



TÜRK AKADEMİSİ
SİYASİ SOSYAL STRATEJİK ARAŞTIRMALAR VAKFI

**THE RISE AND FALL
OF POPULAR FRONT OF
AZERBAIJAN:
1992-1993**

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TÜRK AKADEMİSİ Siyasi Sosyal Stratejik Araştırmalar Vakfı (TASAV)

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THE RISE AND FALL OF POPULAR FRONT OF AZERBAIJAN: 1992-1993

INTRODUCTION

Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic regained its independence on October 18, 1991 from the USSR and Ayaz Mutallibov, the Secretary General of Azerbaijan Communist Party, continued to be the first president of the country afterwards. Meanwhile, another development took place during the same period. Azeri intelligentsia turned out to be very influential thanks to *perestroika* and *glasnost*, launched by Mikhail Gorbachev towards the late 1980s. The opportunities of *perestroika* and *glasnost* were efficiently used by Azeri nationalist-liberal intelligentsia and, as a consequence, the movement of Popular Front emerged in that era. Following its establishment in 1989, through the effects of the external and internal facts, the Front gained strength and came to the position of being the single alternative of the old regime in Azerbaijan.

The most significant features of the movement were as follows: i) it was mainly benefited from the freedom atmosphere of *perestroika* and *glasnost* era, ii) its cadres consisted of local nationalists and liberals, and iii) it flourished against the incumbent regime in the country. Therefore, it had characteristics of being both an opposition and a social movement in the early history of newly independent Azerbaijan state.

Abulfaz Elchibey, the leader of Popular Front of Azerbaijan (PFA), came up as the movement's candidate for the presidential elections in 1992. He managed to take 54 per cent of the total vote in the elections and became the new president. Elchibey was an important figure not only for newly independent Azerbaijan but also for the other post-Soviet states, because he was the first elected anti-communist leader throughout the region. He gained his reputation and eminent position along the 1970s, in which he struggled against the communist regime in Azerbaijan. He was imprisoned in his early years in 1975 because of his political activities.

The distinguishing features and personal history of the movement's leader as well as the conditions that helped to form the movement profoundly influenced policies, which were implemented in the era of 1992-1993 when the PFA ruled the government. Remaining from the movement's two years governing was a parameter for both the country and the region in terms of the establishment of democratic culture, the development of civil society and NGO culture, introduction

of democratic norms and rules, the attempts for the building of alternative nation- and state-identities against the Soviet produced ones and finally, reforming and redesigning electorate behaviors and plural democracy culture inside the country.

THE EMERGENCE AND RISE OF PFA

Just after emerging as an independent state in 1991, Azerbaijan got into defending its territory against Armenian attacks. Moreover, it had to deal with the negative effects of Soviet intervention happened on January 20, 1990, one year before the independence. Azeri state could not profit by *perestroika* like other Baltic or some Central Asian states without any problem or conflict. Its transition process for independence was pretty challenging in that sense. It had to deal with the question of Nagorno-Karabakh in the period of 1988 to 1994 by warring against Armenian secessionists and had so much difficulty in resolving that problem.¹ One can argue that the state building process of Azerbaijan came about substantially problematic. The state building and nation building processes in the early years of Azerbaijan were strongly influenced by the hostile tendency against Armenia and Armenians. Under these socio-economic circumstances, the pro-democracy and nationalist political movement “Popular Front of Azerbaijan” won the elections under the leadership of Abulfaz Elchibey.² Ayaz Mutallibov’s pro-Soviet regime in the country and the heavy losses in the region of Nagorno-Karabakh were successfully utilized by the PFA in order to compel Mutallibov to flee to Moscow and gain the power.³

Popular Front of Azerbaijan came to power with the popular support of a great and influential nationalist wave within the country. As a result, the public fundamentally and simply expected this party to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. However, Elchibey and his cadres were lack of experience and organizational-administrative know-how and skills to solve the problems and conflicts the country already faced.⁴

The formation of the PFA as a first social and political movement was derived from the freedom atmosphere of *perestroika*. In addition, the outbreak of Karabakh conflict and deportation of Azeri population from Karabakh also influenced the movement’s formation. In 1989, the Popular Front merged with “Varlig” group, which had a pan-Turkic view, so it began to represent the considerable majority of nationalist intelligentsia in Azerbaijan.⁵ Just before the dissolution of the USSR, the

¹ Scott Radnitz, “Oil in the Family: Managing Presidential Succession in Azerbaijan”, *Democratization*, Vol.19, No.1, (2012), p.62.

