

The Great Britain's Azerbaijan Policy During the Years 1917-1920

Hokuma Abbasova*

Introduction

Due its ancient culture, rich recourses and geographical location Azerbaijan was always in the scope of European countries from ancient times. Azerbaijan territory connecting the Mediterranean and Black Sea basin and coordinating various civilizations led to early and extensive interaction with the foreign countries. As a result of this Azerbaijan established diplomatic relations with almost all Asian and European countries in the Middle Ages.

Obviously, UK which began to play a major role in the international system of relations since the 17th century was one of such imperialist states interested in Azerbaijan territory. The interest of the Russian Empire in the Caucasus, including Azerbaijan, from the XVII century and subsequent strengthening here was contrary to the interests of the United Kingdom in the region. Thus, the British policy of Azerbaijan during the years 1917-1920s which was very important period in Azerbaijan history always keeps its importance.

The First Ties Between Azerbaijan and Great Britain

Taking into account the importance of the Caucasus region it must be stated that Great Britain has always economic and political interest to the region. The first economic and political relations between Britain and Azerbaijan date back to the XVI century. At that time, the newly formed English bourgeoisie was struggling for cheap raw materials and sales markets. In the 16th century the Ottoman Empire was guarding the land and sea routes from Europe to India. This was the reason why the British tried to find other ways to India. In the search of such a road, six expeditions to the Safavid Empire were sent by the British "Moscow" company during the 1580s. The main purpose of the expedition was to go India via Volga-Khazar, Azerbaijan and Iran passing through Russia. Moreover, they wanted to use the Safavid State as a profitable marketplace and a cheap source of raw material¹.

* Phd, Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences, Institute of History, Baku/AZERBAIJAN, h.abbasova@yahoo.com

1 Mahmudov Yagub, *Azərbaycan Diplomatiyası*, Bakı 2006, s. 245.

During the 1580s the relation between Safavid Empire and England began weaken as the Russian Tsar Ivan IV prohibited English merchants from passing through the territory of Russia trade with the Asian Countries².

From the 1870s the British became interested in Azerbaijan again as the oil industry developed in Azerbaijan. English investors were closely involved in investing in Azerbaijan's oil industry.

The dramatic development of the oil business on the Absheron Peninsula during the late 19th and early 20th centuries made Baku the main industrial center in the Caucasus and even in the world. Even by the end of 19th century, half the world's oil gushed from Baku³. The main result of this was increase in oil production due to the development of petrochemical industry in foreign countries and in Russia. The other factor was foreign and local investment in oil industry. So soon, Baku could compete with the leading oil centers.

As Baku Khanate was occupied by the Russian empire in 1806, they also took a monopolistic control of oil production. The Tsar's government adopted a government resolution on May 1, 1880 that was devoted to the admittance of foreigners to oil fields within the Baku region and this encouraged the foreign investment in the oil industry. As a result of this resolution, toward the end of 1870s the foreign capital inflow to Baku increased. In the 1870s and 1880s eight British, three French, two Swedish, two German, two Belgian and one Danish company and others, were operating in Azerbaijan⁴.

Thus, in 1910s two-thirds of the foreign capital invested in the Baku oil industry was owned by the British. The oil of Baku exported to Austria-Hungary (Trieste), Belgium (Antwerp), Indochina, the Ottoman Empire, Japan, Greece, China, Germany, the Netherlands, France, Malta, Portugal, Algeria, the Philippines and the Danubian principalities along with Great Britain (London). In 1904 Britain provided 74% of its oil production on the base of Baku oil⁵.

At the end of 1880s British company Shell before called "Samuel&Co" became interested in Baku oil. The Shell became the official companion of "Caspian-Black Sea Society" belonged to French Rothschild Brothers that sold out their

2 Mahmudov Yagub, *age.*, p. 245.

3 Denis Babusiaux, *Recherche et production du pétrole et du gaz: réserves, coûts, contrats*, Editions Technip, Paris, 2002, p. 8.

4 S. S. Aliyarov, *Oil Monopoly in Azerbaijan during the Great War*, 1974, p. 74.

5 Lev Polonskii, *Bakinskii dom Rotshilda*, Vestnik evreiskogo universiteta v Moskve 3 (13), Moskva –Jerusalim, 1996, p. 174.

oil goods in East. In 1890 Rothschild family already controlled 42% of Baku oil export. Thus, they soon became the second largest investor after Nobel Brothers⁶.

