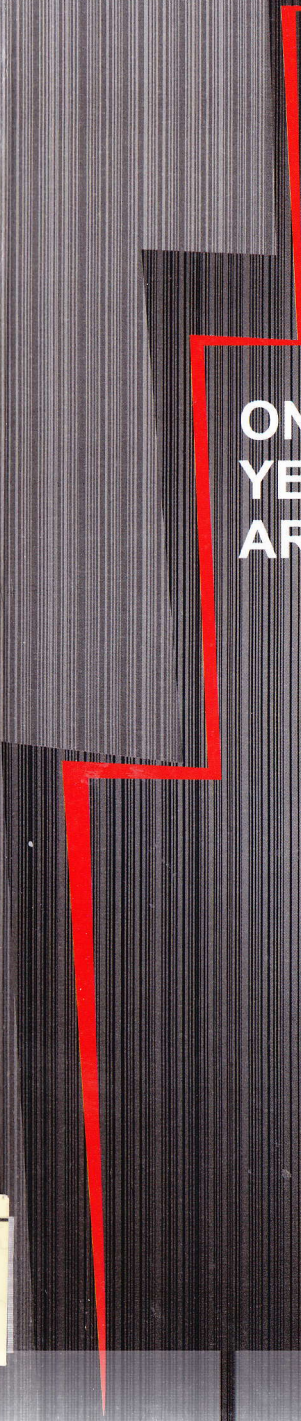




SERGEY AMBARTSUMIAN

ON THE BRINK: THREE
YEARS OF **STRUGGLE** FOR
ARMENIAN INDEPENDENCE

2010
Yerevan

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**ON THE BRINK: THREE YEARS OF STRUGGLE
FOR ARMENIAN INDEPENDENCE**

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English Version Edited by Myrna Douzjian

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AMBARTSUMIAN SERGEY

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IN LIEU OF A FORWARD

Sergey Ambartsumian¹ – a well-known scientist, an academic of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia, and one of the most prominent Armenian public and political figures of the late 20th century - wrote *On the Brink: Three Years of Struggle for Armenian Independence*.

Due to circumstances, the author played a central role in the turbulent events of his time. During the period reflected by the book, Ambartsumian served as a Deputy of the Supreme Council of the USSR and, later, became People's Deputy, leading the deputies elected by the Armenian SSR; he was also an executive member of the Supreme Council of the USSR and one of the most active participants in the negotiations for a fair resolution of the Karabakh conflict.

This book offers a particularly reliable perspective: it was written not based on memories, but in the midst of the events that took place from February 1988 to March 1991. It truly presents a unique chronology of turning points in the history of the Armenian people – crucial changes that affected Armenian social and political life.

This first English version of the book was preceded by three publications in Russian and one in Armenian. It was first published in Russian in 1992.

¹ Editor's note: Ambartsumian's family name became known based on a transliteration of its Russian equivalent. The standard transliteration of the original Armenian name is Hambardzumyan.

Although the book relates the specific tragic events and the emotions that resulted during a period in the history of the Armenian people, it is first and foremost intended for a foreign audience. After all, the Armenian people have experienced these events firsthand.

The propaganda of the time influenced people's perspective of reality and distorted the representation of history. The English translation of the book aims to correct that distortion, which history does not tolerate. History condemns both falsehood and apathy toward the fate of "others." The Soviet administration allowed the bloodshed organized by the Azerbaijani leaders in Sumgait, Baku and Kirovabad to take place unpunished. Undoubtedly, the international community's lack of concern provoked similar atrocities in various other republics of the Soviet Union.

In the forward of the book's second publication, the scholar Aram Grigoryan mentions that the author dedicated the book to the memory of his father, Aleksandr G. Ambartsumian, who became a victim to the purges of the authoritarian regime in 1937. It is relevant to recount certain biographical details about Aleksandr Ambartsumian, because his fate represents that of many Armenian intellectuals of the time.

Aleksandr Ambartsumian was born on October 16, 1885 in Aleksandrapol (also written as Alexandropol in English; Leninakan in the Soviet period; present-day Gyumri, based on the ancient name Kumayri), where he received his elementary education. In 1903 he graduated from the Nersisyan School of Tbilisi, where he had received a

classical education. By that time, he was fluent in five languages: Armenian, Russian, French, German and Turkish. In 1905 he enrolled in the University of Odessa as a student in the Department of Physics and Mathematics. In 1906 the University dismissed him for participating in student movements. As a result, he was deported back to his homeland, where he was placed under police surveillance. In the same year, he immigrated to Switzerland, where he was admitted to the School of Law at the University of Lausanne. A year later, in 1907, Ambartsumian moved to Russia and began his second year of law school at the University of Moscow. In 1910 he graduated from the University with honors and started to work at the district court in Moscow.

From 1910 to 1921 he worked as a lawyer in Aleksandrapol; thereafter, he was appointed to the executive committee of Aleksandrapol, where he served as a legal consultant and director of the planning department. He held this post until 1935. From 1934 to 1937 he was a legal consultant for the Armenian Relief Committee.

For many years, Ambartsumian conducted economic research and wrote books and articles. Notably, in 1924 he published the scholarly work entitled *The Economy of the Province of Aleksandrapol* in Armenian for the first time.

Aleksandr Ambartsumian was one of the founders of the State Pedagogical Institute of Leninakan. From 1919 to 1937 he taught economics, geography, mathematics, Russian, and statistics and planning at the Agutyan

School of Aleksandrapol, the vocational schools in Leninakan and the Armenian Pedagogical Institute.

From 1912 to 1937 he worked as a journalist and translator. In 1912 he published the newspaper *Novaia zhizn'* (*New Life*) and was a correspondent for the periodical *Ekonomicheskii vestnik Zakavkaz'ia* (*Economic Herald of the Transcaucasus*).

On August 2, 1937 Ambartsumian was detained by the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs; on March 16, 1938 he was executed for being one of the leaders of the anti-revolutionary center of Leninakan. On June 18, 1955 a decision by the judicial advisory of the USSR Supreme Court exculpated him posthumously.

Ambartsumian's life obviously had an impact and left a trace on the fate of his son: it played a major role in shaping his rebellious character and persona.

Sergey Ambartsumian is the author of many journalistic articles devoted to the development of the sciences, culture and the socio-political issues facing the Republic of Armenia.

Laura Melikyan

Dedicated to the bright memory of my father Aleksandr G. Ambartsumian, who fell victim to the purges in 1937.

"The Karabakh conflict is the
touchstone of perestroika."

Andrei Sakharov

I have an infinite and passionate love for my homeland. It is my Armenia. I love our myth-like, ancient, rugged country with its fantastic nature; I love the fierce clusters of mountains that the winds have struck for centuries, the rocky hills, the basalt columns of the canyons decorated with the green sprouts of the fantastic flora. I love our Biblical Ararat soaring majestically over the valley.

From high above, I love watching the bright, gray land interwoven and furrowed with deep passes and canyons, mountain peaks - spotted with white, ever-lasting snow - that seem to stretch towards the blue sky.

I love the greenery and bright flowers of the Alpine grasslands, the bright shade of the new leaves that sprout on fruit-bearing trees and the blooming of the delicate spring, the rocky moss and the emerald, motley shades of the green sprouts.

I love our multifaceted Sevan, our loud, cold and clear rivers and streams that flow swiftly and tenuously from the snow-capped mountain peaks.

I love the forest's dense mist, the first snow that falls on the mountains and the rain that precipitates while the bright rainbow sparkles, our apricot-color sun and its

ultraviolet rays, the moon in the dark blue sky among the golden galaxy of stars that are distant, yet near.

I love the taste of our water, the smell of the cool mountain air, the ozone of air after the thunder and the bitter, sharp smell of flowers in the field. I love the smell of our land.

I love our history, which can be traced back to ancient Sumero-Hittite times. I love our cultural monuments which have turned into the unique chroniclers of the fate of our people.

I love our language - pure and simple, the letters of our alphabet - holy and refined, our ancient manuscripts and miniature paintings, our boundlessly captivating paintings, as well as the soulful and melodious music that takes us to the heavens and summons us to perform great heroic feats. I love my Armenia just as it is. I am proud of Armenia and proud of being Armenian.

I know that we are like everybody else. I know that each person has his own "Armenia" and, if he is really a human being, he must be proud of his "Armenia," his homeland.

My love for Armenia is not based on the notion that we are exceptional, unique or unsurpassed, but rather that I am the flesh of another Armenian.

I hate and curse those who distort our history; I hate lies. I don't accept people who ascribe the culture, monu-

ments, achievements and creations of others to themselves. I know for a fact that the people who do that underestimate themselves and have no respect for themselves, their people, their culture and history. All of these things result from a lack of self-esteem. These people are not proud of their nation; instead, they are infinitely far from the true national interests of their people. These types of people are merely barbarian invaders, who ascribe the civilization of indigenous peoples to themselves.

Writing a memoir does not cross my mind at all, because I know in advance that it will lead me nowhere. It is obvious that I don't remember everything, yet I don't like and don't want to devise anything. That is why I will simply give a description of my experiences in the last three years (February 1988 – February 1991), leaving my career in research and education aside. Everything is in order in that realm – students listen to my lectures; my books and articles continue to be published in Armenia and other countries across the globe.

I write my thoughts based on the principles of equality and justice for all peoples, and out of love for mankind and the homeland. First and foremost, I must use the universal values of individual freedom and rights as a foundation. The people's freedom – the freedom to create and work consciously, the freedom of love and thought – rests in the idea of the freedom of every

individual. The ability to live and think freely is man's priceless gift from nature and society.

I am not a politician, but I must discuss politics by recounting the exact facts with comments and generalizations, which, naturally, remain subjective to a certain extent, but not intentionally so. Politically, I am a steadfast internationalist, but I have developed a healthy feeling of love toward my people, my home and my homeland. I consider myself an internationalist with a strong sense of "nationalism" and national pride for my people.

To feel proud of your nation, to live and suffer for it, to share its thoughts and expectations, to reveal and show its virtues, while at the same time to be thoroughly demanding of it is not nationalism, but genuine, true patriotism.

The national question is one of the most important and perhaps most painful issues facing our country today; it intensifies day after day with the involvement of new regions, new republics, and pro-national structures and organizations.

I believe that the main reason for these conflicts is that many so-called scholars and some short-sighted politicians used to assert with conviction that the issue of the nation had been ultimately solved by the USSR and that there were no grounds to think, talk or write about it.

Those who tried to show that the fundamental issues of the nation and its conflicts exist regardless of the slogans and calls for friendship between nations of the multi-ethnic country, in the best cases, managed to drag out their miserable existence by taking on the labels of "nationalist" or "chauvinist."

Members of ethnic groups were often called "nationalists," and during the final years of the USSR they became "ultranationalists," and clergymen turned into "provokers" of inter-ethnic conflict. The situation reached its peak when some government officials and political leaders persistently tried to explain that the national and religious conflicts between nations were due to the intrigues of corrupted clans that wished to destabilize a particular region or the entire country.

This is absurd. Instead of showing conscientious and serious involvement in the problem of interethnic relations, these statesmen insulted various peoples and nations in an effort to ascribe the issue to minor cultural disputes and to suppress the ethnic conflicts that were escalating by the day and by the hour.

However, history has repeatedly shown that the use of force in order to solve ethnic conflicts leads directly to the establishment of a dictatorship – Stalinism was the most horrific and monstrous manifestation of such a scenario. I am anti-Stalinist not because I was personally injured by the "great favors" of Stalin's totalitarianism, but because it was an era of falsehood, brutality, xenophobia and anti-humanism. That era ruined the masses and produced a

huge army of extremely ignorant people, whose enthusiastic followers continue their evil deeds to this day. The unrestrained celebration of Stalinism is being reborn in some regions of the country today. It is horrifying to even think that it could suddenly become a way of life for us.

Unfortunately, it can actually happen. After all, the idea still exists and there are many people with that ideological bent. To give just one example, there was a man who was respected by the government and the people. He was a kind Communist "great leader of all nations" – and a fan of "favors." He lived his entire life by keeping current with the trends of the times. He praised Marxist-Leninist ideology and adhered to its rigid rules: he spared no effort to complete all assignments issued by the Center and longed to hear instructions by the party's Central Committee. Recently, he announced that he has always struggled to prevent Marxist-Leninist ideology from setting limits on the development of society and social sciences in the republic – that he has always upheld an independent policy in his "diocese," without submitting to the Center's directives. This announcement was not too surprising, because it was made by someone for whom nothing was holy, who could say one thing and do another, who could praise one policy today and praise one diametrically opposed to it on the following day, "love" someone he needs for the moment and then consider him "dead" the next day. He is convinced that all measures are acceptable for the sake of a post and for securing one's welfare. You could expect anything from those kinds of people. They have an elastic conscience

and an amputated morality. They are the people of that era.

Obsessive worship and cult-like devotion to a leader are terrible evils for mankind, especially for societies that are fanatically devoted to those kinds of rigid ideas.

Khrushchev saved us from Stalinism; he did everything possible to move the country away from the faulty path of ignorance. Khrushchev's thaw was the "first swallow" in the democratization process of our totalitarian society.

I welcome perestroika – the restoration of the minds of millions of people who had hitherto remained silent. I support collective thought, but disapprove of the "mentality" of the masses. I greatly appreciate the fact that perestroika introduced the rights to live, create, and speak freely. Many people take perestroika to mean the reconstruction of the national economy, the sciences and culture, and the overall policies of the state. Of course, all of those things are very important and necessary. However, the perestroika of man is most important – his freedom to think and to create. Many eloquent speakers, among others, declare perestroika's victory. I am categorically opposed to that opinion. Thus far, perestroika hasn't changed our mentality, our conscience, our attitude toward work and our vision for the future. That is why the hasty announcements about the victory of perestroika call to mind the old policy of faulty slogans and the old confusion about the "victory" of socialism. I was extremely surprised when I heard (among the speeches made during the First Congress of the People's

8824

Deputies of the USSR) that a talented person and thinker like Chingiz Aitmatov also shared this view. Something is not right here: either I am truly mistaken or Aitmatov has been misled.

If we are currently actively involved in the general reconstruction of the country, we are obliged to dispose of ancient, rigid theories, as well as the slogans and nonsensical declarations about our achievements in the sciences and culture, the friendship between nations, internationalism and the decisive achievements in the socialist economy.

We must be objective and courteous in determining and announcing publicly all our successes and achievements, alongside our failures and losses; at the same time, we must differentiate the causes and effects, thereby determining the interconnections between and the sources of this or that conflict.

FEBRUARY-APRIL 1988

For decades, the Armenian people of Nagorno-Karabakh had been trying to shake off the colonizing oppression of Azerbaijan, which was executed by the local administration and sponsored by the Center with roaring slogans of internationalism and friendship between nations. The demagogical announcements, supported by the Communist Party and governmental officials of the USSR, caused a deadlock in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. But in February 1988, enthusiastic about reforming the social order and all social relations, the Armenians of Nagorno-

Karabakh publicly announced that they saw the reunification of two regions that were separated by force – that is, the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic and the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region (NKAR) – as the only true and fair solution to their chief conflicts.

This expression of the people's will was documented by thousands of signatures and, most importantly, as a resolution passed by the Soviet of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Republic. With this resolution, on February 20, 1988, the NKAR Soviet of People's Deputies petitioned the Supreme Soviets of the Armenian SSR and the Azerbaijan SSR with the request to transfer the NKAR out of the Azerbaijan SSR and into the Armenian SSR.

The revolutionary processes of perestroika were destroying age-old, rigid theories and rectifying the mistakes of the past. After decades of harboring hope, Armenians finally saw the possibility of a fair resolution to the conflict in the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region turn into a reality.

The people believed in the right to self-determination of nations. After all, Lenin had written: "The rejection of the peoples' self-determination in the era of socialism would entail the betrayal of socialism." The Armenian people were convinced that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and its administration were fighting for these Leninist ideals – justice, democracy and the victory of humanism. Inspired by these hopes, the Armenian

people rallied in the streets with rapturous slogans, the most emblematic of which read "Lenin-Party-Gorbachev."

Unfortunately, on February 21, 1988, some leaders of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union – those who were misaligned in terms of national politics – made a hasty decision to characterize the pan-national Karabakh movement, which had incorporated the victory of perestroika, democracy and rational principles of national policy, as the work of separate "extremists" and "nationalists."

This type of declaration was harsh and inadmissible. Not only did it contradict the spirit of the times and intentionally distort reality, but it also unleashed the perpetrators of unprecedented crimes against the Armenian population living in the Azerbaijan SSR. I believe that this hasty decision made by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the mass media's improper coverage of the events surrounding this issue considerably predetermined future events that disturbed society as a whole.

Enormous rallies, marches, demonstrations and workers' strikes took place in Yerevan.

The Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia convened plenary sessions, political party meetings and discussions held behind closed doors with secretaries of the Central Committee as representatives

of the Communist Party. I am not listing their last names here, because, in this case, doing so wouldn't convey anything of significance. Furthermore, as a rule, all of their decisions, even the most trivial ones, were made with Moscow's consent: no individual steps could be taken, and no independent thoughts could be expressed. In these circumstances, it was even difficult to "make" a decision such as the one to create a governmental committee that would study the issues relating to the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region. Nevertheless, despite many obstacles and thanks to the efforts of the Republic's leaders, especially Karen S. Demirjyan, and some members of the Central Committee, the decision to create such a committee was ratified. However, this decision was of no avail. After all, Moscow was against the creation of such a committee, though, to this day, I can't understand why.

I would not be expressing myself fully here if I didn't mention that during those difficult days, the administration of the Republic prioritized the idea of national dignity in the discussion of all issues.

Another interesting event took place during those days, although in retrospect it has been viewed differently than at the time. In the midst of this occurrence, we were naive enough to think that it was a coincidence or that it happened accidentally. Now, I have no doubt in my mind that it was the result of a preplanned intrigue. I am referring to the shots that were fired on the garrison

building of the army forces stationed in Yerevan. In their explanations to members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party's Plenary Session, high-ranking army commanders attributed the shooting to anti-Soviet, anti-military, Armenian "extremists." Our persistent complaints and demands to investigate that accusation, as well as my statement claiming that it was an intrigue (that the commanders were wrong and that no Armenian would permit himself to shoot at the Soviet army) were effective. The following day, the commander of the army officially announced that the shot was unintentional and that it was fired by an official on duty, as he was cleaning his weapon. At the time, we swallowed that announcement, but today, under the pressure of the events that followed the operations of the Soviet army, we are convinced that it was an intrigue - the first steps in the long chain of such intrigues. I wish I were wrong about my assertions.

The rallies, demonstrations and strikes did not cease after the Plenary Session and party meetings. Neither the speeches by party members and state officials nor the appeals in the press made by renowned scientists, educators and cultural figures reduced the tension. A totally new political situation, in the spirit of the ideas of perestroika, had developed in Armenia - one that led to the start of a national, patriotic movement. The rebirth of the ideas of justice, democracy and progress facilitated the people's active involvement in society and politics; it also led to the collapse of unyielding psychological barriers, which had hitherto restricted the fulfillment of

rich creative and intellectual potential. Unfortunately, neither the state leaders nor the Center never fully understood the situation. By no means could they grasp the fact that a completely new political juncture was in its natural and normal process of formation; and, if applied correctly, it could lead to the establishment of a totally new political structure, with new mechanisms of governance, essentially different from the accepted norms. After all, wasn't it the right time to talk about creating a truly democratic society? But, unfortunately, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Mikhail S. Gorbachev, did not understand this point, and, in line with the best traditions of the stagnation period, called on the Armenians and the Azerbaijanis to be generous, reasonable and friendly, thereby placing the cause and effect, the criminals and victims on an equal footing.

Unfortunately, Gorbachev and his supporters were not able or, better yet, did not want to realize that this was the beginning of the national-liberation movement, in the spirit of democracy and perestroika. Perhaps to this day, Gorbachev still doesn't realize that in general the movement of the Armenian people, and particularly in the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region, was a reaction against the Azerbaijan SSR's employment of discriminatory and colonial policies in the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region and the Nakhichevan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. Approximately seven decades of this type of rule included the misrepre-

sentation of the history of the Armenian people, the appropriation and sometimes even the eradication of materially and spiritually valuable historical monuments in the regions of the NKAR and the Nakhichevan ASSR, the distortion of the region's historical maps and indigenous and world historiographical evidence, and the demographic changes imposed on the NKAR and the Nakhichevan ASSR. As a result of these policies, the entire Armenian population of the Nakhichevan ASSR, forced to leave their indigenous lands, immigrated to other regions of the country. These evil acts were vigilantly concealed and, to this day, continue to be concealed from the people of the USSR and the international community.

The administration did not realize that deliberately ignoring the conflict would not make it disappear. Rather, doing so would lead to and did in fact lead to more serious consequences. Despite that fact, the Armenian people, remaining true to the notions of honesty and fairness, tolerantly accepted Gorbachev's call. With the feeling of responsibility toward the common cause and a great sense of civic duty, all of the students and workers of Armenia put an end to the demonstrations and resumed their daily activities. However, the ultranationalist constituents in the Azerbaijan SSR provoked flagrant disturbances and used force and violence to commit ruthless acts that led to murders, the genocide of Armenians and crimes against humanity. Azerbaijan opened a "new page" in the history of the USSR - a disgraceful page that will never be erased from the memory of the civilized world.

Pogroms took place in Sumgait on February 27-29, 1988. The murderous revelry of the gang of organized criminals continued uninterrupted for three days with the active support of the authorities. They robbed, eliminated and exiled the entire Armenian population of the city. Dozens of peaceful citizens were injured and killed; hundreds of innocent people were tortured and left handicapped; their houses and belongings were robbed and set on fire. The first caravans of Armenian refugees began to appear.

The peaceful and defenseless citizens of Sumgait were being killed. The false declarations according to which different ethnic groups were victims of the events in Sumgait aroused anger and agitation. Everyone knows that Armenians were the only ones who were barbarously murdered, and that the Azerbaijanis who died were those perpetrators of the massacres who fell victim to the "transportation means" of the military units that entered the city on the last day to establish order.

Massacres, violence, bombings, victims... This medieval barbarity, organized at the end of the 20th century by the ultranationalist elements of Azerbaijan, was aimed at eliminating the Armenian population living in the Azerbaijan SSR. It was one link in the chain of events starting with the Armenian Genocide that took place in Ottoman Turkey in the beginning of the past century.

Sumgait, like Guernica, My Lai, and Soweto, was a humiliating crime against humanity - a symbol of

genocide, violence and oppression. Armenians associate the events of Sumgait, which contradict the tenets of contemporary civilization, with the 1915 Armenian Genocide in Ottoman Turkey and the massacre of thousands of Armenians in Baku, Nakhichevan and Shushi from 1918 to 1920. As a result, the mass media's various attempts to ignore these tragic events are futile, because it is impossible to eliminate a people's collective, historical memory.

On countless occasions, we have demanded that the administration evaluate the genocide in Sumgait, identify the precise extent of and motives for the crime and give an undeniable legal evaluation of the evidence of the genocide. However, none of these things were done.

At the same time, the Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union (TASS), shamelessly and with an authoritative tone, declared that the events of Sumgait were perpetrated by some hooligans. The official Azerbaijani line added the nonsensical declaration that almost all of the hooligans were juveniles. Meanwhile, in reality it was a mixed crowd of well-organized unenlightened extremists, ultranationalists, criminals and assassins.

I am convinced and, at the time, I repeatedly stated (and I was not the only one to do so) that we could have avoided the interethnic dissension that came about in the Soviet Union had there been a timely political evaluation of the events of Sumgait and had the criminals been brought to justice. Perhaps we wouldn't have seen the events in Fergana, New Uzen, Nakhichevan, Kirovabad,

Osh and Baku. We also could have avoided interethnic conflicts in Armenia, which took place just ten months after the events in Sumgait, while Armenians were impatiently waiting for the so-called fair and impartial evaluation of the Central Committee. But alas, it was all for naught. The Center remained silent, and, after awhile, it organized the ridiculous display of local trials against the criminal "hooligan" elements of the Sumgait carouse.

What happened in Sumgait should not be repeated in Armenia or in any other part of the world. That is why it was necessary (and it is still not too late) to produce a truthful political evaluation of what happened, provide extensive and impartial coverage of the genocide of Armenians in Sumgait and penalize the provokers and perpetrators. After all, it is evident that these barbarian and violent acts had much deeper political, ethnic and religious motives; it would be naive to think that they were committed independently by separate groups of criminals. The well-organized and planned succession of crimes attest to the fact that they had and still have "experienced" and "influential" leaders – "shady" ideologues, who would do anything, even commit the most violent crimes, for the sake of realizing their regressive, ultranationalist ideas. The subsequent events in Azerbaijan confirmed this reality.

After the events in Sumgait, the political climate in Armenia became extremely heated. Massive rallies and demonstrations began to take place once again. This

time, the people demanded that the administration take radical and swift measures in order to unite the NKAR with the Armenian SSR. Labor and hunger strikes were organized in demand of the administration's resignation. Professors and students actively engaged in Armenia's heated political life: they, too, held various labor and hunger strikes, called together spontaneous rallies and organized meetings, among other activities. All of this led to a truly pan-Armenian movement fueled by centuries of pent up bitterness, feelings of being victimized and a firm understanding of the historical injustices that had been the Armenian people's lot. In addition, the never-ending faith in the eventual victory of justice and reason were at the core of the movement. The people believed that, legally, the government of the USSR represented them, that through regional councils they should establish national governance and that the expression of the people's free will is the cornerstone of the country's national policy. Accordingly, the people started making fervent demands for convening a special session of the Supreme Council of the Armenian SSR, which would have to settle the issue of reuniting the NKAR and Soviet Armenia once and for all; otherwise, they threatened to call for the disbandment of the Supreme Council and the resignation of its members. In fact, some radical nationalists were already demanding secession from the USSR and the creation of a new, independent nation. This political movement was so well-organized and carried out with such discipline that it surprised Armenians and foreigners alike. Perhaps, the inner world of the people and their profound certainty about the legality of their demands were creating the Armenians'

new social image, regardless of the quality of their intellectual development. Other significant contributions included the people's noble feeling of responsibility toward the good name, honor and dignity of the Armenians. Unfortunately, it was all temporary: these honest, expressions of the human soul and attitudes diminished more and more as time progressed.

These days marked the beginning of the pan-national, patriotic Karabakh movement, which furthered the advancement of radical political concepts: these ideas were more profound and wide-ranging than the liberation of Nagorno-Karabakh and the issue of restoring justice in this ancient Armenian land forcibly connected to Azerbaijan in the 1920s.

Perhaps I am repeating myself, but I would like to reemphasize that a lack of necessary experience and the predominance of narrow-mindedness hindered the ability of governmental and political party leaders to assess realistically the completely new political reality in Armenia. They were unable to comprehend the intensity of the rebirth of the political conflict and the people's national pride and self-awareness. After all, in March of 1988, the Supreme Council of the USSR unanimously adopted a resolution favoring the socio-economic development of the autonomous region. The decision was made in order to pacify the Armenian people, especially the Armenian population of the NKAR, at least to a certain degree.

This was yet another typical resolution, prepared according to old structures: it was a resolution that could not and would not be implemented. It could not satisfy the fair and legal political demands of the nation. Rather, it was ratified in order to silence the unbreakable spirit of the people who had freed themselves from the fear and conservatism characteristic of the so-called period of "stagnation."

After what seemed like a brief period of tranquility, the revolutionary spirit of the Armenian people culminated in a huge march of mourning. On April 24, the entire Armenian nation, including the population of Yerevan, all regions of Armenia and representatives of the NKAR formed mass crowds and walked toward Tsitsernakaberd, the Armenian Genocide Memorial. Portraits on display before the columns of the monument included those of the victims of Sumgait, the avengers of the perpetrators of the Armenian Genocide of 1915, and, national hero, General Andranik. The marchers' signs and slogans cursed the instigators and perpetrators of the tragic events in Sumgait, and they called for the overthrow of the government and the establishment of an independent, sovereign Armenia.

The sound of the trumpet echoed in perfect silence at Tsitsernakaberd; it resounded with the melody that had quickly become the musical symbol of Armenian marches and demonstrations.

On this day, the Armenian people paid tribute to the victims of the Armenian Genocide perpetrated in the Ottoman Empire, the victims of the Armenian genocides in Baku, Nakhichevan and Shushi in 1918-1920, the innocent martyrs of the purges from 1937-1953, as well as the victims of the pogroms in Sumgait.

Everything was so majestic, ceremonial and beautiful that everyone felt a legitimate sense of pride for the Armenian people. It was as though there had been neither mourning nor victims, as though the blackness of silence had not dominated the atmosphere; instead, there was an utterly silent procession of a people who had stood the test of time and was victorious over the century...

I don't agree with my fellow compatriots who believe that the Armenian people, having lived under the rule of various colonizers, having lost their statehood for so long, and having wandered across the globe as "eternal emigrants," have aged and become exhausted; the Armenian nation does not have the capacity to make miracles work, to defend its rights in a civilized world, and to have a say in contemporary society. According to the logic of these people, there are too few Armenians for anyone to heed such a small nation among the great powers of the world.

I believe that the Armenian people proved the exact opposite to the world: throughout centuries of civilization, they preserved their spiritual wealth, that is, their faith,

language, literature, music, art and science. We lived our lives, and, today, not only do we live, but we create, while remaining Armenian. And we must continue to live, even if there only remains a single Armenian in the world.

I was convinced of this fact once again, after having reflected upon the historical, political, scientific and cultural events that the Armenians of my generation had witnessed over the course of the past few years. It was this generation that raised and educated a new generation of young, brave and manly revolutionaries, who will draw upon our centuries-old traditions and achievements in order to create a free and democratic Armenia once and for all.

During that time, the Central Television Station aired a series entitled "Alignment" which was devoted to the Nagorno-Karabakh issue and broadcast under the heading "Nagorno-Karabakh: Thinking out Loud." For the first time ever, television viewers all over the USSR received relatively objective and factual information about Nagorno-Karabakh and the events concerning it. After a few days, for unknown reasons, the writers of the program were apologizing to someone, who had shed light on the facts relating to the events. This was painful to see.

MAY-JUNE 1988

Events proceeded at a drastically rapid pace and with great intensity, as the rallies and demonstrations continued on a regular basis.

The tent camps at the Theater Square and hunger strikes were the first signs of civil disobedience. Students held labor strikes and staged walk outs from classrooms. The First Secretaries of the Central Committees of the Communist Party of Armenia and Azerbaijan were removed from office. This was perhaps the moment when the Center adopted the flawed approach of applying the same exact policies to both republics. At the time, two influential party figures visited the Republics of Azerbaijan and Armenia. Yegor Ligachov gave a speech at the plenary session of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in Azerbaijan, while Aleksandr N. Yakovlev addressed the same body in Armenia. Taking advantage of their posts, they tried to appease the people at any cost, even if it meant telling a white lie.

In Armenia, Ligachov announced that the Armenians were right – Azerbaijan must be restrained and its intentions checked; in Azerbaijan, Yakovlev announced that the Azerbaijanis were right - handing over Nagorno-Karabakh was out of the question; there could neither be any territorial claims nor any redrawing of borders.

Having made these announcements at the plenary sessions, the two representatives, as though in mutual agreement, refused to have their speeches published.

This was an expected move. After all, both party leaders had most probably agreed not to create disagreements: to say different things surrounding the same issue and to conceal from the public the real situation facing Nagorno-Karabakh. Unfortunately, this type of "Ostrich Politics" that has repeated itself throughout our history often occurs to this day.

