

**History**

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**Discussions on Baku State University at the Parliament of the Democratic  
Republic of Azerbaijan**

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***Abstract.** The aim of this article is to examine the discussions in the Parliament of the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan on the establishment of the first university in Azerbaijan, the consistent and decisive positions of parliamentary factions, as well as different approaches. It should be noted that the draft of the University Commission was discussed by the Government of the Republic on July 7, 1919. After the decision of 10 paragraphs, discussions on whether or not to open the Baku State University were discussed in the Parliament of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Discussions in Parliament lasted for up to three months.*

***Methodology and methods.** The study used several research and information methods of historical science, such as induction, historicity, comparative analysis and analogy. For this purpose, scientific works, especially Archive documents were used.*

*The novelty of the article is that the author for the first time analyzes the parliamentary discussions on opening a higher education in Azerbaijan based on documents dating back to 1918-1920 and the way these discussions took place in a democratic situation.*

**Conclusions:** *Thus, it is clear from the research that the Republic of Azerbaijan has been attentive to the development of science and education since the very beginning of its existence. The government and parliament of the Republic of Azerbaijan, taking into account that there were no higher education institutions in Azerbaijan during the reign of Tsarist Russia, took serious and urgent steps in this regard. These discussions were included in the agenda of the parliament. In this regard, all representatives of the parliament actively participated in the discussions and put forward their own ideas and opinions. Despite the difficulties of the time, they saw the opportunities for Azerbaijani youth to enter the world in the development of science and education. The establishment of Baku State University was a great historical event. The Azerbaijan Democratic Republic achieved another pioneering milestone, the foundation of university education in Azerbaijan was laid.*

**Key words:** *Parliament, discussion, faction, Baku State University, higher education institution.*

## **Обговорення в парламенті Азербайджанської Демократичної Республіки про Бакінський державний університет**

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**Анотація.** *Метою цієї статті є розгляд обговорень у парламенті Азербайджанської Демократичної Республіки щодо створення першого університету в Азербайджані, послідовних та рішучих позицій парламентських фракцій, а також різних підходів. Слід зазначити, що проект Університетської комісії обговорено Урядом Республіки 7 липня 1919 року. Після рішення 10 пунктів обговорення з питання відкриття Бакинського державного університету відбулися в Парламенті Азербайджанської Республіки. Обговорення у Парламенті тривали до трьох місяців.*

**Методологія та методи.** *У дослідженні використовувалися кілька дослідницьких та інформаційних методів історичної науки, таких як індукція, історичність, порівняльний аналіз та аналогія. Для цього було використано наукові праці, особливо архівні документи.*

**Новизна статті** *полягає в тому, що автор вперше аналізує парламентські обговорення з питання відкриття вищої освіти в Азербайджані на основі документів, що датуються 1918-1920 роками, і те, як ці обговорення проходили у демократичній обстановці.*

**Висновки:** *Таким чином, 15 листопада 1919 року азербайджанський народ став свідком ще однієї історичної події. В Азербайджані, в Баку, розпочав свою діяльність перший вищий навчальний заклад європейського типу на мусульманському Сході – Бакинський державний університет. Хоча закон про Бакинський державний університет передбачав відкриття 4 факультетів, з великими труднощами університет розпочав заняття з 2 факультетами – історико-філологічним та медичним факультетом, із загальною кількістю курсів 4, з яких 3 курси були на медичному факультеті та 1 курс на історико-філологічному факультеті. Створення Бакинського державного університету було великою історичною подією. Після проголошення незалежності Азербайджану 28 травня 1918 року керівники*

*республіки вчасно оцінили подальшу долю країни, процес національної самосвідомості, можливості її виходу у світ і вирішили ще одне доленосне питання. Саме завдяки цим заходам діти нашого народу отримали можливість здобути сучасну університетську освіту. Азербайджанська Демократична Республіка досягла ще одного першопрохідника, було закладено основу університетської освіти в Азербайджані.*

*Ключові слова: Парламент, обговорення, фракція, Бакинський державний університет, вищий навчальний заклад.*

**Introduction (problem statement).** Baku State University is the first University founded in Azerbaijan. It plays a great role not in the past but today. As we know Azerbaijan Democratic Republic was established 1918, on May 28. The leaders of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, who were sensitive to science and education and deeply appreciated the work of higher education, assessed the favorable situation on the spot and took decisive steps. Because there was no University in Baku, Azerbaijan. During the period of Provisional Government, established as a result of the February Revolution of 1917, intended to open the only and only higher education institution in the South Caucasus - a “Russian University” in Tbilisi. Due to the socio-political processes taking place in the Caucasus in 1918, the emergence of independent states, as well as financial and personnel difficulties, the University planned to be established in Tbilisi could not be realized.

