

# Border issues of Armenia and Azerbaijan

Rouben Galichian, Yerevan, April 2021

The problems of the borders of Armenia and Azerbaijan have existed since the first days of the establishment of the newly created Republic of Azerbaijan in 1918, which was founded in the east of the Republic of Armenia.

During the early years of 1918-20 Nagorno-Karabakh, Qarvachar and eastern part of Syunik were under Armenian control, but Azerbaijan disputed and had ambitions for them. These can be seen on the 01 and 02 maps, prepared by Arthur Tsutsiyev, published in his 2014, Ethno-Political Atlas of the Caucasus in the USA.



1920: Partition of the Republic of Armenia

## The Republic of Armenia (May 1918–December 1920)

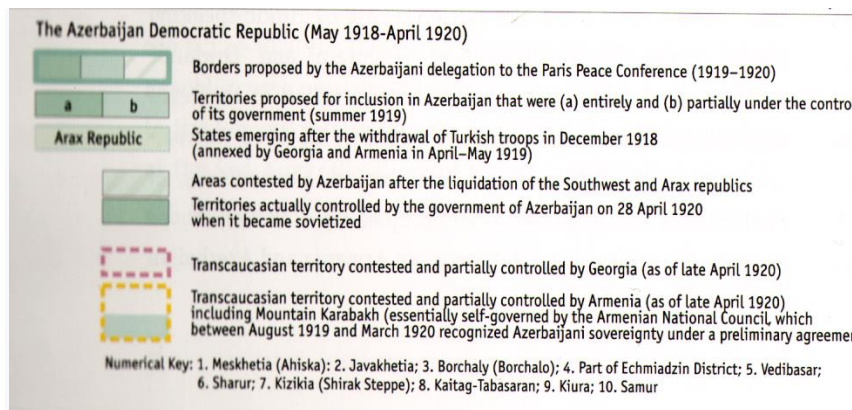
- Borders of Transcaucasian territory proposed for Armenia by the Armenian delegation to the Paris Peace Conference (1919–1920)
- Territories proposed for inclusion in Armenia that were (a) entirely and (b) partially under the control of its government (April 1920)
- Mountain Karabakh (essentially self-governed by the Armenian National Council, which between August 1919 and March 1920 recognized Azerbaijani sovereignty under the preliminary agreement)
- Areas contested by Azerbaijan and occupied by the Red Army after the sovietization of Azerbaijan (in July–August 1920); the 10 August 1920 Preliminary Accord between the RSFSR and Armenia states that these territories' status would be determined within the framework of a future peace treaty
- Territories contested and partially controlled by Georgia, including areas taken by Georgia during the Armenian-Turkish War in October–November 1920
- Territory of the Ottoman Empire nominally assigned in November 1920 to the Republic of Armenia by Wilson's Arbitral Award (under provisions of the August 1920 Treaty of Sevres), but still under control of Turkey (Ankara [Angora] government), which did not recognize the treaty
- Territory occupied by Turkish troops during the Armenian-Turkish War (September–December 1920)
- The Armenian-Turkish border under the 3 December 1920 Treaty of Alexandropol (A-B) and the borders of the territories of Sharur and Nakhichevan (B-C), where under the provisions of the treaty a plebiscite was to be conducted to determine their status
- Sovietization of Armenia, 29 November–4 December 1920
- Former border of the Russian Empire

Map 01 - Republic of Armenia 1918-1920 map and its key.

Here, Karabakh and Nakhichevan are located in the territory of Armenia, but these were controversial issues for the Azerbaijani government.

The next map is the same area from the point of view of the Republic of Azerbaijan in 1919-1920, before the establishment of communist rule in Armenia. Here, too, Karabakh and Nakhijevan are located in the territory of Armenia, but the map explains that they are controversial installations and suggests to move them to the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Note that the region of Karabakh was almost 92% Armenian populated and Nakhijevan was 50% Armenian.