It is worth mentioning that the two party leaders "nobly" fulfilled their unrewarding mission. In my opinion, these two individuals differed not only in terms of their intellect and mentality, but also in their public conduct. I think that they were complete opposites. I formed this opinion after my official meetings and short conversations with them. It would be interesting to find out how they would react to the same situation if they were not firmly connected to the political party.

If we are honestly and enthusiastically involved in the process of completely changing our society, we are obligated to set aside age-old theories, flawed ways and the shameful falsification of reality, especially if we are dealing with inter-ethnic issues. We are obligated to objectively, thoroughly and carefully determine and make public the motives of any given conflict; we must investigate the development of events and differentiate the causes from the effects. As a rule, the confusion of these two categories – the subjective evaluation of the phenomenon and the tendency to equate the cause with the effect – further intensifies inter-ethnic conflicts. When evaluating and normalizing inter-ethnic relations, it is necessary for the "judge" to be bold enough to identify

the involvement of each party and to point out the "cause" and "effect" every time. Other approaches, as demonstrated by history and today's reality, are unacceptable. They may lead, and sometimes do lead, to the exacerbation of those relations.

In fact, with regard to the aforementioned statement made by Yegor Ligachov in Baku, I believe that he erred in his reiteration of the age-old restriction against the "remapping" of boundaries. This unfortunate announcement served as one of the causes of the intensification of inter-ethnic conflict in Armenia. According to the authors of this policy, the administrative and territorial demarcation of a country does not create obstacles for successfully solving issues of socio-economic development facing ethnic groups in all regions of the country. The flaws of this belief were also evinced when our country found itself in a preliminary crisis after seventy years of so-called development and when the national issue led to a state of crisis.

Of course, all of this also refers to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, but only indirectly. After all, Armenia does not have any territorial claims to Nagorno-Karabakh, as some short-sighted politicians persistently claim. How can the Armenian people of Nagorno-Karabakh have territorial claims to the land that they have lived on for centuries? Isn't that absurd?

It is evident that, in this case, the word "remapping" does not reflect the nature of the possible territorial reforms, which would be in the interests of each nationality living

in the given territory. Just as international precedent has proven this fact, so too has the occurrence of the territorial conflicts between the republics throughout the history of the USSR. Indeed, we are not referring to atypical cases, such as the way in which a large part of the Armenian people of Nagorno-Karabakh found themselves in an autonomous region created outside the borders of Soviet Armenia, based on the unconstitutional decision to join Nagorno-Karabakh with Soviet Azerbaijan.

We affirm that the redrawing of borders must be recognized as a positive change, if it comes about as the result of socio-economic, cultural and political demands. These demands include the expression of the collective will of the people living in the given region. Such a remapping would aim to reform the Union and to create a real federation in accordance with international acts pertaining to civil and political laws and on the basis of the Constitution of the USSR. These legislative documents establish a nation's right to self-determination, the right to determine its political infrastructure, the right to ensure economic and cultural development, and the principles of unity and equality of peoples. These are not just words, but the laws of survival in the modern-day, civilized world. They are essential for everyone.

Considering the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh and the expression of the will of the Armenian population in Armenia and the NKAR, the Supreme Council of the

Armenian SSR gave its consent to unite the NKAR with Armenia. With only a slight hope that the Azerbaijan SSR would objectively evaluate and correctly perceive the situation, the Supreme Council of the Armenian SSR nevertheless petitioned the Azerbaijan SSR's Supreme Council with a request for a positive response to their decision. In the past, this issue had been brought to this body's attention numerous times.

The ruling of the Supreme Council of the Azerbaijan SSR, according to which it was impossible to unite the NKAR with Soviet Armenia, did not come as a surprise. The decision sparked a new wave of rallies and demonstrations that called for the secession of the Armenian SSR from the USSR. However, in those days, such demands did not have a large public appeal yet.

Different governmental organizations, including the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia, successively held multiple meetings and consultations. Universities closed their doors and students declared strikes; no directives could normalize the situation in the country. Students and many short-sighted professors did not realize that the decline of educational processes was irreversible: if things continued at this rate, we would lose a strong pool of Armenian-educated, highly-qualified future professionals, who would go on to become economists, scientists and cultural figures. After all, many times in our history, we have been required to gather such professionals from all four corners of the globe.

Everything can be restored and improved upon, including industry, agriculture, buildings and architectural monuments. But when a nation loses its intellectual potential or if the development of that potential is temporarily stunted, the nation may disappear once and for all. Or, as a worst case scenario, it can drag out its existence while being cut off from world civilization. We must be very careful when it comes to these types of issues. There is no doubt that the intellectual potential of a nation can be restored through the combined and continuous efforts of all levels of society. The intellectual of a previous generation is no longer an intellectual, and many people forget this truth. Needless to say, we have already lost something, and it is necessary to recover these losses through enormous efforts. We can't wait for miracles to happen.

The tragic event that took place Zvartnots Airport shocked us all. "Anonymous" provocateurs attacked the airport and surrounded it for over a day. Military regiments or perhaps internal forces put an end to the blockade with the use of cold weapons and force. There were many casualties, including three soldiers who were injured by pieces of a broken bottle. Not far from the airport, a teenager, trying to take a photograph of the events, was killed by an army official.

This episode was perhaps the first serious conflict between the military and the people – a people who had respected the Russian army for centuries and who had transferred that feeling of respect to the Soviet army as

well. Two or three days later, without any remorse, the Central Television Station's falsified "musical comedy" program aired images of clubs, shovels, chains, swords and hammers that had been confiscated from private cars coming from Yerevan or going to Yerevan on the Etchmiadzin highway. But everybody knew that you could find anything and everything in private cars – this fact is simple enough for anyone to understand. Only an evil falsifier with a particular mission could have presented these things as evidence of criminal activity. On the same day, the Central Television Station reported on the three injured soldiers, but forgot to mention the hundreds of injured and disabled citizens, including ambulance workers who were removing the injured out of the lawless battle. The television station also failed to depict the barbarian assaults of the Soviet soldiers against the ambulance vehicles.

We condemned the events that took place at Zvartnots Airport. They were devastating, and we felt as though we were in a nightmare. The events that took place at the airport remain a mystery to me until this day.

The Communist Party of the USSR held its 19th Congress, and inexperienced politicians expected something unusual to happen. Unfortunately, the Congress took place according to the well-known script with some interesting political "episodes" that had become the new standards of conduct for the radical communist.

We certainly had expectations with regard to problems of national concern. The issue was placed on the agenda and the discussion resulted in a delayed, senseless resolution without any practical proposals. The programs relating to the national issue remained inviolable. In the past few decades, those very programs had further complicated our issue instead of facilitating a reasonable solution.

In the days preceding the Congress, its deputies and the Supreme Soviet received many phone calls, letters, statements, and proposals, requesting a discussion and fair resolution to all of the Armenian nation's painful issues. I would like to cite some passages from the letter I sent to the leadership of the Congress: "Genocide, massacres, violence, bombings, loss of human life, refugees... The ultranationalist elements of Azerbaijan organized such medieval barbaric acts in the late 20th century. These were planned, systematic events that resulted in the death of peaceful Armenian citizens living in Sumgait." The letter continues:

It appears that the subsequent genocide of Armenians in Sumgait was perpetrated with the silent consent of the Communist Party and Soviet leaders of the Azerbaijan SSR; otherwise, it would not have gone unpunished for two days, just 30 kilometers away from Baku. [...] The justice system's strange decision to hold separate trials for each individual murder committed in Sumgait was obviously aimed at concealing the preplanned nature of the crime and the genocidal policy that

was "successfully" perpetrated by the Azerbaijani ultranationalists against the peaceful Armenian population. [...] But for me, as for any rational human being, it is clear that Soviet society must condemn the genocide the Azerbaijani ultranationalists committed against the Armenians; the Central Committee of the Soviet Union's Communist Party must politically assess this shameful fact.

It was during those days that the three Armenian delegates of the Congress held a joint press conference at the press center of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the USSR; there, we openly discussed all contemporary issues of concern to the Armenian people. In particular, we discussed the possible alternatives for compromise in determining the political status of the NKAR. As a result, for the first time, we publicly announced three options: presidential governance; submission to central authorities (particularly the leadership of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR); and provisional inclusion in the Russian Federation. The statement stressed that the Karabakh issue was being pursued not by Armenia, but by the majority of Armenians living in Nagorno-Karabakh; these people were guided by the idea of a nation's right to self-determination, a concept accepted by all civilized nations in the world. In addition, it highlighted the fact that Armenia and Armenians have no territorial claims: the people of Karabakh simply did not want to be a part of Azerbaijan; they wanted to live on their historical land

without any changes imposed upon historical borders. It explained that the liberation struggle of the people of Karabakh did not involve any elements of religious strife. The press conference was successful: Viktor Shishlin, the conference moderator and Representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, expressed his satisfaction.

Life went on to show that the Armenian people had misconstrued the USSR as wise, when in fact the issues raised by the Armenians remained unresolved, without a solution that corresponds to the most basic rules of civilized countries. Apparently, our society only talks about international standards, and, unfortunately, concepts, such as the freedom of the individual, a nation's right to self-determination, national liberty, and the state's right to sovereign governance, remain mere words that look impressive on paper and sound nice when articulated on stage.

The delegates of the Communist Party of Soviet Armenia also addressed the presidium of the 19th Congress of the Central Committee of the Soviet Union. The Armenian delegates referred to irrefutable historical facts that demonstrated the social and political injustices that resulted from the decisions made regarding the NKAR in the early 1920s. We explained: "The revolutionary processes of reformation, the breakdown of age-old theories, and the opportunity to restore justice instilled hope among the Armenians of the Nagorno-Karabakh

Autonomous Region for the possibility of a fair solution to the issue." We added in writing:

The national policy of discrimination implemented by the administration of Soviet Azerbaijan was one of the main sources of discontent among the Armenian population of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region. This policy compelled the entire Armenian population of the Nakhichevan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic to abandon their homes and move elsewhere. The total population of Armenians in the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region is in constant decline due to a high rate of emigration to other parts of the country. The widespread distortion of history, the destruction and/or usurpation of Armenian cultural monuments, and infringement upon the people's national dignity are all elements of the national discriminatory policy. Part of the historic Armenian lands in the Azerbaijan SSR is in danger of being entirely emptied of its native inhabitants. These were the premises for the aforementioned decision made by the regional council of delegates from the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region. Unfortunately, the first reaction to this resolution was not based on reasonable, balanced and objective analysis. On the contrary, it was perceived as an attempt to create a rift between Armenians and Azerbaijanis and as an articulation of Soviet Armenia's territorial claims against Soviet Azerbaijan. The attempts of the Central Soviet and local Azerbaijani mass media outlets to conceal

the actual reasons for the events taking place led to a heightened state of affairs. The events became more and more drastic and finally, in late February, culminated in the Sumgait tragedy, when the Armenian people were subjected to genocide and massacres - that is, genocide that was the result of the organized crimes of the Azerbaijanis. The ridiculous Sumgait trial, the falsification of information, and the speeches made by officials in the media rendered a situation that seemed to be gradually calming down into a ticking time bomb that could go off at any moment.

The appeal addressed other important issues, to which the Congress did not pay adequate attention. The administration of the political party did not realize that it was of utmost importance to arrive at a timely, civilized and radical solution to this painful issue. Despite our multiple warnings, the party neither felt nor understood how dangerous its actions and decisions could be. It didn't realize that the issue of the NKAR could cause a domino effect, as a result of which similar problems in inter-ethnic relations would appear throughout the Soviet Union. The party administration did not understand that neither the NKAR nor the Armenian SSR had presented territorial claims to anyone and that they had no intention of doing so. The appeal continued:

But today, considering the fact that the situation in the region continues to be extremely tense, it is necessary to take drastic measures based on an objective evaluation of the situation at hand. From

this perspective, we believe that the most recent proposal made by the council of delegates from the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region to hand over the NKAR to the provisional administration of the Soviet government (21.06.88) is the only fair solution to the problem at this time.

But this rational proposal was ignored once again in service of certain dark forces, which, apparently, wanted to witness the spread of inter-ethnic conflicts across the country. And, indeed, they reached their goal. The events related to inter-ethnic conflicts taking place in our country are like a "dark forest," while those who must cut the Gordian Knot are incompetent "woodsmen." I have yet to hear a fully rational, all-embracing, and fair proposal for the radical solution to these issues. The age-old approaches taken by political leaders will eventually result in failure. This fact is self-evident to everyone who has seen the successive breakdown of all the initiatives aimed at resolving extremely complicated inter-ethnic conflicts. They are falling apart because their conceptual basis for conflict resolution is fundamentally wrong and their strategic approaches are flawed. An example of this type of approach is the appalling decision to "solve" a given issue through negotiations, without the participation of the Center, because "they're your issues and you should solve them."

But those who express the problem in this way forget that the Center provoked the Karabakh conflict in the early 1920s. All of this is true, but some standard questions arise: Why is there a Center in this case? Why are there

governing bodies? What is the role and significance of the President in solving inter-ethnic conflicts?

It was during those days when one of the influential members of the Political Bureau, Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Aleksandr Yakovlev, received a group of delegates who had arrived for the congress organized by the Communist Party of Soviet Armenia, including Sergey Ambartsumian, Shchors Davtyan, Eduard Jrbashyan, Arman Kuchukyan, and Eduard Laziyev. The delegates thoroughly discussed the key issues facing the NKAR. They talked about the constitutional exclusivity of the Nakhichevan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, which went from being a multi-ethnic republic to a mono-ethnic (Azerbaijani) republic. The NASSR remained part of Soviet Azerbaijan as an autonomous republic thanks to the periodic, calculated efforts of the Azerbaijani authorities. However, according to all constitutional norms, the NASSR had to be part of Soviet Armenia as an autonomous region of Azerbaijan, because it lies in the territory on the border with Soviet Armenia and occupies historic Armenian lands, rich with Armenian medieval architecture and cultural monuments. Considering the current political situation, it could instead join the Soviet Socialist Republic of Russia, based on the fact that Nakhichevan was once an important, strategic military frontier in southern Russia.

This option would also serve to fulfill the USSR's need to strengthen its borders and, for that matter, the general

stability of the Soviet Union. Future events, as is known, fully justified these prophecies. Suffice it to mention two incidents: the declaration of the state council of people's delegates to remove the NASSR from the Soviet Union and the insolent destruction of huge sectors of land in this border region of the USSR.

Another important topic of discussion at the time was the rather well-known and executable idea according to which it was necessary to raise the NKAR's status to that of an autonomous republic. It was also mentioned that the new republic could be called the Armenian Republic in the Azerbaijan SSR, while the NASSR could be the Azerbaijan Republic in the Armenia SSR. The Political Bureau representative promised to relay all of this information to the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

The next day [the last day of the party's Congress] a meeting was scheduled with the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The four delegates of the congress, Silva Kaputikyan, Viktor Ambartsumian, Sergey Ambartsumian, and Suren Harutyunyan, were told that the meeting was scheduled to take place after the Congress, at seven o'clock in the evening. Unfortunately, the meeting never took place, because the scheming of party leaders caused the final session of the Congress to continue on until midnight. These schemes had huge political consequences that continue to trouble our entire society.

"Leaders" of different ranks and political leanings came to power and then disappeared; former active members left the party; democratic meetings were in full swing. This atmosphere instilled confidence in the people who felt as though they were participating in the creation of something new. They formed new political parties and political movements; the stratification of society began to take place; the reputation of intellectuals generally became diminished, and the intellectual leaders in support of democratic meetings bolstered this trend.

Of course, all of this was of broad-ranging significance. As for the criticism of the government and party figures of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, it was justified in many ways. It could serve as the basis for paving a path toward the eradication of the crises in the party, social economy, sciences and culture. Everything became a jumble of confusion: you couldn't tell the positive from the negative. As a rule, any show of emotion in a given realm of activity was accompanied by extremism with no room for mutual compromise.

The situation was similar in Armenia. The rallies, marches, and demonstrations took place in an extremely tense atmosphere; mass worker strikes resumed. All of the events in the NKAR had reverberations in Armenia. Mass media outlets, particularly the Central Television Station, began a widespread and deliberate attack on the Armenian population of the NKAR and Armenians in general. Meanwhile, the ideological planning for the upcoming session of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR was underway.

On the opening day of the 19th Congress, the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR Andrei Gromyko received the delegates of the NKAR at the Kremlin. The delegates provided the Chairman with detailed information regarding the current state of the region. As expected, it became evident that the president was unaware of the events surrounding the situation in the NKAR. Gromyko ended the conversation, assuring the delegates that the First Session of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet would definitely address the issue. At the same time, he emphasized once again that, according to the Constitution of the USSR, uniting the NKAR to Soviet Armenia was impossible without the consent of Soviet Azerbaijan.

Preparations for the Presidium's session began immediately after the 19th Congress. Gromyko, who had already consulted with the heads of the republics and had conversations with a number of delegates from the Supreme Councils of Armenia and Azerbaijan, took the lead in organizing the planning.

Each of the Chairman's meetings was attended by two to three deputies, one representative of the Armenian Supreme Soviet, the head of the Legal Department of the Supreme Soviet, and some staff members of the Presidium. All in all, about eight to ten people from each republic participated in the discussions.

The conversations were rather heated, and our position was clear. We were defending the resolutions of the Regional Council of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region and the Supreme Soviet of the Armenian SSR regarding the decision to unite the NKAR with Soviet Armenia. We also proposed another option as a form of compromise: to place the NKAR under the rule of the Russian SSR or to arrange for presidential governance.

However, these proposals were not implemented, because our opponents were guided by a fixed anti-Armenian ideology backed by the government: it was impossible to change anything because doing so would create a precedent for territorial changes; it would provoke new manifestations of Sumgait; the Constitution of the USSR could not be changed, and so on.

But the arguments against making changes to the USSR Constitution were dubious. They attested to the fact that the Soviet government did not have the power to oppose oppression and barbarism. In the case of national politics, perhaps all of the new and progressive ideas could not be realized in the Soviet Union.

The idea that the Constitution of the USSR could not be changed was indeed laughable. After all, history has shown that the great powers of the world have and will continue to make such changes, without showing any signs of remorse.

During our conversation (in which deputies of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, Sergey Ambartsumian and

Levon Simonyan, took part), Andrei Gromyko felt the lack of substance in his arguments and decided to replace them with hard-hitting insults against Armenian "extremists" and progressive intellectuals.

At that point, I protested: "If you don't change your attitude and the unfounded content of your words, we will be forced to interrupt the conversation and bid you and your colleagues farewell."

Sensing that he had said the wrong thing, Gromyko immediately changed his tone and the conversation continued amicably, but, at the same time, it was obviously on a pointless track. After all, we knew that, given the circumstances, Gromyko could not resolve any issues independently; he was nobly carrying out orders by adhering to predetermined notes.

Nevertheless, Gromyko asked us about our expectations and what we envisioned for the future. We clearly explained that there would be more demonstrations, worker strikes, hunger strikes, mass assassinations, and possibly civil disobedience and a civil war.

Unfortunately, our prophetic response was interpreted with contempt and Gromyko asked us: "How do you know all of this? Perhaps you have already planned it?"

We were forced to retort once again: "Honorable Andrei Gromyko, all you need to know is one thing – history, the history of modern-day states. It will help you come to such conclusions easily."

After these meetings, the Supreme Soviet started to prepare for the Presidium's upcoming session. As the development of future events showed, the Presidium prepared for the session rather thoroughly.

The Armenians didn't expect anything in particular to come out of this session. After all, their representatives, that is, the deputies, already had enough information about what was slated to happen.

JULY 18, 1988

On this day, with a sense of pain for the Armenian people, the group of ten deputies of the Supreme Soviet of the Armenian SSR and consultants from Yerevan State University (Lendrush Khurshudyan, Yuri Mkrtumyan, and Babken Harutyunyan) left the Moscow Hotel for the Kremlin to participate in the session of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union dedicated to the discussion of the issues surrounding the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region.

Before attending the meeting, we learned that the Presidium's draft resolution would present the issue of the NKAR as a groundless demand by "extremists," and changes would not be permitted.

The officers stationed at the State Department Store asked us to part ways with our consultants, who had diligently worked with us. We remained standing on the pavement of the Red Square, alone with our thoughts. On our way to the Spasskaya Tower of the Kremlin,

many of us considered taking the desperate measure of resigning from our positions if we were unable to affect the course of discussion and if the draft resolution remained unamended.

The Presidium's session began at 10 o'clock in the morning and lasted eight hours with two intermissions. The atmosphere was stressful. It was perhaps the first time that the Presidium had convened a session in the Chamber of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. The podium was moved to the corner of the room, so that speakers would not be facing the Presidium with their backs.

Members of the Presidium took their seats, while the invited deputies, social and political figures, scientists and journalists were seated in the hall. Television monitors and microphones had been installed in the hall. One could sense the well-organized "presentation" that was being broadcast to the whole world. The world was about to learn about how bad the Armenians were, but the Armenians had come to prove to the pioneers of perestroika that their demands were new and fair and they were ready to fight until the end.

The session began with a speech by the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR Andrei Gromyko. Literally a few minutes later, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR, member of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR Mikhail Gorbachev took over the proceedings. It was a unique situation: the leader of the

"attack" Mikhail Gorbachev and the "neutral" Andrei Gromyko, who only spoke to announce the next speaker according to schedule, were seated next to each other.

The members of the Presidium made similar speeches, except for some speakers who had "gone astray." One got the impression that the speeches were written by a single person or a group of people and that they were based on the same points. After all, in essence, they were saying the same thing in different words, without even trying to provide rudimentary support for the propositions they presented. They unanimously stressed the inalterability of the draft resolution of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR.

The following list of points consists of brief excerpts taken from the speeches made by Vladimir Orlov, Aleksandr Mokanu, Vladimir Shcherbitski, Lev Zaykov, Rafik Nishanov, Arnold Ryuhtel, Aleksandr Sukharev, Vitautas Astrauskas, Zakash Kamalidenov, Aleksey Logunov, Irakli Abashidze, Aleksandr Gitalov, and others:

- Based on all of this, we can conclude that anti-perestroika forces are playing an active and organized role in the events in Nagorno-Karabakh; they are inciting dichotomies and skillfully manipulating people's national sentiments.
- It is a clever step by those who want to inhibit perestroika by distracting people from the key problems that urgently need to be addressed in the republics: issues related to cadres and the

battle against negative realities, such as the shadow economy and patronage.

- We believe that the Communists of Armenia and Azerbaijan, and the entire labor force will find the strength and courage to overcome their disputes and to preserve and strengthen their friendship for the benefit of the entire Soviet people.
- It must be made clear that the disturbances are seriously damaging the economies of the Republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan as well as the economy of the entire nation.
- Redrawing the borders of republics and regions could cause their economic ties to become severed, thereby inhibiting the unified development of the nation.
- We don't have the right to forget that there are some people abroad who are trying to do everything possible to spread the events in Transcaucasia throughout other regions of our country.
- In these unusual situations, there are no ready-made solutions. The primary solution is the struggle against nationalism and ultra-nationalism.
- The resolutions adopted in Armenia go against the Constitution of the USSR. We must make decisions based on our nation's Fundamental Laws. There should be no talk whatsoever about giving an autonomous region to Soviet Armenia.
- Based on the current laws, it is impossible to make a decision to change the status of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region.
- In order to prevent things from getting out of hand, all abrupt demands, hunger strikes, and

demonstrations making extreme exclamations must be put to an end.

- Only the honest work of every individual can solve these complex problems.
- We must first and foremost fight against nationalism and ultra-nationalism.
- Friendship between nations is the strength that helped defeat fascism. Friendship between nations is the mobilizing force of perestroika.
- This is painful for all of us and it marks a crisis in our socialist government.

These were all weak and old ideas and proposals which, as reality showed, did not and could not have contributed to alleviating the situation in the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region. It would be interesting to find out what the authors of these age-old, stereotypical statements think today, when the entire nation is steeped in political events similar to, but more unpredictable than those that involved the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region in 1988. I don't think that they want to remember this connection; and even if some remember it, they do so with deep bitterness. At least that's my opinion.

None of the other speeches had the mark of originality either. Here is a brief excerpt from the speech given by academician Yevgeny Primakov:

We must look truth in the eyes and say that we are all Communists first, and then Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Russians, Ukrainians, etc. If that is the case, we must view this conflict in light of

perestroika. If the conflict develops any further, it will destroy perestroika. There is an undoubted need to make concessions in order to resolve the conflict; any opposing viewpoint can foster an environment of extremism. And we can't draw upon history, because it would be useless. History doesn't offer any precedents. If there had been a precedent, we would have had to accept the fact that if a people ruled a given territory in the 18th century that land belongs to them forever. Or in the 19th century and so on. We must not refer to history. Claims that priority should be given to the ethnic majority in the region's population are also unsubstantiated. It is impossible to seek concessions in this regard as well. I bow my head before comrade Vezirov, who openly admits that the Azerbaijani authorities are to blame for the events surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh. When Vezirov expresses his convictions and everybody listens to what he says and how he says it, everyone becomes convinced that he is a true internationalist. I, for one, would never believe that he could lead an anti-Armenian campaign. Of course, it is impossible for the region to secede from Azerbaijani land. After all, these people bare the tremendous burden of holding an executive office. They can't take steps that would jeopardize the Soviet Union. Let us leave things as they are and not demand changes from them. I believe that anything else would be absolutely impossible and cannot be done.

It would be hard to imagine a more groundless speech, especially considering the fact that the speaker is a scientist and not a politician. Hardly anyone paid attention to this speech, aside from the people for whom it was intended.

This "planned" speech aimed to provide a theoretical explanation for the draft resolution proposed by the presidium. But the academician's scanty speech lacked substance. Nevertheless, it helped him attain high political status. In other words, it was a clever move: he gave a short and even illogical speech, defending the wavering ideas of the influential authorities, and suddenly found himself on top.

One of the young political figures gave a speech that was unquestionably a "masterpiece." It began with the following lines: "I would like to believe that the voice of reason and the call for wisdom which General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev made will reach the youth and the people of Armenia and Azerbaijan." The speaker went on:

We young Communists must help the people and youth of Armenia and Azerbaijan realize that they have been caught in a misunderstanding, to say the least. I think that Sergey Aleksandrovich really told the truth: he speaks on behalf of the majority of young students in Yerevan, or perhaps he speaks for the youth in its entirety. I don't think so. But the truth is that he speaks on behalf of the

young students who have been misled and have participated in classroom strikes and hunger strikes, earnestly believing that these means can help resolve these conflicts. The request of the Supreme Soviet of Armenia cannot be fulfilled given the current political circumstances in the country, Armenia, the NKAR, and Azerbaijan. The resolution proposed by the Supreme Council of Armenia is unacceptable, because it places the blame on someone else... It seems to me that, apparently, some former authorities, yes, probably the corrupt cliques to which Mikhail Gorbachev referred, are willing to sacrifice their people in order to conceal their own mistakes.

Later, I met that same man several times, when he no longer held a high position in the party's administration. Surprisingly, it turned out that he was a normal, even pleasant person, an intellectual with a "contemporary outlook." I was shocked and pleased at the same time. Most probably, he, like many other officials at the time, was fulfilling his role as a functionary. He had essentially become another victim of the top-down command system of government, and I was glad to find that this miserable system had not ruined him completely. After all, if you look carefully, you will see that second-rate civic, state and political figures surround us and create the country's political climate. They are eternally corrupted by the flawed ideology and methods cultivated by the country's state apparatus for decades.

Members of the presidium also gave individual speeches. I will never forget the sincere speech that the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the Tajikistan SSR, Gaibnazar Pallayev, gave. I find it relevant to include some excerpts from it here:

I will say it clearly: the unhealthy events taking place in Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenia and Azerbaijan arouse great pain and concern. [...] Of course, the events taking place in Nagorno-Karabakh and its surrounding regions have their causes. Apparently, in the last few decades, there have been many problems concerning inter-ethnic relations, and they must be solved. It is not a matter of form, but content, although the former is also important. The key is to ensure the development of the language and the overall national culture and to solve all the issues that have been accumulating over a long period of time. [...] Perhaps it is really worth thinking about raising the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh's status. And, until the situation has been settled, perhaps we really should send representatives from the Central Committee of the Communist Party, the Presidium of Supreme Soviet of the USSR, and the USSR Council of Ministers to Nagorno-Karabakh.

The academician Nikolai Basov also gave a sincere and objective speech:

It is hard to talk about the events that took place... Nagorno-Karabakh has been troubling us for many

months now. What's happening is something that does not fit into our consciousness. We can't imagine that something like this can happen at the end of the 20th century. [...] Mikhail Sergeyevich didn't find a compromise here. But it is necessary to find it. There has to be a solution to the issue. And I think the solution is in concessions... It is painful to see that we are facing an issue that can't be resolved... I believe that perhaps a similar commission, comprised of representatives of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, can help find a solution.

Another speech was given by the beloved and well-known poet, Rasul Hamzatov, who declared:

Our decision today will determine the legacy that we will leave for our grandchildren and great-grandchildren – national hatred that will continue for a few more decades? Or, the feeling of friendship? My proposal is simple: let us leave everything the way it is, entirely in accordance with the Constitution. At the same time, before making a principled decision, let us discuss the issue of handing Nagorno-Karabakh over to the temporary governance of union bodies.

And, so, essentially, everyone agreed. The others only expressed their "disagreement" with the draft resolution during recesses. They did not make official statements, so as to remain outside the purview of the administration and the many keen observers. Everything proceeded in

accordance with the decades-old modus operandi of disingenuously pious democracy. For instance, during the recess, Rafik Nishanov expressed his disagreement with the draft resolution. When I asked him to take the podium and announce his opinion, he was sincerely shocked.

He said, "What are you saying, dear Sergey Aleksandrovich?"

Rafik Nishanov, who was actually a decent person, could not imagine speaking against the draft resolution prepared by the Supreme Soviet. Such were the protocols.

The speeches given by the representatives of Azerbaijan (Suleiman Tatliyev, Abdul Rahman Vezirov, and Mirza Ibrahimov) and Armenia and the NKAR (Hrant Voskanyan, Suren Harutyunyan, Henrik Poghosyan, Viktor Ambartsumian, and Vardges Petrosyan) were totally different. Naturally, they were fundamentally disparate in both form and content.

The Azerbaijanis gave their speeches mildly, based on the authorities' plan which obviously had the approval of the Soviet administration. Their speeches focused on already tired slogans: the friendship of peoples; the permanence of the USSR Constitution; the groundlessness of the idea of "restructuring" borders; the struggle against nationalism; the need to establish relations between the workers, collective farmers, and intellectuals of both republics; the expansion of mutual

relations between city-dwellers and villagers; the need to enhance the reputation of intellectuals; etc. All of the speeches were made in the spirit of the years of stagnation: not a single word was uttered about concessions.

The Azerbaijanis gave their speeches confidently, and nobody interrupted them. One could sense the agreement and consensus between the speakers and the authorities.

The Armenians were placed in an unenviable position. Their speeches were constantly interrupted by waves of questions, cries from the audience, and the unseemly interference of Mikhail Gorbachev. The more logical and substantiated the Armenians' speeches were, the ruder and stricter the interferences became. Every effort was made to confuse the Armenian speakers and to create the impression that their weighty arguments were groundless. Nevertheless, the leader of the "attack" did not succeed. The previously drafted proposal collapsed like a house of cards. They were forced to change the direction of the struggle and to draft a new resolution literally on the spot. The first vice-chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR successfully completed this task. It was done so hastily that even Chairman Gromyko did not understand what happened; he wanted to postpone the approval of the resolution to the following day.

The picture will become clearer after I cite some excerpts from the speeches of the delegates at the session and

from my conversations with Mikhail Gorbachev. All of the references are from memory, though in some cases, I have used information published by the press at the time.