² *Ibid.*, p.62.

³ Kyle L. Marquardt, “Framing Language Policy in post-Soviet Azerbaijan: Political Symbolism and Interethnic Harmony”, *Central Asian Survey*, Vol.30, No.2, (2011), p.183.

⁴ Radnitz, *op.cit.*, p.62.

⁵ Aytan Gahramanova, “Internal and External Factors in the Democratization of Azerbaijan”, *Democratization*, Vol.16, No.4, (2009), p.781.

Popular Front was the single strong movement in the country that could establish a sustainable regime and political order for ruling the country and constructing an independent state, mainly because of strong political support provided by intellectuals, leading elites and prominent personalities. The PFA had two basic principles during the transition of the country into the independence. The first one was to enable the public to participate in the perestroika process whereas the second one was to defend territorial integrity of the state within the USSR. The second principle meant the solution of Karabakh conflict.⁶

The PFA arisen in a very striking historical era in which a variety of factors complicated the political domain. First of all, the formation period of the PFA took place just before the dissolution of the USSR. Besides, Azerbaijan was in the middle of an armed conflict in Karabakh with Armenia. The *nomenklatura*⁷ was still in power both in the last years of Azerbaijan SSR and first years of Azerbaijan Republic, therefore the PFA was under the pressure of pro-Moscow President Ayaz Mutallibov and his *nomenklatura*. The nation building process was also in predicament. The identity construction of Azerbaijani people was being prevented by this *nomenklatura*.⁸ On the other hand, the PFA took great responsibility in that era for realizing scores of reforms in the country. The emergence of civil society for the first time could be accomplished by the efforts of the PFA. The PFA managed to politicize the society and mobilize the masses in the late 1980s and 1990s' conditions. As Aytan Gahramanova states:

“Continuing pressure from the *nomenklatura* prevented the identification of a broader circle of people in 1989 in the PFA who would be able to undertake responsibility for the reform of public institutions. However, the Popular Front movement inspired the diversification of local civic patterns and the formation of civil society. Thus, the mobilization stage of civil society development in Azerbaijan was characterized by the weakening legitimacy of the communist state, as well as by the emergence of groups proposing some elements of alternative forms of governance to a society which had become quite politicized. The institutional stage of civil society development started in October 1991”.⁹

For the PFA, the *nomenklatura* in Azerbaijan, especially Mutallibov's regime and political circle around his rule had to be broken; therefore, popular accusations of the PFA against Mutallibov regarding his close links with Moscow intensified. The Soviet regime was harshly criticized and blamed by the Azerbaijani society because of the Soviet support given to Armenia in Nagorno-Karabakh question, and of the Soviet intervention happened on January 20, 1990, aiming to prevent the deportation of Armenians from the lands of Azerbaijan. All these factors ended

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.781.

⁷ The generic name given to Soviet officials and bureaucrats who occupied the key positions of administration in such fields as army, industry, government, agriculture, intelligence, etc. during the era of the USSR. In Russian, 'номенклатура' or 'советская номенклатура'.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.789.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.781.

up with the weakening of Mutallibov's regime and losing its public support, and caused the rise of nationalism throughout the country.