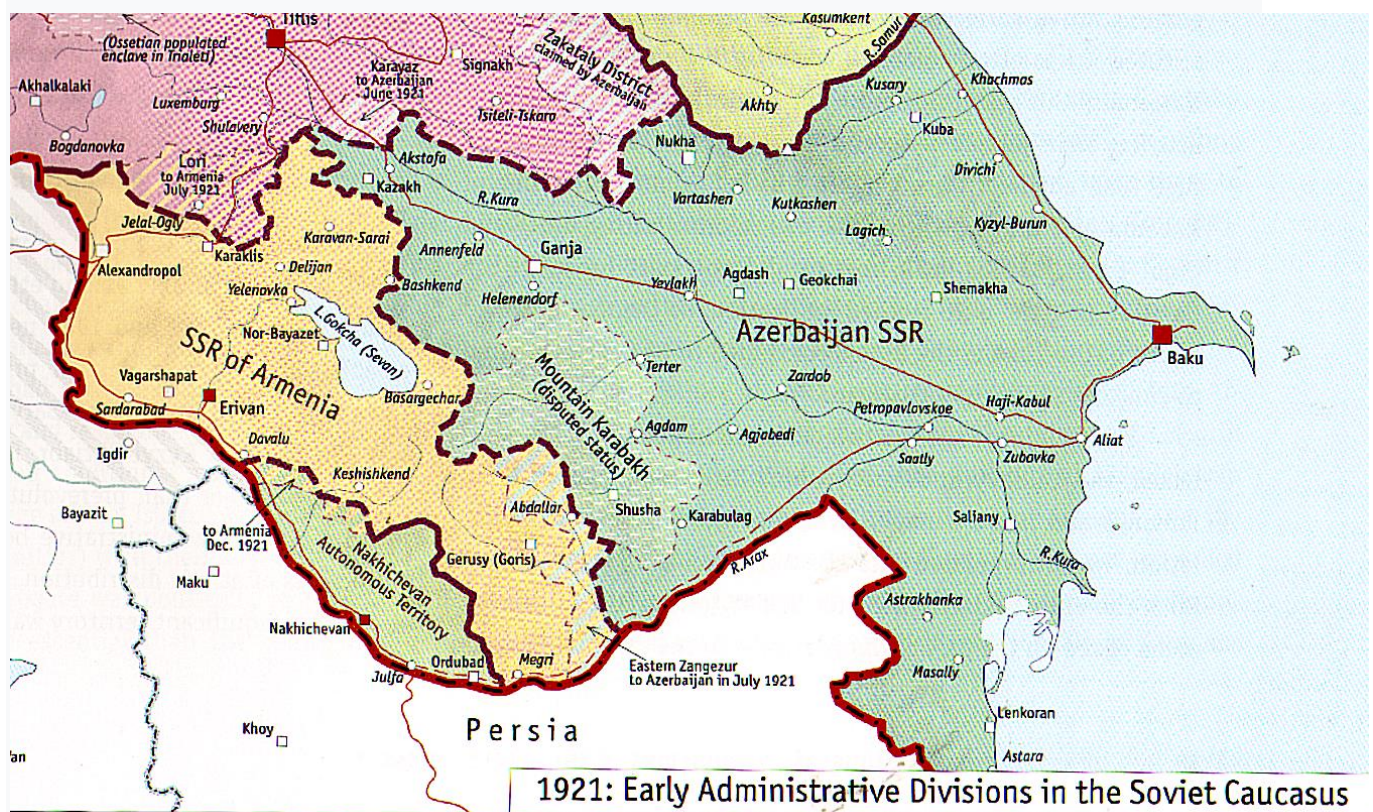
Map 02 - Map of the Republic of Azerbaijan and its key, 1919-1920.

In April 1918, Azerbaijan adopted the communist regime, and Armenia did the same on November 29. The next day, November 30, the communist authorities of Azerbaijan congratulated the newly established Government of Armenia and announced that the Azerbaijani authorities had unilaterally decided that the disputed territories between Armenia and Azerbaijan, which are Karabakh and Nakhijevan, should be incorporated inside the territory of the Republic of Armenia.

This decision was published in the newspapers of Baku, Moscow and Yerevan. Stalin visited Baku in July 1921 and reaffirmed this decision. However, a day later, after a closed-door meeting with Narimanov, Stalin overturned his decision, declaring that the predominantly Armenian-populated Karabakh and 50% Armenian populated Nakhijevan, should be part of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The first was to be an Autonomous Region, and the second, an Autonomous Republic.

Here lie the root of all the problems and the controversy that has been raging for over hundred years over these territories.

According to Stalin's resolution, not only Nagorno Karabakh, but also its neighbouring regions of Kalbajar (Qarvajar), Lachin (Qashatagh) and Eastern Syuniq, which were located between Karabakh and Armenia, were also handed over to Azerbaijan. Encouraged by Stalin's support since those days Azerbaijan has constantly sought to enlarge its territories and appropriated more than 1,000 square kilometers from Armenian lands of strategic importance. Complaints of grievances in Armenia over these wrongful appropriations and confiscations were, as a rule, ignored by the central government, who often responded saying the issues had already been resolved and the matters have been closed.