I have excluded all personal information, with the hope that doing so doesn't hurt the integrity of the references herein. After all, what should interest us most is not who said what, but what was said:

- The endorsement of this resolution (according to the draft) will hurt and disappoint the Armenian people.
- The people of both the region and the Armenian SSR never came to terms with this scandalous injustice. (This point refers to the fact that the Caucasus Bureau, upon Stalin's insistence, reconsidered the resolution ratified on July 4, 1921. As a result, the indigenous Armenian region of Nagorno-Karabakh, with its 95% Armenian population, was automatically taken from Armenia and placed in the Azerbaijan SSR.)
- In the decades that followed, the Armenian people and the authorities continually raised their concerns regarding the restoration of historical justice.
- The basis for the structure of our multi-ethnic unified state is established by two articles of the USSR Constitution: Article 2, which forms the USSR's political structure by delineating the people's sovereignty and providing for delegates to the Supreme Soviets, and Article 70, which

expresses the principle of the people's right to self-determination

- In trying to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, it would be a mistake to refer to Article 78 of the USSR Constitution and to focus on the non-existent territorial claims of the Armenian SSR from the Azerbaijan SSR. The Armenian SSR has no territorial claims. The issue at hand deals with the people's constitutional right to self-determination.
- It should be taken into consideration that the bitter fate of the Armenian population of the Nakhichevan ASSR served as an important source of exacerbation for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh view the deportation of Armenians from the Nakhichevan ASSR as the realistic fate that awaits them in the future.
- With the consent of the authorities, the massacre of Armenians in Sumgait began a day after the address of Mikhail Gorbachev (February 26, 1988) began. This unbelievable act of barbarism in a socialist state immediately aggravated the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh and the region surrounding it.
- The majority of the country's population has a rather vague idea about the history and geography of the land where the events took place. However, informed people have no doubt that Nagorno-Karabakh has always been populated by Armenians and that it is a part of the Armenians' Homeland.

- How do we treat the fact that we entered Azerbaijan's jurisdiction with autonomy and our own land? How do we treat Article 11 of the Constitution, according to which land in any part of the Soviet Union is the exclusive property of the government and is the general property of the entire Soviet nation? If that is the case, then why should the Azerbaijanis have the right to veto the resolution of the issue? How can we allow one group of people to govern another group in our socialist state?
- The Armenian people of Nagorno-Karabakh won't be satisfied with material wealth, while national, cultural and spiritual development remains neglected. It is not by chance that hundreds and thousands of Karabakh Armenians have abandoned their homes and are currently forced to live outside the borders of the region. Could it be that they are leaving their homes because they have such a good life? As life has shown, the unfair resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict will definitely lead to the exile of the Armenians from their Homeland.
- We bow our heads to the members of the Azerbaijani general public, who risked their lives in order to save Armenians under assault. However, we are against those who talk about friendship between peoples, but in actuality want to establish what the entire world would simply call a "provincial regime" for the Armenians of Karabakh.
- It is pertinent to remember one general fact: as a national, territorial whole, Nagorno-Karabakh is not

part of Azerbaijan, but rather an inseparable part of our collective home, that is, the Soviet Union. And the Armenians, the very people of Karabakh, made this decision in 1805, when Karabakh voluntarily seceded from Eastern Armenia and became part of Russia a quarter of a century ago.

- But one thing is clear: Nagorno-Karabakh can no longer remain a part of the Azerbaijan SSR; and any resolution that ignores this reality, which was brought to light by the suffering of Karabakh's people, threatens to produce catastrophic results. A catastrophe is possible. And it is preferable to go to extremes today than to witness a tragedy in Nagorno-Karabakh and, perhaps Armenia, tomorrow.
- Throughout the entire course of its three thousand-year history, Artsakh-Karabakh has been an organic part of the Armenian people – their struggle, language, culture, psychology, and traditions. I could cite Greek, Roman, and Persian historians and, of course, our stone-built monuments. These Armenian historical and cultural monuments in Karabakh date from antiquity to the 20th century. The people of Karabakh are proud and extremely devoted to their land.
- During these months, the Armenian people demonstrated their commitment to ideas of perestroika and an attitude of discretion and dignity. However, unfortunately, painful acts of negligence also took place. I have in mind the uncommon event that took place at the Zvartnots Airport, when a group of provokers managed to direct and

apply the people's tense emotions to illegal acts. A month ago, girls from Yerevan gave flowers to officers in charge of maintaining civil order in the city. This was a touching display of our affection toward the Russian soldiers and the glorious army. The extremism and mistakes of those days resulted from months of long-standing tension, hopelessness, and despair. That is the reason why, before making a decision, I ask you to consult history, justice, the conscience of Lenin and that of mankind. Your decision will determine the fate and faith of an entire people. An unfair solution will cause pain and disappointment and, most likely, will lead to a tragic end.

As I mentioned above, all of our speeches were interrupted by numerous questions, broad suppositions, and points of advice. From this perspective, my (S.A.) conversation with the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, was of a similar nature. I have included an abridged version of our conversation, without making any editorial corrections.

S. A.: Dear friends, our Republic is in an extremely volatile situation today. For six months now, the Armenian people, with their national dignity crushed, have been seeking mutual understanding and cooperation.

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is not new. Its history dates back to the 1920s, when Nagorno-Karabakh was placed in the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic according to an unconstitutional resolution passed by the Caucasus Bureau of the Central Committee, under direct pressure from Stalin, and against the proclamation that Azerbaijan's Supreme Soviet had ratified previously. An historical injustice was committed: part of the Armenian population, against the people's will, found itself in an autonomous region created outside Soviet Armenia.

Today, at a time when the results of all illegal acts and wrongdoings of the past are being scrutinized and justice is being restored, we must reinstate the legal decision approved by the Supreme Soviet of the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic on December 1, 1920, according to which "from now on, Nagorno-Karabakh, Zangezur and Nakhichevan are recognized as components of the Armenian Soviet Republic."

I believe that only this decision can serve as a basis for satisfying the demands of the Armenian people of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region.

The Azerbaijan SSR's intentional and planned discriminatory policy directed against the Armenians over the course of 67 years has motivated the Armenians of the NKAR in their resolute desire to reunite with their people. This policy has already resulted in the displacement of Armenians from the Nakhichevan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, the closure of the Pedagogical Institute of Baku, the Armenian Dramatic Theater, and 76

Armenian schools, as well as the destruction of hundreds of Armenian symbolically and financially valuable cultural monuments. The policy of discrimination complements the widespread revision and distortion of native and world history. In particular, the Azerbaijanis have appropriated over a thousand Armenian spiritual monuments and architectural structures, including the classic symbol of Christianity, the Armenian cross-stones. The historical maps have been distorted in order to leave no room for Armenia in the Transcaucasus region.

And all of these acts were and still are accompanied by vain words and grandiose speeches about the friendship between peoples, internationalism, the feeling of love toward one's neighbors, and the victory of Lenin's policy of national interest. At the same time, people are given the wrong impression about the history of their homeland.

The tragedy of Sumgait became the climax of all of this. The Armenians organically found parallels between the events in Sumgait, which were incompatible with socialism, the Armenian Genocide in Western Armenia in 1915, and the massacres of tens of thousands of Armenians in Baku, Nakhichevan, and Shushi in 1919-1920. In fact, mass media outlets failed in their attempts to relegate these tragic events to oblivion, because the people's historical and social memory is eternally active.

Today, Armenia is at a new political juncture, with the development of a pan-national movement fueled by centuries of pent-up bitterness and the insults added to the, deep certainty that the Armenian people have had

their share of historical injustice. The people's everlasting faith in the triumph of justice and reason has also contributed to this movement.

The Armenian people chose the aforementioned course of action for the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. They rejected the other two obvious options: the loss of another historical Armenian region which would remain without its indigenous population (as in the case of Nakhichevan) or the type of physical extermination that occurred in the past and was later repeated in Sumgait.

While the region remains in the Azerbaijan SSR, it would be naive to think that calls for internationalism and the strengthening of the friendship between peoples would quell this movement. Measures promising the development of socio-economic conditions would be equally ineffective.

The issue regarding the reunification of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region with the Armenian SSR must be resolved politically, without paying heed to any phony hindrances. This process will correspond to the spirit of the times and the 19th Congress. I completely agree with Mikhail Gorbachev who said that we must resort to concessions.

M.G.: In my opinion, there is not a single hint of concessions in your speech. You have not uttered a single word of self-criticism. This was the first speech that did not make any references to self-criticism or concessions. It was a speech that demonstrated where

you are leading the youth. You, reputable people... One minute... Let me finish my part of the dialogue. Don't you want to enter into a dialogue, Comrade Ambartsumian? Think about it – after all, we are all Communists, deputies. And this is the podium from which the people hear everything. Perhaps this is how you wish to wield an easily-gotten reputation? By fighting for Nagorno-Karabakh as though you were defending the interests of the Armenian people? Is it possible to evaluate the ideas and interests of the Armenian people and our fraternal Armenia, admired and respected by all, independently of the others – those of Azerbaijan and the entire nation? This is how we must judge things, Comrade Ambar-tsumian. I can only imagine the lectures you give to your students...

S. A.: I consider it my duty, Mikhail Sergeyevich ...

M.G.: Aren't we here for a discussion? You don't have discussions, self-criticism, or concessions. I empathize with everything you said about pain and suffering. That troubles us all. But you don't want to start a dialogue with the Azerbaijanis, and you won't even start one with us.

S.A.: Before starting a dialogue with you, I consider it my duty to tell you the whole truth, perhaps the bitter truth. The political climate in our republic is extremely volatile right now. When they only tell you what you want to hear, it is very difficult to draw accurate conclusions based on that information. I deliberately created a heated atmosphere, because I knew that you would interrupt me. And I deliberately...

M.G.: You had planned everything.

S.A.: No, I thought that the truth had to be told. And the truth is that the republic is in an extremely difficult situation, extremely...

M.G.: Allow me to ask you a sincere question. Do you believe what you are saying? You always point a finger at the people – the people think this, the people do that, and the people don't see a way out. Are you speaking on behalf of the people? Is that what you think?

S.A.: I am speaking on behalf of my electorate, my colleagues, and my young students.

M.G.: And you are pressuring us.

S.A.: No, I am not pressuring you. If I were pressuring you, I would have said, as many others have, that it is impossible to do anything; I would have said that we should base our decision on a particular article of the constitution and close the subject. In that case, I would have been pressuring you.

What I am about to say is totally different. During your meeting with intellectuals and scholars in Poland, you yourself said that we must get down to business and take action according to the resolutions of the 19th Party Congress, without waiting for constitutional reforms. Now I am saying that we should resolve our issues without waiting for constitutional reforms. I am trying to say that we need concessions. I believe that the academician

Basov was right when he said: "Of course, this is not the decision that is in the Presidium's draft resolution, which many delegates considered inviolable. If we do not make concessions today, the situation in Armenia will become more difficult and severe."

We are afraid, today's intellectuals are afraid that a rash decision may lead to tragic consequences. That is why our decision must be based on concessions.

As an option for concessions, I propose the following: first, presidential governance. Unfortunately, Andrei Andreievich was unaware of such an option, and, one day, he asked me to explain it. I explained it to him with the example of India. In a similar way, I believe that provisional presidential governance can be set up in Nagorno-Karabakh.

The next option for concessions is to temporarily remove the NKAR from the subordination of the Azerbaijan SSR. Here, I emphasize the word subordination, because I do not mean a literal secession from the Azerbaijan SSR. In this case, the NKAR will be governed by supreme bodies, for instance, in the form of a triumvirate, comprised of the Central Committee, the USSR Supreme Soviet, and representatives from the Council of Ministers. This triumvirate will temporarily govern the NKAR until we manage to arrive at the best permanent, constitutional resolution to the conflict.

Forgive me for creating a heated atmosphere. I confess that I did so intentionally – in order to be able to have a

conversation with you and to tell you the whole truth. I wanted the members of the Presidium to understand that we are in favor of concessions, while the Azerbaijani representatives believe that there can be no concessions.

The next step for concessions is...

M.G.: When I talk about concessions, I mean something totally different. Do you understand that? You are proposing options that keep the two nations alienated from one another. I am talking about concessions which that will enable the conflicting parties to shake hands. I have received reports according to which the society in Azerbaijan believes the following: perhaps the status of the region could be raised to the level of an autonomous republic in order to instill confidence among Armenians living in the Autonomous Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh. I think that this is an interesting idea. The fact that this suggestion came from Azerbaijan makes me feel confident. It would have been a good thing. But the Council of People's Deputies of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region convened a session and announced that the NKAR is not subject to Azerbaijan. This announcement came when the resolution was being drafted.

S.A.: That is also an option.

M.G.: It would provide for a greater level of assurance. They would have their own constitution, where certain

principles would be delineated. Overall, I believe that this is an interesting idea.

A. Vezirov: Mikhail Sergeyevich, I would like to add that after talks were held on this matter, a protest against such a decision took place in Stepanakert. After that, some Azerbaijani factions started petitioning to dissolve the region.

M.G.: What's more, since the number of Azerbaijanis living in Armenia is no less than the number of Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh, let's create an autonomous region there as well...

S.A.: Naturally, certain forces don't want to see the right solution to the conflict, they don't want to engage in a dialogue... It was not coincidental when I said that people are plugging up their ears. They say...

A. Vezirov: Listen to the talk of this respected person, to whom the party has entrusted the education of the youth. What, then, will that youth inevitably say? Should we really say things like that to the youth?

S.A.: Mikhail Sergeyevich, I don't wish to respond to Vezirov, because my response will be a blow below the belt. But I am forced to...

M.G.: No, wait. I will tell you about what I have read and what I know about Comrade Ambartsumian's speeches. I call him "Ambartsumian the Second," because there's

also a senior Ambartsumian. Ambartsumian the Second. The way he positions himself is actually positive.

S.A.: My position is very specific and substantiated. We can talk separately, Mikhail Sergeyevich, and there is no need to debate here. I am also an eloquent rhetorician, and that is why our debate will take a lot of time.

M.G.: Perhaps the time has come to take action and to quiet many people down by means of self-criticism.

A. Vezirov: I deeply regret what I said. Perhaps it was inconsiderate of me. I just wanted to be heard. I would be very happy to meet with you and the others as well. Let's talk, and perhaps then we can arrive at a compromise.

S.A.: There's nothing to it. Come to Yerevan and I will be your host. Mikhail Sergeyevich, the fact of the matter is that in such a serious situation and in the context of our discussion, you must express your concrete opinion. I hope that we will leave for Yerevan, having made a radical decision. It would have been appropriate for Comrade Vezirov to repeat what he said during our brief conversation from the podium. I am referring to Azerbaijan's proposal to dissolve the autonomous region. You must know everything. We must know all of this information in advance in order to be able to make the right decision. Inaccurate information will not lead us to the right solution.

M.G.: There is too much emphasis being placed on the demographic changes and the processes taking place

there. And it is all presented as important evidence and the result of a specific policy. How many Azerbaijanis were there in Yerevan at the beginning of the century?

S.A.: At the beginning of the century in Yerevan?

M.G.: Yes.

S.A.: It's hard for me to say.

M.G.: You must know the answer. I will remind you. At the beginning of the century, the Azerbaijanis made up 43% of the population. What is the percentage now?²

S.A.: They are very small in number now, less than one percent.

M.G.: I don't want to blame Armenians for deporting the Azerbaijanis. We will not gain anything by drawing conclusions based on numbers and by blaming each other. After all, you are a scholar. We must have precise information and tell the precise truth. If it is only your truth or only mine truth, then perhaps it's not the truth at all. But one truth has been established: Armenians and Azerbaijanis have lived on that land for centuries. Nagorno-Karabakh is a cradle of the Armenian people, and one of the, how shall we say, one of its pillars, its

² Gorbachev was misinformed. At the beginning of the century, 43% of Yerevan's population was Muslim, including Caucasian Tatars (Azerbaijanis), Kurds, Turks, Tatars, etc.

spiritual pillar. But Shushi has also produced Azerbaijani composers and artists. And this is all part of Nagorno-Karabakh. It is not possible to overrun the souls of people, to overrun centuries and the people with a plough.

S.A.: There is no need to overrun anyone, Mikhail Sergeyevich. Here's what should be done: having gathered precise information, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet will make a decision; the deputies of the Armenian SSR can then comfortably proceed to convince the people that said decision is the best, feasible decision.

M.G.: Politics is the art of possibilities.

S.A.: Of course.

M.G.: The political process is currently underway here – the process of drafting a resolution.

S.A.: That is why I assert that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict must be resolved by using substantiated political avenues, rather than superficial approaches.

M.G.: You must fulfill the promise that you made here. You must get the people to go back to their normal lives.

S.A.: It's a very difficult thing. It all depends on our decision. A lot depends on...

This was the gist of our conversation – a conversation that, for the most part, outlines the proceedings of the session of the USSR Supreme Soviet's Presidium held on July 18, 1988.

Of course, the conversation sounds a little simple-minded today, when we hear substantiated and unsubstantiated critiques of the authorities and the chairman himself during meetings, assemblies, rallies, and forums. But we must not forget that, at the time, these were unprecedented events in our country. Having understood the political significance of the beginnings of perestroika, we were the first to dissent, by expressing the truth. And we were able to do so in a high-profile meeting, where a false mask of unity had blossomed and prevailed until then.

On that day the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet turned into a "battlefield." All of us fought to the end by every means possible. Even though the ratified resolution did not and could not have satisfied us, we came out of that hall feeling victorious. Pressure from an enormous country, its leader and his supporters could not break the will of a small group of Armenian delegates. Our victory was a moral and political one, and it will be remembered for a long time. After all, it was the first time in the history of the USSR when a small group of representatives of a small republic did not retreat, stepped up to the intrigues created by a strong, multi-ethnic nation and proudly showed off their "ego." That day will perhaps go down in

history as the first day of the victory of a civilized minority over an organized majority, for which the orders of the powers that be were above reason, logic and basic honesty.

We won because we were absolutely certain that our demands were fair. We were confident that, sooner or later, reason would triumph over imperial, totalitarian mentality. We knew that we had the support of our people, who had finally managed to overcome their catastrophic fate – their struggle for human existence. We won because we were defending the rights of an ancient people, the honest, hard-working, freedom-loving, proud, and long-suffering Armenian people.

Don't misunderstand me. I know that, as with any other people, there are dishonest, lazy, hypocritical, and phony Armenians. But they are not representative of the Armenian people as a whole. They are the dregs of society and have no moral right to be called Armenian.

For instance, I know an Armenian scholar who declares that he is Armenian only when it serves his interests, so that he can brag about himself according to the occasion. But his main goal is to discredit Armenian academics living in Armenia and Moscow. He partakes in scheming and treachery; he produces false academic defamations and arranges for the failures of dissertations by Armenian scholars. As a matter of fact, he is considered to be a good scholar about whom his teacher once said: "He is the conscience of scholarship, but he has no conscience and no morals." But everyone knows that you can expect

anything from a remorseless person - from falsehood to betrayal. His physical appearance and image replicate the persona of the traitor of 1937. That is why, in my opinion, he can't be a real scholar, much less an Armenian. I am convinced of that.

After all, he grew up during the disgraceful years of Stalin's era. During the years of stagnation, he crushed people "for the sake of" the homeland and academia. During the years of perestroika, he began to flourish both as a scholar and as a public figure. Well, may God be with him and people like him. As they say, every family has its black sheep. God protects people like him too, but more often He punishes them. We'll wait for the divine punishment so that the Armenian people will cleanse themselves of such human beings. Thank God there aren't too many immoral people like that. There are many rational people as well, and I am convinced that the Armenian people will be able to reach perfection very quickly through mutual comprehension and solidarity. Of course, for that to happen, the "highborn lions" must also unite in the name of a noble goal - the love of the Homeland.

The July 18 session of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR received a great deal of attention. The entire world talked about it for several days. Nearly all of the leading newspapers reported on the session; many television networks aired clips from the sessions in the auditorium; and journalists provided enthusiastic

analysis in their coverage of the events, because they were outside the scope of the rules set by the USSR.

For the first time, the leader of the country received a sharp, logical and substantiated blow from average citizens, who went up against an orchestrated denouncement in which all of the roles had been prescribed. For the first time, the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR silenced the Chairman of the Presidium, took the reins of the meeting, and publicly suffered a moral defeat.

Despite the fact that the Presidium made a decision that was unacceptable for us, Armenia and the Armenian Diaspora were bursting with joy. The Supreme Soviet of Armenia and the delegates to the session received thousands of congratulatory letters and telegrams. In reference to my confrontation with Gorbachev, residents of Leninakan [present-day Gyumri] proudly asked: "Didn't Gorbachev know that Ambartsumian is from Gyumri?"

Russia's conscience, academician Andrei Dimitrievich Sakharov, wrote the following about the session:

The Presidium of the Supreme Soviet held its long-awaited session dedicated to the issues facing the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region in July. The proceedings were aired on television, and this mere fact turned it into an event. The broadcast of the Presidium's session (the entire country watched, as they will watch the Congress next year) left a big impression on us and, I think,

on my people. Gorbachev's position was clearly biased. It was clear that the resolution [his resolution] was pre-approved, and it favored Azerbaijan. He presided over the session like a despot. It was anti-democratic and scornful. He frequently disrespected the delegates to the session, especially the Armenian representatives. He interrupted the speakers and commented on their speeches from time to time. He interrupted the dean of Yerevan State University Sergey A. Ambartsumian (the same last name of the president of the Academy of National Sciences) and asked: "Who gave you the right to speak on behalf of the people?"

Turning pale, Ambartsumian responded, "The voters." And he continued with his speech. We don't know what the reasons for Gorbachev's anti-Armenian and pro-Azerbaijan stance, which was noticeable even after the tragic earthquake. Gorbachev could have formed a primary perestroika regiment comprised of the most loyal and hard-working Armenians in Armenia. The first slogans of the national movement in Armenia clearly testify to this fact. The Armenians could have restored everything that was neglected during the worker strikes. But he chose a different path. Why?

We also ask why, but we can't find a reasonable and logically substantiated answer. What was the problem?

Sakharov was undoubtedly right. Gorbachev didn't have to think twice about relying on the Armenians - the honest and loyal allies of the Russians. We told him this several times. But he didn't understand. Perhaps he still hasn't understood, because the Armenians are not sycophantic - they neither kneel before nor do they flatter the president. He should know the elemental law of nature: you can lean on something that stands up. And Armenians, thank God, stand up; the president could have leaned on them without thinking twice. That's what Sakharov was saying; and his opinion, as was proven, deserves special attention and the highest and most sincere form of respect.

I think that the country's future president made a fatal mistake that day. On that day, he should have addressed and solved the issue of the status of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region. At the same time, he should have instituted presidential governance there. He should have presented a clear political evaluation of the genocide of Armenians in Sumgait. He should have declared the supremacy of the right to self-governance for all republics and autonomous regions. On that day, he should have declared his belief in the humanist concept of individual and national freedom. On that day, he should have condemned the falsifiers who were using mass media outlets to spread lies.

But he did not do any of those things, because he was under the influence of his short-sighted political advisers.

From that day forward, with his silent consent, a period of ethnic conflict developed; it entailed destructive political acts and tragic events that continue to take place to this day.

They later described the events of that day: "That was the first attempt of the great and powerful Central Committee to place bureaucratic pressure on the national liberation movement, which thereafter recurred several times in other republics."

AUGUST- DECEMBER 1988

The short period of tranquility that lasted throughout the summer apparently was "the calm before the storm." The situation became heated again in the NKAR, with the start of hunger strikes, rallies and demonstrations in Stepanakert. Armed assaults in Armenian residential areas resurged and Armenians were massacred again. All roads linking Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia were closed off and hundreds of people were injured and killed.

Labor strikes and rallies were held in Yerevan with renewed fervor. This time, a clearer stratification of the society into factions was observable: the groups included radicals, extreme radicals, and the so-called "conservatives." Conservatives were those who either shared the views of the authorities or continued to live with the hope that all of the problems would be resolved in the end.

The country's authorities made attempts to cooperate with the different groups in the population; they held an "unofficial" meeting with members of society in the theater square.

Azerbaijani mass media outlets continued to further their anti-Armenian campaign. Tensions began to rise in Baku and in other cities throughout Azerbaijan. The rallies and meetings consisted of anti-Armenian, anti-Russian and anti-Soviet speeches. Massacres took place in Baku, Kirovabad and Nakhichevan; Armenians, Russians and soldiers of many other nationalities died. The massacres in Baku and other regions of Azerbaijan surpassed the extent of the tragedy of Sumgait. A state of emergency was declared and a curfew was instated in Kirovabad and Nakhichevan on November 23 and in Baku on November 24.

Surprisingly, on the following day, a state of emergency was declared and a curfew was instated in Yerevan. The decision resulted from a flawed approach to resolving inter-ethnic conflicts. And, to this day, the actual necessity of these measures remains doubtful.

But you can't do anything about it - a government plan is a government plan. This inflexible approach still functions today, and it only causes concern among intellectuals. For example, recently, when President Gorbachev planned his trip to the U.S., a deputy of the Armenian SSR was to be among his advisors. However, this was impossible. For the sake of equality and the "victory" of this infamous plan, a people's deputy of the Azerbaijan

SSR joined the group of advisors. When the president only mentioned the Armenian deputy in his report to the USSR Supreme Soviet, one of the deputies wrote an appeal demanding him mention the Azerbaijani representative as well. This example would have been funny if it were not so sad. Where are we going? What do we have faith in? After all, such maneuvers can neither solve inter-ethnic problems nor eliminate the sources of contention.

The state of emergency and curfew were declared ominously in Yerevan. It all started with the force and strength of military demonstrations conducted by the Soviet army and internal forces. The horrible roars and sounds of numerous helicopters flying low over Yerevan annoyed the citizens and left the impression that the state of emergency and curfew were "necessary." The tanks and bombers were reminiscent of well-known images that displayed seized cities in distant countries – images that people saw frequently on the Central Television Station.

The tension created during the first few days of the state of emergency died down quickly. The ominous helicopters came to be referred to as the "swallows of perestroika." Students sat on the granite stairs of the Opera House. The theater square, which had turned into the symbol of freedom, was recognized as a corner of the militarized city. It was sad to see the interior of the marbled Opera House turned into a military comman-

dant's office. It was once an Opera House with sounds of divine music, and now a barrack.

The people were agitated. Of course, there were some conformists, who discreetly welcomed the suppression of the individual's freedom - something that was completely unusual for Yerevan.

It was yet another political mistake. The infamous plan to implement parallel policies in the Azerbaijan SSR and the Armenian SSR did not justify the declaration of a state of emergency and the implementation of a curfew. Unlike Baku, massacres, violence, bombings, political assassinations, and other acts of violence did not take place in Yerevan.

True, in those days the citizens of Yerevan were politically active: they participated in rallies, demonstrations, and local hunger strikes... In general, the people's emotions were heated, and that probably alarmed the "forces of this world." It's too bad that they didn't realize that one shouldn't be afraid of one's own people.

On December 1, 1988 the members of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR held a meeting with a group of deputies of the Supreme Soviets of the Armenian and Azerbaijan SSRs, the heads of both republics, and the representatives of the NKAR. The meeting was headed by General Secretary of the Central Committee of the

Communist Party, Mikhail Gorbachev. The meeting's agenda was to create a plan for the immediate normalization of the situation in the region. Apparently, this meeting was the continuation of the session of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet that was held on July 18. As I mentioned previously, the resolution adopted by the Presidium proved to be impractical. On that day, when Gromyko announced that the resolution passed unanimously (only members of the Presidium voted), Gorbachev started clapping and then everyone clapped, with the exception of myself and some of my friends.

Gorbachev then turned to me and asked, "Why aren't you clapping?"

"Because I don't like the resolution. It's impractical," I responded.

It seems to me that, even at the time, Gorbachev understood that the resolution was impractical and that it was the start of a major political game that continues to take place to this day. We are fully convinced that, in the past three years, none of the resolutions and decrees intended to solve the conflict and to lessen the tension in the NKAR were implemented. And, consequently, none of them produced any results. On the contrary, the political climate in the NKAR and the surrounding region became exacerbated: it resembled a time bomb that was about to explode. What was the problem? Only one person – the President of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR Mikhail Gorbachev – knows the "correct answer" to this question. But I don't have any hope that we will

ever hear the logical, substantiated answer to the question, "What was the problem?" I'm sure that, in the future, after analyzing and synthesizing the facts, historians will eventually provide an impartial answer to this question.

We anticipated a number of surprises from the meeting. During the session, there were "suspicious" people sitting near the Presidium, in the front rows, particularly Viktor Ambartsumian, Hrant Voskanyan, Martin Harutyunyan and I.

After pausing to think for a moment, the General Secretary said: "Let the representatives of the working class give their speeches today."

That's when the Azerbaijani representative got up to speak. Gorbachev asked him to introduce himself.

We were so surprised when we heard him say, "I am so-and-so, People's Artist of Azerbaijan."

Gorbachev, a little confused, said, "Yes, yes, we know you, of course we know you. Please, speak."

(But we got the impression that Gorbachev did not even know who this man was.) Forgetting his own instructions – "Let representatives of the working class give their speeches today" – Gorbachev gave the floor to an Azerbaijani intellectual instead of the workers. I don't remember the details of the Azerbaijani intellectual's speech; I don't remember the details of the others'

speeches either. But I remember the general mood of the session very distinctly - practical and unpleasant. Below, I cite only the ideas I expressed in my speech, which, unfortunately, was only preserved partially, due to the incomplete nature of my notes:

What are the main reasons for the extremely tense situation in our region? Why didn't the measures taken result in the normalization of the situation in the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region and its neighboring regions? I believe that some fundamental mistakes exacerbated the situation, and, evidently, those mistakes can further exacerbate the situation.

Gorbachev interrupted me and said, "Yes, you are right, we all made mistakes. I recently told Shakhnazarov that his ancestors from Karabakh also made a big mistake at the time."

(During the recess, I found out that, in the 18th century, Georgiy Shakhnazarov's ancestors failed to solve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in a way that was favorable to the Armenians).

I explained that I would not talk about the mistakes made throughout the course of history; I would not discuss the burdensome years, marked by inhumane conditions in the NKAR. Rather, I would concentrate on the current mistakes:

The first mistake is the hasty resolution on "The Events in Nagorno-Karabakh," passed by the Communist Party of the USSR on February 21, 1988. It was ratified literally the day after the Regional Soviet of People's Deputies of the NKAR passed a resolution to secede from the Azerbaijan SSR and reunite with the Armenian SSR. The resolution passed by the Regional Soviet was falsely characterized as the work of a group of nationalists and extremists. We believe that it was wrong and unfair to pass judgment on the resolution in that way. The resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR not only distorted the truth, but it also unleashed anti-Soviet, anti-socialist forces, which led to unprecedented crimes against the Armenians in Sumgait and other residential areas in the Azerbaijan SSR.

I also said that it wasn't too late to review the hasty resolution of February 21, 1988 and to address the fact that it did not reflect the essence of the conflict in the NKAR. The Karabakh movement had to be classified as a movement that embodied the spirit of perestroika and democratization. It represented the people's goal to reinstate the universal principles of national political rights, the cornerstones of which are equality, a people's right to self-determination, and the freedom of individuals.

The second mistake is the incorrect evaluation of the crimes in Sumgait, including the efforts to veil the motives for these events and to underrate the

extent of the violence. The crimes were not adequately linked to relevant political realities, and judicial processes were shamefully postponed. The crimes in Sumgait have to be characterized as the genocide of Armenians.

The third mistake is the deliberate misrepresentation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the events surrounding it, as well as all of the major issues related to inter-ethnic relations – the information presented is often incomplete and sometimes even incorrect. The distortion of the facts by the central news and television media offended various groups and severely damaged inter-ethnic relations and the party's national policy.