After the establishment the government made a lot of reforms in Azerbaijan, one of them was formed higher University in the country. In April 1919, a working commission of the university was created, under the leadership of V.I. Razumovsky, exiled by the tsarist regime, together with other exiled scientists N.A. Dubrovsky, L.A. Ishkov and doctors A.M. Levin and I.S. Sitovich. The commission began work in a short time. The discussions in the parliament continued for three months.

Because Azerbaijani Democratic Republic was Parliament Republic and all issues were discussing in the Parliament sessions. At the end on September 1, 1919 Parliament adopted a law on Baku State University [1. 15, p. 61].

**Review of recent publications.** It is clear that in newly formed higher educational institutions, it is impossible to immediately create conditions for training highly qualified specialists, which would ensure the demand for human resources. For this, developed logistics between production and universities is necessary. Unfortunately, in the first years of independence, along with positive trends in peaceful development, there were some conflict situations in the soil of class and estate relations, sometimes leading to clashes, to civil confrontation. All this is repeated, one can say, in all newly formed independent states. This event is reflected in all reports of international organizations on education [2].

The work “Baku State University Teachers and Students Subjected to Repression” published by Boran Aziz and Vagif Amiraslanov in 2024 is of interest regarding Baku State University [3, p. 10]. The book collects detailed information for the first time about the teachers and students of Baku State University who fell under the clutches of repression in 1937-1940 and presents it to the general public based on the method of comparative critical analysis.

The top best universities in the world provide hundreds of examples of the methodology of implementing the best education. All these examples emphasize that higher education should not be a component of the state system, but a locomotive of education and the formation of humanism along with the national identity of each student [4].

The early 20th century witnessed significant geopolitical changes on the Eurasian continent, including the collapse of empires and the rise of newly independent states. In the process of nation-building, the establishment of national universities was a critical priority to promote education, develop state institutions,

and preserve cultural identity.

In Ukraine, after the dissolution of the Russian Empire and during the brief period of independence (1917–1921), efforts were made to reorganize and nationalize educational institutions. The Ukrainian Academy of Sciences was founded in 1918, and universities such as Kyiv National University were restructured to reflect national needs [5].

In Armenia, Yerevan State University was officially founded in 1919, serving as a key institution for the newly established Democratic Republic of Armenia [6]. Similarly, in Azerbaijan, Baku State University was established in 1919 following the country's brief independence before Sovietization [7].

These universities were modeled partly on European education systems but adapted to local cultural and political conditions. They played an essential role in training civil servants, teachers, scientists, and legal experts crucial for the survival and development of these young nations [8].

“Baku State University - 100 years of science and education temple”, published in 2019 under the scientific editorship of Musa Gasimli, in connection with the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Baku State University [9]. Here, the authors draw attention to the 100-year path of education and science of Baku State University.

“History of Baku State University” written by Ziyad Amrahov and Samir İsmayilov in 2019 deals with Baku State University [10]. In the book the authors try to examine the steps taken by the government of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic to establish the first European-style higher education institution in Azerbaijan.

Heydar Aliyev wrote: “Many of the patriotic intellectuals who worked with great determination for the progress, development and prosperity of Azerbaijan were graduates of this national educational institution. The university ... throughout its history has given prominent figures to the fields of science, culture and literature of

our republic...”[5. 7, p. 2]

Ilham Aliyev: Baku State University, a relic of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, has passed a glorious path rich in achievements since its establishment as the first new-type higher education institution in the Muslim East. The University, which has constantly demonstrated its loyalty to the ideology of Azerbaijanism, has made commendable contributions in establishing the higher education system in the country, conducting scientific research in accordance with modern standards with deep content and the application of the latest technologies, and generally accelerating the process of national self-awareness [12, p. 5; 8]

**Mine matters.** *Parliament discussions in 1919-1920 years.* After the government of the Republic discussed the project prepared by the university commission on July 7, 1919 and adopted a 10-point decision, the discussions on the issue of opening Baku State University were put up for discussion in the Parliament of the Azerbaijan Republic. The discussions in the Parliament continued for 3 months. In addition to the majority being in favor of opening the university in the Parliament, there were also opponents. The lack of highly qualified, trained national personnel was the main reason for the dispute. Representatives from the Ittihad and Ahrar parties, in particular, seriously resisted this. They understood the opening of the University in Russian as a continuation of the Russification policy in Azerbaijan. Deputies from the Musavat and Socialist factions, noting that opening the university in Russian did not pose any threat, emphasized that more Azerbaijani students should be attracted to the university, and after they are educated and trained as national personnel, a gradual process of Azerbaijaniization of teaching at the university should be initiated.