Map 03 - Map of the South Caucasus, 1921, according to the Tsutsiyev, which is confirmed by the Great Soviet Encyclopedia of 1926 (see Map 4.) On the map you can see that the territory of Nagorno Karabakh was part of the Kalbajar-Qarvajar also Lachin-Qashatagh regions, and the eastern part of the Syuniq province of Armenia extending eastwards towards Vorotan and further east, to the Hakari River, reaching south to the River Arax and the Persian border, were also handed over to Azerbaijan.

Thus, when Nagorno-Karabakh was ceded to Azerbaijan by Stalin in July 1921, Kalbajar and Lachin were also ceded, as were the eastern regions of Syuniq, which, in the east, ran up to the mountains near Vorotan and Hagari Rivers.

1923 Azerbaijan introduced a new factor in the status of the border between Azerbaijan and Armenia, trying to reduce their existing contacts with "Armenia" by creating a theoretically neutral province called "Red Kurdistan", which would physically separate Azerbaijan from Armenia, leaving Karabakh, surrounded by Kurds and Turks, making it easier for Azerbaijan to control and manage. At the time the total population of Kurds in Azerbaijan was under 34,000, which, according to the present-day Azerbaijani reports, has now fallen to zero.

With this change of situation, the eastern part of Syunik, Kalbajar and Lachin, were taken out of Armenia by reasoning that the nomad Kurds needed pastures for grazing, which are located mainly inside Armenia. The allocation of pastures and territory of the so-called Red Kurdistan province of Azerbaijan was the main reason used for appropriating Armenian lands.

It should be reminded here that according to the Great Soviet Encyclopedia (1926) before the founding of Red Kurdistan, Armenia and Karabakh were separated by a river only. This was the Hakari (Hagaru or Aghavnu) River separating them. See map 04.

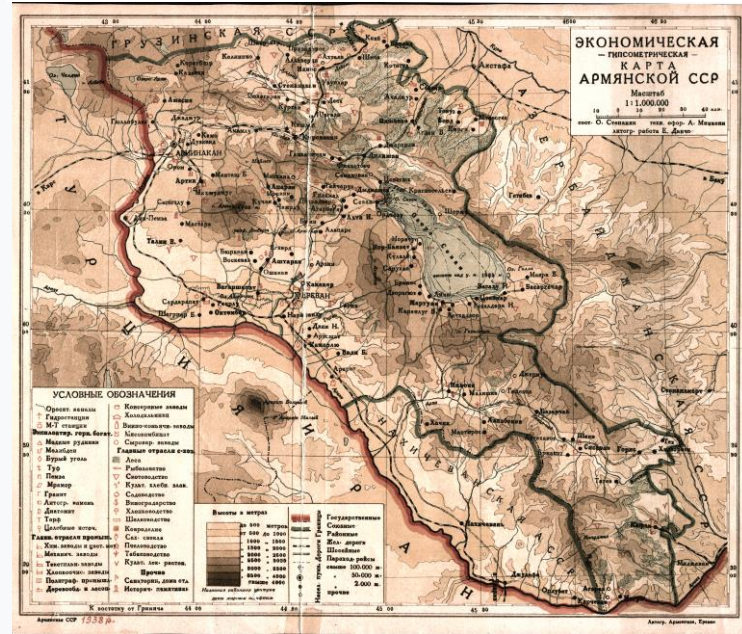


Map 04 - Republic of Armenia according to 1926 Soviet Great Encyclopedia. According to this map, the Big and Small Al lakes, (south east of Sevan) the village of Shurnukh and Vorotan (near Goris) were all inside the territory of Armenia, and the city of Kapan was located a few kilometers west, away from the Azerbaijani border.

These days, the so-called occupied territories to be returned to Azerbaijan are an urgent problem. However, looking at Armenia in 1928 and 1938 shown on maps 05 and 06 it could be seen that during that period several important regions and lands on the eastern borders of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia were ordered to be transferred to the Soviet Socialist Republic of Azerbaijan, with insufficient legal reasons. Among them are the three lakes located in the south-east of Lake Sevan, which are a very important part of the water sources for Lake Sevan as well as the Republic of Armenia (see page 8 of this report.)