That is all I remember. In fact, that wasn't the last time I spoke about these issues and many other mistakes made by the authorities; I also addressed the USSR Supreme Soviet with a special written communication. When dealing with issues related to inter-ethnic relations, one must first and foremost be a true internationalist and someone who is absolutely impartial and speaks the truth about events. All generalizations must be scrutinized thoroughly and formulated precisely; all other possible readings must be considered and disproved. If we don't follow this process, whether we like it or not, we will always encounter disagreements due to unpredictable interpretations and miscomprehension. That, in turn, can lead to the destabilization of the situation in the country or in any other region.

As far as the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is concerned, I announced several times that my opinion corresponds with that of the indigenous people of Nagorno-Karabakh. Guided by the ideas of perestroika, the Armenian people of Nagorno-Karabakh resolutely announced to the entire world that they view the reunification of the NKAR with the Armenian SSR and the reunification of the Armenian people under a single republic in the USSR as the only fair and just resolution to all of the issues. However, considering the political situation created in the region and the fact that, for all practical purposes, the NKAR functions outside the Azerbaijan SSR, the well-known solutions and options for mutual concessions must be discussed and implemented before the conflict is finally resolved.

The concessions had to be strictly balanced and substantiated as reasonable and effective steps toward the resolution of the conflict. However, unfortunately, our opponents took concessions to mean that they would simply agree to fulfill commitments that they had neglected and left unfulfilled for decades. Their attitude naturally caused doubt and feelings of bitterness.

After two days of discussion at the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR, I was convinced that, in dealing with our neighbors, we wouldn't be able to reach an agreement based on mutual concessions regarding the NKAR. I realized that some high-ranking state officials of the Azerbaijan SSR didn't know and

didn't understand what the phrase "mutual concessions" meant. One of the members of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR, Aleksandr Yakovlev, noted this fact by relating a military anecdote that expressed the same idea.

As a result of the talks, a committee of representatives from the Azerbaijan and Armenian Soviet Socialist Republics and some members of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR was formed in order to determine the best and most immediate solution to the conflict of the NKAR. The committee was expected to review the proposals drafted at the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR once again.

It was amazing. Did the authorities really need nearly ten months, rallies, hunger strikes, and numerous victims in Sumgait, Kirovabad and Baku in order to finally agree to create such a committee? We were talking about and demanding the creation of an authorized committee back in February 1988.

Every time one thinks about these realities one wonders - What was the problem? Was all of this done intentionally? Was this the result of a thoroughly planned political policy?

It is hard to understand. Hadn't we firmly rejected the mistaken and sick mentality of the cult of personality and the phony mentality of the years of stagnation? Aren't we currently implementing a policy based on transparency,

democracy, and justice and aimed at restructuring the entire social order and social relations? Perhaps I'm mistaken. Perhaps nothing has changed in essence: we continue to "play" the game of creating the external appearance of social reform for our observers abroad. And if something has changed, it's nothing in connection with issues related to Armenia.

The intensification of the situation in Baku created an influx of refugees from both sides, and soon it all became very dangerous. The situation became increasingly complicated for Armenia in that, as a rule, the residents of cities were being relocated due to employment and housing shortages. The rural population, for the most part, was leaving Armenia; these people had the option of settling in the rural regions of Azerbaijan. However, Azerbaijan wanted to change the demographics of the NKAR as soon as possible and was working to resettle the refugees in the rural parts of that region in particular.

Conditions in Yerevan went back to normal; almost all of the industrial companies and schools resumed their activities. The curfew and other demands were loosened to a certain extent.

DECEMBER 7, 1988

A horrible tragedy struck Armenia at 11:41 and 20 seconds local time. It was as if terrestrial and celestial forces clashed and our land, which had undergone so

much suffering, was shaken by the extraordinary force of the devastating earthquake. At the epicenter the earthquake had a magnitude of ten on the Richter scale (perhaps more). It destroyed the cities of Leninakan, Kirovakan, and Stepanavan and completely razed the city of Spitak, leaving many old, small villages and residences under ruins. Tens of thousands of people died, hundreds of thousands were injured and over half a million people were left homeless. The earthquake also destroyed factories, plants, institutes, schools, kindergartens, hospitals...

On December 8 the rescue teams of Yerevan State University were already in the earthquake zone. The entire nation participated in the relief efforts. The first rescue teams of Georgia were already working side-by-side with our men. New rescue teams, doctors, psychologists, political figures, scientists, seismologists, engineers, experts of various professions, and many others were coming to Armenia.

The Governmental Disaster Relief Committee, headed by the President of the Council of Ministers Nikolai Ryzhkov, also arrived at the earthquake zone.

Armenia, its infinite pain and tragedy were the focus of the international community's attention. The entire world was talking about the tragedy and the news media was busy providing coverage of it.

The civilized world extended a helping hand to the suffering, yet bravely surviving, Armenia.

The entire Soviet nation shared our pain and did everything possible to help, with the exception of some dregs of the Azerbaijan SSR who "congratulated" the Armenians in their moment of catastrophe and even, as central papers wrote, organized a march with torches in Baku.

As a sign of gratitude, we bow our heads to the entire Soviet nation and to all nations worldwide for their deep compassion and enormous amount of assistance.

In those days Leninakan, our ancient Kumayri, was in ruins. Every bit of ground was covered in the rubble of destroyed multi-story buildings, and, above the rubble, swarms of people were searching for their friends and relatives – dead or alive – under the ruins.

The courageous rescuers heroically struggled for all those who showed any sign of life from the depths of the piles of destruction that were full of people's bodies – both dead and alive.

Rescuers... During the first few days, this word was a reference to all of the laymen who often risked their own lives to save the lives of others. It was as though they were "yanking" breathless people of all ages and nationalities from the ruins. Coffins were placed on the streets in front of each destroyed house. A collection of coffins in all colors – black, white, and red... Piles of unpainted boxes and wooden containers that resembled coffins were for the remains of innocent people who had fallen victim to the devastating disaster.

The people, who had gone crazy because of this pan-national sorrow, weren't crying anymore. With a practical approach, they discussed the possible ways to save people who might still be alive and made the arrangements for the funeral procession of the deceased.

Candles and bonfires were lit atop the fresh graves in the cemetery, where priests read their simple prayers.

The General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR Mikhail Gorbachev cut short his visit to the U.S., returned to Moscow, and he was already in Armenia the following day. He visited the earthquake zone and his human compassion touched the nation. Gorbachev's global fame and reputation grew. His visit, during the height of the Armenians' mourning, raised his stature as a political figure.

But another mistake was made with respect to national policy. I have in mind the imbalanced criticism of actions taken by leaders of the Karabakh movement, which eventually led to the arrest of leaders of the Karabakh committee and a number of activists. By criticizing the "bearded men" and pointing a finger at them for thinking and talking about issues concerning the NKAR at "such a time," Gorbachev made two mistakes. First, he didn't understand or, more precisely, didn't want to understand that even the greatest sorrow of the Armenian people could not cause them to forget the pain and insults that they had tolerated for centuries and, that continued to intensify. Second, as a rule, vigilant functionaries tend to misuse criticism offered by the head of state in order to

justify violence, especially in a state of martial law, which was still in place even in a time of pan-national tragedy.

Within a week after the earthquake, the executive members of the Karabakh committee were arrested. This categorical act of violence agitated the people and the democratic forces of the Soviet Union.

The administration of Yerevan State University was the first to express a form of protest against the illegal act. We were particularly invested in the issue, because university staff and students were among the detained individuals.

Our conversations with law-enforcement officials of the republic and the Center were not comforting. Their answers demonstrated neither logic nor clarity of judgment. We finally decided to create a petition. The representative of the Prosecutor's Office asked us to include descriptions of the arrested YSU employees in our petition. The university administration did just that, and the petitions were officially sent to the Prosecutor's Office.

Upon receiving the documents from the university administration, the representative of the USSR Prosecutor's Office was bewildered. After all, the entire university had stood up for rights of the detained.

After a couple of months, nearly all of the People's Deputies of the USSR raised their voices in defense of the Karabakh committee. They met with the USSR Prosecutor General and investigators of the USSR Prosecutor's Office several times. A large group of People's Deputies of the USSR met with the USSR Prosecutor General, and, things reached a point where, the latter finally agreed to release the leaders of the Karabakh committee. Two or three days later, the leaders were in fact released. The Prosecutor General kept his word after he came to an agreement with Mikhail Gorbachev.

But, later, the mass media reported that the leaders of the Karabakh committee were released thanks to the work of one or two devoted people. Through self-flattery, those individuals also contributed to the misrepresentation of the facts. It was also announced that Mikhail Gorbachev was directly responsible for ordering the committee members' release. (I, too, believe that was truly the case.)

It's relevant to note that the fate of the Karabakh committee depended greatly on the general political situation in Armenia. The leaders of the committee were released thanks to the efforts of many Armenian public figures whose names remained unpublicized. Perhaps that was not so bad. The identification of particular individuals would have distorted the truth - that the Karabakh committee was rehabilitated thanks to the fervent efforts of anonymous intellectuals and representatives of the Armenian people.

Many People's Deputies of the USSR, especially our unforgettable Andrei Dmitrievich Sakharov, assisted in our efforts. All of the honest people of the USSR and the entire world supported us.

Incidentally, in my opinion, Sakharov's activities in both the theoretical and practical study of inter-ethnic relations should be the focus of particular research projects. "Sakharov and Inter-Ethnic Relations in the USSR" - this would be a great research topic in the field of political science, worthy of bearing his name. But the politician who can (and has the right) to take the initiative to conduct such research should not be someone who has been tainted by all kinds of "-isms". He must be guided by two concepts: individual freedom and human rights.

International aid continued to flow into Armenia. Enormous, state-of-the-art freight planes from around the world landed at the Yerevan and Leninakan airports. In those days, the emblems of almost all of the world's airlines could be seen at Yerevan's Zvartnots Airport. This enormously generous display of selfless assistance (people, medicine, foodstuff, clothes, equipment, transportation means, construction materials and more) shook the entire world.

What was the source of all this? How can we explain it?

There were many reasons, but I think that the main reason had to do with the fact that the civilized world was

saddened and alarmed at the possibility of the extermination of the Armenian people from their historical lands. After all, times had changed; the world was different and relations between countries and peoples had changed as well. In addition to that, in recent years the international reputation of the Soviet Union had also changed: it was no longer considered the "evil empire."

The fact of the matter is that the civilized world knew that the barbarian acts of genocide, the caravans of refugees, the distortion of history, the destruction of materially and spiritually valuable monuments, the tens of thousands of victims of the devastating earthquake, and, finally, the large frequent political intrigues could lead to the ultimate elimination of the Armenian people and to their deportation from the lands of their ancestors. If active and practical steps weren't taken immediately, it would be too late to put an end to this process.

I would to make special note of the active efforts of the governmental committee headed by Nikolai Ivanovich Ryzhkov. Ryzhkov himself participated in organizing the work of the rescue team and in facilitating the restoration of the cities and villages destroyed by the earthquake. The Armenian people are grateful to and will never forget Ryzhkov for his active and determined efforts to mobilize the country's various resources and to reconstruct the earthquake zone. Even if all of the goals were not met, even if everything did not work out as planned, we must

remember the selfless devotion of Ryzhkov and his colleagues. Things like this are never forgotten.

It may come as a surprise, but the country's "strictly consistent" press used the information about the immense, worldwide flow of humanitarian aid to the republic to further the negative public opinion about Armenia and Armenians. Journalists who stayed true to the ideas of the "establishment," rushed to report on Gorbachev's speech at Zvartnots Airport, which addressed the devastating earthquake and condemned the Karabakh movement and others like it. They viewed the speech as a call for widespread criticism. Consequently, the press, the Central Television Station, and the radio stations spread loathsome information about massive robberies, pillage, and the theft and sale of products that were received as humanitarian aid. However, experts from the International Red Cross said that such cases were less common in the earthquake zone of Spitak than any other place in the world, even in the case of smaller earthquakes.

The flood of defamations ceased, or more precisely diminished, after Ryzhkov resolutely interfered during one of the sessions of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee. Ryzhkov clearly explained that there were hundreds and thousands of cases of heroism and self-sacrifice and that there was a need to talk about them first.

Unfortunately, to this day, newspapers like *Pravda* [*The Truth*], *Krasnaia Zvezda* [*The Red Star*] and *Sovetskaia Rossia* [*Soviet Russia*] the programs broadcast by the Central Television Station continue to disseminate false information. In one episode of "Vremia" ["Time"] it was reported that Armenians received butter and other products from Rostov by selling foreign products that were sent as aid to the earthquake zone.

With that said, let's talk about the amount of the foreign aid. Ninety-five to ninety eight percent of the aid came in the form of cranes, bulldozers, prefabricated homes, soldering irons, medicine and medical equipment. But that aid undoubtedly played a decisive role in saving the lives of hundreds of thousands of injured people.

The rest of the humanitarian aid – nearly 2.5% of the total aid – consisted of rations, including clothes, shoes, blankets and other materials worth 6 million rubles and other items worth nearly 10-12 million rubles. It is difficult to determine a precise value, because over three-fourths of the products were used items. It turned out that, on average, the rations, shoes, clothes and other materials from abroad cost no more than 15 rubles per person. And, as the program "Time" confirmed, Armenians were selling used foreign products in Rostov. I think that this is all self-explanatory.

JANUARY-JUNE 1989

The Communist Party of the Soviet Union held another meeting with a group of delegates from the Supreme

Soviets of the Armenian and Azerbaijan SSRs and the authorities of both republics. General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR Mikhail Gorbachev headed the talks. Members of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR also participated. Apparently, the Central Committee wanted to discuss the same issue – that is, defining new radical ways for normalizing relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan and for governing the NKAR.

As before, the discussion lasted a couple of hours. But this time we knew that a new type of administration would be established in the NKAR, and that's why the discussion went as it did.

Despite that fact, we still considered it our duty to give an impartial evaluation of the situation that had been created in the NKAR and Armenia, particularly with regard to Gorbachev's reproach of the activities surrounding the NKAR after the terrible earthquake. We explained once again that it was natural for people to be concerned about the NKAR, because their historical memory can't be erased: the people will remember everything, and they will fight for a fair and just resolution to the issue. With that said, I told the story of a tailor from Gyumri by the name of Andranik. Tailor Andranik was hospitalized after incurring severe injuries during the earthquake.

The doctors asked him about the first thing he felt during the earthquake, and he responded, "The blow was so

strong that it seemed as though Karabakh had joined Armenia.”

The critically ill Armenian man, who, unfortunately, died at the hospital, linked his perceptions of the earthquake with Karabakh. This story captures the true essence of the pain of the nation, and nothing can eliminate that pain.

The discussion was of a rather heated nature. Our opponents did everything they could to avoid answering our questions. For instance, writer Vardges Petrosyan talked about the improper behavior of a well-known Azerbaijani writer. In an interview with a foreign mass media correspondent, he accused the Armenian people of masochism; he claimed that had it not been for Sumgait, Armenians would have intentionally created a similar situation. The Azerbaijanis, particularly the leader of their delegation Abdul Rahman Vezirov, tried to deny this fact and accused us of falsification. We immediately handed him a copy of the infamous interview published in *Le Monde*, the French newspaper. Then, the Azerbaijani authorities, without any apparent feelings of guilt, declared that the paper had distorted the Azerbaijani author's views. In order to put an end to this “tragicomedy,” I suggested that a refutation be sent to *Pravda* [*The Truth*] and *Le Monde* papers. Clearly no such denial has been published to this day, and, of course, it never will be. That's the approach of our Azerbaijani “friends” – they say whatever they want; lie about whatever they want; trick whomever they please; and write whatever they want to write. After all, they have

always been convinced that they are right in everything that they do; that's why they can “invent” whatever they want, without being subject to punishment. I will provide a few examples in order not to seem subjective.

One of the People's Deputies of the Azerbaijan SSR made an explicit announcement from the podium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR: he claimed that Armenians settled in Nagorno-Karabakh in the 19th century. What a lie! Who was he trying to fool? Who was the People's Deputy trying to deceive? Perhaps they had already planned to eliminate 19th century archives and documents that attest to the presence of Armenians in present-day Nagorno-Karabakh in ancient and medieval times, not to mention the modern and contemporary age. These falsifiers even disregarded relatively recent documents, dating back three hundred years, of significance to Russian history as well. I have in mind letters sent by Karabakh Armenians to Peter I (1716-1725), Catherine I (1725-1726), Catherine II (1781-1783) and others.

Is this really the 19th century? Isn't falsehood aimed at presenting false information to the Soviet parliament and to society as a whole? Is it appropriate for a People's Deputy of the USSR to ascribe words and ideas to the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, when the Chairman never uttered such ideas? In an interview with *Bakinskii Rabochii* [*The Worker of Baku*], one of the People's Deputies of the Azerbaijan SSR claimed that in the 2nd session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, Gorbachev “called on all deputies not to consider Zori

Balayan's openly rude words as a speech." Gorbachev had said no such thing. But the People's Deputy felt no shame in distorting the facts, and he remains unpunished. Unfortunately, he was confident that he could do anything because he was from the Azerbaijan SSR. It's not possible to remain silent about these issues. The act of granting immunity from the law must be punished.

Finally, a third example: officials in the Azerbaijan SSR complained that the influx of refugees into Azerbaijan created a severe housing shortage in the republic, and the situation gave way to unsolvable issues. Evidently, this claim was deceptive, because the facts state otherwise. It is a well-documented fact that nearly 160,000 people emigrated from Armenia to Azerbaijan and twice that number of people emigrated from Azerbaijan; in other words, Armenian families left more homes and apartments in Azerbaijan than the Azerbaijanis did in Armenia.

Demographic data shows that Armenians left nearly 72,000 homes and apartments in Azerbaijan, while the Azerbaijanis left 27,000 in Armenia. Thus, the severe housing difficulties developed not in Azerbaijan, as the partisan and state figures of the Azerbaijan SSR claimed, but in Armenia. When politicians say something that is a half-truth and a half-lie, it's worse than telling a simple lie. And their lies go unpunished. What's going on here? There's only one answer: the pro-Azerbaijan policy of the country's administration, extensively supported by the pro-government mass media, enables the propagation of these lies.

After the meeting held by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, on January 12, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR passed a Decree, according to which a special form of governance would be introduced in the NKAR, though the region would maintain its status within the Azerbaijan SSR. A Special Governance Committee was created and the authority of the People's Deputies of the Regional Soviet of the NKAR was terminated.

The Special Governance Committee, headed by experienced politician Arkadi Volski (he had previously dealt with issues concerning the NKAR), was to be under the direct supervision of the USSR state authorities and the highest ranking bodies of government.

This decision, which was ratified with such great difficulty after nearly a year of discussions, was the most favorable resolution in this period of Karabakh's heroic story. Of course, the decision had its drawbacks, namely the termination of the activities of the People's Deputies of the NKAR and their Executive Committee, because they were deemed unconstitutional. But many people in Armenia and the NKAR did not understand the significance of this decision.

Armenia, as well as the entire nation, was actively engaged in politics as the pre-election campaign for the

People's Deputies of the USSR began. For the first time, the election process of People's Deputies would offer voters real alternatives. Some candidates were nominated for each post, and the pre-election meetings were not compromised: nothing stood in the way of the success or failure any particular candidate.

This was probably how it was supposed to be. After all, the long-established, old standards, concepts and order were being abolished. Nevertheless, it was something positive that looked toward the future. We believed that in the future we would no longer see accidental or extra election procedures, and that instead we would have civilized and democratic elections. The real democratic system of holding elections could only vaguely be observed and only from a distance.

The authorities were not really worried or concerned about any of this. Their electoral system was "organized" in a way to ensure the success of candidates "in demand" through the election of People's Deputies chosen from non-governmental organizations of the Soviet Union. In addition to the People's Deputies, there were submissive deputies elected by the people; they came to be known as the "passive-aggressive majority" that ensured the majority required in congress and the parliament.

In many regions of the country, including Armenia, there were attempts to boycott the elections for People's Deputies of the USSR; non-governmental organizations made similar attempts as well.

In general, the elections were held and deputies were elected from all republics, territories, and regions, as well as all political and non-governmental organizations of the Soviet Union. Alongside the "submissive majority," "dissident" deputies were also elected – during the pre-election campaign they had put forth propositions that diverged from the official state line.

Newspapers and magazines, television and radio stations started to report on the upcoming struggle for parliament, the parliamentary debates, and pluralism. By April, we foresaw the inevitability of heated arguments. Excerpts from my interview, published in *Sovetskaia Kultura* [*Soviet Culture*] in late April, clearly depict the atmosphere at the time:

Telling the truth is considered bravery. I am certain that the words of an honest person are no different from his actions. Thus, it is the duty of all honest people to tell the truth. Of course, throughout our history, there have been times when people had to pay a price for telling the truth. For instance, let's think back to 1937 and the post-war years. How was it back then? On the one side there was His opinion and on the other was the wrong opinion. However, we all know that one person cannot be the only source of truth, no matter what his position or rank. Truth is an international category. [...] Although I have been a Deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR for ten years, to be

honest, I feel like I am going to a new school – that is, the newly established school of democracy. I think that there will be a place here for pluralism, without which there can be no democracy. [...] I'm sure that parliamentary factions will form within the framework of the political platform. Yes, heated debates will be inevitable. But that's a good thing. The truth will be born as the result of differences in opinion, different human experiences, and perhaps even through the expression of honor and self-respect.

I continued:

“Even debates based on principles require civility. Let's call it the civility of exchanging ideas in parliament. I am not naive enough to expect all of the elected deputies to uphold an honest approach to the discussion of issues. Unfortunately, some are unprepared both politically and civilly in terms of holding in-depth and extensive debates. This is not a crime, but a misfortune that stems from the long absence of democratic customs in the country and the supreme governmental body of the state. [...] I hope that the new parliament will not conduct its work superficially, and, in essence, that it will demonstrate that there is no longer a false show of unity. [...] We need to put in a lot of effort in order to undo the firm knot in inter-ethnic relations, which is the most complicated issue in our lives. In this sense, perhaps the deputies will pay special attention to certain republics, including Armenia,

because the situation in our country has worsened as a result of the devastating earthquake and the emergence of thousands of refugees. [...] I hope that the Supreme Soviet of perestroika will go down in our history as the school for the absolute victory of democracy, the expression of free will, and pluralism.

Other people's deputies expressed these and other similar ideas, in addition to more radical opinions.

Despite the general mood of democracy throughout the entire country, the First Congress of the People's Deputies of the USSR had an ultra-conservative bent. Unfortunately, the “best” traditions of old times guided the Congress. It did not meet the expectations of millions of people, who impatiently waited for radical reform in the government, the governmental system, state structures, and more. The people expected to see fresh, new individuals in government. But none of that happened. At the beginning of the Congress, some deputies gave truly enthusiastic and daring speeches, while others gave speeches that were conventional and restrained, with elements of “daring” pluralism. Some of the deputies advocated new ideas: the organization of the Congress's work; the facilitation of truly democratic elections of the highest ranking state leaders; the creation of a real federal union of independent democratic states; the creation of a state based on multi-partisanship; etc. But after a few days, it became clear that the state

leadership, with the help of the "voting machine" - the so-called "passive-aggressive" majority, or better yet, the "silent-aggressive majority" - would bury all of these radical ideas. In this situation, a shadow was cast upon the leaders of the democratic minority. They realized that they were "defeated" in the much-anticipated battle: Gorbachev and his team steered the First Congress of the People's Deputies of the USSR onto a predetermined path.

But we shouldn't forget that, at the same time, the First Congress also gave birth to a new precedent for open debates between the bureaucracy and real life. We started to cultivate the beginnings of this type of honest debate in 1988.

The First Congress partially strengthened the ruined reputation of the Party's bureaucratic apparatus, which had been ruling the country autocratically for the past seventy years. The same people remained the heads of state, and, in the best case scenario, low-ranking party figures were able to take on high leadership positions. And all of this was accomplished democratically: through pluralism and anonymous voting, and, in some cases, by increasing the number of candidates, etc.

The Congress made no effort to solve the issues relating to inter-ethnic conflicts. Small ethnic groups that had struggled for years in the republics of the union were ignored. For the first time, issues regarding the legality of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the possibility excluding the Baltic Republics from the USSR were officially

brought to the table. The deputies of Lithuania were especially participatory.

I would like to say a little about the people's deputies of the Baltic Republics. I highly value my colleagues from the Baltic Republics and I respect their aspiration to freedom and independence. But I am surprised by the conduct of their people's deputies. Throughout all of these years, I can't remember a single time when a people's deputy from the Baltic Republics spoke in defense of our proposals for the freedom of individuals, human rights issues, and the independence and sovereignty of our people. On the contrary, in such cases their speeches and behavior transformed. Suffice it to take the example of Deputy I. Gryazin's openly pro-Azerbaijani speech, which factually defended the idea of blockading Armenia and the NKAR; or, take for instance, Deputy K. Haliki, who, as a member of the Parliamentary Committee on Nagorno-Karabakh, said one thing in Karabakh and something different in Moscow. In the end, Haliki signed a suspicious document on Nagorno-Karabakh in order to fulfill the will of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. And, as a final example, let's take the Armenian delegation's proposals and resolutions on which the delegates of the Baltic Republics unanimously voted "nay" every time.

The delegates of the Baltic Republics only remembered us when they needed advocates for their proposals. And, as a rule, we always gave them our support.

The evidently organized persecution of the academician Andrei Sakharov will remain a humiliating event in the history of the First Congress. From the very first day, Sakharov's speeches were distinct in their criticism, civic involvement, and reasonable proposals that dealt with issues on the Congress's agenda as well as issues related to the country's democratic development. It is likely that this did not please the authorities, who organized a speech against Sakharov, and this created a scandal. An outwardly handsome people's deputy, who had fought in the Afghan war and was disabled, gave a speech; in it, he accused Sakharov of many crimes connected to telling the truth about the humiliating war in Afghanistan. Some phony deputies also defended this speech. In another speech, a people's deputy, who screamed at Sakharov, asked him to take a shovel and dig into the earth. Then, in a malicious tone, he said, "You're extremely clever."

Almost everybody knew Sakharov's stance on the war with Afghanistan. These defamations obviously could not have cast a negative light on the enlightened man who passionately and enthusiastically fought for the freedom of individuals, justice and democracy.

After my conversations with some of Sakharov's "critics" at the Supreme Soviet, I understood that they were to blame for their opinions: they had been the victims of a political deceit.

In my opinion, the First Congress of the People's Deputies of the USSR opened up a new phase of

elaborate political intrigues that continue to this day. During the Party's meeting at the Congress (all of the people's deputies were present), the Chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers Nikolai Ivanovich Ryzhkov first came under attack. If I'm not mistaken, the Siberians, who did not provide an explanation for their proposals, initiated the attack. In those days this particular intrigue was "unsuccessful." As for us, we were on Ryzhkov's side and openly declared that we still remembered his honest mission and active efforts during the days of Armenia's greatest sorrow, that is, the earthquake in Spitak. In that connection, on behalf of our group of delegates, I gave a speech at the Party's meeting of the Congress.

The members of the Congress decided to create a committee of delegates that would investigate the events that took place in Tbilisi on April 9, 1989. The moral and physical wounds of those days had not healed, and the people still asked: "Who ordered the Special Forces into the city in order to calm down the protesters?" The people waited for the straightforward and truthful answer to this question. But there was no clear answer. There was only the subsequent "rescue" committee. It was already clear that in order to postpone the discussion of an issue, or "to put it to rest," a committee would be formed. This committee would either thoroughly clarify the issue (which happened very rarely) or make it more confusing.

To this day, an official answer to the question has not been announced. Everyone who had the authority to give orders is a suspect.

The Supreme Soviet of the Armenian SSR recognized May 28, 1918 as the day Armenian statehood was reestablished. Just before the official recognition of that day, during an academic session held at the University, May 1919 was proclaimed the date of the establishment of Yerevan State University. (The proclamation noted that, due to lack of space in Yerevan at the time, the University held its first classes in Aleksandrapol. Only in early 1920 did it move to Yerevan.) In this way, the historical truth was restored.

The civilized world is based on historical truth. Any distortion of history and historical facts must be exposed. Revisionist authors must be imprisoned, because the falsifiers of history may and, unfortunately, already have caused severe damage to mankind - both at the local and global levels. It's obvious that the development of civilizations will cease when man loses the freedom and ability to think correctly, when he thinks and lives falsely in a society of falsehood.

JUNE-DECEMBER 1989

The first session of the Supreme Soviet came immediately after the First Congress. As one might expect, I will not present the agendas of the assemblies and

sessions in their entirety. Rather, I will describe some moments that are of interest from the perspective of drawing some important conclusions.

After the establishment of the "exemplary" structure of the Supreme Soviet's administrative bodies, the session went on to election the chairmen of the chambers and their deputies, the chairmen of subcommittees and sub-commissions, the deputy chairmen and secretaries. Nearly a hundred people were elected; notably, Armenia was excluded once again. Not a single People's Deputy of the Armenian SSR was elected in the administrative body of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. I was elected to the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, only because the order of presiding the session dictated that this body include one representative from each republic.

The Supreme Soviet took the initiative to structure the bodies of government, the Supreme Court and the Prosecutor's Office. The confirmation of the Military Prosecutor General of the country was also brought to the table. The renowned Aleksandr Katusev was nominated to fill the post. In the beginning, Katusev responded to the deputies' written questions in the order they were received. My question was also included, but he did not answer it. Instead, he shamelessly announced that there were no questions remaining. When I reminded him about my question, he did not get flustered. He simply said, "Yes, there is another question from Sergey

Aleksandrovich Ambartsumian. Should I or should I not answer it?" The Chairman, Anatoliy Ivanovich Lukyanov, insisted that he answer the question.

Katusev had to read the question he tried to avoid in front of everyone:

During the early stages of the events in the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region and especially during the days of the tragic events in Sumgait, you provided falsified information in many televised interviews. That information was later disproved. Do you realize that with your actions, you worsened the situation in Azerbaijan, the NKAR and Armenia? How do you explain your actions? Were they the result of your professional incompetence, or were they predetermined steps intended to exacerbate inter-ethnic conflicts?

The response was insincere and unsubstantial. He specifically said, "I had to tell people the truth. To be honest, I have always told the truth. Perhaps there have been some inconsistencies due to a lack of experience, but I have always told and will always tell the truth."

And these words came from somebody who tried to deceive the Supreme Soviet by announcing that "there were no further questions" just ten minutes before providing this response.

The next speaker, People's Deputy Henrik Poghosyan, referenced Katusev's televised speech in Baku regarding

the events in the region of Askeran: "Comrade Katusev's announcement did its dirty job: it was a powerful catalyst for the events in Sumgait that followed the day after. [...] I believe that Katusev made a very serious political and professional mistake. I think that Comrade Katusev's actions must be evaluated here by the Supreme Soviet."

There were other speeches both in favor of and against Katusev's nomination. Of course, the people's deputies of the Azerbaijan SSR defended Katusev in their speeches. All ended "well" and Katusev was confirmed as the Military Prosecutor General of the USSR by a majority vote.

This example was typical of the confirmation procedure for all of the administrative positions. Deputies voted without getting into details, without making impartial judgments, and without looking at the facts. They were guided by a type of inner logic that dictated the course of their behavior: they followed commands from above, the behind-the-scenes work of active functionaries, or simply gossip.

The Supreme Council of the Armenian SSR recognized the Armenian National Movement, which had become rather active after the release of the leaders of the Karabakh Committee and the termination of the investigation. Those days were full of tension. The Azerbaijan SSR began the "largest" economic blockade against the Armenian SSR. This blockade, in addition to the already existing blockade on the NKAR and the Center-organized "blockade on information" regarding the events in

Armenia and the NKAR, created a volatile situation that was out of control.

