanis - Turks, including the demands for the first language (Yol, 1999: No.21, 4).

In the early 2000s, the worsening of Iran's international relations, especially with the United States, had a negative impact on the socio-political situation in Iranian Azerbaijan and strained it. After the reception of Mahmudali Chohraganli in Washington, there sounded doubts that Azerbaijani organizations could receive open or secret support from the United States

(Cornell, 2008: 6). Of course, the national movement in South Azerbaijan in those years was in the interests of the United States. Because any action aimed at weakening of the Iranian state was welcomed by the United States. Despite the mentioned country's efforts to support the struggle of southern Azerbaijanis, the superpower's lack of full support for the national movement was due not only to its interests and geostrategic factors, but also due to the inability of the Azerbaijani Turks in Iran to create a strong organization that could play the role of an organized, locomotive of the movement, and the lack of a charismatic leader who would unite all his forces around him.

One of the most important consequences of global change in the world was the implementation of the democratization process in Iran, which during this period became one of the means of pressure on Iran by great powers. On the other hand, the strengthening of the anti-democratic situation in Iran was the next step in changing the positions and views of national forces.

There emerged a group in the national movement which believed that the path to the main goals was through democracy. Democracy was considered the most important tool for achieving national rights. It was thought that if democratic organizations were established, it would be easier to obtain national rights. For example, one of the activists of the national movement, head of the Organization for the Protection of the Rights of World Azerbaijanis (DunAzHaq) Beyuk Rasuloglu stated: "Finally, we must bring our democratic slogan to the attention of our people in order not to fall into the games around us. Our nation should know that we say: "We want to be educated in our native language". Democracy also says so. We say: "We must have a free press and radio and television in our native language". Democracy also says so. We say: "Our economy must develop". Democracy also says so. We say: "Our nation must be free". Democracy also says so" (Cümhuriyyət, 1999: 31-1.04). The activity of the national forces represented in the national democratic camp, based only on democratic values, passed to the level of rational-realist activity. The pass of national-democratic demands in their activities in the foreground put the national-political issue in the background. The issue of national identity began to be presented mainly as part of the struggle for democracy. In January 2001, the Organization for the Protection of the Rights of World Azerbaijanis (DunAzHaq) in its appeal to Amnesty International's Middle East representative, D.Dick, and the organization's head, A.Harrison, referring to the escalation of anti-democratic tendencies in Iran as a result of confrontation between the wings of power wrote: "We ask you to shed some light on the dark future of those imprisoned for their legal struggle for the restoration of our rights, and we ask you to help them as political prisoners" (Yeni Müsavat, 2001: 25.01). After the appeals of , the Organization for the Protection of the Rights of World Azerbaijanis (DunAzHaq) and WAU to the religious leader of Iran Khomeini in March and May to stop the excessive wave of repression during this period, to make the right decision on national activists fighting for national rights (Yeni Müsavat, 2001: 10.03; 03.06.2001) accusations and counter-propaganda began against them.

Along with Iran's position in the system of international relations, the deepening of national-political processes in the country can be considered as one of the reasons for the escalation of the confrontation between the wings of power in Iran in early 2001. As one of Western correspondents in Iran wrote, "Khatami with his speech pointing to the devil's triangle blames Bush, who has plunged Iran into a long slough of crisis, anointing the bread of his

opponents and frustrated hopes for national reform” (Abrahamian, 2014: 250). Indeed, the victory of the Conservatives and the defeat of the reformers in several elections proved this (the 2003 municipal elections, the 2004 parliamentary elections and, finally, the 2005 presidential elections). One of the reasons for the coming of conservative forces to power in 2005 was the fear of national unity in the Iranianist forces [Mustafayev, 2014: 276).