Map 05 – 1928

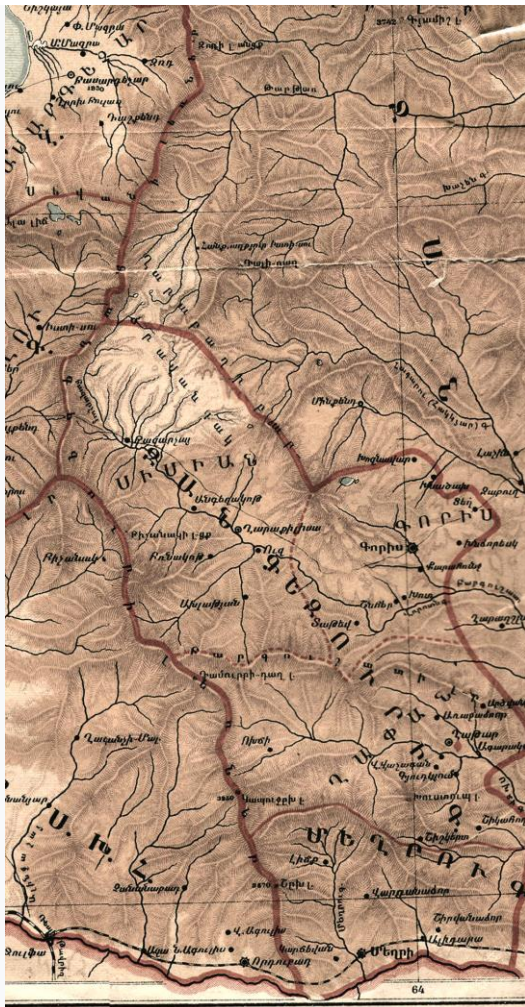


Map 06 - 1938

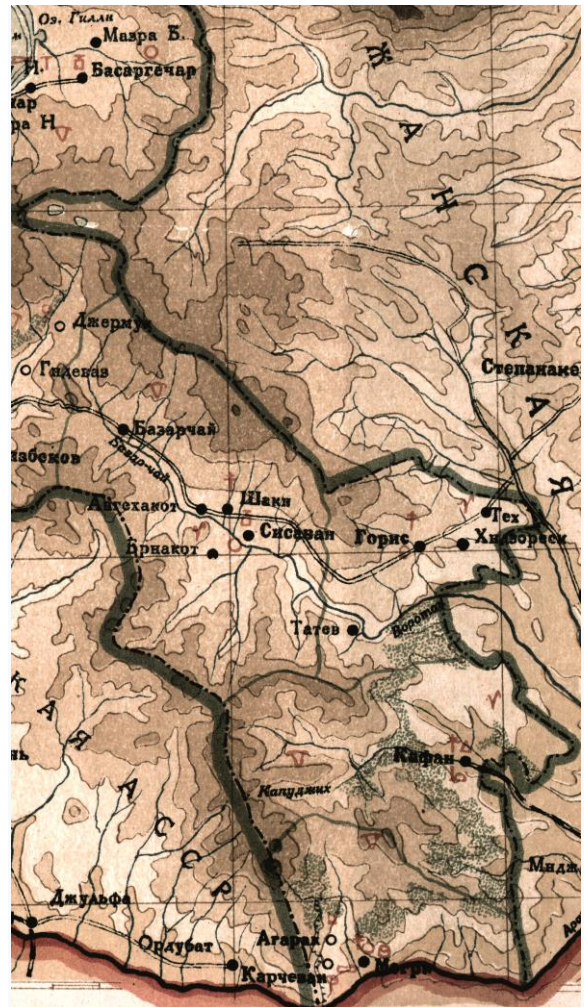
Map numbers 07 and 08 show the details of territory of Syunik, taken from the above-mentioned 05 and 06 maps. Comparing the two maps it becomes clear which territories from the eastern borders of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia were handed over or appropriated by the Soviet Socialist Republic of Azerbaijan during the years of 1928 to 1930, the results of which appear on the map dated 1938.

One could also see about the confirmation of the above-mentioned problems by looking at the maps of the Great Soviet Encyclopedia, vol. 3, Moscow, on the maps included in these volumes in 1926, inserted between pages 416-417 of the publication, and reproduced as map 09, which also shows the fact that region of Al Lakes is in Armenia. It also confirms that the location of the borders of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region at the present Lachin-Berdzor town, and the Republic of Armenia, is the Hakera or Hakari (Aghavno) River, forming a natural border between the two countries and indicated by the yellow pointer on the map 09.