Armenia's main roads of transportation were constructed in such a way that 85% of all freight came through Azerbaijan; the blockade of railways and roads cut Armenia off from the entire country. The Transcaucasia Railway, which ran through Georgia, was the only functioning line of transportation. Although the railway did not supply much freight, we are grateful to our friends in Georgia for keeping it open. Eventually, things escalated to the point where the Azerbaijanis demanded that the people of Georgia put an end to the transportation of goods to Armenia.

Armenia was isolated and in need of bread, foodstuffs, medicine, and fuel, which were all brought by air. Extremist Azerbaijanis were pleased to see that the Armenians were left with no plausible means to restore the nation's economy that was destroyed after the earthquake. All of the republic's industries were devastated; there were no raw materials; storage rooms were full of products that could not be exported. The Armenian SSR and the regions linked to the industrial enterprises of Armenia suffered huge losses. After all, at the time, Armenia exported over 84% of its products to markets across the Soviet Union. Local newspaper presses closed down, and a few dailies were flown in from Moscow.

A new type of blockade with a more creative approach began after a short break. Armenia began to receive

wagons with expired food products, fuel mixed with water, pillaged shacks for the earthquake zone, construction materials mixed with trash, and cement filled with water. All of the railway stations were full of wagons loaded with goods, but it was impossible to unload them due to the lack of fuel and the lack of transportation means. The earthquake zone was in the direst condition. All reconstruction work ceased. Foreign and Soviet construction workers, who had come to Armenia to help rebuild the republic, stood idle due to a lack of construction materials and technical equipment. Many highly-qualified professionals who had come from around the world left Armenia.

Considering the circumstances, the people had a certain degree of expectations from the upcoming session of the USSR Supreme Soviet.

In his opening remarks Mikhail Gorbachev said:

I will address an issue of particular concern to us at the moment - the situation in Armenia and Azerbaijan as it relates to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict... In the past couple of days, despite attempts that have been made, we haven't been able to untie the knot (in terms of eliminating the tension). Only today the trains began to operate.... Nevertheless, I think that we must admit that the region can't be left in this condition... If our approach does not have a stable foundation ...

Let's wait one or two days for the government to be ready to report its proposals.

Despite this announcement, I was given the responsibility to express our opinions based on our bitter experiences.

I said:

I speak on behalf of all of the people's deputies of the Armenian SSR and the entire Armenian nation. We feel that our parliament should categorically condemn the leaders and organizers of the blockade against the Armenian SSR. It should also provide a political evaluation of this act, which has severely threatened our Party, the reputation of our state, the idea of unity between the peoples of the USSR, and the existence of the United Federation. We believe that the parliament should provide a system of guarantees in order to ensure that a similar situation will not develop in any part of the Soviet Union. With that said, I propose to introduce a discussion on the Azerbaijan SSR's blockade on the Armenian SSR and the NKAR.

Of course, the proposal was rejected.

That was enough encouragement for the Azerbaijani representative, E. Kafarova, who, after distorting the facts once again, announced:

Comrade Deputies, everyone knows very well that the blockade is in effect on both sides. That is why

both Armenia and Azerbaijan are to blame. Mikhail Sergeyevich proposed to give the deputies of our republics two days to do everything possible to solve the issue in collaboration with the government. This is the most reasonable decision, and I support Mikhail Sergeyevich's proposal to give the deputies the opportunity to meet.

This was another factually distorted announcement. First and foremost, Armenia was not to blame for the blockade of roads. After all, the Armenians understood that the blockade was equivalent to death for Armenia. Second, Gorbachev had not said anything about a meeting between the people's deputies of both sides. He only said, "Our government along with state bodies must develop certain measures..." What do the people's deputies have to do with this? Where is his suggestion to hold meetings?

I'm focusing on these details in order to show, once again, that our opponents, who were backed by the government, solved their issues by distorting the truth and lying. I'm certain that the government was well informed and knew almost all of the facts; however, because of its pro-Azerbaijan leanings, the government did not openly and truthfully condemn the Azerbaijani politicians. This story affirms once again that the Azerbaijani political figures and state administration felt uninhibited, because they were certain of their impunity. As a result, they allowed themselves to do as they pleased.

What next? The answer is simple: nothing new; the blockade continued.

A week later, the vice-chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers announced:

A special state of emergency has developed at the Azerbaijani and Transcaucasus railways, where transportation routes have been completely shut off; railways are being destroyed; bridges are being blown up; and trains are being bombed. As a result, Armenia has no way of receiving food, fuel, and 32,000 wagons containing construction materials. This has made the reconstruction of the earthquake zone very difficult.

The People's Deputies of the Armenian SSR protested against this unprecedented anti-humanistic step, explaining that it made it impossible to maintain Armenia's living standards and completely terminated the reconstruction of the earthquake zone. The protest stated that the blockade was one link in the chain of planned political steps, which included pressure and threats, aimed at hindering the resolution of the conflict in the NKAR. It also stated that the country was not informed about the extent of the blockade and how severely it impacted, not only Armenia that had been devastated by a natural disaster, but the entire economy of the Soviet Union. In order to preserve the country's international reputation, the mass media tried to conceal this humiliating situation

from the Soviet people and the international community. The protest went on to point out the dangers of not providing a political evaluation of the blockade and a counterattack against those who suppressed the Armenian people's economy: keeping quiet on the issue puts us in danger of turning into a country where terrorism, violence, and blockades are commonly used to solve inter-ethnic conflicts. According to international norms, a blockade is considered an offensive attack – an act of war.

Despite the validity of our statement, nothing changed. The country's leadership operated according to other standards. They didn't understand that, for just-minded men, or for men who deserve the honor of being called human beings, not wanting to know the truth or maintaining the right to keep silent about it imposed a high price for Armenia to pay with this blockade.

A week later, the vice-chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR made another announcement: "Despite the assurances of the leaders of the Azerbaijan SSR, the railway is still not functioning properly."

Nevertheless, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR passed an imprecise resolution that did not reflect the situation and did not even condemn the illegal acts of extremist Azerbaijanis.

The People's Deputies of the Armenian SSR disagreed with the direction of the discussion on the issue of blockade. They left the session after making the following statement:

The NKAR has been blockaded for over a year and a half, while Armenia is in its second month of the blockade. All of our efforts to discuss the situation at hand and to find ways to get out of this labyrinth were in vain: they were completely rejected. Today's decision regarding the issue of the blockade didn't produce any practical results. The deputies of Armenia and the NKAR are compelled to leave the session's chambers. This step is not an act of disrespect toward the Supreme Soviet. We express our deep gratitude to the deputies who shared in our pain. We leave the chambers with sense of helplessness, convinced of the impossibility of solving the crisis with the help of the parliament.

After this statement was made, the People's Deputies of the Armenian SSR and the NKAR engaged in many discussions with the administration of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. Only after our conversation with Gorbachev, who made certain promises, the People's Deputies of the Armenian SSR continued to participate in the work of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. "By chance," the meeting with Gorbachev was organized in the lobby of the Supreme Soviet's meeting chamber. For the first time in that entire period, Gorbachev came to the lobby on the second floor, where we were waiting for the

Presidium's response to our statement. Portions of our meeting combined with analytical commentary were televised in the United States. I found out about the television broadcast after the fact, when, one of my American colleagues, in a conversation with me, enthusiastically described the "attack" of the Armenian parliamentarians on Gorbachev.

The Azerbaijan SSR's blockade on the Armenian SSR became a topic of discussion during the Second Congress of the People's Deputies of the USSR. We proposed to include the issue on the agenda, because we wanted it to be discussed thoroughly – with the appropriate explanations and conclusions. We particularly demanded an open and honest discussion of the blockade on Armenia because this phenomenon could spread throughout the entire country.

The anti-Armenian sentiment was discernable in the chamber of the congress. The congress denied our proposal with 578 votes in favor, 1318 opposed, and 96 abstentions.

Apparently, the Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR was ashamed of its refusal to discuss the blockade of one republic against another. That's why it accepted academician Georgiy Arbatov's "opportune" proposal not to televise that part of the Congress (1,427 votes in favor, 443 opposed and 95 abstentions). They decided not to show the people of the Soviet Union their

deputies' attitudes and what they really thought about the blockade.

I can't understand: Where are we going? What was the problem? Why shouldn't the people know the whole truth? Why do we always feed the people false information or half-truths? People are tired of all of this - their daily problems, heated politics, false promises, unnecessary and false slogans. In all fairness, it should be noted that, on the last day of the Congress, Gorbachev proposed to discuss the blockade on Armenia in the upcoming session of the Supreme Council. He made this proposal after our meeting with him. During this meeting, he assured that the Supreme Soviet of the USSR would take the measures necessary to lift the blockade and resolve the conflict in the region.

In those days, the Azerbaijani authorities said that the blockade was bilateral. Or they completely disassociated themselves from the organizers of the blockade, claiming that they were unable to open the roads. The Azerbaijani politicians insisted that only the people of Azerbaijan can make such a decision; they claimed that the people declared the blockade with the demand that Armenia set aside its claims for Nagorno-Karabakh, compensate for the damages incurred by the Azerbaijanis who left Armenia, and, finally, apologize for its "insults" against Azerbaijan with regard to the territorial claims of 1924. But that was only during those days.

Recently, one of the prominent leaders of Azerbaijan, A. Motalibov, made a diplomatic "discovery" and blatantly

announced: "Why is the international community, the progressive community as we call it, opposed to Iraq's attack on Kuwait? Why shouldn't we do the same thing by subjecting Armenia to a blockade as a response?"

In this way, the economic blockade made a smooth transition into the arsenal of the Azerbaijani administration - as a political step toward resolving inter-ethnic conflicts. In some way, this is related to the President's decree on the economic blockade in Lithuania. Let's pray to God that these generalizations are wrong.

It should be noted that we witnessed another mistake made by the country's leadership: they consistently did not want to organize a broad-ranging discussion about the Azerbaijan SSR's blockade on the Armenian SSR and the NKAR. The administration had to understand that this was not a separate phenomenon at the local level. After all, illegal and violent acts had taken place in other regions of the country, and they can recur.

Today, despite the fact that the problem of the blockade has at least partially been resolved, we still have no guarantee that such illegal and inhumane acts will not be repeated.

On November 28, 1989, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR passed a resolution on the "Measures for Normalizing the Situation in the Region of Nagorno-Karabakh." During the discussion of the bill, we said that

the resolution did not reflect the real state of affairs, and obviously the administrative bodies of the Azerbaijan SSR wouldn't be able to implement it. We turned out to be right this time as well. Not only did the resolution fail, but it created a new source of tension for the organizing committee, which was supposed to be created on the basis of equality for the NKAR.

The resolution had the following specific demands:

Reinstate the activities of the Council of People's Deputies of the Twentieth Convention of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region and its Executive Committee; take immediate legislative measures in order to raise the issue of establishing real autonomy; create guarantees for securing the life and security of the Armenians in the NKAR; within two years, develop and pass a new law on the status of the NKAR; the new law should guarantee the full governmental, economic, and cultural development of Nagorno-Karabakh on the basis of the right to self-governance, territorial integrity, economic and cultural relations; take the measures necessary to prevent demographic changes in the region; create All-Union Supervisory Observer Commission that will report to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR; maintain the corresponding personnel of the interior forces of the USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs under the union's supervising-observer committee in order to guarantee the security and protection of the population.

Of these points, only the following have been implemented: a supervisory committee has been created, but it has remained dysfunctional to this day; there are interior forces of the USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs which, contrary to the resolution, are still under the command of Azerbaijani authorities. An announcement made by the commander of those forces demonstrates this fact: "As for the independence of the republic, I don't see a practical method by which to solve this issue. The forces are in the territory of the state; the state maintains and takes responsibility for them."

There is no doubt that the first point of the resolution was unique:

Complete acceptance of the announcement made by the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Azerbaijan SSR, according to which the state authorities and the administrative bodies will take decisive and immediate measures to lift the blockade of railways and roads in the territory of the Azerbaijan SSR and ensure the continual transportation of goods.

This was another lie and a deceitful announcement, especially when juxtaposed to the Chairman's aforementioned "discovery," the ongoing blockades of roads, and the closure of the gas pipeline to Armenia, especially during the winter months.

I am always surprised and disappointed by this situation. The central administration, and the leaders of the country

knew everything, the whole truth, but for some reason, they remained silent and pardoned the lies, deception and hypocrisy. What was the problem? What was the source of this evil?

The Second Congress of the People's Deputies of the USSR was significant in that Gorbachev managed not to include the issue of Article 6 of the Constitution of the USSR in the agenda. This was thanks to immense efforts, long speeches, and the people's deputies' amazing ability to control the masses.

We didn't understand why there was a need to fight for keeping Article 6 of the Constitution. It was clear for everybody that this article, which specified the leadership and administrative role of the Party, would definitely be declared obsolete.

The times when the chairman of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union played the role of a leader had passed, and there was no hope at all for their revival. I was certain that General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Gorbachev himself knew this fact very well, but he was playing some sort of political game. However, this did not last very long. Article 6 of the Constitution of the USSR was declared invalid during the Third Congress of the People's Deputies of the USSR.

During the days of the Second Congress of the People's Deputies of the USSR, in December 1989, one of our contemporaries, the academic genius Andrei Dmitriyevich Sakharov, passed away.

The Armenian people placed the immortal humanitarian among the saints. Sakharov was not with us during the Armenians' most difficult and tragic days. We used to see him on the mountainous roads of Karabakh, the ruins of Spitak, and in the barricades of our struggle for humanity, justice, the equality of peoples, and the freedom of individuals. The Armenian people will always keep the memory of Sakharov alive. That was his mentality in those days, and that's what every Armenian said. Bouquets decorated the empty chair, where Sakharov used to sit in the chamber of congress. Those flowers reproached those who didn't realize that Sakharov's memory burned like a torch that lit the road leading to ideas of the eternity of mankind. His legacy was the plan for the Constitution of Europe, Asia and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The political determination of the man of the future should be taken into account when drafting the constitution of any state, even to the extent of including a unique article that proclaims: "a happy, meaningful life, material and spiritual freedom, the well-being, peace and security of all citizens and people of the world, regardless of tribe, nationality, gender, age and social class."

It would be interesting to find out the thoughts of the academicians who demanded to remove Sakharov from his post. Perhaps many of them truly grieved, while some

chameleons, for whom there was nothing sacred, dedicated songs to Sakharov without noticing that everyone had stopped believing them a long time ago.

It was an extremely active year in terms of politics. In addition to giving many speeches at the sessions of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and the Congresses of the People's Deputies, and participating in television and radio conferences, the People's Deputies of the Armenian SSR also write collective and individual letters and announcements. They handing these letters that remained unread to the Presidium. (In fact, they were of great political interest back then and even now). I hope that scholars will analyze them in the future. Here, I will include some of the deputies' main points, without getting into details. This information is interesting, and it realistically portrays the situation in those days.

- During the First Congress of the People's Deputies of the USSR, a number of orators gave speeches in which they did not properly address inter-ethnic relations. They actually used the faulty principle of "the worship of individuals;" their speeches demonstrated an inconsistency between their words and their actions – one of the legacies of the years of stagnation. They made abstract calls for friendship and internationalism, which had neither substance nor meaning in terms of the values and ideals of humanism.

- The development of democracy and transparency were the key demands of perestroika. They gave the peoples of our multi-ethnic country the opportunity to get out of the labyrinth of fear, silence and social somnolence. They gave meaning to unresolved conflicts by making socio-political activism possible.
- Today, I believe that the Gordian Knot of conflicts connected to the NKAR must be undone, not through provisional measures, but by a final, substantiated decision based on the principle the self-determination of nations. There is no doubt that the issue must be solved through a pan-national referendum. Such a solution to the issue will indicate the real victory of democracy and will be considered one of the victories of perestroika. Opponents of perestroika will resist it and, as before, they will continue the propaganda of "political hostages;" they will preach the unpredictability of the fate of Armenians living in Baku and other regions of the Azerbaijan SSR. Here, we refer to the worsened living conditions of this sector of Armenians and, possibly, physical retribution.
- Recently, heightened tensions in the NKAR and its surrounding regions have brought the people of Azerbaijan and Armenia to the brink of war. The universal values of peace, security, and freedom are under threat, and the people of Karabakh have been deprived of the right to determine their own fate.

- The First Congress of the People's Deputies of the USSR established a committee on the NKAR. This committee was charged with the task of making recommendations for a political solution to the issues concerning the NKAR. Nearly a year has passed and, although this was enough time to examine all angles of the issue and develop practical proposals, the committee's conclusions underwent radical reforms under the force of political pressure.
- The deputies of the Armenian SSR were completely unaware of the "new versions for a solution" to the issue. The discussion of measures for resolving the conflict in the NKAR and normalizing the situation in the region without the representatives of Armenia was nothing but a show of discrimination and something that was totally unacceptable for us.
- We, the People's Deputies of the Armenian SSR and the NKAR, believe that the political solution to the conflict of the NKAR rests in the expression of the will of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh. This idea is based on Lenin's principle - that is, the people's right to self-determination.
- It is an indisputable fact that the measures taken to this day, including the November 28 resolution of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, did not lead to the normalization of the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh and the surrounding region. What's more, relations between the two republics have become sharply polarized, tensions have risen, and the Azerbaijan SSRs blockade on the

Armenian SSR has been manifested in new ways and in new forms.

- I would like, once again, to cite Gorbachev's words during the second session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR:

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict did not just come out of nowhere. It has, first and foremost, existed for a long time and there have been attempts to solve it in the beginning stages and probably not in the best way. This issue has always died out and then sparked up again and only the war "put an end to it" for a certain amount of time. This issue has always been in sight.

This statement is absolutely true. It calls on us to comprehend the essence of the issue thoughtfully and to make fair and substantiated decisions.

- The acts of barbarity and violence that were committed in order to end the Karabakh movement – a movement that was inspired by the revolutionary ideas of democracy and perestroika – led to the genocide of Armenians in Sumgait, the widespread massacres of Armenians in other cities and regions of the Azerbaijan SSR and the long-running blockade of the Armenian SSR and the NKAR. The intellectuals of Azerbaijan cleverly falsified the entire history of Nagorno-Karabakh order to convince the Azerbaijanis that Nagorno-

Karabakh has been a territory of Azerbaijan since ancient times. They forget that Nagorno-Karabakh is the home of many material, and spiritual, and cultural monuments of the Armenian people – Christian monuments that have been documented in native and world historiography and culture for a long time. False scientific concepts can't change their national belonging.

- The people of Azerbaijan are not the only ones confused by the dissemination of false information in Azerbaijan. There is no doubt that it had a negative impact on previous discussions. It is important to take this fact into account now, when we are discussing the resolution of the conflict in the NKAR again.
- The region is currently in a state of crisis and the situation can get out of hand at any moment. There is firing from both sides. The idea of resolving the conflict by forces is wrong, and it can't be implemented. Today we rely on the Center, but the Center must resolve the issue based on the truth, the principles of democracy, and universal national policies, especially the right of peoples and ethnic groups to self-determination.
- The Armenians and Azerbaijanis have lived side-by-side and must continue to coexist. However, time is necessary to resolve the conflict and calm the people down. Time will facilitate the ability to give an impartial evaluation of the situation and find the course for a fair resolution to the issue. But today it is necessary to temporarily separate the conflicting sides from one another. That is, in

my opinion, what the logic of further developing the relations between our peoples requires. I can't believe the assurances of the Azerbaijani side when they guarantee that they will lift the blockades on Armenia and the NKAR, that they are making efforts and will continue to make efforts to reestablish friendly relations between the people of Armenia and Azerbaijan, and that they are taking steps to ensure the security of the Armenian population living in the entire territory of the Azerbaijan SSR. The big and small Sumgait, and the deliberate distortion of the truth, which is aimed at confusing the country's leadership, are so characteristic of the previous months and years that they don't give me the moral right to believe in the promises of the Azerbaijanis. May God and the Supreme Soviet forgive me for not believing most of the words of my Azerbaijani colleagues.

I feel that this selection of statements fully captures the points that were made at the time. The picture is clear. The most important thing is that subsequent events confirmed our doubts, and a legal question arose: "What would happen if the administration...?"

In order to make the picture clearer, I will add that these excerpts were taken from the speeches and letters of the deputies of the Armenian SSR (Viktor Ambartsumian, Zori Balayan, Hrant Voskanyan, Galust Galoyan, Artsvin Grigoryan, Gohar Yenokyan, Henrik Igityan, Samvel Sargsyan, Grigor Khanjyan, and others).

In November the Supreme Soviet of the USSR discussed the issue of citizens of the Soviet Union who were deported from their permanent residences during the years of the Patriotic War. I made a proposal to extend the period of time in question and to change the emphasis in certain places. I specifically said:

Ferocity, massacres, violence, completely illegal actions, and inhumane behavior — we have witnessed all of this during the deportations of people not only during the years of the Patriotic War, but later, even until the 1950s. Nearly 200,000 Armenians were deported starting in 1948. That is why in our proclamation, which must be presented as a resolution of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, the time frame for the deportations must be expanded to include the 1950s. That way, we won't have to address this issue again. We must omit the term "rehabilitation" from the resolution's title, because it has nothing to do with rehabilitation. This is a totally different concept. I propose to call the document "The Resolution of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR in Condemnation of the Forced Deportation of Peoples and the Illegal Conviction of Innocent Victims under the Regime of Stalin's Cult of Personality, and the Full Restoration of Their Rights as Citizens of the USSR." It is necessary for the title to carry the weight of a condemnation. We must not compromise on this point.

Interestingly, after the first session, one of the chairmen of the Supreme Soviet approached me and asked me not to insist on including the words "condemnation" and "Stalin's cult of personality" in the title and the word "genocide" in the text. I obviously disagreed, and, in my absence, a revised version of the resolution was passed. The "voting mechanism" was put to action.

I would like to raise another serious issue, which we discussed with the country's leadership in November 1989. The deadlock created around the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is due to different historical, social and political factors. Many of them have been discussed several times at different levels of Party and state bodies, and they are still being discussed to this day. But for some incomprehensible reason, no attention has been paid to a political concept that obviously cuts off all routes leading to the radical resolution of the conflict in the NKAR: the grand, regressive state plan for a new pan-Turkism, which is unfortunately flourishing even in the Soviet Union, where there are many preachers and anonymous fans.

Several facts confirm this reality. In his assessment of the openly pan-Turkish and reactionary book by the Turkish scholar Ildiz, a well-known Azerbaijani historian announced that the book makes a valuable contribution to our history. Question: What motivated him to introduce such a book in the context of Soviet historiography? The

answer is clear - it was the Azerbaijani historian was in agreement with the ideology of pan-Turkism.

In a statement in the Turkish paper *Hurriyet*, another famous Azerbaijani author expressed his agreement with the policy of Turk ideologues. In discussing territorial issues related to the conflict in the NKAR, he stated that any attempt to change the existing borders would mean a provocation of war. In response to the correspondent's request for him to clarify his thoughts about Armenians' territorial claims against Turkey, he specifically stated that those claims were unjust and that they would inevitably lead to WWII. There were probably certain grounds for this threat.

One of the leaders of Azerbaijan explicitly expressed the new ideology of pan-Turkism in *Al Bahan*, a newspaper printed in Abu-Dhabi.

He said, "We are striving to reestablish our sovereignty and independence and to declare the Turkish Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan... That is the ambition of eight million Azerbaijani Turks."

He then went on to say, "Our objective is to create a "Strong Turkey," to unite all Turks around the world under the auspices of Turkey."

As for Nagorno-Karabakh, he explicitly said, "... If the Center leaves us alone with the Armenians, we will easily be able to solve that issue. After all, Armenia is not only aligned against Azerbaijan, but against Turkey as well."

One of the advocates of this ideology from the popular front of Azerbaijan told the correspondent of the Lithuanian newspaper *Atgiminas*:

The popular front of Azerbaijan views the USSR as a dualistic: it's either a Muslim-Christian or, better yet, a Turkish-Slavonic nation. We don't even consider leaving the USSR, because, for us, that would mean not being part of Turkish unity. The exclusion of the Baltic Republics was unfavorable for Armenia, because it meant that there were three fewer European Christian nations in the USSR. This strengthened the impact of the Muslims in the Soviet Union. Muslims are not in favor of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the destruction of Turkish unity.

Then he said, "In general, the sun is setting in the West, while the East is experiencing a rebirth. If the development of world history continues at this rate, in twenty years the picture will be very different."

And finally: "As far as the divergences in the Muslim world are concerned, they contribute to the unification of the Turkish peoples and the establishment of Islam."

The opinions shared by former heads of the party of that republic and another "leader" gave way to serious discussions after the open and sincere confessions of the leaders of Azerbaijan's popular front. He announced that it was necessary to write Article 70 of the Constitution of the USSR in a new way - that is, the land and territory of

the republic are inseparable; in other words, as it is also stated in Turkey's Constitution.

I can provide many examples of the opinions expressed by politicians of the Azerbaijan SSR. They are not new; they have been revitalized these days with the purpose of carrying out the regressive, nationalist and state policy of pan-Turkism against other peoples of our country.

This concept crept into the pages of *Pravda* with a new type of packaging: "For millennia, the fate of Eurasia has highly depended on the influence of the Turks and the Slavs and their interdependence. In the future these relations will determine the life of societies in over one-sixth of the globe and more." This is a flawed and dangerous announcement of great powers: it factually denies the role of tens of other peoples (living on one-sixth of the globe) in determining the fate of our multi-ethnic country.

Interestingly, the supporters of pan-Turkism tried to create an alliance (obviously a provisional one until the final victory of pan-Turkism) with the Slovenians, meaning the Russians, by stirring up nationalist passions. Nothing stood in their way in this regard. For instance, what is the value of this statement of self-adulation, published in *Sovetskaia Rossiia* [*Soviet Russia*]: "Russians and Azerbaijanis have many things in common in terms of a unique and amazing tolerance, nobleness, discretion, comprehension and willingness to suffer deprivations."

How false is this? I think that the real representatives of the Russian intellectuals must express a clear and specific viewpoint about this issue. As far as the Russian people are concerned, everything is clear. I am certain that the people, as always, clearly understand everything.

The examples that I brought up are rather revealing in terms of their substance. They say it all. It immediately becomes evident that such publications and viewpoints cause substantial damage to inter-ethnic relations and contaminate the national policy of the USSR with the Turkish nationalist spirit. Meanwhile, the interests of our multi-ethnic state require that we respond with a resolute "no" to the authors and preachers of such an ideology.

I am deeply sure that the fate of our society does not depend on the actions of individual "exclusive" nations, but first and foremost, on their true collaboration - so that there will be real internationalism in the country; so that we will be able to establish equality, fraternity, friendship and unity among all nations regardless of their size. The ambition of individual "scientists" and "politicians" to exacerbate the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict by using theoretical conclusions and the arsenal of pan-Turkism is extremely dangerous. It is sufficient to recall Sumgait and Ferganan, the refugees, the blockade of Armenia and the NKAR. Fortunately, it's not every day that we hear these kinds of announcements. However, I am very concerned over the fact that all of these thoughts and ideas reverberated recently, after it became clear that the people of Nagorno-Karabakh are ready to fight until the

end for their right to self-determination and the reunification with the Motherland.

The Supreme Soviet of the USSR must state its final word and condemn all manifestations of nationalism and the obsessive desire for honor. However, unfortunately...

In November, the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations passed a resolution on Nagorno-Karabakh, which was later approved by the U.S. House. The resolution substantiated the reasons for discussing the issue and indirectly described the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh in light of the relations between Armenia, Azerbaijan and the Soviet state. According to it, the Armenians, Jews and other ethnic groups were discriminated against and subject to organized violence. It also noted that Armenia, Georgia and Nagorno-Karabakh were still under a blockade.

The resolution went on to state that the American people have historical and cultural links with the Armenian people and that the U.S. plans to provide assistance to the Armenians for the restoration of the regions struck by the earthquake. It promised that the U.S. would assist the people of Nagorno-Karabakh in exercising their human rights and finding a fair and peaceful resolution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. According to the joint resolution of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, the U.S. would continue to help Armenia in its restoration efforts; it called on President Gorbachev to reinstate the

legal order and to ensure the physical security of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh; the U.S. would contribute to the fair resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict through bilateral talks with the Soviet Union and by revealing and bringing all those responsible for the murders, bombings, and other acts to justice.

Following the age-old, stereotypical methods of Soviet diplomacy and much to the surprise of rational people, the USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs made a threatening statement in response to this resolution:

Apparently, U.S. lawmakers plan to give orders for the governance of the sovereign peoples of another country... The resolution caused anger among Soviet citizens, and we can understand their disappointment... We view these acts of provocation as nothing more than a return to the Cold War, which may harm the efforts of both countries.

This came at a time when not only citizens of the USSR, but even members of the Committee on International Relations of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, were unaware of the content of the resolution of the U.S. Congress. Nevertheless, they were obligated to express their official predetermined viewpoints which had to correspond to the spirit of the statement made by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the USSR.

It's a difficult claim to make, but I think that another explanation for this type of hard-line diplomacy rests in

the topic of discussion: Armenia and the conflict of the NKAR, concepts to which certain politicians reacted like a bull does when it sees the color red.

Of course, some members of the Committee and I protested against this attitude, the roots of which can be easily traced to our old, dusty rules of diplomacy. The conflict eased without any victims. We were graciously handed the text of the resolution of the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, and, without any difficulty, we drafted a statement of confirmation. As a matter of fact, one of the leaders of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR asked me about it. Then, I found out that other members of the Committee had also made the same request. But things did not go the way we had planned. A serious discussion took place with the participation of the People's Deputies of the Armenia and Azerbaijan SSRs. As a result, a different statement was approved. The spirit of our statement was different. The new statement clearly expressed an elevated sense of dignity, which did not violate the standards of diplomatic ties accepted by great powers.

To make the picture clearer so as not to confuse the reader, I must honestly say that there were, and still are, people's deputies who liked the hard-line diplomacy of the Cold War period.

Our efforts were successful. The statement made by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the USSR, which was in favor of an influential politician and unfavorable to Soviet diplomacy, could not have confused us new "diplomat-

parliamentarians." We would have preferred to see things stay the way they were. However, despite the fact that Soviet diplomacy underwent radical reforms in the past few years, it felt as though the old "illnesses" were still around when it came to the standards of foreign diplomacy.

The positive case described here is the only unique one, but I hope that we will achieve the type of diplomacy that corresponds to real foreign diplomacy – there's real potential for that today among the capable and experienced diplomats at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the USSR. In many cases, the republics of the Soviet Union had good standards for foreign policy, but we must not forget that not everything went smoothly. Accordingly, Gorbachev's international reputation declined to a certain extent. In my opinion, this was due to his harsh and inconsistent domestic policy in all realms of life in the USSR. The failures in the policy on inter-ethnic relations were most notable, and they always attracted the attention of the leading powers of the West.

JANUARY-JUNE 1990

In January 1990 Baku became the center of another bloody tragedy and another humiliating chapter began in the history of the USSR. The events in Baku will remain in the memory of future generations as a symbol of ferocity and xenophobia. Only barbarians, ideologues, and those who concealed the organizers and perpetrators of the crimes in Baku from the international

community will either forget or remember these events with admiration.