Establishment of a new regime under the leadership of Abulfaz Elchibey's in 1992 came into being as an inevitable result of comparatively advanced civil society, which principally supported, developed and mobilized by the PFA. Within the atmosphere of plural democratic norms, Abulfaz Elchibey was elected in June 1992. From another perspective, the establishment of this government could be considered as a contract between the developing civil society and the state.¹⁰ In the context of democratization process, Azerbaijan was the first among other post-Soviet states. In terms of democratic transition, Azerbaijan was the single country in which the civil society could improve and play a major role; moreover, civil initiatives were not backed by the West, rather, they appeared and acted as a natural consequence of the country's own socio-economic conditions. What was noteworthy was that these civil initiatives were comprised of grassroots in addition to local and national intellectuals. The aforementioned democratization process of the PFA also prevented Aliyev from establishing a full authoritarian regime when he came to power in 1993.

DEMOCRATIC STATE BUILDING IN THE ERA OF THE PFA

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The PFA firstly attempted to transform the existing state institutions and consequently the established state structure, inherited from the Soviet era into democratic system. As Aytan Gahramanova puts it succinctly:

“Although the USSR had provided the formal structures of statehood, these structures still had to be made democratic. A number of initiatives undertaken by the government in that period justify the opinions of many that the new establishment was trying to introduce democratic rules of the game into the political sphere. Anti-corruption measures, the withdrawal of Russian military bases from the country, the guarantee of basic freedoms such as assembly and the presence of a free media represented the first steps towards consolidating democracy after independence.”¹¹

The development of the non-governmental organizations was also realized during the course of the PFA government in the early 1990s. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was the most significant factor that was used by the PFA for the aim of the NGO setting. It can be claimed that the development of civil society and progress in NGO culture came up by various reasons such as the security problems of Azerbaijan, the PFA's nationalist policies and the counter-policies of pan Turkic Azerbaijani intelligentsia against the urgent foreign policy crisis. Gahramanova comments on this issue as follows:

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.782.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.782.

“Many local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were originally created with goals relating to human rights and democratization, for example the Helsinki Initiative-92, which was founded in response to the massacre of the Azerbaijani population of the city of Khojali by the Armenian and Russian military in Nagorno-Karabakh, and which continues to be engaged in protection of human rights to this day.”¹²

On the other hand, it should be stressed once again that the development of civil society and NGO culture within the country was basically relied on local elements and local groups rather than the externally backed organizations.

The most important problem for the PFA between 1992-1993 for independent state building, nation building and democratic state building processes were the lack of support to the PFA from administrative-experienced circles, nomenklatura and Soviet Azerbaijan’s elite. The PFA left alone in state and nation building processes.¹³ The nationalist intelligentsia of the PFA attempted to conduct nation building process through its own pan-Turkic agenda, but the state building process was interrupted and the PFA confronted with serious problems because of the nomenklatura’s refusal to aid. This ultimately resulted in a political turmoil. Yet, the experience of the PFA government was unique among post-Soviet states’ new governments, particularly when the challenges that the PFA faced are taken into account. The elements which formed the PFA proved the possibility of the development of civil society even under an authoritarian regime.¹⁴ Gahramanova emphasizes the importance of this success with the words presented below:

“The glasnost period in Azerbaijan demonstrates that even under authoritarian rule civil society can emerge – though through an iterative ‘political construction’ that combines availability of political opportunities, social energy (drive), and scaling up of networks.”¹⁵

The PFA and the movement of the nationalist-liberal intelligentsia that contributed to the formation of the Front played an important role to constitute and evolve the democratic culture. Afterwards, when Aliyev came to power in 1993, he realized that it was virtually impossible to found a full authoritarian regime in Azerbaijan anymore thanks to the activities and implementations of the PFA government, ruled between 1991 and 1992, that created a pro-democratic beginning in the first years of the independence. The political society developed, political parties gained rights to compete freely, plural democracy was promoted and democratic norms took roots in this period.¹⁶ For these reasons, Aliyev could not found an authoritarian regime even if he desired; instead, he chose to transit into a semi-democratic regime in which opposition parties including the PFA were allowed to compete.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp.782-783.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.783.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.783.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.783.