In 1897 Shell Transportation Company merged with "Royal Dutch" company of Netherland and in 1990s this company began interested in buying some oil fields in Baku. However, all oil fields had already been bought by largest foreign investors like Nobel Brothers, Rothschild Brothers or Russian and local investors.

At the same time with this Rothschild Brothers declared that they want to sell shares of their companies operating at Baku oil industry. Meanwhile, Royal Dutch/Shell decided to buy their shares. The negotiations between Royal Dutch/Shell and Rothschild on the sale took place in 1911. Rothschilds decided to sell two of its companies - "Caspian-Black Sea Society" that cost 6.5 million rubles and Mazut that cost 21.624 million rubles. The cost of the two companies was approximately 28.124 million rubles - about 75 million francs.⁷

On February 21st 1912 Rothschilds had sold their Russian oil enterprises to the Anglo-Dutch trust Royal Dutch/Shell. According the agreement signed between two companies Royal Dutch Shell got 80% of shares of "Caspian-Black Sea Society" and "Mazut" company. This deal cost 22,136 million rubles, or 58,881 million francs⁸. In return of this they received a significant equity participation in Shell and the Rothschilds became the owners of Shell's banking arm in Paris. Besides this Rothschilds get 60% shares of Royal Dutch and 40% shares of Shell.⁹

This sale has caused great surprise and it was the largest selling transaction in the history of the oil industry of Russia. It must be stated that before the World War I the 60% of the investment on Baku oil industry belonged to Great Britain¹⁰. Up to that time, Britain and the Antanta forces attempted to prevent the Baku oil from falling into the hands of the enemy forces.

Since 1917 the great powers, including Britain, have begun a completely new policy against Azerbaijan. The main reason for this was due to exciting historical circumstances. After the February Revolution Russian Empire collapsed and socio-political situation of the county was changed. In the regions, including in

6 Akhundov Bakhman Ju., *Monopolisticheskii kapital v d orevolucionnoi bakinskoi neftyanoi promyshlennosti*, Moskva-Leningrad, 1959, p. 39.

7 Archives Nationales du Monde du Travail, 132 AQ 195.

8 Lev Polonskii, *age*. p. 182.

9 Archives Nationales du Monde du Travail, Banque Rothschild 132 AQ (1995 057), p. 58.

10 R.G. Suny, *The Baku Commune. 1917-1918*, Princeton, 1972, p 5.

Azerbaijan, the National Councils was established and its authority was increasing, due to the majority of Azerbaijanis recognized it as the legitimate government and united around it. However, later after the coup in St Petersburg during the night of 24 to 25 October Bolsheviks came to power in Russia and declared that they had started “a world communist revolution”. Soon Bolshevik ideas became spread in the neighboring areas, too.

On December 1917 British Government began to think about sending armed forces to Baku and South Azerbaijan¹¹. Commander of the British army Major General Layonel Densterville wrote in his memoirs: “Our plan was to achieve superiority over the Caspian Sea, but we could only achieve this goal by invading Baku, so it was important to protect the city from the occupation of others”.¹²

During the First World War, the British seriously competed for owning Baku oil. In order to prevent the Baku oil from falling into the hands of the Ottoman and German armies, in June 1918 Britain sent first British troops in Baghdad to Baku led by General Dunsterville. The British understood that if they wouldn't occupy Baku then Bolshevism would have covered Southern Azerbaijan, Iran and the whole of Central Asia and Afghanistan. Later the India would have been also involved in this turmoil.

On May 28th 1918, at the first meeting of the National Council of Azerbaijan in Tbilisi with the adoption of “Declaration of Independence” was declared the establishment of Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (the People's Republic of Azerbaijan) the first democratic republic in the Middle East. On May 30, 1918, the radio telegrams on creation of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR) were sent to the leading states of the world by the Chairman of the Council of Ministers Fatahi Khan Khoyski. Radio telegrams were sent to Istanbul, Berlin, Vienna, Paris, London, Rome, Washington, Sofia, Bucharest, Tehran, Madrid, Moscow, Stockholm, Tokyo and other capitals.¹³

After the declaration of independence, the Azerbaijani Government was temporarily settled in Ganja as Baku was under the control Dashnak armed forces by the leadership of Stepan Shaumyan and Centro Caspian Dictatorship was formed in Baku.

11 Ф. Д. Волков, тайны Уайтхолла и Даунинг-стрит. М.: Наука, 1980, p 50.