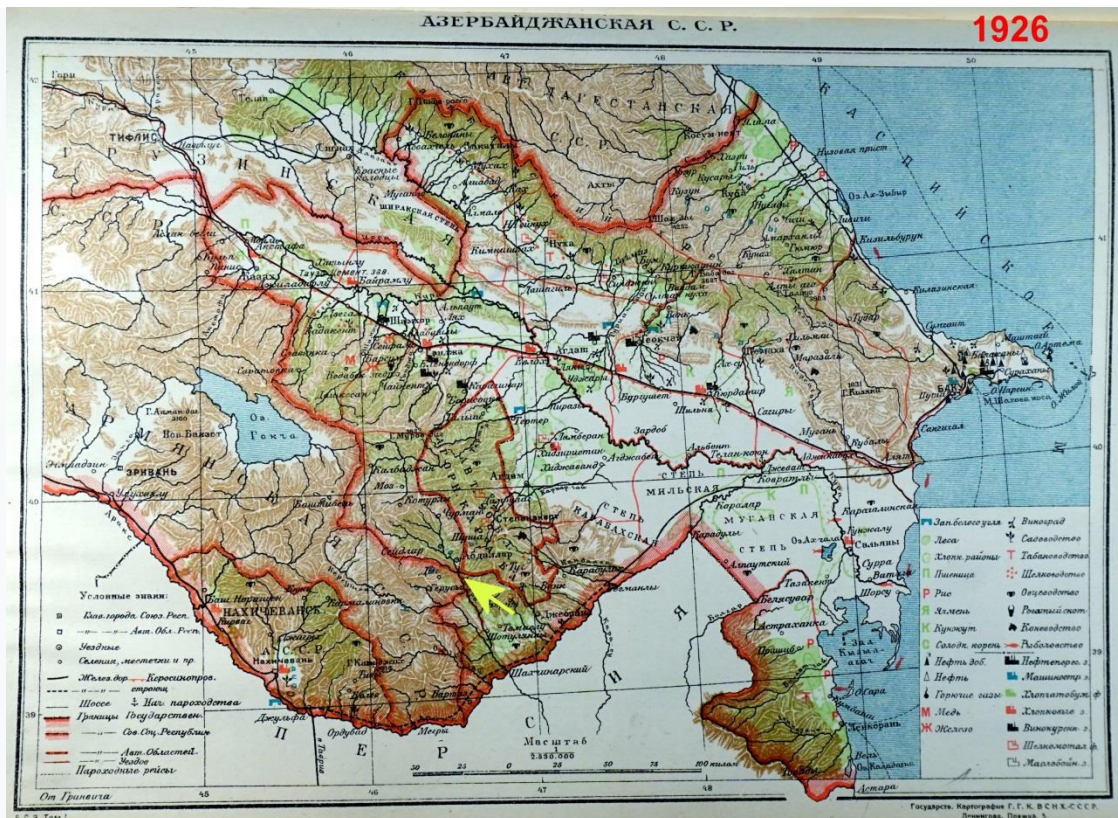
Map 09 on the following page is the map of Soviet Azerbaijan from the Great Soviet Encyclopedia of 1926. The map 04 is the that of the Soviet Armenia, taken from the same encyclopedia of 1926. Both these maps confirm that Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia were separated only by the river Hakera/Hakari, and in the area of the Al Lakes, as well as the territories east of Shurnukh and Kapan, belonged to Armenia and the Azerbaijani borders were more than 10 km to the east of these towns (for map images see next page.)



Map 07 – Syuniq in 1928



Map 08 – Syuniq in 1936



Map 09 – Republic of Azerbaijan according to Great Soviet Encyclopedia in 1926.

The next map, no. 10, shows the territories of Armenia and Nagorno Kabakagh (Artsakh), both in shades of yellow. On this map the territories appropriated by Azerbaijan from Armenia and Artsakh have been marked and numbered blue. Looking at the map it could clearly be seen how these changes have affected the eastern borders of Armenia. See below for the detailed description of the indicated regions



Map 10, Territories appropriated by Azerbaijan, during the 1920s and 1930s.