The deepening of confrontation between the wings of power further strengthened the anti-democratic situation in the country. However, this anti-democratic situation could not prevent the development of the movement, on the contrary, new organizations were created. The main goal of the Gunesh(Sun) Party, established in 2000, was to fight for the cultural and political rights of southern Azerbaijanis (“Restoration of the legal rights of Azerbaijan, the return of its language, history and culture”) (Mustafayev, 2007: 28). Although the party announced its existence in 2002 and submitted its registration documents to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Iran, the desire of the Gunesh members were not granted.

Founded in 2001, the ultimate goal of “21 Azer’s” was to restore the National Government of Azerbaijan. For this, it set short-term (tactical) and long-term (strategic) goals. The long-term goal in the organization’s program is as follows: “In Iran, the rights of national autonomy for the national state of a nation living in a certain area and forming majority, those people who live in a certain area, but in minority and cultural autonomy for intertwined nations should be recognized officially.” For tactical purposes, the provision of education in the first language is defined as the main task (Mustafayev, 2007: 27).

During this period, the Southern Azerbaijan National Awakening Movement (SANAM) also expanded its activities. SANAM has opened foreign offices and representative offices since 2002. The organization had 24 offices in the Republic of Azerbaijan, Turkey, European countries and the United States. SANAM was a democratic organization officially recognized by various UN commissions, the European Union, the European Parliament, as well as democratic states.

In 2002, South Azerbaijani national activists established the Committee for Protection of Political Prisoners of Azerbaijan (ASMEK) to bring information about Azerbaijani political prisoners in Iran to the world and to international organizations. Their main goals were to inform the public and the international community about human rights issues, to carry out cultural and social work in this direction, and to provide assistance to southern Azerbaijani political prisoners in various ways. Although the activity of the organization was banned in 2004, it continued to operate in secret. In April 2004, most of its members were arrested and their activity was banned for protesting against anti-Turkish protests of the Armenians (Isali, 2012: 52).

Founded in 2003, the Azerbaijan National Front set the restoration of national system in the historical lands of Azerbaijan as its main goal. The organization’s 12-item appeal on March 21, 2003, outlines its program. Paragraph 6 of Article B of the Decree, published on the mentioned date, demanded the Azerbaijani Turkic language to be the national and official language (Mustafayev, 2007: 27).

In 2004, the South Azerbaijan Independence Party was established (Yeni Müsavat, 2003: 15.01). The party’s Rules (December 5, 2004) state that South Azerbaijan is fighting for full independence and the establishment of a Democratic Republic. The party does not ignore the fate of Azerbaijanis outside the independent Republic of South Azerbaijan as well. It states

that will try to declare Tehran and its environs a bilingual (Persian, Turkish) republic and create an autonomous state for the Qashqai (Mustafayev, 2007: 28).

On April 11, 2004, a committee called “Committee for the return of the eternal name of Azerbaijan to Ardabil ostan” declared its existence (Məhəmmədi, 2012: 166). The main goal of the committee is to fight for the return of the name of Azerbaijan to the ostan inhabited by Azerbaijanis.

In 2004, the West Azerbaijan National Defense Committee (WANDC), based in Urmia, was established to counter Kurdishization in the western part of South Azerbaijan. The committee's goals were stated as follows:

To oppose terrorism; clearing the western region of Azerbaijan from Kurdish and international terrorists; To prove the true face of terrorists with documents and to make the people vigilant against them; To create a national resistance movement by informing the people; Explain to the people the policy of deliberate resettlement of the Kurds; To determine the main directions of changing the ethno-demographic image of the western region of Azerbaijan; Delivery of historical and ethnographic documents to the international community regarding the fact that this region is the ancient land of Azerbaijan (İsali, 2012).

Founded in 2004, the Federal-Democratic Movement of Azerbaijan (founded by Alirza Ardabili and Mohammad Azadgar, who live in Sweden) set itself the goal of creating a federal and democratic republic in Iran and a Federal Republic of Iranian Turks. The platform of the organization stated: “The Federal Republic of Iran should be a two parliamentary state, federal states of nations living in Iran, states of autonomous regions and a private city should be created as a result of free and voluntary unification of the Tehran government... There will be 6 official languages of the central state... Azerbaijani language will be the state language in Azerbaijan and in autonomous Turkish structures. Khorasan Turks, Turks living in the south of Iran, Qashqai Turks have the right to establish local government bodies” (Mustafayev, 2007: 29).