¹⁶ Scott, *op.cit.*, p.63.

As an impressive accomplishment, following issue is also of crucial importance: during the era of Elchibey's presidency, a hundred and ten laws passed in the Parliament and forty of them were related to economy. Remaining seventy bills were related to political parties and freedom of media.¹⁷ In sum, for the Elchibey regime, democratization and democratic state building were more important than other issues such as economic consolidation and pursuit of balance policy in foreign affairs. While Elchibey regime was keeping on a war against the Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh, the government concurrently endeavored to sort this bloody trouble out through the democratic ways, i.e. by creating a public opinion in the world agenda.

THE FALL OF THE PFA

The Elchibey regime and the PFA government were quite unlucky in terms of many aspects. The political situation in the region just after the dissolution of the USSR was unprecedentedly intricate and the harsh conditions with which the decision makers tried to deal were deeply intimidating; therefore, all these factors negatively influenced the sustaining of the PFA government. In some subjects inexperienced PFA government took reactive positions towards the internal and external events and was unsuccessful to transform the threats into the opportunities. Furthermore, the economic power of the country, mainly based on oil resources, could not be exploited as much as it had to be by the PFA government unlike the successor Aliyev regime did.

The PFA came to power through two crucial discourses. The first one was the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh question whereas the second one was the hatred against the Soviets and the nomenklatura bounded up with Moscow. The first question could not be surmounted, on the contrary, the war extended. The PFA predictably lost its popularity.

The second discourse was held as a foreign policy parameter and Azerbaijan put a distance with Russia in foreign policy field; nevertheless, this new tendency influenced the Elchibey regime negatively as it triggered Russia's hostile attitude. The nationalist policies and pan-Turkic agenda of the PFA also created disturbances and unrest among the public and ethnic minority groups. During the PFA government, the other ethnic unrests such as Talysh and Lezghin in addition to Armenians also emerged. Moreover, Russians and Russophones began to flee from Azerbaijan after a sudden nationalist attack to themselves.¹⁸ One can argue that the

¹⁷ Jayhun Molla-zade, "Azerbaijan and the Caspian Basin: Pipelines and Geopolitics", *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization*, Vol.6, No.1, (1998), p.30.

¹⁸ Marquardt, *op.cit.*, p.183.

nationalist policies of the PFA were hazardous in terms of internal balance and international circumstances influencing the region. There were other small minority groups and communities and Russophones living in Azerbaijan. These communities, especially Talysh and Lezghin groups, began to display their disturbances and reacted against the new regime. Kyle Marquardt summarizes this situation as follows:

“Though it is difficult to pinpoint the causes of ethnic unrest under the APF government given the government’s lack of control over its territory during the period, that the period was marked by ethnic instability is clear: in addition to the ethnic conflict with Armenians over Nagorno-Karabakh, Russians and Russophones fled Azerbaijan and ethnic unrest developed among two other principle Azerbaijani ethnicities, the Talysh and Lezghin”.¹⁹

These small ethnic minority groups were manipulated by external players in the region. For example, Karabakh Armenians were manipulated by Russians, the Talysh minority living near Iranian border was manipulated by Iranians, the Ingilois small minority was manipulated by Georgians, and the Lezghins, Avars, and Tshakhurs were also manipulated by Russia.²⁰ Marquardt also points out the following:

“In the eyes of the government, the events in Nagorno-Karabakh proved the danger in too much support for ethnic identity; that independent Talysh state was briefly declared in 1993 and a Lezghin independence movement was active in the early 1990s has not been forgotten.”²¹

Indeed, the periods of Elchibey regime in Azerbaijan and Zviad Gamsakhurdia’s regime in Georgia are seen as interregnum eras by Alexander Murinson, because the nation building in these eras, having blended with the forced national integration policy, adopted by these nationalist leaders just after the dissolution of the Soviets, caused ethnic unrest and enabled foreign powers to intervene the domestic unrest.²²