On August 21, the 67<sup>th</sup> session of the parliament was entirely devoted to the issue of the organization of the University [13, p. 621]. First, Mehdi bey Hajinski, a member of “Musavat”, gave detailed information about the work done by the

government on the organization of the University. It turned out that there were two opinions on the organization of the University before and during the parliamentary discussions. The supporters of the first opinion were in favor of the opening of the University as soon as possible without giving any reasons, while the defenders of the second opinion, considering the lack of time, advised to wait for now. Mehdi bey Hajinski asked the parliament: “Is it possible to have a medical academy in Baku? The government declares that it is possible, because the professors and teaching staff do not object to coming to Baku, the building of a commercial school as an educational institution is ready, there are samples of instruments and equipment for the medical department, etc. What else is needed to open a university?” [13, p. 623].

The chairman of the "Ahrar" party, Gara bey Garabeyli, did not object to the opening of the University, but claimed that we do not know who is opening the university, who will study there, and what the conditions will be like? [13, p. 62].

Mammad Amin Rasulzadeh's speech in parliament on the opening of a university in Baku took a long time, but its content convinced even his opponents. The main lines of the speech were as follows: “Why do we need a University? Why do we need education in Russian? Why should those who dream of a national academy of sciences not suffer?” M. Rasulzadeh said: “Science has no homeland, teaching any science in Russian does not create conditions for Russian occupation. No one who studied in Russian academy of sciences has suffered any harm. Most importantly, this academy of sciences will gradually become nationalized” [14, p. 26]. In fact, this speech by M. Rasulzadeh was the most convincing answer to the question of what we can achieve by organizing a University and what we can lose if we do not organize one. Mammad Amin concluded his speech with these words: “No nation has ever had a national Darulfun in its first step in history. It first used others and then gradually gained strength. We must open and study Darulfun, even if it is in any language. Because with this institution we are establishing a spiritual

institution and through it we will enlighten our youth and gradually have the national professors we want” [14, p. 27].

The representative of the “Ahrar” party claimed that the budget is gradually bending the neck of our people, and if we add the Darulfun budget to this, the situation of the people will become even worse. As long as we do not have national students, as long as we do not have national teachers, there is no need to open a Darulfun (*in English - university*) for now.

Samadaga Agamalioglu, a representative of the socialists who always attracts attention with his oppositional speeches, answered the question of why we need a University as follows: “They say here that the University brings in 18 million. That is why it cannot be opened for now. But I say that by opening the University, we have made not 18 million, but maybe 18 billion profit in the future. This University is like an oak tree, if you bury it, it will turn into a giant tree in twenty years. In a situation where the opportunity and the moment come by itself, there are professors who want to come and work on their own, they cannot be missed” [15, p. 16].

Although another representative of the “Ahrar” party, Mukhtar Efendizadeh, expressed his support for the opening of the Darulfu, this idea was also his own: “Up until now, everything in government circles has been conducted in Russian. Our neighbors, Armenians and Georgians, laugh at us that while our native language is spoken in our country, Russian is still spoken in Azerbaijan. Because they nationalized their writings and transactions from the day they declared their independence. But for some reason, we still do not have this movement” [15, p. 32]. Socialist Aliheydar Garayev explained his support for the opening of the University as follows: “It is true that the Darulfu should have been national in our native language. A culture that comes for the common people and the poor, do not hold it with your finger, let that light fall on the common people and the poor of Azerbaijan” [16, p. 133].

At the end of the tense discussions, the Minister of Education Rashid bey Kaplanov and Mehdi bey Hajinski called on everyone to unite in the speedy opening of the University. In order to put an end to all hesitations, the Minister of Education turned to the members of parliament and said: “We need a place of learning that will elevate the spirit, and that is nothing other than a boarding school. Since the opening of a boarding school is possible, since we confirm its importance - political and national, then there is no need for hesitation” [1, p. 133]. As can be seen, there were no sharp differences of opinion among the members of parliament regarding the opening of a university in Baku, except for minor nuances.