Another body established in 2005, the Azerbaijan National Assembly, wanted all national forces to unite on one front and fight for a common goal (Mustafayev, 2007: 29).

The establishment of these organizations with various orientations and their application to state bodies for official registration was a new event in the history of the national movement - the transition to the stage of legal political organization. Although many stated that they would operate under the relevant articles of the constitution, they were rejected in registration. The national-political forces operating during this period mainly sounded protests on 4 issues:

- According to the second paragraph of Article 15 of the Constitution, 22 million Azerbaijani Turks living in the historical lands of South Azerbaijan, as well as 7-10 million Azerbaijanis scattered in other regions of Iran must receive compulsory education in their first language from primary to higher education;

- Free press in the native language should be published and distributed in South Azerbaijan, radio and television programs should be broadcasted. Turks living in other parts of Iran should also benefit from this right in terms of size correlation of the population;

- Economic development. Discrimination by the Tehran regime against the regions hinders economic development in South Azerbaijan. Due to the lack of development of industry and other sectors of the economy, the population moves from their ancestral lands to non-Turkish regions in search of work.

As the national movement grew, the government took steps to attract weaker organizations to its side. By pursuing such a policy, the government was gradually trying to take control of the movement. However, the policy of “splitting the national movement” by training new leaders with deceptive slogans did not work. The Azerbaijani national movement basing on the method of “democratic integration” played a major role in preventing disintegrations. One of the preventive measures to prevent the disintegration of the national movement was the emergence of 16 organizations and circles with different views in South Azerbaijan and Tehran to form an organization called the Council of Elders of South Azerbaijan (Yeni Mûsavat, 2003: 31.01).

The most important indicator for the level of development of the struggle for national rights was the initiative of a number of Azerbaijani representatives working in government agencies to ensure the rights and to raise the status of the Azerbaijani language based on Iranian legislation. An open letter from the East Azerbaijan Provincial Council to President Khatami in May 2003 stated: “Members of the East Azerbaijan Provincial Council, respecting the laws of Iran, taking into account the historical necessity and circumstances, as well as Article 113, request you to order the implementation of Articles 15 and 19 (language and national equality)” (Yol, No.21: 3). Taken into consideration that the members of the Council do not represent national forces, this can be considered one of the attempts of the pro-government South Azerbaijanis to implement the requirements of the Constitution within the framework of the idea of a legal, cultural society. Such initiatives were later continued more consistently.

In 2004, during a march to Bazz Fortress with the participation of about 160 organizations, participants appealed to Ayatollah Malakuti, who lived in Gum. Ayatollah Malakuti called Babek a national hero fighting against the Abbasid caliphate and signed a fatwa not to hinder the march (Olaylar, 2004: 18.06). This was a new event in the history of the national movement. However, the attitude of Azerbaijanis represented in the ruling circles to the ethno-national problem, especially to their first language, remained the same, with some exceptions mentioned above. As in the years of Gajar rule, after the Islamic Revolution, southern Azerbaijanis were represented in central and in limited scale with varying intensity in local government. It is enough to say that the head of the Provisional Government (1979-1980) M.Bazergan, the first president of Iran (1980-1981) A.Benisadr, a number of members of the Islamic Revolutionary Council, after the victory of the revolution the chairman of the Supreme Court Ayatollah Mousavi Ardabili, Prosecutor General Mousavi Khoiniha, M.H.Mousavi, who was the Prime Minister in 1981-1989, Ali Mishkin, the Chairman of the Khubragan Assembly, who elected the “Leader” from 1989 to 2007, and Ayatollah S.A.Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran since 1989, and many ministers were Azerbaijanis. However, they did not represent the Azerbaijani people like the Gajars, and had not taken any initiative to solve their ethno-national problems, with some exceptions mentioned above. From this viewpoint, Azerbaijanis represented in the ruling circles of Iran are no different from the representatives of the Gajar dynasty. The reason for this, according to some Western scholars, is that Azerbaijanis hold important state positions in this country (Grebennikov, 2010), (Higgings, 1984). G.Rooks also notes that there is less hostility towards ethnic groups in the Islamic Republic compared to the previous regime, Iranian nationalism has already become a state ideology and many leading figures of the new regime are of Azerbaijani origin (Riaux, 2012: 45).