The foreign policy preferences of the PFA also deeply influenced its situation during its ruling years. In that period, nationalist and liberal intellectuals of Azerbaijan, who mostly were also members of the movement, pursued the policies for breaking the ties of Soviet past, even attempted to create an identity constructed upon hostility against Russia Federation. Aliyev followed a different way when he came to power. He used his administrative skills and built close links with Moscow immediately. Although the PFA exerted great efforts to resolve Nagorno-Karabakh question through military precautions and methods for the sake of territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, Aliyev chose the way of a sudden ceasefire in 1994 and focused on establishing a powerful regime and strengthening his position in Baku. The deterioration of Russia-Azerbaijan relations due to the

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p.183.

²⁰ *Ibid*, p.189.

²¹ *Ibid*, p.189.

²² Alexander Murinson, “The Secessions of Abkhazia and Nagorny Karabagh: The Roots and Patterns of Development of Post-Soviet Micro-Secessions in Transcaucasia”, *Central Asian Survey*, Vol.23, No.1, (2010), p.17.

Soviet invasion in Baku in January 1990 encouraged the PFA to follow a pro-Western policy, especially getting into a close cooperation and establishing a partnership in each field with Turkey that was expected to found links between Azerbaijan and the West. Elchibey government rejected to participate in the CIS; more importantly, Azerbaijan was the first post-Soviet state that demanded Russia to withdraw its forces in spring 1993.²³ As Jayhun Mollazade states:

“The fact is that under President Elchibey, Azerbaijan became the first former Soviet republic to rid its own territory of all Soviet and Russian troops- and this before the Baltic States and even Germany had achieved that goal. The border troops, the military bases and the Caspian Fleet were all gone.”²⁴

The period of chaos, which began in 1991 and lasted till 1993, essentially sprung from the loss of territories and hundreds of thousands of refugees, and this chaos caused a huge impact on economy and society.²⁵ Elchibey and his PFA could not achieve to come up with the chaos and bring an end to conflicts threatening the territorial unity of Azerbaijan. In addition, Elchibey was targeted by Russia and Iran due to his nationalists and pan-Turkic agenda; therefore, he had difficulty in finding external support for the solution of these problems. In 1993, a military coup headed by Colonel Suret Huseyinov forced him to resign. He had to invite Heydar Aliyev, who had been former leader of Azerbaijan SSR and old member of Politburo, to Baku as the chairman of the Parliament of Azerbaijan.²⁶ Scott Radnitz underlines that:

“As Azerbaijan continued to suffer significant human and territorial losses and Armenia gained ground, Elchibey faced insurrection from a rogue militia leader. In order to stave off disaster, militarily and politically, Elchibey made the critical decision to invite Heydar Aliyev to the capital as head of parliament.”²⁷

In sum, the Karabakh conflict, the lack of governmental and administrative experiences of the PFA officials, instability due to these reasons and Russia’s hostile policies against the PFA government were the basic factors influencing the fall of Elchibey. When the coup started, Elchibey invited Heydar Aliyev, the Chairman of Parliament of Nakhchevan. As a matter of fact, the coup aimed to bring Ayaz Mutallibov, the former President of Azerbaijan, to the office back.²⁸ Mutallibov was known as pro-Moscow and had to flee to Moscow in 1992. Elchibey invited Heydar Aliyev to Baku so that Mutallibov’s probable presidency was prevented; however, Elchibey was no longer powerful to protect his position and eventually Aliyev succeeded. The coup brought the alliance of the old nomenklatura class and semi-

²³ Razi Nurullayev, “Political Culture & Challenges in Azerbaijan: Past, Today & Future”, (Conflict Studies Research Center: Political Culture Case Studies), 2003, p.16.

²⁴ Jayhun, *op.cit.*, p.31.

²⁵ Rena Salayeva and Michael J. Baranick, “State-Building in a Transition Period: The Case of Azerbaijan”, (The Cornwallis Group X: Analysis for New and Emerging Societal Conflicts), 2005, p.210.