For nearly a week from January 12-19, the Azerbaijani assassins robbed, attacked, burned and killed completely innocent Armenian residents whose families and ancestors had built, beautified and enriched Baku. The massacres had been planned in advance under the leadership of partisan and state leaders of Azerbaijan (Abdul Rahman Vezirov, Ayaz Mutalibov, and Viktor Polyanichko), as well as representatives of the Center (Yevgeny Primakov, Dmitry Yazov, and others), and by the silent complicity of others. During those horrible days of the massacres, they tenaciously waited for something and did not declare a state of emergency until January 19. The Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan and the government were waiting, although they knew that the number of victims grew every minute. The call of the National Defense Committee of Azerbaijan allowed for the resumption of the slaughter of Armenians in the NKAR and other regions of Azerbaijan along with the "revelry" in Baku. The bandits, dressed in militia uniforms, the assassins, the armed hooligans were waging a real war not only against the Armenians, who were protecting their lives and residences, but against the military subdivisions that had assisted them. It was during those days when one of the officials of the forces made an obscene claim in an interview with *Moskovskie Novosti* [The Moscow News]: "The Armenians finally got what they wanted. We are forced to help them because they are protecting themselves."

It is impossible not to be horrified when one remembers how twelve elderly Armenians, brought out of their convalescent home in the city of Gyanja, were tortured and killed. How could there be people capable of such inhumane and barbarian acts? Where did they come from? The comprehensive plan of actions also included the unprecedented act of eliminating the state border of the USSR, the border between Iran and the Azerbaijan SSR: the check points on both sides of the border allowed for the transfer of arms, artillery and other military equipment from Iran to the Nakhichevan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic.

Interestingly, the authorities were in silent agreement with this violation against the state; in other words, the border forces of the KGB of the USSR facilitated this process. What was the reason? There's no convincing answer to this day. The unheard of explanation that the border guards took a humanitarian step by giving Azerbaijani friends on both sides the opportunity to visit each other or to visit the graves of relatives was completely disproved. After all, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the USSR made a statement in which he explained that individuals had been submitting appeals with such requests for the past ten years.

The Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR and the USSR government received substantial and comprehensive information about the tragedy. The appeal of the refugees of Baku at the Second Congress of the People's Deputies of the USSR was sufficient: "... Immediately reinstate the

legal order in the Azerbaijan SSR and ensure the security of Armenians and other ethnic groups living in the republic..." But as always, Moscow was in no hurry.

As mentioned previously, a state of emergency was declared and state forces entered Baku on January 19, when the killings, deportations, and massacres of Armenians had already come to an end. Baku no longer had an Armenian population and, apparently, there was no need to defend anyone. The forces did not enter when the killings, robberies, bombings, and massacres were taking place. As the media announced, "... suffering psychologically, the soldiers turned their faces when they saw the violence and robbery." They said that there was no command to defend the innocent victims of the crimes. Several questions arise: Where was the command for remorse? And the command of human souls? Where was the command of reason if, of course, we are dealing with rational human beings?

However, soon a command was given to shoot - not to save the people, but to maintain power. People died, including Azerbaijanis who were defending their honor and freedom at the time. Of course, the command must have come from the politicians and not the military.

Here's an example of what the media used to say in those days:

The series of bloody, tragic events starting with Sumgait and continuing with Baku and Gyanja reaffirmed that the situation in Azerbaijan was one

in which each nation or ethnic group fighting for its rights can be subjected to physical elimination - the sliest methods of medieval barbarism will be used against them. The interference of forces put an end to the "revelry" in Baku right after the barbaric acts committed against the Armenian population had died down. Surprisingly, it was already the standard for forces to arrive late on the scene in Baku. A state of emergency was declared in Baku only after the seventh day of the massacres.

Unfortunately, there's no basis for believing that perhaps all of this was unintentional. The tragic events in Sumgait and many other cities and regions of Azerbaijan took place according to predetermined plans. Forces arrived late - after the massacres of Armenians - every time. That is why the civilized world asked some completely justified questions - Why didn't the forces come in and take action when the Armenians were being killed? Why did the team of nearly 12,000 soldiers of the internal forces of the USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs take no action? Why did the Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan decide not to declare a state of emergency in Baku on January 14, when the massacres of Armenians had reached their climax? Why did Moscow and the representatives in Moscow stay silent in Baku?

To this day, there are no satisfying answers to these and many other questions. That is why the Armenian people, as well as many representatives of the civilized world, think (and perhaps they are justified in their opinion) that

the central authorities were not really interested in the fate of the Armenians living in Azerbaijan. More opinions like this are expressed when people try to compare the events and actions taking place in Armenia and Azerbaijan, or in comparisons of the assassins or criminals and the victims.

I would not like others to get the wrong idea. We are far from blaming the people of Azerbaijan for these crimes. Many Azerbaijanis risked their lives in order to help Armenians hide or escape: they preserved the honor and dignity of their people. We condemn all the executioners who massacred, killed, robbed and raped innocent Armenian women, children and the elderly. We condemn all the leaders and proponents of the physical and spiritual genocide of Armenians. We condemn all those who silently gave their consent to the bloody tragedies that took place over the course of the last few years. We resolutely condemn all those whose ill-will stood in the way of bringing the enthusiasts, organizers, and participants of the genocide of Armenians to justice.

Azerbaijan continued its blockade on Armenia and the NKAR. In this way, it controlled all of the economically vital industries of the republic. Construction came to a halt; automobile production companies terminated their work; many industrial and local, domestic businesses stopped functioning; and contractual supplies ran out. The country felt a severe reduction in the supply of energy – all television programs were broadcast only

during certain hours. The different regions of Yerevan and the republic received a rationed supply of electricity. To make the blockade complete, the Azerbaijani aggressors bombed the Georgian section of the railway, which was the only remaining "lifeline."

Unfortunately, alongside the numerous state, public and political figures who condemned the blockade, there were many so-called people who welcomed the ridiculous idea of a complete economic blockade on Armenia. There were also certain political states that directly or indirectly supported Azerbaijan's xenophobic policy against Armenia.

Despite that, I proudly say over and over again that the Armenian people have not lost hope and will never give up in their Homeland - the land of their ancestors.

During these volatile times, Armenians began to form the opinion that the Soviet government and its corresponding law-enforcement bodies, including the internal forces of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the USSR and the subdivisions of the army, would not defend the Armenian people; as a result, they believed that the Armenian people should form their own armed regiments in order to prevent an attack from Azerbaijan. Citizens of the republic, especially those living in the regions bordering Azerbaijan, actively began to create self-defense regiments. Some armed groups joined political parties, as well as political and non-governmental organizations, which led the struggle on the ground.

The interregional committee of People's Deputies of the USSR organized a conference on the issues facing the Transcaucasus. The conference was held in Moscow and both Soviet and foreign journalists were invited to attend. In actuality, the conference merely justified the committee's general resistance to the party apparatus. It did not provide the global community with an explanation of the situation facing the region; it presented a completely distorted image of and commentary on the events in Baku. Disappointed by the conference, a group of People's Deputies of the Armenian SSR made an open statement to the interregional group of People's Deputies of the USSR. I cite excerpts from that statement:

Your interpretation of the so-called "issues of the Transcaucasus" represents the ill-famed "logic" of comparing the bloody crimes and acts of genocide committed in Azerbaijan with the peaceful, democratic political struggle in Armenia and the NKAR.

Of course, this logic is not new. It was introduced for the first time two years ago when the Azerbaijani's responded to the resolution of the regional council of the NKAR "On Nagorno-Karabakh" with the most xenophobic political violence expressed in the most xenophobic political violence, that is, the genocide that took place in Sumgait. It seemed that the interregional

group of deputies, who had vowed to stay true to the ideas of Andrei Sakharov, the ideas of European democratic culture, would dedicate the conference to stripping away the distortions, condemning the political violence and genocide, and raising their voices in defense of the refugees—those great Christian martyrs who suffered the terrible blows at the hands of barbarians. It seemed that the deputies of the interregional group, who declared themselves to be democratic, would demand that the government put an end to the blockade on Armenia, which was enabled a type of genocide during the freezing months of winter - the half million people injured during the earthquake and close to 300,000 refugees (only 800,000 people) underwent tremendous suffering.

But these expectations were not met. Instead of categorically condemning the perpetrators of the genocide of the Armenian population in Baku, instead of condemning the murder of the families of Soviet soldiers, who carried out the duty of protecting the peaceful population, you express doubts about whether it's appropriate to declare a state of emergency in the capital of Azerbaijan... For seven consecutive days, people were continually being killed and massacred, just for being Armenian. And only on the seventh day did the armed forces enter the city... What prevented you, our dear colleagues, from demanding that the government take decisive measures to stop the violence? Were you waiting to see when they

would kill the last Armenian so that you could regretfully declare that there was no need to bring the forces into the city (because it was too late)?... But while you kept silent then, now you reserve the moral right to reprimand the government for declaring a state of emergency in Baku. You are trying to take political advantage of the bloody violence of Azerbaijani fanatics and using them to justify your plan to resist the party apparatus. In the meantime, you gave a distorted interpretation of the events that took place in Baku... Does it suit those who consider themselves democratic to collaborate with any given force, regardless of its political goals? Perhaps only those who are prepared to label dictators and assassins democratic, to justify genocide and the blockade of a people struck by an earthquake, and to deprive those people of the right to self-determination for the purposes of political gain and based on a consideration of the situation...

The speeches made by the USSR Minister of Defense, the Chairman of the KGB of the USSR, and the USSR Minister of Internal Affairs during a closed-door session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR depicted a reliable picture of the events that took place in Baku in January 1990. After hearing the speeches, we held the firm belief that the crimes committed against the Armenians in Sumgait, Kirovabad, Nakhichevan and Baku (mass killings, massacres, robbery, setting people on fire,

throwing people out of windows, rape, cannibalism, and the deportation of Armenians, Russians, Jews, and other ethnic groups, including Azerbaijanis) were linked to a doctrine of ultra-nationalism. They were the result of Azerbaijan's state policy. I hope that one day the speeches made during the behind-the-scenes session of the Supreme Soviet will become public knowledge, so that the people will finally learn the naked truth. After those speeches, not one of the members of the Supreme Soviet of the Azerbaijan SSR insisted on discussing the January events. That's why I was a little surprised, when recently in March 1991, the Chairman of the Council of Ethnic Groups of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR Boris Oleynik gave an emotional speech on the issue - a topic he was asked to address a year ago. What was the matter? Perhaps new facts had shed light on the past details or perhaps the facts had been forgotten. Whatever the case, after his trip to Baku, on the occasion of the referendum, our dear people's deputy cordially praised the Azerbaijani government and referred to the events of 1990. However, in his speech, he only mentioned the 130 dead citizens of Azerbaijan; he forgot about the 56 Armenians who were sadistically killed by the Azerbaijani executioners and the 21 soldiers who were killed "while putting an end to the blockade and maintaining order in the streets at night."

Like my colleagues, I, too, am in favor of honestly investigating all of the tragic events in Osh, Fergana, Sumgait and Moldova... And I am in favor of investigating the tragedy in Baku to the end, without missing or forgetting anything. At the time, in Boris Oleynik's opinion

(I have paraphrased his words), the global community, which was generously responding to any injustice in any corner of the globe, would also respond to the deaths of over 207 citizens, a couple of hundred injured people, and the sufferings of many others, including defenseless women, children, and the elderly – all of various backgrounds, Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Russians, Jews...

I don't know why, but I'm certain that nobody will seriously discuss the events in Baku until changes have been implemented in the country and in the Azerbaijani government. I know that many of the "world's great powers" don't want our people and the global community to know the whole truth about that tragedy, because their hands are also dirty. But the statement made by our colleague (a rather decent person) can be considered another outcry of the lyrical soul.

Tensions were still high in our republic. Problems in inter-ethnic relations had become rather complicated and had reached a climax. The armed conflicts in the regions bordering Armenia and Azerbaijan became more and more dangerous. Many people died, and the number of refugees exceeded 100,000 people. The central and state bodies' efforts to normalize the situation in the region didn't change a thing.

In March, upon our insistence, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR discussed the situation created in the region once again. The Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR proposed another draft resolution on the conflict in the NKAR. It was clear, for any rational person, that the unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was the core of all inter-ethnic conflicts in the region.

The discussion was rather heated and my speech read as follows:

I firmly believe that the issue concerning inter-ethnic relations is of utmost significance, not only for both republics, but in terms of finding the right solution to the national problem in the country in general. If we don't find a radical solution to this issue, this local unresolved conflict will go on to become the catalyst for the emergence and development of other similar phenomena in different regions of our country.

As we all know, the resolutions, decrees, and assignments aimed at solving the problem of inter-ethnic relations, particularly the conflict in the NKAR, were passed as the result of conversations between the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. However, all of these resolutions were passed in vain: none of them bore any positive results. What was the problem? Why didn't we achieve positive results after addressing this issue

so many times? There is only one answer. All of these measures were unsubstantiated, because they were ratified hastily, without a justified political framework, without analysis of their potential consequences, without taking into account the interests of the given nation, particularly the people of the NKAR. The political basis for all of these resolutions was probably faulty; that's why none of them produced any positive results. We must admit this fact. The problem is that when we passed these resolutions, as a rule, we forgot the guarantees of the country's constitution and the principles of international law – the people's right to self-determination and the freedom of individuals. It is our duty to pass thoughtful resolutions only by taking into account the radical interests of the nation and the public opinion into consideration. Any resolution that contradicts the will of the people is destined to fail in a democratic society. That's why any resolution on the NKAR must reflect the opinion of the entire population of the NKAR, regardless of nationality. The people who, at the moment, live in the NKAR must agree with the resolution. This principle is one of the fundamental criteria of a democratically legitimate state. That is why the parliament of a democratic country would be unable to pass such an imprecise resolution, such as the one we are forced to discuss today. Instead of providing a political assessment of the shameless acts taking place in Azerbaijan, we occupy ourselves with general conversations, judgments, and vague

words... Nothing is said about the unprecedented destruction of the USSR border in the territory of the Azerbaijan SSR, the genocide of Armenians in Azerbaijan, the murders of residents at the convalescent home in Kirovabad, the illegal blockade on Armenia following the earthquake, the purges of Armenians, Russians and Kurds from Azerbaijan, the removal of ethnic minorities living in Azerbaijan (Talysh, Yezidis, Avars, and Lezgins) from the census lists of the USSR population, and, finally, the bloody revelry in Sumgait and Baku. We must pass a specific resolution that describes the uniqueness of each case, identifies those who are responsible, and sets the right course for normalizing the situation. The resolution proposed here cannot achieve this goal, when any criminal may do whatever he wants, having realized the "logic" of impunity. No matter how strange it sounds, the draft resolution apparently says: "People, you can demolish state borders, kill people and commit violent crimes, and nobody will punish you."

We were certain that the parliament would not ratify this resolution. But unfortunately, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR passed the resolution. Later, people with impartial judgment were convinced that we were right. Our suspicions were justified because they were accurate: they were based on an analysis of the facts, which the political authorities of the country often ignored.

The root of all the trouble was that the country's administration, especially the parliament, was not listening to us. We knew this very well and we completely understood the situation. The state continued its anti-Armenian policies as a "matter of honor." These policies, in turn, led to new complications, the intensification of the conflict, and new tragedies for the nations living in our region.

I find that a single drop of blood of an individual from any nation is more precious than the honor of all state figures combined.

There was no doubt that our speeches, which criticized the state policy on inter-ethnic relations, displeased the administration and the parliament. After a short interval, they coordinated the speeches of functionaries, who sacrificed themselves and tried everything to neutralize the criticism aimed at the administration. In such cases, these figures would either try to cast a shadow on the ideas put forth or to vilify the author of the speech. In this case, it was impossible to challenge anything. The concepts were true and the facts were undeniable. That's why they were forced to use the more shameful version of "criticism," – that is, they branded us with derogatory political labels.

To prove my point, I will cite portions of the speeches made by People's Deputy of the USSR Aleksandr Orlov. He had a good reputation, and he held a post in the Supreme Soviet for his "services."

He said:

I get the impression that the people's deputies of both republics (and a number of others) are first and foremost expressing their nationalist viewpoints. You say it is not so. Take our dear academician Ambartsumian, who says that if we don't solve the issue, it will become a catalyst for intense ethnic conflicts in other regions... Everyone sees and evaluates the events from a nationalistic perspective. We must overcome nationalist approaches and adopt worldly positions that serve the state's interests... It is time to assess the activities of a number of people's deputies of the USSR.

Here Orlov sees "nationalist viewpoints," "a nationalistic approach," and that "it is time to assess the activities." I don't know what confused my colleague. But it should be clear for any reader that there isn't a single hint of "nationalism" and that my suspicions were right - the imbalanced decision did become a catalyst for the intensification of ethnic conflicts in the country and in other regions, at least to a certain extent.

Another example of trickery. When the Supreme Soviet discussed the legal order of a state of emergency, our people's deputies (Henrik Igityan and Lyudmila Harutyunyan) specifically said:

What is the current regime in Nagorno-Karabakh? Is it a state of emergency or a military state? It is a

state of emergency aimed at releasing eruptive passions? If we have a republic, where there is a state of emergency, do the people of an autonomous region need to be protected from violence? Does the draft law reflect this?

And then:

Democracy begins with the protection of the weak, and that's the core of democracy. For us, it turns out that the majority pressures the minority. How can we imagine declaring a state of emergency in such a situation, when we have so many refugees? Half a million people living in the country are refugees. So, what should we do? Should we deport them from the disorderly regions and let it go at that? Those people are wandering from one country to the next as beggars. Are there any laws that address this matter? It can't be said that it is tied to the state of emergency... What standards determine the fairness of declaring a state of emergency? There have already been cases when we weren't able to determine why we were voting and whether we were honest or not, mainly being the honest people that we are. Very often, it turns out that if the majority decides to declare...Take, for example, the NKAR. What is the situation like there? It is humiliating. If we predict that China will become part of the Soviet Union, and we know that there are over a billion Chinese citizens, should they be able to place pressure on the other republics? In other words,

with this bill on the state of emergency, which we surely need in order to protect law and order in the country, we are doing something that is confusing and unclear...

But one of the people's deputies of the USSR who was a prominent figure in the Azerbaijan SSR considered these questions irrelevant and qualified them as "based on self-interest and issues that riled up people's passions." To our surprise, he even objected to the reference to Nagorno-Karabakh in the aforementioned speech. We probably shouldn't have been surprised by his attitude, because it was in perfect accord with the actions of our opponents. They had to oppose everything that was related to Armenia and the NKAR.

Of course, all of these lies did not go unaddressed. During the session of the Supreme Soviet, I announced that the Armenian delegation's impression of the speeches was that they resulted from a "bad imagination." I hit the bull's eye. After making some reproachful remarks, the people's deputies of the Azerbaijan SSR left the session's chamber. They had planned this step in advance and were looking for an appropriate occasion.

We saw similar strange occurrences almost every day. For example, the same "hero" angrily declared the following on the occasion of the confirmation of the Supreme Council group on relations with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe: "It's disappointing. Armenia is not part of Europe. The republic doesn't want to be part of the Union and we are heading off the

list of names in the group with Ambartsumian. How can I not be disappointed?"

This person probably couldn't understand that, in this case, as a people's deputy of the USSR, I was representing the entire country and not only Armenia; I was the first one on the list, because it was alphabetized in Russian by last name.

I sent another personal letter to Gorbachev. I include an abridged version of it here:

Today many of my fellow deputy-academics and I are deeply disappointed. A new resolution on the normalization of the situation in the region was approved by the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, but unfortunately, it will not solve the key issues. We did not succeed in our struggle for justice again. We get the impression that to please Azerbaijan's ambitions for attack, the mighty Russia is shutting an eye on Azerbaijan's ambitions to eliminate the Armenian people and their civilization. It turns out that in our days, it is possible to sacrifice a small nation for the sake of foreign policy, even if that nation is one of the "last Mohicans" of the ancient civilized world. This is not a new policy. Back in the 1930s and 1940s, Stalin and his supporters eliminated the core of the Armenian intelligentsia, and they planned to resettle all remaining Armenians in the Alta territory with the intention of

possibly broadening the territories of Georgia and Azerbaijan – and all of this at the expense of Armenian indigenous lands. You were easily convinced when you were introduced to the transcription of Stalin's conversation with the Catholicos of All Armenians Gevorg Chorenkian and the articles by Georgian and Azerbaijani scholars published in the central and state books, papers and magazines during those years.

After the establishment of a presidential system in the country and your election, it is necessary to set up temporary presidential governance in the NKAR in order to put an end to the mass riots. I truly believe that taking this step will demonstrate the power of presidential governance in our country.

The People's Deputies of the USSR held their Third Special Congress, during which Gorbachev was elected president, according to a "democratic" system of voting, but one that did not offer any real alternatives.

There were many talks about the need for pan-national presidential elections, but those rumors didn't really mean anything because the majority of the people's deputies of the USSR - the "submissive majority" - voted to elect the president during the Congress of the People's Deputies of the USSR. Many democrats supported – Gorbachev's nomination were many democrats. As the

advocate of perestroika Anatoly Sobchak explained, "The majority of democrats were not supporting Gorbachev as much as they were supporting the ideas that were inseparably linked to his name."

After Gorbachev was "enthroned," an article published in *Uchitel'skaia Gazeta* specifically read: "It was not the first time that my fellow journalists and I were in doubt when the resolutions, which seemed to be unusual, were put up for a vote and for some reason, tens of deputies abstained from voting." I won't state the last name of the scholar who explained his decision to stay abstain while the record of the balloting committee for the presidential election was being confirmed. "Yes, I voted for Gorbachev, but I abstained from voting during the confirmation of the record." In response to my question as to why, he said: "I wanted the chairman of the balloting committee to be Russian." (The chairman of the balloting committee was the Armenian academician Yuri Osipyan.)

I don't want to jump to conclusions, but in light of this fact, I would like to respond to the publication of this article. If this is what the scholar thinks and if *Uchitel'skaia Gazeta* considered it possible to publish such a declaration without expressing any critical commentary or disappointment, then some questions arise - Where are we going? What awaits us in the realm of inter-ethnic relations?

After Gorbachev was elected president, we were sure that he would take certain measures to normalize the situation in the NKAR. But the president did not take any radical steps and the situation in the NKAR worsened and the conflict intensified.

The Supreme Soviet of the Armenian SSR passed a resolution on the "Situation Created in the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region and the Issue of Normalization." The resolutions specifically stated: "The inter-ethnic tension in the NKAR and the surrounding regions is on the rise and the conflict has escalated to an unprecedented degree."

Tensions heightened again after the Azerbaijani administration received the silent consent and support of the central authorities of the USSR to resort to violence in order to reaffirm its domination over Artsakh, where the Armenian population has been resisting oppression for two years.

Actually, by establishing military occupation in the region, the forces of the internal service fulfilled the wishes of the Azerbaijani authorities - they took on the role of the castigators against the Armenians of Artsakh. The Soviet and partisan authorities were eliminated: the local mass media outlets, including radio and television stations, were taken over by force in the NKAR.

The peaceful population has been subjected to assaults and terror; innocent people are being killed; the defenders of the people's fair demands have been detained, kidnapped, and removed from the region in violation of all standards of legality. The military units have helped open up roads leading to Azerbaijani residential areas in Artsakh, while the connection with Armenia has been completely severed. Considering the fact that the proclamation of the Second Congress of the People's Deputies of the USSR is not in effect, the Armenian people are fully aware that the central authorities have consented to Azerbaijan's blockade on Armenia and the NKAR and the suppression of the democratic movement of the Armenian people. This situation gave the Azerbaijani authorities the opportunity to circumvent the constitutional status of the NKAR and to pass a resolution to change its administrative-territorial separation. The Azerbaijani authorities have currently taken immediate measures to change the demographic balance of the region in favor of the Azerbaijani side.

Baku has counterattacked the democratic national liberation struggle of the Armenian people with massacres, bloody killings, and the economic blockade. The law enforcement authorities' efforts to conceal and deny the new massacres of Armenians in Azerbaijan and the central authorities' attempts to avoid assessing these events were aimed at showing the Soviet and global communities that the Armenians' fair, democratic movement was a struggle against the policies of perestroika. The authorities believed that Soviet Armenia's geopolitical situation forced the Armenian people to bow

to violence, give way to military pressure, tolerate all violence, and come to terms with the violation of their dignity. We must remember that the current situation created in the region is a result of the predatory Russo-Turkish treaty signed behind the Armenians' backs in 1921 and the illegitimate resolution passed by the Caucasian Bureau of the Caucasian (Bolshevik) Party of Russia. According to this resolution, the Republic of Armenia was split and the people of Armenia lost over 80% of their historical territory. The hopes for breaking the will of the Armenian people were in vain. The people will never accept the merciless situation in which they have found themselves; they will never succumb to the pressure and the oppression.

Expressing the unanimous will of the people of Soviet Armenia and Artsakh, the Supreme Soviet of the Armenian SSR addressed the President of the USSR with the following demands:

1. Terminate the state of emergency in Nagorno-Karabakh; remove the subdivisions of the internal forces of the Ministry of Internal Affairs from the territory of the NKAR and distribute them in the demarcation zones near the region and the Azerbaijan SSR.
2. Implement the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh regional council on reinstating the powers of the Soviet bodies of the region.

3. Declare invalid the unconstitutional and provocative decree issued on April 21, 1990, because it was aimed at changing the demography in Nagorno-Karabakh and prohibiting the Armenian people's right to self-determination; solve the consequences of the illegal actions taken by the Azerbaijani side thus far.

4. Implement a number of resolutions, passed during the Second Congress of the People's Deputies of the USSR and by the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, that call for an end to the blockade on Nagorno-Karabakh; ensure the free communication between the region and the Armenian SSR through the Goris-Lachin-Stepanakert road in order to prevent the possibly undesirable acts against the opening of the road.

5. The Supreme Soviet of the Armenian SSR resolutely emphasizes once again that the solution to the issue concerning the Shahumyan region and the sub-region of Getashen in the NKAR rests in the implementation of the people's right to self-determination in compliance with the constitution and the norms of international law.

6. The Supreme Soviet of the Armenian SSR expresses its protest against the Supreme Soviet of the USSR for continuing to ignore the resolution passed on November 22, 1988 by the Supreme Council of the USSR in condemnation of the Armenian Genocide – something that led to illegal

actions committed in Stepanakert on April 24 of that year, that is, the day of commemoration of the victims of the Genocide of 1915. Participants of the march were subjected to violence in a new attempt at infringing upon the national dignity of Armenians on this day of great sorrow.

The Supreme Soviet of the Armenian SSR declares that the people of Armenia and the entire Diaspora are fully determined to restore their national rights and defend their honor and dignity; they will fight until the end for Nagorno-Karabakh's right to self-determination.

If measures are not taken based on this appeal, the central authorities and the president of the USSR will personally take responsibility for the further exacerbation of the situation."

After having a chance meeting with President Gorbachev during those days, I wrote him a letter, the content of which I have edited slightly.

Dear Mikhail Sergeyevich:

I recently had a conversation with one of your closest supporters at the Kremlin about the situation in Armenia. During the conversation, he mocked me, calling me a "justice soldier" and mentioned that my efforts were in vain. He added:

"You finally have to understand that you have lost."

However, despite his nonsensical opinion, I consider it my duty to continue to fight for the radical solution to the current and historical issues facing the people of Armenia. I intend to do so based on the principles of justice, democracy, and humanism.

After having their dignity crushed, the people of Armenia are still waiting for the Soviet society and the president of the country to comprehend the history of the Armenian Cause and the current political realities in the republic.

I call on you, the president of our country, to look into the heart of our issues without any biases and to support the sincere aspiration of our people to get out of the extremely critical situation.

Without any detailed explanations (it is already evident), I will formulate some unanswered questions regarding issues that cannot be solved without your mediation:

1. It is necessary to radically change the political concept on the basis of which the country's leadership is trying to solve the issues concerning inter-ethnic relations in our country.

2. This concept is flawed in that it is broad, and it doesn't take into account the population's right to sovereignty in the given territory. It contradicts international legislation on civil and political laws, as well as the Constitution of the USSR, both of which lay down the right of nations to self-determination, the right to define a nation's political status, the right to ensure free economic and cultural development, as well as the will for unification and absolute equality of peoples.

3. The flaws of this concept become evident in the example of the NKAR. The many resolutions that were approved and decrees that were issued based on the NKAR did not lead to a positive outcome; on the contrary, the situation has noticeably worsened.

4. The Supreme Council of the USSR must finally recognize the Armenian Genocide perpetrated in Ottoman Turkey in 1915. It is known that the civilized world has always condemned genocide, as an act of inhumanity and violence.

5. It is necessary to recognize and assess the genocide of Armenians in Baku and Sumgait. The global community must know about the Soviet government's position on the facts of the genocide. It is not only required to broadly and impartially investigate the genocide of Armenians in different cities and regions of Azerbaijan, but to bring the perpetrators and enthusiasts of these evil

acts to justice. It is naive to think that what happened was carried out by criminal groups.

6. The Azerbaijan SSR's blockade on Armenia has completely destroyed the nation's economy, and it has put an end to the restoration efforts in the earthquake zone. The blockade must be publicly condemned. There is a need for strong guarantees that such measures will not be taken again; and the Armenians must be compensated for the damages caused by the blockades.

7. There are currently more than 250,000 refugees, 350,000 unemployed and 1 million homeless people in the country. These are terribly huge numbers for a small republic like Armenia. Immediate steps need to be taken in social, economic and political realms in order to put an end to these developments that are shameful for our country.

8. All of these promises and plans for Armenia's restoration after the earthquake have remained unfulfilled. The reputation of the party and the government received a strong blow. Only 17% of the earthquake zone has been restored; a difficult, psychologically complex situation has developed in the disaster zone and perhaps the entire republic. Radical measures must be taken quickly. The measures taken thus far have diminished and, currently, they are barely noticeable.

9. It is necessary to quickly define the final status of the NKAR, taking into account the will of the people living in the region. It is currently accepted worldwide that even supreme leaders are not authorized to make decisions without taking the will of the people and their right to self-determination into consideration.

10. Urgent measures are required to put an end to the forced changes in the demography of the NKAR and some regions of the Azerbaijan SSR, where Armenians have been living collectively for centuries.

11. It is necessary to reconsider the issue of constitutional "exceptionality" for the Autonomous Republic of Nakhichevan. The republic is located on indigenous Armenian lands next to the Armenian SSR and it is enclosed by its territory. Today, it is almost fully populated by Azerbaijanis and, as surprising as it sounds, it has autonomy within the Azerbaijan SSR. Primitive logic dictates that it must be an autonomous republic in the Armenian SSR.

I presented only a few fundamental issues. It is impossible to imagine the pacification of the political tensions in the Armenian SSR and the entire region without the immediate resolution of these issues.

To be honest, I am a little surprised by the Center's lack of concern for the issues facing the Armenians, when these issues apply to different spheres of our society. Similar phenomena can be seen in different republics and territories. Unfortunately, in the current reality, the delay of the timely and fair solution to this or that issue becomes a catalyst for social and political destabilization; this pattern keeps appearing in new regions of our country. My declarations are not groundless: there are many facts that can support them and confirm my thoughts.

Honorable Mikhail Sergeyevich, once again, I urge you to create a presidential committee charged with the responsibility of studying the Armenian Cause. To tell you the truth, many of my fellow deputies believe that our efforts are in vain, but I disagree with them. I still believe in the strength and power of the president who can solve the unusual issues facing our society today. That's the reason presidential governance was established in our country.

Today, I am forced to admit that my colleagues were right. All of our efforts didn't lead to peace for the NKAR and all Armenians. There's not much hope for a strong Russia and a strong Union of nations that have lived together for centuries.

The people of Armenia had already lost faith in President Gorbachev who recently, on March 15, 1991, made an inconsiderate call aimed at the people of Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh. Probably having forgotten his previous statements on the conflict in the NKAR, he questioned whether Nagorno-Karabakh had been exceedingly populated by Armenians for years. But the "handwriting" of the call was not like the previous "handwriting" by Gorbachev, which was characterized by its compliance, flexibility and ability to circumvent the issue.