Parliamentary discussions on the opening of Baku State University continued at the 68<sup>th</sup> session of parliament on August 25, 1919 [1, p. 141]. Member of parliament Mehdi bey Hajinski proposed to put the draft law on the organization of a boarding school to a vote article by article. At this time, members of parliament, especially the chairman of the "Ittihad" party, expressed their dissatisfaction with the issue of granting the University the right to autonomy. In his opinion, an institution consisting of foreign professors cannot be granted the right to autonomy. Wanting to clarify the issue, Mehdi bey Hajinski stated that the charter of the Darulfun, consisting of 72 articles, grants the University the right to autonomy and this autonomy will be within the charter. Expressing his opinion on this article, Mammad Amin said: “Their autonomy is not a political autonomy, but a scientific autonomy within the charter. The Darulfun should be accepted in this way and given autonomy. If there is a threat with the granting of autonomy, the government is in your hands, you can do everything” [10, p. 64].

When the “Ittihad” party demanded what the five million budget allocated for the University would be spent on, the Minister of Education Rashid bey Kaplanov explained the issue as follows: “Although we would like to give you honest information about the estimate, this is not possible. Because in one case the

difference in prices is between ten and one thousand manats, it is difficult to make an estimate. But I know for sure that the estimate will be presented to you soon” [1, p. 22].

During the discussions in parliament on the opening of the university, one of the most controversial items arose regarding the salaries to be paid to the professors of the medical faculty. Making a statement on this issue, the Minister of Education said: “Those specialists who wish to come here should not have their salaries threatened. If their salaries are threatened, they will not come here” [10, p. 22-23].

One of the main controversial issues at the 68<sup>th</sup> session of the parliament was the allocation of a building for the university. Speaking about this, the Minister of Education, Rashid bey Kaplanov, emphasized that this was a very serious issue: “A disagreement has arisen between the education control and the departments on this issue. This issue was given to the government to be resolved, but it has not been resolved so far. In fact, these schools (Baku Commercial School and Men's Gymnasium - S.I.) did not come into the hands of the government until last year. However, since the government has been covering the costs of the aforementioned schools since last year, those buildings can also be considered government property...” [10, p. 18; 16]. Thus, the parliament concluded its 68<sup>th</sup> session on the opening of a university in Baku with intense discussions.

After intense discussions lasting almost three months, the parliament approved the “Law on the Baku State Academy of Sciences” at its 70<sup>th</sup> session held on September 1, 1919 [10, p. 23].

The 10-article law adopted by the Parliament of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic envisaged the establishment of 4 faculties of the Darülfunu (in English - university) – history-philology, physics-mathematics, law and medicine with the Eastern department. In the 1919-1920 academic year, a temporary, one-year staff and estimate were approved for the first 4 courses of the medical faculty and the first

course of the history-philology faculty. With the consent of the Azerbaijani government, the Darülfunu council was authorized to request funds annually for the opening of new faculties and courses [10, p. 23]. The Darülfunu commission, consisting of representatives of the Ministry of Science and Education, the city administration, and the Council of Oil Industrialists, was authorized to invite the rector, professors in specialties, and deans. The law approved the creation of councils, departments, and faculties on an autonomous basis from the invited professors, and allocated up to 11 million manats (10 million 857 thousand 500 rubles) for the first academic year for expenses. If civil servants were not provided with housing, they were supposed to be given housing allowance in the amount of  $\frac{1}{4}$  of their salary [13, p.16].

Thus, on November 15, 1919, the Azerbaijani people witnessed another historical event [13, p. 10-12]. The first European-type higher education institution in the Muslim East, Baku State University, began its activities in Azerbaijan, in Baku. Although the law on Baku State University provided for the opening of 4 faculties, with great difficulties the university began classes with 2 faculties, the Faculty of History and Philology and the Faculty of Medicine, with a total of 4 courses, of which 3 courses were in the Faculty of Medicine and 1 course in the Faculty of History and Philology. The establishment of Baku State University was a great historical event.

Despite facing political instability, war, and later Soviet integration, the early universities laid the groundwork for modern national education systems in Eurasia. Their creation reflected a broader vision: achieving national sovereignty through intellectual empowerment and cultural revival [17; 18; 19].

### **Conclusion:**

1. Thus, it is clear from the research that the Republic of Azerbaijan has been attentive to the development of science and education since the very beginning of its

existence;

2. The government and parliament of the Republic of Azerbaijan, taking into account that there were no higher education institutions in Azerbaijan during the reign of Tsarist Russia, took serious and urgent steps in this regard;

3. These discussions were included in the agenda of the parliament. In this regard, all representatives of the parliament actively participated in the discussions and put forward their own ideas and opinions;

4. Despite the difficulties of the time, they saw the opportunities for Azerbaijani youth to enter the world in the development of science and education.

5. The establishment of Baku State University was a great historical event;

6. The Azerbaijan Democratic Republic achieved another pioneering milestone, the foundation of university education in Azerbaijan was laid.

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