²⁶ Radnitz, *op.cit.*, p.62.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.62.

²⁸ Jayhun, *op.cit.*, p.30.

criminal groups into power. So, the democratic transition of the country ended in June 1993. In the new era, economic and political monopoly began to reshape the state building process.

TURKEY AND THE POPULAR FRONT OF AZERBAIJAN

That Elchibey could not take sufficient support from Turkey, his most reliable ally, is one of the well-known arguments stated by political scientists and historians. Nationalist elites of Turkey who take place in Turkish government, bureaucracy, political parties and intelligentsia had very close relations with Elchibey and he relied on these links. Elchibey's sincere faith for the pan-Turkic nationalism was much more than many of his counterparts in Turkey and other Turkic states in the post-Soviet regions. He was sometimes criticized because of some policies implemented based on pan-Turkist agenda during his office years. He attempted to recreate the national identity of Azerbaijan according to the pan-Turkic ideals. The PFA desired to reshape the national identity of the people as Turkish rather than Azerbaijani. The PFA also tried to recreate the state building by reconstructing the state identity as a "Turkish state" rather than unique and different "Azerbaijani state". Elchibey and his PFA government did not accept the engineered identities in the era of the USSR. The local nationalist intelligentsia aimed to develop an alternative and different identity for Azerbaijan state and society during their era. As it is emphasized in Marquardt's article:

"The cultural policy of the PFA government can be summed up in one phrase: the Turkeyisation of Azerbaijan."²⁹

The term "Turkeyisation of Azerbaijan" refers to the cultural policy pursued by the PFA government, which implemented salient policies such as broadcasting Turkish TV programs, taking the crucial steps for passing to Latin alphabet, using Turkish vocabulary in speeches.³⁰ In addition, the nationality inscriptions on the identification cards were written as Turkish instead of Azerbaijani. However, these policies disturbed the masses. People began to make demonstrations and protests against the programs and policies of the PFA. Heydar Aliyev and his party "New Azerbaijan Party" exploited these policies in order to blame Elchibey and his government in the following years.

Despite all of these pro-Turkey policies stated above, Elchibey and the PFA could not take enough support and aid from Turkey during the coup crisis. On the other hand, Elchibey expected Turkey to intervene in Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as Russia strongly backed Armenia. However, Turkey, as a NATO member country, did not

²⁹ Marquardt, *op.cit.*, p.183.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.183.

have open determination to intervene in the issue itself alone.³¹ This was a source of disappointment for Elchibey and his PFA. Then Turkish government accepted the succession of Aliyev in 1993 rather than insisting the maintenance of Elchibey's rule. Süleyman Demirel, ex-president of Turkey during the 1990s, expressed his views in a TV program on December 28, 2005, after his retirement, as follows: "Turkey is not a superpower. There are more powerful ones than you (Turkey). UN intervened in half an hour in the Cyprus war and ceased the war. The aid should be through peace, not through an armed intervention."³²

Indeed, while Elchibey hoped to take support from Turkey due to his pan-Turkist agenda, the political gains deriving from Azerbaijani-Turkish partnership were less than the PFA's expectations, since Turkish government avoided angering Russia in the Caucasus and were not willing to get into the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict much.³³

Turkey's potential remained insufficient to act as an influential actor and powerful model for both Azerbaijan and other Central Asian republics. Turkey, in the early 1990s, was incapable of providing a competent and accurate model in terms of being a secular democratic country for all the newly independent countries. Turkey was trying to overcome a challenging economic crisis in the early 1990s. This severe and arduous crisis reached its peak in 1994 and compelled Turkey to stand away from Azerbaijan and Central Asian states to some extent. In addition to these factors, perhaps more importantly, Central Asian leaders were not ready for democratic transition and did not need Turkey's contribution in this regard.³⁴ The given conditions forced regional states to maintain their authoritarian regimes in the early periods of their state building processes. Within the region Elchibey was the only leader who figured out the crucial importance of democratic transition, but unfortunately, as a foresighted leader with an enlightened mind, he came to power earlier than he had to be, because none of the external factors was in favor of him.