1. Looking at the area near Lachin, the border between Armenia and Karabakh, which was previously divided only by the Hakari or Aghavni rivers, it can be seen that now they are about 18 kilometers apart and the two Armenian-populated areas are thus completely separated.
2. Some ten kilometers from the lands between Shurnukh and the Vorotan River were taken over by Azerbaijan, whose border now reached the centre line of the Goris-Kapan highway, where the village of Shurnukh is located. Thus, the border has become the central line of the highway passing through the village, and the villages of Dzhokhadzor and Masrik were taken and became placed within the Azerbaijani borders.
3. Mount Dalidagh, 33 kilometers northwest of Ishkhanasar, was handed over to Azerbaijan.
4. The 12-kilometre-deep area southeast of Kapan was handed over, as a result of which a part of Kapan airport passed into Azerbaijani hands (see the map 11 on page 9.)
5. The region of the two Al Lakes, south east of the Lake Sevan, which are the source of the main spring waters supplying Lake Sevan. After the decision to establish the province of Red Kurdistan between Azerbaijan and Armenia, this region was also given to the Kurds in order to secure pastures for them. This was done, without consulting the actual owners of the land, the local villagers, which was against the Soviet law ruling at the time. However, when in 1930 the establishment of Red Kurdistan was annulled all the lands earmarked for this province were not returned to the rightful owners, but were all taken over by Azerbaijan.

6. *The territory around the Armenia village of Artsvashen and the road leading to it were all handed over to Azerbaijan.*

7. *Territory around the Artsakh town of Martakert was also appropriated by Azerbaijan.*

Thus, indirectly, without following the legal procedures of the time, Azerbaijan confiscated more than a thousand square kilometers of lands from the territories of Armenia.

One example for this illegal confiscation is the correspondence regarding the region of Al Lakes, southeast of Lake Sevan. There are documents in the National Archives of Armenia regarding the decisions to transfer lands from Armenia to Azerbaijan. The following are among them:

1. Ref. HAA f.112.ts.1.c.551, t.9. A letter dated 12 November 1930 of the People's Commissariat of Agriculture of the USSR to Haykent Executive Committee. It states that the Alagyollar (Al Lakes) territory was annexed to Azerbaijan without conducting a local research and consultation or hearing the opinion of locals and their executive committee continuing .... *In view of all this, it is requested that the issue be examined in order to ensure that it was executed according to the accepted procedures, during which a local examination should have been carried out, as well as obtaining the opinions of local executive committees with the participation of the People's Committee.*

The above-mentioned objections were discussed at the 51st session of the Central Executive Committee of the Armenian SSR in 1930. The following reply was sent on December 11, with the following text:

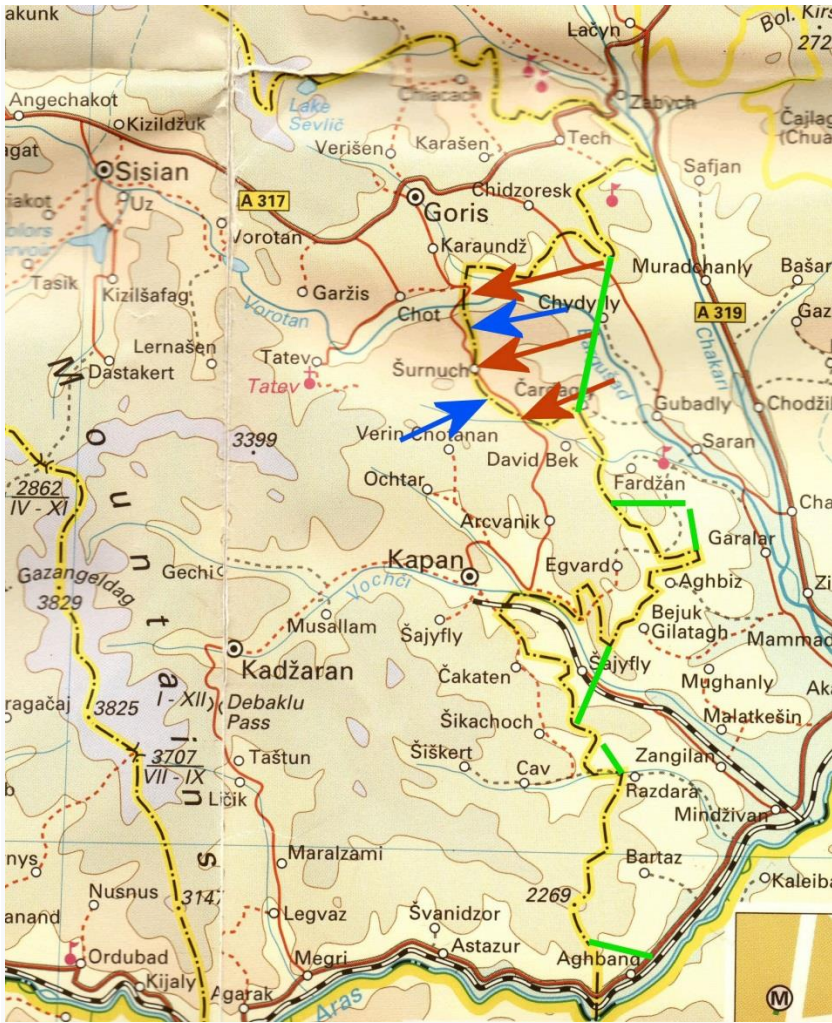
2. Ref. HAA f.112.ts.1.c.5551, t.7. *Considering the fact that the necessary delimitations have been fulfilled by the Trans-Caucasian special commission, the above mentioned question has been considered as resolved.*