Tragic events took place in Yerevan on May 17. Twenty-three Armenian citizens, including women, the elderly, and one Soviet soldier, died as a result of the conflict between armed regiments and army subdivisions near the railway station and Erebuni Museum. The people still don't know the reasons for this crime.

The main reasons were unquestionably clear: the extremely tense situation created in the Transcaucasus over the past few months; the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh and the surrounding region; the volatility of the political situation in Armenia; the open call of the Azerbaijani administration to settle Azerbaijanis in the NKAR; and, finally, the persistent silence of the country's president.

In those days, we, the people's deputies of the USSR wrote to Gorbachev:

It is clear what the reaction of the civilized world was to the pan-national struggle of the people of the NKAR for self-determination and the reunification of the Armenian people – that is, to reach the goal of democracy and humanism. The powerful arguments in the resolutions of the U.S. Congress, the European Parliament, and a number of other reputable organizations are a testament to this fact. Before your visit to the United States of America, you had to find a truthful explanation as to why the natural, inalienable right, the right to self-determination, had been violated in a “legal” state for two years. And, as if by fate, a tragedy took place on May 27. Taking advantage of this, the country’s official propaganda used the label “Armenian terrorism” to undermine the bright ideas of the democratic movement and to cast a shadow on our nation in the eyes of the civilized world.

Like a Delphic envoy, a day before the tragedy the television program “Vremia” [“Time”] announced sinister prophecies that were surprisingly realized literally a few hours later. Was this just a coincidence?

For over two years, we have been living in an atmosphere of constant genocide, blockade, physical and moral terror, assaults and defamations against mass media outlets. All of this took place after the terrible earthquake. There were people whose psychological temperament did not resist the inhumane conditions of the blockade,

the horrors of violence against their neighbors that went unpunished, the feeling that the nation was unprotected and that they had been crushed.

Only the people who have seen the victims – the brutally beaten elderly of Sumgait, Baku and Gyanja, children who became disabled for life, girls and women who were raped and will never feel the joy of marriage and motherhood – will understand the aspiration to have a means for self-defense at any price. Those who subjected them to these inhumane sufferings also took people’s lives during the tragedy of May 27.

Thousands of people were morally hurt and were no longer able to live calmly in this world. While condemning those who stole combat weapons from Soviet army soldiers, we protest against the accusation of terrorism against these people, as long as there has been no investigation to reveal the real reasons for their “crimes.” We call on you, as our country’s president, to put an end to the physical, moral, and psychological terror against the Armenian population of the NKAR.

The Armenian SSR was preparing for the upcoming Supreme Soviet elections. The pre-election campaign was extremely tense. Diametrically opposed concepts came into conflict. It was proposed to postpone the elections until all political parties and socio-political movements were formed and officially recognized. The

elections were formally headed by the Supreme Soviet of the republic and the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia, but the primacy of the newly formed socio-political movements became more and more discernable each day. The candidates for people's deputies, who were also members of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, found themselves in a grave situation. They were held responsible for the visible and invisible crimes committed by the Communist Party of the USSR and there were some members who immediately declared that they were leaving the Communist Party. It seems to me that some of them were leaving based truly on their convictions, while others were leaving in order to get elected as people's deputies.

I had also been nominated without my consent. I sent a telegram from Moscow in which I expressed my gratitude to the residents of Leninakan and rejected the nomination. Despite that, a new political figure that had the great desire of defaming me, made a speech at the rally and expressed "profound" ideas that had nothing to do with reality. Of course, everyone recalled the troubling years of our not too distant history, but I am not sad as I remember the wise Eastern saying, "For the sake of truth, I had to say all this..."

JUNE-DECEMBER 1990

The pre-electoral meetings were rather heated and things often got out of control. The people's deputy candidates, their proxies and voters were talking about everything besides the main issues, such as Armenia's indepen-

dence, inter-ethnic relations, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, relations with Moscow, and other key issues of the day.

The elections ended. In my opinion, many meritorious candidates, real representatives of the Armenian intelligentsia and the people who would represent the interests of our nation unfortunately weren't elected as people's deputies of Armenia. I believe that this was due to the fact that our democracy was underdeveloped. It really felt like it was still a young democracy.

The Supreme Soviet of the Armenian SSR held its first session, during which Armenia was proclaimed the Republic of Armenia.

I hope that our people will give meaning to the official, legal concept of a "republic," with its activities in the fields of economy, politics, culture, and science. Without that, all of our declarations and proclamations will simply remain words.

Levon H. Ter-Petrosyan was elected chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Armenia and his first speech during the subsequent session of the USSR Supreme Soviet left a good impression.

The Communist Party of the Soviet Union held its Twenty-eighth Congress and passed the declaration

entitled "Toward Humanitarian and Democratic Socialism."

Of course, there hadn't been a plan like this until then, and it was entirely unexpected. The people had mainly lost interest in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. It no longer led them, and it still hadn't learned to function as a parliamentary party. We were expecting the congress to pass some radical resolutions on the national issue, the normalization of inter-ethnic relations. But, unfortunately, no productive steps were taken in this regard. We got the impression that no congress had been held at all and that the General Secretary of the party didn't know what was going on.

In those days *Pravda* reported:

Congress is receiving troubling news from Nagorno-Karabakh. Gorbachev informed the delegates that, according to the information, on July 11 Armenian assailants bombed a row of cars in the territory of the NKAR, leaving 3 people dead and 24 injured of which 4 were soldiers serving in the internal forces. Three of the injured were in critical condition. All assailants left the scene. Investigators found hand grenades, two-way radios, and explosives. "On behalf of the Azerbaijani people, whose patience has no limits, the deputies," Gorbachev continued, "express their just disappointment in the incident. They demand that the country's leadership and the president of the USSR put an end to the illegal acts and take

decisive measures to disarm the unconstitutional Armenian ethnic groupings and prevent such events from recurring. The delegates find that the Twenty-eighth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union must assess these offensive operations. We share in the Azerbaijani's disappointment and express our firm protest against the attempts aimed at destroying recent improvements in the region. We express our deep sympathy for the injured and their families. These days, new steps are being taken to normalize the situation along with the leaders of both republics... It is necessary to address the public and the heads of Armenia and Azerbaijan, calling on them not only to discuss the issues, but also to participate actively in normalizing the situation.

We witnessed the subsequent "reverence" to the Azerbaijani authorities. We couldn't have disregarded this announcement, and, a couple of days later, I wrote an open letter to Gorbachev. The letter, which, obviously, wasn't published, specifically read:

Distinguished Mikhail Sergeyevich:

The current situation forces me to write an open letter to you again, with the hope that it will be published in *Izvestia*. Although I would love to be wrong at least this time, I doubt that the editor will print my open letter addressed to the president. As a result, I'm also sending you this open letter by mail.

You would probably agree that I have always expressed myself sincerely – during our numerous meetings and conversations, in my letters to you, and in speeches I've given in your presence. I am content with regard to this point. True, we have not always shared the same positions and viewpoints on one or another contemporary issue in our complicated lives, but perhaps that is natural in times of crisis and conflict. By addressing you with this letter, this time, I would like to receive your open reply. I am certain that if the president provides a concrete answer and makes a specific political statement about the issue at hand, it will not only result in a wide-scale reaction, but it can also affect positive changes to the situation. This fact is self-evident, because the president's assessment and his every word have the potential to influence any situation.

In the letter, I said that I was deeply surprised to see the president of the country allow himself to make such an announcement on behalf of the congress delegates and the people of Azerbaijan from the podium of the party's congress – an announcement that casts a shadow on the people of Armenia and that can bring about a new wave of violence against the Armenian population. I found that this step was based on a big misunderstanding, and it was unacceptable for the president of the country.

I continued:

Somebody else could have said that the "patience of the Azerbaijanis has no limits." But not you, the president of the USSR, especially when you know very well that the genocide of Armenians took place in Sumgait, Kirovabad, Baku and other regions of Azerbaijan in the past two and a half years. But you have never said that the Armenians haven't lost their patience. In your announcement during the Twenty-eighth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, you said: "The congress must politically assess these offensive acts" (referring to the three people who died on July 11, 1990 in the NKAR), but what really surprised me was the fact that, to this day, neither the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union nor the supreme state bodies have politically assessed the genocide of Armenians in Sumgait and other cities of Azerbaijan – barbarian acts that shocked not only the Armenian people, but the entire global community.

In this letter, I expressed my certainty that if a political assessment of the crime committed in Sumgait in February 1988 had been made, if the severity of the crimes had been properly defined, and if the organizers and perpetrators of the massacres of the Armenians had been identified and punished, inter-ethnic relations in the country would not have reached this level of barbarity and ferocity. We think that the politicians were short-sighted; they lost time attempting to redefine the nature of the crimes. Through defamation, state bodies, non-

governmental organizations, and mass media outlets (especially the Central Television Station) tried to offend the Armenian national dignity and tarnish its reputation in the eyes of the public. "Unfortunately," as I stated in my letter, "at the time the president did not come to the conclusion that Armenians may lose their patience. Of course, such a remark could have had a positive impact on the development of events and put an end to acts of violence."

All of this obviously disappointed the Armenian people; it created a sense of distrust in the fairness and the abilities of party members and state bodies to find impartial, substantiated solutions to the issues facing our people in the era of perestroika. This distrust strengthened the aspirations of the people to achieve justice independently, through self-reliance and self-defense. These were the factors that significantly shaped the current crisis in the republic.

I don't doubt," I underlined at the end of my letter,

that the president remembers the tragedies in Sumgait, Kirovabad, and Baku. I don't doubt that he knows about the ongoing blockades of the Armenian SSR and the NKAR, the elimination of the borders of the Soviet Union, the destruction of historical and cultural monuments, and the distortion of history. I don't doubt that he is aware of the hundreds of thousands of Armenian refugees deported from Azerbaijan – the refugees who are wandering around the country – the

350,000 unemployed and over half a million homeless people in the republic, as well as the insufficient reconstruction in the disaster zone. Talking about the Azerbaijanis losing patience in these conditions was an unfair, anti-humanistic step taken against the Armenian people, especially since these words came from the president. All of the peoples of our country are equal, but equating their actions without taking all factors and actions into account cannot lead to any good; doing so doesn't demonstrate any objectivity or fairness. Dear Mikhail Sergeyevich, I ask you to answer the following questions – Why did you make this announcement at the congress? What was your goal? Today, your answer is absolutely crucial. It is necessary for putting an end to the negative emotions, stabilizing the political and moral- psychological state in the region and the country, and defining our strategy for the future.

We witnessed another interesting occurrence during the Twenty-eighth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Along with certain communists and special functionaries and with the help of Gorbachev, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union elected candidates for whom the election was a step towards reaching their aspirations to fill high political posts. They simply wanted to steal something from the ship that was already sinking. Those members of the

Central Committee quickly left the party. Of course, the Central Committee also included "romantics" who thought that by being members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, they would save the committee by establishing a truly democratic order.

On July 25, 1990 President Gorbachev issued a decree on "Prohibiting the Formation of Armed Groups Not Designated by USSR Legislation and Confiscating Illegally Harbored Arms." The decree was rather imbalanced and was rejected in various regions and republics. We understood that there would be bloody events if the Ministry of Defense and the forces of the USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs did not enforce the decree issued by the president. That's why a group of people's deputies of the Armenian SSR urged Gorbachev to table the decree until new state bodies were formed in Armenia and the activities of the constitutional bodies of the NKAR were restored by the decree of chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR.

We said:

In this situation, the only line of conduct of the center must be tolerance and restraint. That will give local authorities the opportunity to control the existing armed groups by exercising their right to self-governance. It is clear that the events in the NKAR had created an opinion among all levels of Armenian society that the nation will only survive

through the means of self-defense. The well-known formula applies here: people don't trust each other not because they are armed, but they are armed because they don't trust each other. It is necessary to create normal conditions for nations to trust each other and to trust Moscow. One nation can't be given precedence over the others, and one nation can't be subject to another, making one feel superior and tolerant and the other underestimated. We call on you to carefully judge the extent of your responsibility.

President Gorbachev temporarily terminated the decree. The President of the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Armenia Levon Ter-Petrosyan signed the resolution of the Supreme Soviet. It declared a state of emergency in the entire republic as well as the illegality of all armed groups that were not part of the internal regiments maintaining the social order in Armenia. The adoption of this resolution certainly saved us from the occurrence of inevitably bloody crimes. The voluntary or compulsory disarming of illegal armed groups under the sponsorship of the country's law-enforcement bodies began.

I would like to repeat that the republic disarmed all illegal groupings through its own forces which, in my opinion, must be considered an important step toward independence.

The situation in the regions bordering Azerbaijan was still tense and complicated; sometimes serious conflicts arose as a result of armed attacks and bombings on Armenia. Reports from the KGB and the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Armenia provided the following information:

With the purpose of engaging the army subdivisions in the armed conflict with the Armenian population, the Azerbaijani assailants bombed military targets, thereby causing the "response fire" from Armenia. There have been 12 such offensive bombings by Azerbaijani assailants. The political scandal about the armed assaults by Armenian assailants is on the rise. Unfortunately, we are forced to report that the mass media immediately announces incorrect information, which creates anti-Armenian sentiments in the military and other negative consequences.

I would like to add that such provocative actions were not new. Our "friends" had used such provocations in the territory of the NKAR starting in 1920.

In September, four people's deputies of the USSR from the Republic of Armenia and the NKAR, Zori Balayan, Viktor Ambardzumyan, Samvel Sargsyan, and Vachagan Grigoryan, and Chairman of the Regional Soviet of People's Deputies of the NKAR Semyen Babayan, declared a hunger strike in Moscow; they demanded for

the protection of human rights in the NKAR, the termination of the state of emergency in the region, and the restoration of constitutional power.

The hunger strike was held under the supervision of doctors; nevertheless, the situation was rather troubling, because one of the strikers had undergone a difficult cardiac operation and the other was a very old man. Everyone was afraid of the possibility of a fatality. The people of the Soviet Union and the entire world were worried.

Thanks to the efforts of the other deputies, especially the active efforts of Henrik Igityan, the suite at the Moscow Hotel where the deputies were staying became a site of "pilgrimage." Prominent political figures, famous scientists and writers, artists, cultural figures, and journalists visited the strikers and pleaded with them to put an end to the hunger strike. Gorbachev's next step was significant. On September 18, presidential adviser Vitaliy Ignatenko came to the hotel with a bouquet of flowers from Gorbachev on the occasion of academician Viktor H. Ambartsumian's birthday; at the time, Ambartsumian was still on a hunger strike.

On the same day, upon the request of Viktor Ambar-tsumian, I gave a speech at a session of the presidium of the USSR Academy of Sciences. The presidium discussed the condemnable acts of Azerbaijan and asked Ambartsumian to end the hunger strike. On the same day, I gave another speech at the presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. After the speech and the

subsequent question and answer session, the Supreme Soviet of the USSR promised to meet the strikers' demands immediately.

The hunger strike ended only at the request and with the blessing of the Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, His Holiness Vazgen I.

In the end, the hunger strike did not yield positive results in terms of resolving the Karabakh conflict. We were convinced, yet again, that the Karabakh conflict could not be solved through political means. Apparently, the behind-the-scenes tactics of our "opponents" were far more productive. I came to this conclusion after observing all of the discussions on the conflict. Nevertheless, I still advocate open dialogue without any behind-the-scenes tactics.

The Supreme Soviet of the USSR, upon the proposal of the president of the USSR, discussed the issue of granting legislative rights to the president; this meant giving the president certain functions of the Supreme Soviet. At the time, the country was in a real state of political and economic chaos. In my opinion, President Gorbachev had lost himself. That's why he appealed to the Supreme Soviet with the request for additional powers; he wanted supreme executive power, and he took on the responsibility for the fate of the country.

The Supreme Soviet of the USSR granted the president provisional "dictatorial" rights, which, as far as I understood, he could not use: by character, Gorbachev was too "weak" to play the role of a dictator.

Gorbachev was a democrat-reformer. He was the first to introduce the idea of creating a legal state and a free, democratic society. He inspired us tremendously: we were happy to see that the leader of the only ruling party, which held endless power, could realize the idea of a democracy.

However, in a sense, he stopped half-way as his actions contradicted the main ideas of democracy. He began to make many mistakes: he made several consecutive short-sighted decisions implemented in the form of decrees, orders, and instructions. He forgot that each missed opportunity for democracy was politically fatal. Gorbachev completely destroyed the national issue in the USSR. All of his initiatives were fruitless; his ideas were unfounded and his decisions were faulty.

The threat of a "decisive return to a dictatorship" remained. It was not a dictatorship run by an individual; rather, it was one that functioned according to the Party's bureaucratic apparatus, which was supported by a power-hungry military. Of course, we shouldn't forget that there are other manifestations of dictatorship. But we shouldn't be afraid of it either, because I am certain that there can't be a return to the old ways. Minor symptoms of the old illness may appear, but they will only be

temporary. It's clear that you can't cross the same river twice.

Almost all of the members of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR were seriously concerned after hearing Gorbachev's "State in the Union" address on November 14, 1990. After all, the deputies and the entire nation expected the president to introduce new revolutionary proposals aimed at getting the country out of the deep political and economic crisis. Meanwhile, it seemed that the president's speech was meaningless: it did not provide a clear evaluation of the state of the nation; it addressed economic concerns in the old, outmoded way; the severe problems in inter-ethnic relations were glossed over; and the so-called foundational proposals were unrealistic.

Members of the parliament were dissatisfied with the situation; they were ready to wage a "battle" against the president and to tell him the whole truth. As far as I recall, there were more 150 deputies on the list of speakers. Unofficial discussions took place about the situation in the country and in individual republics, regions, and provinces. Some people's deputies drew attention to the people's lack of confidence in the president and the government. The atmosphere was extremely tense. But, of course, nothing happened. Three days later, on the morning of November 17, President Gorbachev made a new announcement with ideas that instilled confidence in the nation: he suggested new courses of action to

alleviate the crisis. He proposed the radical restructuring of the executive branch of government, so that power would be centralized in the hands of the president, with certain legal restrictions.

Gorbachev's "genius" step was like an expert move in the game of chess. All of his potential opponents, who, just the day before, were planning to criticize him and "destroy" his speech, were bewildered. The President of the Council of Ministers of the USSR Nikolai Ryzhkov told me that he learned about the president's idea an hour before his speech on the morning of November 17; he, too, was confused and troubled by it.

The Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR Anatoliy Lukyanov was indifferent as usual. He was undoubtedly a mysterious person. He really knew what he was doing: he had climbed up the "steps of authority" without any difficulty. He did his job by relying on insignificant, average people. He accepted political realities regardless of how unjust they were. I believe that he could not stand people who had their own opinions. I think that he knew a lot, but stayed silent. He knew all about the country's domestic policy, but he never expressed his personal views if they differed from the state's official stance. Anatoliy Lukyanov was a bright "man of the apparatus." It was very likely that, outside of politics (if there was such a thing for him), he was a normal human being. In fact, his former colleagues didn't say anything bad about him. As they would say, "There was nothing strange for him." They said that he even wrote rather nice poems. But there's no need to rejoice.

The example of this "aristocrat" convinced me that, in our times, people like him will say and write anything – even if it has nothing to do with reality – in order to achieve personal success. Unfortunately, I was also convinced that this flawed approach often wins over truth. Anatoliy Lukyanov was the "monopolist" of all resolutions passed by the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. His firm will was enough to sway the vote of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR in a particular direction on any given issue. The "voting mechanism" stayed true to him: staff of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR immediately responded to the reverberation of his voice. Anatoliy Lukyanov would clarify the voting procedure, and he would always conclude his statement by saying, "You know, I'm not even voting." This was how the incorrect, dysfunctional, and very often unconstitutional resolutions that did not correspond to the preceding discussion were passed.

What more is there to talk about? Perhaps it's all clear. The voices of the occasional protesters were lost among the majority of voices – the voices of the "virtuous" deputies who always had an unwavering position.

The situation in the Republic of Armenia began to normalize, but apparently nothing had changed in the NKAR and the regions on the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Continued armed conflicts led to a terrible rise in the rate of fatalities and injuries. (In 1990 in the NKAR, there were 58 fatalities, of which 41 were Armenian, 15 were Azerbaijani, and 2 were soldiers;

there were 126 injured, of which 92 were Armenian, 32 were Azerbaijani, and 2 were soldiers.) According to incomplete official data, Azerbaijan led 96 armed assaults and bombings starting on September 1: these left 16 people dead and 17 injured. Armenia initiated 18 armed assaults and bombings on Azerbaijan: these left 3 people dead and 8 injured.

As a result of these events and those that took place in the Martakert region of the NKAR, two People's Deputies of the USSR from the Republic of Armenia, Lyudmila Harutyunyan and Sergey Ambartsumian, sent the following letter to the President of the USSR.

Honorable Mikhail Sergeyevich:

We write to you with deep concern over the recent events that took place in the Martakert region of the NKAR. These assaults are not new developments: the internal forces and special assignment regiments have already led many assaults on peaceful Armenian villages in the NKAR. But what happened in the Kajavan village of the Martakert region can lead to a critical situation; it can become a precedent for the armed resistance of the population against law-enforcement forces, and thereby cause a new wave of violence in the region.

Recently, the Armenian authorities, with their balanced position, offered several opportunities for the peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh

conflict. However, unsurprisingly, these opportunities remain disregarded because of Azerbaijan's position. By relying on the strength of the armed forces and the internal forces of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Azerbaijani officials can continue make statements on behalf of these forces for a long time without understanding that their efforts are in vain: they cannot force the Armenians of Karabakh to give up their right to self-determination.

It has almost been a year since the Supreme Soviet ratified the November 28 resolution, which promised to resolve the conflict in the NKAR. Unfortunately, not only did the resolution not affect progress, but it exacerbated the situation. The Karabakh conflict continues to keep the country in agitation; it is causing a blow to the reputation of the Center and serious hurdles for restructuring the society. Dear Mikhail Sergeyevich, aren't you, the country, the army, the internal forces, the Armenian people and the Azerbaijanis themselves paying a high price in order to maintain the status-quo in the NKAR - a status that the Azerbaijanis violated by dissolving the autonomous region and by persistently working to alter its demographics and eventually eradicate the civilization there?

Currently, there is a danger that the recent events and the new extension of the term for regional soviet elections of the NKAR can drastically

heighten emotions in Armenia; and, in turn, this can have serious consequences.

In order to avoid this, it is necessary to set an immediate date for the NKAR regional soviet elections, punish those responsible for the violence against residents of the Kajavan village, and finally free the internal forces and the army from the responsibility of fulfilling political commitments in the NKAR. In this way, it will become possible to prevent the development of dangerous events in the region and to create a real basis for the resolution of the Karabakh conflict in the future.

This letter didn't have any impact on the country's leadership either. And one couldn't help but wonder how many more people had to be killed before the implementation of a radical solution that meets the interests of the majority of Nagorno-Karabakh's population. After all, everyone knows that all of the measures taken thus far have placed us in a labyrinth.

Today, I have no doubt that the politicians are the first to blame: they intentionally created this labyrinth in their approach to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Pipeline explosions, phony accidents, and pipeline closures often interrupted a vitally important supply of

gas to Armenia. None of the mass media announcements about these incidents identified the perpetrators.

It was a cold winter. One of the prominent leaders of the republic invited me to Moscow and asked me to address the country's administration about preventing future interruptions in the gas supply.

After long and difficult negotiations, Gorbachev said: "Go to Kryuchkov on my behalf." I immediately contacted Vladimir Kryuchkov from the hotel (we had a specially furnished room, from which it was possible to call the government directly) and he promised to take care of the issue. An hour later at the Kremlin he told me that everything was fine. And in fact, the gas pipeline to Armenia was opened soon after. The gas pipeline functioned after just one phone call. It became clear that the administration in Moscow had cut off the gas supply with the intention of "pressuring" our republic. Perhaps I am wrong, but, unfortunately, I am certain that at the time Moscow often used those kinds of tactics.

The Fourth Congress of the People's Deputies of the USSR took place in December 1990. A day before the opening session, the People's Deputies from Armenia and the NKAR addressed the Congress, the head of state, and the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR in a statement that specifically said:

We, along with our voters, had high expectations of the congresses of the People's Deputies of the USSR and the country's parliament. However, unfortunately, every resolution of the Congress or the Supreme Soviet of the USSR has exacerbated the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh and, as a result, we find ourselves in a quagmire today.

The statement continued:

We have informed the country's authorities and the USSR parliament several times in violation of the USSR Constitution and contrary to several resolutions, the Council of People's Deputies elected by the people of Nagorno-Karabakh has been dissolved. Despite the numerous promises made by the administration of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and the president himself, the council has not been reinstated in the region to this day.

Given these circumstances, we refuse to participate in the Fourth Congress of the People's Deputies of the USSR. Our non-participation will remain in effect as long as basic human rights continue to go unprotected in the NKAR, the state of emergency has not been eliminated, and the region's constitutional power has not been restored.

Later, the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Armenia made the following statement: "We would like to inform the Fourth Congress of the People's Deputies of the

USSR that the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Armenia consents to the call made on December 2 by the 58 People's Deputies of the USSR from the Republic of Armenia and the NKAR and defends their demands."

There was no reaction to our announcement before the launch of the Fourth Congress, and we resolutely decided not to participate in the Congress.

Unfortunately, among us there were strikebreakers, who, in my opinion, had no moral right to represent Armenia. May God be with them – the three "heroes" of the period of perestroika.

In making this decision, we knew the unwritten rule that "the absentee is not always right." Nevertheless, the situation forced us to take this desperate measure. The events that followed confirmed that our decision at the time was the right one.

On the opening day of the Fourth Congress of the People's Deputies of the USSR, the seats of the People's Deputies from the Republic of Armenia in the congress chamber and one seat in the presidium of the congress were empty.

The red cloth on the empty chairs of the Armenian "corner" formed a red line that ran across the room, and, according to the figurative words of one of the congress participants, "caught the eye as a bleeding wound." But the congress organizers tended to the wound without

saying a word and by temporarily seating a group of deputies from the "loyal majority" in our seats.

On the second day there were attempts to convince us to take part in the congress. But they were all unofficial and secret - not by the high order of the administration.

Finally, the "heavy artillery" was brought out. Anatoliy Lukyanov invited the representatives and me to the Kremlin. We decided to send Martin Harutyunyan, Hrant Voskanyan, and Oleg Lobov to the meeting in order to declare that our decision remains unchanged. These negotiations obviously led nowhere.

Mass media outlets generally kept silent, and only on December 20 did *Izvestia* finally report: "Why weren't the Armenian deputies at the congress?" In the section about the delegates, the article indicated: "On the evening of December 18 Mikhail Gorbachev called Sergey Ambar-tsumian at his hotel and invited him to a meeting."

That was true, but I decided that my personal encounter with Gorbachev or my presence at the congress wouldn't really help us. As a result, I asked him to receive my colleagues from the Supreme Soviet of the USSR as well. (I confess that I needed witnesses.) In fact, right after that telephone conversation, I received a call from Georgiy Shakhnazarov, who asked me to occupy his seat at the presidium of the congress starting in the morning on the next day. I obviously refused. On December 19, Gorbachev and his two advisers met with five People's Deputies of the USSR from the Republic of Armenia,

whom I had selected (Lyudmila Harutyunyan, Hrant Voskanyan, Henrik Igityan, Oleg Lobov and Sergey Ambartsumian). The conversation was practical and constructive. Despite their efforts, the President and his advisers were unable to change the topic of discussion and present the issues of vital importance for our nation in a different light. In the end, our seats in the hall of the Fourth Congress remained empty.

In his speech at the congress, the President specifically said:

The situation in Nagorno-Karabakh continues to be extremely tense and dangerous. The previous congresses, the Supreme Soviet, numerous committees and commissions have been involved in this issue. It has always been the focus of the president and the government. Nevertheless, it would probably be wise to have the new staff of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR deal with this issue in its upcoming sessions. I think that the Federal Council must get involved by considering the new propositions. Constitutional norms must be reinstated.

He went on to say: "I would just like to emphasize that here, where the situation is particularly delicate, where the people and government face a real danger, it will be necessary to declare a state of emergency or presidential governance. That is when the president will take full responsibility."

The president's statement was rather reassuring, but it did not contain any details that would guarantee the possibility of its implementation. Similarly, the obstructionist speech made by the president of the Supreme Soviet of the Azerbaijan SSR also excluded the possibility of the implementation of the rather rational proposals made by the head of state. We were angry and disappointed in the fact that the very unseemly speech by the representative of the Azerbaijan SSR remained unquestioned: it wasn't properly evaluated. As always, the head of state was afraid of the elite Azerbaijani representatives of the party and the government.

It was obvious that we couldn't have participated in the Fourth Congress of the People's Deputies of the USSR in these circumstances. On this occasion I made a statement that was published by the news media: "We would like to participate in the congress, but we do not want to hurt our reputation and national dignity."

In this way, the seats of the People's Deputies of Armenia in the congress chamber and presidium remained empty. There were some dangerous, conspicuous, empty-headed people; but they did not scare us, because as the congress proceedings showed, the thriving spirit of my nation was spreading its wings in the congress chamber.

The Fourth Congress of the People's Deputies of the USSR decided to hold an all-Union referendum in order to determine the issue of preserving the reformed Union as a federation of soviet socialist republics.

Some republics, including Armenia, decided not to participate in the all-Union referendum. At the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and the session of the Supreme Soviet, the People's Deputies of the USSR from the Republic of Armenia and I calmly and clearly demonstrated that it was inappropriate to hold an all-Union referendum now, when there was still so much vacillation on the issue.

The Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Armenia decided to hold its pan-Armenian referendum on a specifically formulated question: "Do you agree that the Republic of Armenia should be an independent, democratic state outside of the USSR?" Even in those days, I knew that this was a serious and complicated question. Thank God for the time to think, deliberate, and discuss before declaring the final word – the weighted word of the citizens of the Republic of Armenia.

The Declaration of Independence approved by the Armenian parliament was rather flexible and allowed for new paths in the development of a radical solution to the issue. As far as the first part of the question on the referendum is concerned, there is only one answer: the Republic of Armenia must unquestionably become a truly independent state. Whether it will have any federal ties in the USSR or not is a different story. This is a serious question and it requires an in-depth, weighed, and multifaceted answer. The answer must be informed by the lessons of our past, today's conditions, and, most

importantly, how we see our future. In my opinion, this answer must satisfy Armenians living outside the Republic of Armenia. This is a question that is on my mind every day. Perhaps I am the only one who worries like this – a person who, as they say, has gone through "thick and thin" and knows that you can pay a high price for every mistake you make. I don't think that the referendum will provide a positive solution to the conflict in its entirety. In order to reach a final solution to the issue, we need time, endless work, a stable political state, and a conscious desire to live and create until the end for the welfare of our nation. But one thing is clear for me today: Armenia must be a politically and economically independent state with the cooperation of other civilized nations and democratic states. We must reinforce our economic, cultural, and scientific ties with all countries of the world, especially our neighboring countries and, of course, democratic Russia.

During the Fourth Congress of the People's Deputies of the USSR, everybody was amazed by Edward Shevardnadze's resignation and his threats against the dictatorship. For the first time ever in the history of the USSR, this kind of political figure resigned by ignoring the legalized definition of a dictatorship: he said that he "is a soldier of the party" and that he would go anywhere the party sends him. He was one of the devoted individuals of perestroika and one of the president's final (perhaps I am mistaken) supporters, the last among the working, brave people. Those who stayed either lacked the will or already had their eyes set on the president's post. I think

that the minister was hurt as he resigned from office and left with "repentance" and thoughts about Georgia.