THE POST PFA ERA AND ESTABLISHMENT OF ALIYEV REGIME: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Heydar Aliyev was a professional politician and served in the Soviet system for years unlike Elchibey. He had a considerable experience in terms of state system and politics. He served as a KGB member and was raised to the rank of Major General in

³¹ Jayhun, *op.cit.*, p.32.

³² Turgut Er, *Azadlıktan Tiranlığa: Sanki Stalin ve Beria Hortlamıştı*, Ankara: Sarkaç Yayınları, 2010, p.157.

³³ Nazrin Mehdiyeva, "Azerbaijan and Its Foreign Policy Dilemma", *Asian Affairs*, Vol:34, No:3, 2003, p.274.

³⁴ Emre Erşen, "The Evolution of 'Eurasia' as a Geopolitical Concept in Post-Cold War Turkey", *Geopolitics*, Vol.18, No.1, (2012), p.30.

this renowned intelligence agency in his early years. Then he was appointed to the first secretary of the Central Committee of Azerbaijan SSR by Leonid Brezhnev, and served from 1969 to 1982. Therefore, he got the reliance of Soviet authorities. In 1982, he was assigned as the member of the Soviet Politburo under the first secretary of Yuri Andropov. Although he lost his fame under the reign of Mikhail Gorbachev, he was elected as the chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic in 1991 during the presidency of Ayaz Mutallibov in Azerbaijan. His long state and politics experience and his informal networks helped him solve many problems. Regarding the case, Scott Radnitz states that:

“Aliyev brought two critical advantages to the presidency. First was his access to a coterie of people who had been educated and socialized in the same Soviet institutions, to staff the bureaucracy. Unlike the ideological PFA, these officials were pragmatic and competent functionaries who shared a common working language. The second of Aliyev’s advantages was the skills he honed over a career in Soviet politics and as head of the KGB, including the ability to anticipate threats and selectively but effectively use repression against his opponents”.³⁵

In the era of Aliyev regime, Heydar Aliyev followed some basic policies which helped him be successful in his office. First of all, it should be noted that his tremendous bureaucratic experience gave him an edge to handle the problems. As a person knowing the sensitivity points in state governance, he redesigned the relations with Moscow. With no doubt, he benefited from his experiences and administrative skills that he gained before.

Secondly, he managed to use the economic and natural resources of Azerbaijan efficiently. He successfully shared the Azerbaijani oil among the big powers through the new contracts and agreements. Economic stability also brought political stability. In the economic field, the prevailing method was to monopolize of all resources. The foreign investment led by the USA and the UK oil industries increased sharply. These economic actors complied with the semi-authoritarian regime, because they preferred the stability and consolidated economic situation to the political turmoil and economic surge.³⁶ The foreign economic actors realized that macro-economic reforms of the semi-authoritarian Aliyev regime managed to provide economic stability whereas socio-economic reforms conducted by the pro-democratic regime of Elchibey had caused instability during his office.³⁷

Yet, there were some speculative claims such as the role of British Petroleum (BP) in the coup d’état happened in June 1993, because the signed contracts and agreements in the era of the PFA were abolished according to the new rules formed in Aliyev era.³⁸ Aliyev regime also gained the support of significant number of internal business actors by providing some economic advantages. He acquired lots

³⁵ Radnitz, *op.cit.*, p.63.