This is the way that issues were “resolved” by communist authorities of the Transcaucasian Federation.

Another problematic situation created by the movement of the borders is the highway leading from Goris to Kapan, which passes through the village of Shurnukh, where, as mentioned before, the center-line of the highway is the official border between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Furthermore, the same road crosses the Armenia-Azerbaijan border in three more locations, thus passing through the territory of Azerbaijan (map 11). The reason for this is that in the 1930s. The area west of Vorotan, before Shurnukh-Jibekli, was illegally transferred to Azerbaijan, making the road a few times cross and enter the territory of the neighbouring country.

We mentioned that the main reason for these decisions was that in 1923 Azerbaijan decided to create the province of Red Kurdistan, and on the pretext of its establishment, a number of regions of Syuniq, which were considered to be good pastures, were unilaterally allocated to the Red Kurdistan soon-to-be-created province. In 1929 the USSR decided that provinces were to be replaced by districts, and in July 1930, by the decision of the USSR, they were reorganized into districts, in which Kurdistan was initially declared, but a few months later the creation of the Red Kurdistan annulled and the territories allocated to it remained inside the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan.





Map 11 is from a Canadian tourist map of 2000. On this map, the present borders of Azerbaijan-Armenia are marked with chain-dotted black-yellow line, pointed by the blue arrows. The Goris -Kapan highway is the red line, with red arrows marking the points, where this road crossed the border of the two countries. The approximate borders ruling in 1928 are marked green, which can also be seen in all previously published maps, including the 1926-1928 Great Soviet Encyclopedia as well as in the maps 05, 06, ,07, 08, 09 of this report.



Map 12 shows the main Goris-Kapan road as reproduced in 1961 Atlas of the Armenian SSR, which also appears on pages 90, 93, 109 of the Atlas.

Here the Goris-Kapan highway is shown passing completely through the territory of Armenia, which since 1936, did not correspond to the reality. This misrepresentation is present in almost all Soviet-era and subsequent maps printed for the public, up to 2015.

## **References**

*Atlas of Armenian SSR*. Yerevan, 1961 (Armenian.)

Badalian, Armen. *The Border Issues of Soviet Armenia and Soviet Azerbaijan during the years of 1920s and 1930s*. National Archives of Armenia, Newsletter, 2017 (Armenian.)

Galichian Rouben. *Historic Maps of Armenia: the Cartographic Heritage*. I.B Tauris, 2004.

Galichian, Rouben. *Clash of Histories in the South Caucasus*. Bennett & Bloom, 2012.

Galichian, Rouben. *Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkey: Addressing Paradoxes of Culture, Geography and History*. Bennett & Bloom, 2019.

Greater Soviet Encyclopedia, Moscow, 1926 (Russian.).

Khachatryan Karen, Sukiasyan Hamo, Badalyan Gegham, *The Appropriation of Armenian and Mountainous Karabakh Territories by Azerbaijan and Turkey during 1920s and 1930s*, the Academy of Sciences of Armenia, Institute of History, Yerevan, 2015 and 2020 (Armenian.)

*National Atlas of Armenia*. Volume 1, Yerevan, 2015.

Tsutsiev, Arthur. *Atlas of Ethno-Political History of the Caucasus*. Yale University Press, 2014.

Various documents of the national Archives of Armenia (Armenian and Russian.)