The use of Azerbaijani Turkish in the Ardabil court in 2004 was also an important event. National activist Abbas Lisani and his lawyer Saleh Kamrani, who were accused of anti-Iranian propaganda, pan-Turkism, creating an illegal organization, organizing an event at Babek Fortress and publishing a calendar in Turkish, demanded an interpreter on the grounds that they would speak Turkish. The prosecutor strongly objected, claiming that they knew Persian. But A.Lisani reminded that people have the right to speak their own language in court, which is found its reflection in the Iranian constitution, and notified that he would testify in his native language. After that, the judge allowed the witness for the defence to speak Turkish (Yeni M \ddot{u} savat, 2004: 24.08). This was the first Turkish-language trial in South Azerbaijan since the fall of the Azerbaijan National Government, and can be considered a significant step in the struggle for the first language. A.Lisani's insistence on such a demand, not regarding his fate, shows that the repression of the Iranian regime is not able to force people to step back. The sounding of the anthem in the Azerbaijani language during the conference dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the Constitutional Revolution held in Iran in 2005 with the participation of the country's supreme religious leader should also be considered as a special event (Gun.az).

During Khatami's eight years activity, no progress was made in solving the problems of national and ethnic minorities. G.Rooks expressed the state's attitude to the ethnic issue during the years of Khatami's rule, as follows: "Khatami made claims under the slogan "Iran is for Iranians" to ensure their political and cultural rights. However, his repressive approach to ethnic disturbances shows that the central government finds it very difficult to take into account the demands and implement policies to solve the national issue" (Riaux, 2012: 53). Like his predecessor (Rafsanjani), he continued to pursue a more British and Western-oriented political concept, taking a contradictory stance, but recognized the Persian language as a symbol of the Iranian nation's historical identity and national unity. Their views on national grounds were more anti-Azerbaijani and more dangerous than those of the Conservatives.

CONCLUSION

The study of the activities of political forces leads us to the conclusion that, in addition to the policy pursued by the Iranian regime to suppress the movement, to remove it from its orbit, the consensus among national-political forces on the goals is very weak or sometimes absent, created obstacles to development of the national movement. Among the reasons for the difficulties in the rise of the movement, the complex socio-moral-psychological, theoretical-conceptual conflicts between the politicized strata of southern Azerbaijanis are of particular importance.

Representation of southern Azerbaijanis in the Iranian bureaucracy, high-ranking clerics, army officers and a significant part of the Iranian intelligentsia, holding important positions in various spheres of society show that they are better integrated into Iranian society than Baluchis and Kurds, which limits the prospects for resolving the national issue, is one of the reasons.

Thus, after the victory of the revolution, the attitude of the political, socio-political organizations formed by the Azerbaijani Turks in Iran to the options for resolving the national issue at these stages differs depending on events in the world and the region, as well as the existing socio-political atmosphere in Iran. In their opinion, increasing the functionality of the Azerbaijani language and giving it official status is a more pressing issue against the

background of other problems. However, at the stage of obtaining mass character, extremely diverse socio-political composition of the movement, heterogeneous, as well as different, divisive political culture, experience, elements of political morality gained over many years on various fronts, the problem of communication between national and political forces, creates ideological-political, moral-psychological barriers, gives rise to contradictions within the movement. The level of struggle is closely linked with the national formation of the Azerbaijani Turks, as well as their position in the socio-political structure of Iran.

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