³⁶ Gahramanova, *op.cit.*, p.785.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.785.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.784.

of economic funds for maintaining his party and regime. The opposition movements in Azerbaijan had difficulties to compete with Aliyev's New Azerbaijan Party (YAP), because the opposition, mainly the Popular Front of Azerbaijan lacked funds and could not take financial support from the business community.³⁹

Thirdly, he followed a balanced foreign policy instead of approaching to and relying on the one side. He was aware of the Russia's power and influence within the region, so he never stayed away from Russia. On the other hand, he did not become fully dependent on Russia unlike Mutallibov regime did. He knew how to develop good relations with the Western countries. Although Aliyev was firstly seen as pro-Russian, he conducted a more balanced policy among Russia, Iran, and Turkey. While Elchibey directly turned his face in foreign policy to Turkey, the UK, the USA and Israel, which was the second country recognizing the independence of Azerbaijan just after Turkey, Aliyev both developed dialogue with Russia and maintained relations with the West.⁴⁰

Fourthly, Aliyev built a semi-authoritarian regime in the first period of this era. The policies of this semi-authoritarian government brought the stability to the country. In other words, Aliyev regime pursued a different way in the state building process. The nomenklatura, having taken place in the Aliyev regime, preferred the consolidation of power instead of large reform policies that the PFA pursued. The democratic regime of the PFA unfortunately brought instability and political turmoil to Azerbaijan. When the stability came into being in the political arena of Azerbaijan, economic stability was also accomplished. This new situation persuaded the international actors into having share over Azerbaijani oil.

Lastly, Aliyev immediately declared the ceasefire with Armenia upon Nagorno-Karabakh issue in May 1994. Then, the stability was achieved within economic and social realm, which was the prerequisite of attracting foreign investment to the oil sector. "The Contract of the Country" signed in September 1994 with the foreign companies and it enabled the state to perform macro-economic developments. These developments were likely to influence the process of nation building.⁴¹ By the help of economic breakthrough, Aliyev consolidated his power in domestic political arena. Aliyev regime also guaranteed its position by dissolving the forces that had been fighting on Nagorno-Karabakh border, in case of a possible military coup like the one organized against to the PFA.⁴² So, Aliyev could take precautions against a probable coup attempt, because the army members fighting in Karabakh were potentially against the government.

³⁹ Radnitz, *op.cit.*, pp.63-64.

⁴⁰ Jayhun, *op.cit.*, p.31.

⁴¹ Salayeva and Baranick, *op.cit.*, p.210.

⁴² Aytan, *op.cit.*, p.784.

CONCLUSION

Azerbaijan Republic is the unique post-Soviet state which made a significant contribution to the independent democratic state building process during the post-Soviet era. It completely differs from the other republics not only because it owned a well-educated local-national intelligentsia who were proponent of complete independence but also because it experienced an inspiring grassroots movement just after the dissolution of the USSR. This intelligentsia also prevented the country from the continuation of the nomenklatura's old-style and pro-Moscow governance. While other post-Soviet states continued to be governed by early general secretaries of Communist Parties of the republics, Azerbaijan succeeded in getting into different versions of state and nation building processes thanks to the movement of Popular Front, which successfully covered the great majority of liberal and nationalist intelligentsia. Despite the failure of movement for governing the state for a long time, it managed to disseminate new concepts into newly emerging democratic political culture and settle the basic democratic norms within the state structure.

The movement failed and resigned from power in a very short time; nevertheless, it succeeded in thwarting the hard core nomenklatura regime (Ayaz Mutallibov and his crew) to gain the power again. Besides, the democratic culture and established civil society culture within the country also prevented Heydar Aliyev from building a fully authoritarian regime in the early years of his rule. Through the gains of the PFA, the political parties became the indispensable instruments of Azerbaijan's electoral democracy and the opposition parties always secured their valuable position in democratic system despite not being able to come to power.

Briefly, in the political history of Azerbaijan, the role of the PFA is very important and its ruling period represents a crucial landmark in terms of democratic transformation. The current opposition political parties⁴³ in Azerbaijan either were emerged from the Popular Front or pursued the path of the PFA, and much more importantly, they still strive to be an alternative to the New Azerbaijan Party (YAP).

⁴³ Musavat Partisi (Equality Party), Millî İstiklâl Partisi (Azerbaijan National Independence Party), Azadlık Partisi (Freedom Party) and Azerbaijan Demokrat Party are the opposition parties which follow the path of the PFA.

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