JANUARY-FEBRUARY 1991

Extremely significant events took place: the clear political steps taken to overthrow the legitimately and democratically elected government of Lithuania; the change in currency that did not lead to the expected results in the economy; changes in prices, including increases in the prices for food and industrial goods; the heightening of conflicts between the Center and some republics; and the marked confrontation between leaders of the USSR and the Federal Soviet Socialist Republic of Russia (Boris Yeltsin's speech regarding the immediate resignation of USSR President Mikhail Gorbachev).

Any issue that the People's Deputies from the Republic of Armenia would put forth during the USSR parliamentary session was received with hostility. I had the impression that many people, including the administration of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, didn't like (to say the least) our presence. They probably believed the ill-famed idea that "there are no Armenians and no issues." But they were deeply mistaken. As long as the Republic of Armenia is still part of the Union and as long as there is the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, the Armenian delegation must have the opportunity to live and work based on the laws of the civilized world and according to the USSR Constitution.

Another cause for concern was articulated by the USSR Deputy of Armenia Oleg Lobov:

It is established that the government has a project aimed at eliminating the effects of the earthquake in Armenia with the participation of almost all of the republics of the Soviet Union. But we know that it is very difficult to implement this project. Out of the 12 billion rubles allocated to the project, less than 3 billion has been spent. The fact that the project is not listed in the Union's budget creates questions. If we continue at this rate, we will be forced to continue eliminating the effects of the earthquake for another seven to eight years. People will continue to live in tents and wagons. This issue has been discussed by the USSR State Planning representatives and we join them by proposing to indicate the numbers in the budget. No article should be disregarded and the difficulties in funding should be assuaged by using different financial sources. We propose to edit Article 27 in the following way: "Continue to fund the project aimed at eliminating the effects of the earthquake in Armenia according to the nation's economic plan."

This was a normal, reasonable proposal which could not hurt the interests of anybody or make changes in the plan of any nation's economy. The "voting mechanism" went to work and the proposal was rejected with 79 in favor, 243 opposed, and 63 abstentions.

At this point, we were forced to give a speech about morality, ethics, and, finally, politics. Our active People's Deputies Henrik Igityan, Lyudmila Harutyunyan and Hrant Voskanyan conveyed the following ideas:

Dear Anatoli Ivanovich, dear old and new parliamentarians. Our country has seen the three largest disasters. There have been many disasters, but three of them were truly immense, including Chernobyl, Aral, and the earthquake in Armenia. With that said, I believe that these three points must be included in the same law as a state project. I don't understand the morals of most of our deputies. Why do I often insist on casting open votes? It is because I would like to know who is voting against pensions for disabled children and who is voting against funding the disaster zones of Aral, Chernobyl and the earthquake. After all, we must recognize who's who among our deputies. I don't understand the number that appears on the board. I address all members of parliament to feel the pain as if it were their own, just like I feel the pain of Aral and Chernobyl as an Armenian, and so you all feel our pain. I ask you to please put this proposal up for a revote.

I apologize, we are not begging, but asking for a political step. If Armenia cannot rely on the help of the Union and if it has to resort to asking each of the republics for assistance, then what is Armenia doing in the Union? If you really want to know, this step is a political one. It doesn't matter to us where

it is written. If it is written in the budget, we will tell our people that our course is with the Union and it is the only one for us. If you don't put the resolution in the budget, then Armenia, which is currently in ruins, will not be responsible... (*Noise in the hall.*)

I was the last one to speak and here are two excerpts from my speech:

I am not asking to discuss this issue. I came to the microphone to make a short announcement. On the first day of this session, when the Armenian deputies asked a question, an inadmissible statement was made: "Yes, there is an Armenian question to which I don't want to reply." The question was a normal, standard question, but since it was an "Armenian" one, the person decided not to answer it. We are not asking for anything today. Our only wish is for the entire Soviet Union to know that when it is necessary to show moral, physical, and financial assistance to Armenia, the Soviet Union's parliament refuses to do so. In this case, I am referring not to financial assistance, but to taking a political step.

I ask you to seriously consider what we are doing. After all, we are not talking about additional grants, but an issue to which the government and the Ministry of Finance consent. We are talking about the political step. It is necessary for our people to understand that the Union is with them and that

the issues are being solved. Is it really that hard to understand? What we did just now was a flagrant political mistake. Let's carefully reconsider what we are doing.

The remaining details are not important. I simply wanted to present some factual examples that demonstrate how difficult it was to hold discussions initiated by the Armenian representatives during the parliamentary sessions.

For the sake of justice, I must say that there were also people who "repented." One of the deputies said:

I address the entire parliament. Anatoli Ivanovich, please, let's take a revote. Why did I vote against? The proposal stated in the law on the budget does not require a significant amount of financing. It should be placed in the resolution on the budget plan. But if this is the reaction we get, then apparently our debate is not worth anything. I address the parliament (not you, Anatoli Ivanovich) and ask to vote again and defend the proposal to put this point in the law. This will ease the tensions. We will neither gain nor lose anything, but we will maintain unity in the parliament.

This came from a deputy who had not wanted to respond to the "Armenian question."

In January 1991 we witnessed another noble speech made by President Mikhail Gorbachev. He officially expressed his deep condolences to the family and friends of the people who became victims of the conflicts that took place between the people and the military in Baku on January 19-20, 1990. He expressed his condolences not only to the Azerbaijani people, but also the families of the soldiers, that is, the people who died while fulfilling their duty standing on the other side of the "barricades." True, it was all natural and rather magnanimous. But there was a political motivation behind this magnanimity. The president mainly expressed condolences to the families of those who, according to the announcements by the USSR Defense Minister, the USSR Minister of Internal Forces, and the President of the KGB, had been the initiators, leaders and perpetrators of the bloody events that began on January 12 in Baku - those who killed, raped, and burned people alive; those who threw innocent women, children, and the elderly from high-story buildings just because of their nationality; those who forcefully deported Armenians, Russians, and Jews from Baku; those who led armed attacks on the military subdivisions and state institutions with the purpose of seizing power in the capital of Azerbaijan.

The President's advisers had to remind him that he was obligated to express his condolences to the families of the innocent victims of the savage acts. He had forgotten to express words of sympathy for the people who had stayed alive, but were mutilated in body and soul, that is, the refugees from Baku, including Armenians, Russians,

Jews, and members of other ethnic groups, as well as some Azerbaijanis.

The President was somewhat selective in terms of his use of noble words. Why? Perhaps there are grounds for the rumors that spread around the world; otherwise, how could this generosity toward the Azerbaijanis be explained? Who knows? Perhaps there is something behind all of this: anti-Armenian tendencies led our president to favor the Azerbaijanis, who knew the source of the generosity and nobility. God works in mysterious ways. In any case, Gorbachev's pro-Azerbaijani leanings are clear. But I am optimistic and hope that he will open his eyes soon and finally understand who's who. I just pray to God that it won't be too late.

In February, when the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR was discussing the agenda for the fifth session of the Supreme Soviet, I made the following statement, in approximate terms:

In the Fourth Congress of the People's Deputies of the USSR, Mikhail Gorbachev said the following in his concluding remarks: "The situation in Nagorno-Karabakh continues to be extremely tense and dangerous. The previous congresses, the Supreme Council, numerous committees and commissions have been involved in this issue. It has always been the focus of the president and the government. Nevertheless, it would probably

be wise to have the new staff of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR address this issue in its upcoming sessions." He then said, "Constitutional norms must be reinstated." This is unquestionably an extremely important issue. The situation in the NKAR has intensified; nations of the region are apparently engaged in a local war. The number of injured and dead people has reached terrible heights and the situation has intensified over the past couple of months. Twenty-one people (12 Armenians, 5 Azerbaijanis, and 4 soldiers) died in January 1991 alone. It is obvious that the authorities of the Republic of Armenia and the People's Deputies from Armenia can't overlook the fate of their fellow Armenians in this tragic state; they demand that the USSR administration take extreme and radical measures in order to prevent further bloody events and to restore constitutional rule in the NKAR. Based on the aforementioned information, I propose to introduce the issue of the NKAR in the agenda of the fifth session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR.

The proposal was rejected with a statement that claimed that the "Azerbaijanis don't want that." And I responded: "The administration of the Supreme Soviet shouldn't present such a feeble, ungrounded argument. It can also be said that the Armenians want that."

Of course, I realized that the desire of the Azerbaijanis was more important for the administration of the Supreme Soviet. Nevertheless, they informed us that the president

would issue a decree and that it would be issued on the morning of February 18.

On the morning of February 18, the draft of the president's decree was sent to us - Levon Ter-Petrosyan and Sergey Ambartsumian as head of the parliamentary group of Armenia - for our consent. As the President of the Council of Ethnic Groups of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR Rafik Nishanov informed us, the Azerbaijanis had approved of the draft. Nishanov spoke to Gorbachev in our presence and told him that the decree would be signed within an hour. Fifteen minutes after our conversation with Nishanov, Gorbachev entered the Kremlin and took his seat in the chamber of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. After negotiating with Gorbachev, Nishanov sent me a note with the following message on it: "S. A., the document will be signed during the break. Nishanov." But unfortunately, the document still hasn't been signed. After all, the Azerbaijanis didn't want it to be signed.

The Supreme Soviet of the USSR continues to make new laws for the USSR. There is a discord between the laws of the USSR and the republics, but this discord is merely external.

Today, we must pinpoint the roots of our disagreements and find ways to eliminate them. That is why we need a fundamental approach - a visible, practical one, not just a formality on paper.

EPILOGUE

The crisis continues to this day in the country, expanding to encompass new regions and new spheres of human activity. The moral-political atmosphere is fraught with unpredictable and terrible consequences.

The war in the Persian Gulf threatened the entire world. Thank God it ended, but the internal tension lives on in its wake. The U.S. and the ally countries staged a "colossal show." Let that be a lesson for them.

The world keeps an eye on us. It knows that the collapse of a nuclear power such as the USSR is a threat which could spell global catastrophe.

The Armenian people continue to fight for freedom, justice and solidarity. The people fight for a peaceful future.

My friend had twin great-grandchildren named Armen and Nairi, the two synonyms of our country. Life goes on. The situation in Armenia is tense and stable, except in the NKAR where our neighbors, under patronage of the Center, keep coming up with even more ingenious ways of heightening intra-state tension and obstructing all radical and reasonable proposals for normalizing relations between our nations. They don't want to understand that the "confrontation is over" and that it is time to start a dialogue.

True, it's said that apparently our efforts led us nowhere. The Karabakh conflict remains unsolved to this day and the Armenians of Karabakh continue to live on their native land under the oppression of the Azerbaijani administration and the provincial regime of its patrons. Still, I don't agree with such a critical approach. The current rebirth of the Karabakh conflict has spared Nagorno-Karabakh and the Armenians living there from the white terror as well as the fate of Nakhichevan. All one has to do is examine the Azerbaijani authorities' policies that were implemented over the last 70 years in Karabakh to be convinced of this – these policies were no different from their policies towards Nakhichevan. There are currently no Armenians in Nakhichevan, and Nagorno-Karabakh faces the same threat. Thus, the activities of Armenians and progressive individuals around the world in defense of Nagorno-Karabakh's interests helped save Nagorno-Karabakh from complete annihilation. Another indigenous Armenian land, one that had preserved Armenian material and cultural monuments and had been populated by Armenians for millennia, could have been erased from the face of the earth. Consequently, our work can't be evaluated as fruitless.

My readers may ask the following question with the same trite form of judgment that has developed throughout the years in our country: "What happened to self-criticism?" To be frank, eschew the so-called demagogic self-criticism that has been demanded of us for decades. I am very demanding, but I am not innocent. I can obviously

make and do make mistakes in my work and judgments. I am ready to accept those mistakes if they are shown to me. If I find a mistake myself, I will immediately work to correct it, if possible. But I don't approve of the publicly false, sanctimonious self-criticism from the podium and in the presses. It is ridiculous and painful for me.

In this book I have set forth ideas that are mainly connected with the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict starting from February 1988, the three years on the threshold between love and death, an important historical period as the USSR began the second trimester of perestroika. But in this book, that perestroika turned the country chaotic. Those were the historical moments foreshadowing the collapse of the USSR.

I think that there is nothing more to reconstruct. We have already managed to eradicate almost everything "down to the foundation." Now we must honestly and selflessly work to "build a new world" – a new, truly democratic society. But history teaches us that new foundations can be built from the old. There is no other way.

I would also like to say a few words about these three years and our assistants, the women and female workers who were at our side in the apparatus of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and at the Moscow Hotel. They saw and understood our hardships, discerned truth from falsehood with the sensitivity of the female soul, and were quick to grasp what a manly course of action would be where deceitfulness and back-door dealings were abundant. They understood who was

who and believed that we were in the right. As a rule, you can't play with the instincts of women (women don't understand this); you can't buy it with presents; you can't captivate them with political intrigues, as in the case of modern-day political figures. And so, we were the first and the first go down in history for all time.

March 1991

Moscow-Yerevan

EPILOGUE, REVISITED

Almost three years have passed. The most significant event that took place during those years was the collapse of the Soviet Union and the creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States – the creation of a somewhat strange and not fully understood union of “independent” and extremely poverty-stricken states.

I was not mistaken when I said that union was a strange one. It is truly a strange and in some ways an unclear collaboration. What kind of collaboration is it when Armenia, a member of the CIS (one that has been subject to the most brutal economic blockade in recent years), is subject to the armed assaults of Azerbaijan (a state that is not part of the CIS), while the rest of the states that form part of the commonwealth, as a rule, stay silent and some even show military assistance to Azerbaijan? This is at least strange and unclear.

The Nagorno-Karabakh Republic was created, yet it still hasn't been internationally recognized as the second Armenian Republic. Armenia has not recognized it either.

Armenia declared its independence after the entire population voted in favor of establishing an independent republic, and the Republic of Armenia was recognized by the international community. Still, Armenia and the entire Armenian nation endure much hardship, surviving the dark days of a new page in history, coping with the national economic crisis, political independence, disadvantaged academic and scientific institutions, the

wretched state of national culture and education, hunger and cold. Unfortunately, this is how my homeland looks today.

Unfortunately, there is no specific, scientifically substantiated, politically precise plan for getting the republic out of this crisis. One gets the impression that we are living our lives via questionable and capricious programs and regulations that have not been properly thought through or convincingly argued. Our scientists, farmers, industrialists, economists, and especially politicians and other political figures have a massive job at hand.

The extensive blockade on Armenia and the NKAR is ongoing: the war continues between Azerbaijan and the NKAR. Azerbaijan is doing everything it can to engage Armenia in the war by provoking armed conflicts along the borders of Armenia. The Republic of Armenia is officially not at war with Azerbaijan, but in accordance with the rules of the civilized world, the republic does all it can to offer material and spiritual support to its fellow Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh, including the defense of Nagorno-Karabakh's borders from armed assaults by the Azerbaijani army.

The Armenian people need peace, solidarity, and the establishment of friendly relations with all nations, including Azerbaijan.

It is vitally important to put an end to the shooting and the bloodshed. The people need practical and conciliatory negotiations without any preconditions, because there

are no and can never be any preconditions for a cease-fire and negotiations for reconciliation.

All nations with good will have high expectations of the aid of the great powers in conflict resolution, but those great powers have been pursuing a rather odd policy. Without taking into consideration the situation at hand or grasping the essence of the issue, the great powers have been implementing an unchanging and even insolvent policy aimed at balancing and averaging out possible solutions by confusing cause and effect. They seek the solution in the middle ground between two completely opposed opinions, forgetting the great truth that, as a rule, it's not the truth that can be found in the middle, but the root of the conflict.

In the past couple of years I have made several statements about the blockade on Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, key issues facing relations with Armenia, and more. Here I include edited versions of those statements.

TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE RUSSIAN
FEDERATION, BORIS NIKOLAYEVICH YELTSIN

Distinguished Boris Nikolayevich:

Although the issues raised in this letter are of vital importance for the entire Armenian nation as well as for other nations interested in peace and solidarity in the region, I did not want to disturb you before or immediately

after the end of the Sixth Congress of People's Deputies of the Russian Federation. Now that all your concerns regarding the end of the Congress and the society's reaction to the recent resolutions have been resolved, I decided to address you, the President of Russia, with a request to express (if possible) Russia's specific position on some issues that are of the utmost importance for Armenia, especially since the Russian parliament still hasn't ratified the treaty that you signed on the friendship, cooperation, and mutual assistance between our countries. This document on establishing diplomatic relations, which you recently signed, can be evaluated as a standard, formal, and perhaps necessary step at the given moment.

I write to you considering the fact that the centuries-long relationship between Armenia and Russia (no disrespect to any other country or nation) will serve as a firm basis for the advancement of our countries based on mutual respect, confidence, and cooperation in all spheres.

The bloody conflict of Nagorno-Karabakh has drawn the attention of many countries and even the global community for a long time. Unfortunately, as events have shown, your position – that is, the Russian government's position – is still unclear.

As the unforgettable academic Andrei Sakharov used to say, "The Karabakh issue is the touchstone of perestroika." He was truly right in this instance, but the political reality is different today. There are grounds to

say that the issue of Karabakh is the touchstone for the international reputation of a reborn Russia.

Recently, you took on a serious responsibility by placing the army of the CIS under Russia's jurisdiction. Now you are responsible for either taking radical measures to normalize the situation in the region by putting an end to military operations and bloodshed or declaring that it is not your job and that you are going to continue to lead the so-called impartial policy by allowing Armenians and Azerbaijanis to kill each other under the supervision of the Russian army. I don't think that the latter will increase Russia's international reputation, and I hope that it does not reflect your position.

Especially when there are conflicting relationships between independent states, any third party or force must state its position clearly, so that all interested parties can know it. Double standards and maneuvering between conflicting states do not suit strong and impartial politicians.

Our position on the Karabakh issue is more than clear. As accepted in any civilized society, we defend the violated rights of our fellow Armenians. Karabakh is struggling for the lives of the indigenous population - to save Armenians from genocide. We are in favor of the peaceful coexistence of all nations living in Nagorno-Karabakh and the surrounding Armenian-populated regions of Azerbaijan. We are in favor of the freedom of individuals and the preservation of the nation's right to self-determination.

Unfortunately, your efforts, the steps that you and Nursultan Nazarbayev took, were unsuccessful in normalizing of the relations between Armenians and the Azerbaijanis and in establishing peace in Nagorno-Karabakh. I think that the lack of clarity in your position was the reason for this failure. You were not bold enough to make a public announcement about which you support - a nation in need of peace and freedom after living on its own land for centuries or a nation that wants to see Nagorno-Karabakh without Armenians. I find that it is still not too late to clearly state your position and act with a feeling of remorse and common sense.

Russia's doctrine regarding Nagorno-Karabakh must be straightforward and specific. It must be made known to the entire world. But I must say, with a feeling of worry and bitterness, that the latest events are rather disturbing for our people. Without coming to an agreement with the CIS countries, Russia handed Azerbaijan a part of the Caspian fleet with its ammunition; this move drastically increased Azerbaijan's military strength. It is not by chance that the Azerbaijani forces recently increased the pressure on Nagorno-Karabakh and the regions bordering the Republic of Armenia.

I would not have touched upon the issue of the blockade on Armenia if it didn't involve the multilateral ties between Armenia and Russia, the Russian army in Armenia, and Russia's historical interests in the Transcaucasus. The current situation is unquestionably unique. The mighty army functions as a "stage prop" surrounded by "friends:" it watches closely, with "ailing" indifference, how they

steal and destroy arms, how they cause moral and material damages worth billions to Armenia, a country with which Russia has signed a treaty on friendship, mutual assistance, and cooperation.

It is absolutely necessary for you to make an announcement on the state of the Russian army in Armenia - either it is in Armenia with our consent in order to defend the country from foreign attacks, either it defends the radical interests of Russia in Armenia, either the Russian army begins a systematic, peaceful seizure of our independent republic, or, finally, it becomes the silent observer of the nation's tragedy, as its predecessor, the Soviet army did in Sumgait, Kirovabad, Baku, and Nagorno-Karabakh. The whole world knew that the army always planned to arrive late in order to complete a "higher mission" than defending the innocent victims of the genocide of Armenians in Azerbaijan.

That is why by addressing you, Boris Nikolayevich, I would like to ask you to express your position on and your attitude toward these issues. That will determine our foreign policy and the development of events in our very complicated region.

We know that many Russians, who have delved into the heart of inter-governmental and inter-ethnic relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan, continue to be strong and determined by freely expressing their sympathy toward the aspirations of the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh for peace and freedom. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to those people who understand

and appreciate the aspiration of the Armenian people for peace, cooperation, and mutual assistance among all peoples of the world, especially the peoples of democratic Russia. The implementation of many of these goals will highly depend on the position of the president and the government.

These issues have been placed before your predecessors, that is, the authorities of the USSR. (I write this because, in many ways, the current Russian Federation is like the successor of the USSR.) And, as a rule, the authorities either didn't respond or responded so cruelly and vaguely that I would venture to say that even Machiavelli and Talleyrand together would envy them.

The vagueness of the Soviet government's position led to the almost unsolvable problems of today. I am certain that this is an issue of concern for the intellectuals of Russia.

I have always believed and still believe that uncertainties in inter-ethnic relations, especially in times of conflict, can only lead to tragic consequences. A strong power doesn't have the right to "sit on two chairs" and hold double posts. Your reluctance to clear the issues can have drastic consequences and probably not only for Armenia. It may lead to a world tragedy, because that is the nature of Armenia's geopolitical state today.

July 5, 1992

It's hard for me to comment on his reaction to my letter, but in 1993, Yeltsin issued a decree to put an end to supplying arms to the CIS countries.

TO THE PRESIDENTS OF THE ACADEMY OF
SCIENCES OF RUSSIA, UKRAINE AND BELARUS

Academicians Yuri Osipov, Boris Paton, and Leonid
Sushchenya

Dear colleagues:

I write to you, the scholars of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, as Azerbaijan's offensive attack on the NKAR and Armenia has manifested itself in terrible forms. The local military operations provoked by Azerbaijan have turned into a large-scale, undeclared war.

Blockades, the seizure of territories, the bombing of residences, numerous victims among the peaceful population, captives and hostages, destroyed homes, schools, hospitals, kindergartens, refugees, the use of illegal measures to eliminate the masses - this is how the barbarian acts of "democratic" Azerbaijan can be summed up.

Today my colleagues and I are amazed at the persistent silence of the scholars and governments of your countries; they act as though nothing unusual is taking place. Two nations are destroying each other. One of

them will win and the other will lose. Somebody will be forced to leave his homeland; another will go crazy from grief... And then what?

Perhaps the Azerbaijani politicians and their patrons have hypnotized you and the governments of your countries. But I am convinced that you are so experienced that you can see the difference between the truth and the lies. The truth is on the surface and all it takes is the desire to see it.

I know that many of your compatriots have delved into the heart of the matter: they stand firm and determined in their position by expressing compassion for the Armenian people. I express my deep gratitude to those people and bow my head to them.

The global community is not keeping silent either as it gradually approaches the truth - something which, as the events of the past days have shown, is of extreme concern for Azerbaijan and its "guardian" Turkey.

I do not want you to get the wrong idea. My Armenian colleagues and I would particularly like to learn your esteemed opinion about the offensive attacks against the Armenians. We don't need scanty announcements about the "friendship between nations" or declarations that "we must sit around the table of negotiations" and so on and so forth. We have heard all of that several times. We are interested in your position on the events and, finally, we expect your condemnation of the Azerbaijan's offensive

attacks. We hope that your voice will be heard by the leaders of the CIS- member countries.

It should not be forgotten that your "impartiality" and the indifference shown by your state figures can have drastic consequences and probably not only for Armenia. This attitude can lead to a world tragedy, because that is the nature of Armenia's geopolitical state today.

August 17, 1992

Perhaps this letter is not relevant today, but I include it because, according to me, it is important in terms of establishing a chronology.

TO U.S. PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON

Mr. President, I know that the presidents of great powers are always busy with the numerous issues facing their countries, the politically and economically fatal issues facing the entire world, as well as issues of the development of science and culture, which are of significance for all mankind. In addition, they are often involved in issues concerning the nations and states that have experienced natural disasters, and they take humanitarian steps that bring honor and glory to the great power and the president.

Five years ago, the U.S. and the president of the country contributed an enormous amount of humanitarian aid and moral support to the Armenian people who had suffered from the devastating earthquake. With that step, we also saw America's fear of seeing the possible disappearance of the ancient civilization of indigenous people in the Armenian land, that is, the Armenian people, from their historical territory of residence.

There was no doubt that the international community would not let that happen, and we are grateful for that.

Over the last few years, the situation of the Armenian people did not improve. There is now way to stabilize the situation in a region where we see the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Unfortunately, the situation intensified as a result of military operations against and the cruel blockade on Armenia.

However, despite these trials and tribulations, the Armenian people are struggling for their existence, human rights, the freedom of individuals and the nation, and the creation of a civilized state that will peacefully coexist and cooperate with all nations of the world, particularly all of its neighbors.

But there is one particular problem that needs to be resolved on the path toward realizing these goals – that is the issue of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, with a population of nearly 160,000 Armenians. These Armenians are the indigenous people of Nagorno-Karabakh; they have lived on the same land for centuries, and,

guided by the demand of all free people, they want to live freely and independently as an autonomous state. But Azerbaijan (into which Nagorno-Karabakh was placed as an autonomous region during the establishment of the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic - not constitutionally, but by the will of other "powers of this world") is creating obstacles that stand in the way of the people's will by accusing Armenia of "instigating attacks" and "making territorial claims."

This is ridiculous. How can the Armenians of Karabakh and Armenians, for that matter, have territorial claims on lands that they have lived for millennia and continue to live on to this day?

This conflict became a touchstone that led to extreme tensions, a local war, and an enormous amount of deaths. This conflict has always been the center of my attention. By taking advantage of my opportunities, I have raised this issue several times with USSR President Mikhail Gorbachev, the USSR parliament, and the public. But Gorbachev's flawed and eventually failed national policy placed this issue in a labyrinth. As a result, human lives continue to be lost to this day. I consider the silence of the civilized world or its formal participation in this act a crime, because it leaves the impression that the silence stems from a lack of personal interest, and that is an immoral and felonious stance.

I address you, the president of a great power, to personally be involved in the "local" issue, guided by standards of humanism and morality. I ask you not to

forget about the geopolitical location of the region and not turn the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict into a small issue of foreign policy, as many politicians have done and still do – politicians for whom the life and death of Armenian and Azerbaijani youth, the sorrow of the mothers, and the misery of both nations are of no value.

I allowed myself to disturb you with this request, because I see no end to human suffering and death. Those victims must be of concern for any person, including the president of a great power for which the possibilities are endless.

I am not a politician. I am a scientist who has made speeches and given lectures at different universities around the U.S.A. Many of my works have been translated and printed in the U.S.A. In the new stage of the American plan for appropriation of the universe, my works have been translated around the world by the glorious NASA organization.

Unquestionably, the last facts gave me the courage to disturb you and wait for the fair solution to the Karabakh conflict. The bloodshed must be put to an end. People must live in reconciliation and solidarity in our region.

February 2, 1993

This letter was printed in Russian in Armenia and in English in U.S. newspapers.

Armenian and Azerbaijani intellectuals sent a letter to the world-famous musician Mstislav Leopoldovich Rostropovich. On that occasion, I wrote an open letter to him, and I include an edited version of it here.

Distinguished Mstislav Leopoldovich:

The Armenian public gratefully accepted your noble proposal to organize the meeting of Armenian and Azerbaijani composers under the auspices of your glorious name and unique talent.

We truly believe that the greats of this world can't live at ease and remain indifferent when they see how people die, how the hearths of an ancient civilization are eliminated, and how the destinies of people are physically and spiritually mutilated.

Being one of the prominent cultural figures of the world, you continue the good tradition of humanists around the world: constantly concerned about the fate of mankind and the sorrow and tragedy of nations that struggle for the freedom of individuals in every corner of this troubled world.

We, Armenian intellectuals, sincerely want to cease the fire and bloodshed in Nagorno-Karabakh immediately and to begin real practical negotiations. We are against

any preconditions, because there are no and can't be any alternatives to peace and an end to the bloodshed.

Politicians and diplomats have said, wrote, discussed and even passed so-called "resolutions" and "decrees" on this and other similar conflicts. But there is no peace and the bloodshed continues. The fact of the matter is that, unfortunately, none of them take into account the situation created in Nagorno-Karabakh and in the region in general.

Let us leave all this to the politicians and history, which will put everything in its place.

Today, what we all need is peace and tranquility. People today need absolute guarantees for security and peace for their nations and for all mankind.

Nations must live in reconciliation and peace in Armenia, Azerbaijan and especially in Nagorno-Karabakh, which has seen a great deal of suffering. Armenians and Azerbaijanis are close neighbors. They are connected to each other by historical fate and must live with other neighboring countries on this small piece of land called the Transcaucasus.

Throughout these years, my colleagues and I have participated in a number of congresses, official and unofficial meetings dedicated to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. However, unfortunately, they did not lead to any practical outcomes, and we don't want your initiative to be fruitless either.

I am certain that we must and can come to a resolution. For this we need good will and an understanding of the need for concessions and productive dialogue. I know that it requires more than the enormous amount of effort of the Armenians and Azerbaijanis. I am sure that it is time to heal the bloody wounds and pain; I know that we face heavy negotiations, dialogues, endless suffering, and perhaps even deep disappointment. But there is no other way. There is only one road and that is a ceasefire and negotiations for reconciliation.

Here is where the role of the friendly and sincere intermediaries comes into play. All nations of the world, including states of good will and prominent individuals such as yourself – the wizard of music and passionate soldier of humanism – can play the role of an intermediary.

I have great expectations for the meeting. I hope that the real Armenians and Azerbaijanis, who want peace and happiness for everyone, will be present. I hope that the intellectuals of Armenia and Azerbaijan will participate in the meeting, regardless of residence, be it in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, Ukraine, or any other distant country of the world. I find that the participation of intellectuals from Nagorno-Karabakh is mandatory for the success of this meeting.

Distinguished Mstislav Leopoldovich, unlike certain politicians who pretentiously call themselves "humanists," you decided to light a fire of hope in our souls by cursing obscurity. I am certain that with your help, we will find real

courses for resolving the conflict. With your help, peace will spread on the ancient land of our ancestors.

July 29, 1993

Unfortunately, this meeting did not take place. Who interfered in the process? I don't know. There were certainly evil forces at play.

Two years of long, hard-sought peace. The Republic of Armenia is on the road to development. The Armenian Republic of Artsakh is a reality, and hard times await us through words, actions, and arms.

I am optimistic and, as an incurable optimist, I believe that our people will definitely find ways to get out of the situation. For this we must strengthen ourselves and, sometimes, restore our diligence, the unbreakable will of victory, as well as the sense of pride for our dignity and the nation. After all, we have emerged honorably from situations that were more complicated and, at first sight, hopeless.

I have not included fundamental changes in the Armenian version of the book because, in my opinion, the past years once again confirmed the truth of the concepts, generalizations, and predictions presented in this book.

I did not extend the limit of time of the events described because I think that these years (1988-1991) were a

starting point and important for shaping the contemporary history of our republic. I have only added certain forgotten incidents with commentaries which, in my opinion, are interesting and will add more to the book to a certain extent.

In the epilogue that followed the first epilogue, I included summaries of the four letters which, I think, are organically tied to the events that took place in the years mentioned above.

This is all that I would like to say for now. I end the book, but the Karabakh conflict remains. With feelings of discontent, I bid farewell to an issue that is extremely important for our nation. But I hope that, in the future, true politicians and state figures will solve all issues concerning Karabakh according to the people's desire.

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