12 Генерал-майор Денстервиль. Британский империализм в Баку и Персии. 1917-1918 г. Тифлис: “Советский Кавказ”, 1925, p 123.

13 С. Нәсəнов, Azərbaycan beynəlxalq münasibətlər sistemində 1918-1920. Azər nəşr, Bakı 1993, p. 86.

After the establishment of armed forces of the ADR on June 26, 1918 the ADR army together with the help of Ottoman troops sent to the help of Azerbaijan Government began the liberation process of Baku from Centro Caspian Dictatorship”.

In the summer of 1918, the British were preparing strongly by invading the port of Anzaly in Northern Iran. They thought to bring up their troops to Baku after there will be a coup-d'état by the group of Eser-Menshevik-Dashnak bloc¹⁴.

The British thought that “Baku belongs to those powers that control the sea.” The main task assigned to the L. Densterville and U. Malleson's military expedition was this. Therefore, they had to occupy the largest ports of the Caspian Sea - Anzaly, Baku and Krasnovodsk and seize the entire Caspian fleet¹⁵.

While the joint Caucasus Islamic Army intended to liberate Baku, the Centro Caspian Dictatorship leaders asked help from the British army located in Anzaly. On August 4, the first group of 150 people from the British army in Anzaly came to Baku, and on August 6, 130 new soldiers and officers and 2 armored vehicles were brought here. On August 17, General Dunsterville, along with his whole army arrived in Baku at the “Presidential Krueger” liner. In total more than a thousand bullets, 16 cannons and several armored vehicles were brought to Baku.¹⁶

It was obvious that this force was unable to defend the city, even the British Command was well aware of this. Thus, according to the telegram dated July 6, 1918, issued by the Ministry of Defense on behalf of Dunsterville, it was instructed that if the Turks will be able to capture Baku, then destroy the oil pipeline, oil reservoirs and oil-bearing equipment. But remain safe the oil derricks, as the long-term interest of the British oil companies remained in these oilfields.

On the other hand, the British predicted that Turkey would soon lose in the war, and wouldn't anymore want to take part in the bloody actions of the indigenious, even the “allies”. Despite the Centro Caspian Dictatorship's threatening, to shield the Caspian Navy ships the English general began preparing to take his army back to Anzaly¹⁷

During the first British military mission, the Armenians pursued a very ugly policy

14 Генерал-майор Денстервиль, age. p. 159.

15 Мирошников Л. И. Английская экспансия в Иране. 1914-1920 г. Москва, 1961, p 114-115.

16 Дарабади П. Г., Алиев Н. А. Геополитическое соперничество в Каспийском регионе и Азербайджан / С древнейших времен до конца XX века / Баку: АБВМУ, 2001, p88.

17 Генерал-майор Денстервиль, age. p. 248-254.

and tried to portray the Azerbaijanis as an enemy of the British. They met with British Army officers and tried to create an anti-Turkish and anti-Muslim influence. At first, they could achieve their aims, even received financial assistance from the British forces. This financial aid was used in the genocide against Azerbaijanis.

One of the main goals of the British military expedition was to supply the British army with fuel. During his 41-day stay in Baku, the English commander managed to send a lot of oil and oil products to the front. But the military expedition of British faced a number of difficulties in Baku. A number of issues, including lack of food in Baku, the financial crisis, the negative attitude of the local Muslim population to the British supporting the Armenians and their sympathy towards the Ottoman Empire, and the chaos in the city all urged the British army to left. So, the military expedition left the city on September 14, 1918, when they saw that it is impossible to overcome powerful Caucasian Islamic Army. Dunsters force was officially released after reaching Anzaly on September 19, 1918.¹⁸

After the first British mission to Azerbaijan there was no relation between the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic and Great Britain, as they were in opposite fronts.¹⁹

Soon, the British realized that Armenians had greatly damaged the relations with Azerbaijanis and they created an impression that British fulfil anti-Muslim policy. Moreover, the unification of the Armenians with the Bolsheviks worried Great Britain too. The British have informed the British General Staff about the massacre committed by Armenians in Baku and in other parts of Azerbaijan, and asked the other British troops come to Baku.

Britain's Azerbaijan Policy After The First World War and Baku Under The Command of General Thomson

Towards the end of World War I, the Great Britain and France signed a convention on dividing the geographical zone they controlled. Under this convention, the South Caucasus and Central Asia were on the influence of Britain, Crimea, Ukraine and Bessarabia of the French²⁰.

Despite the unsuccessful operations of General Dunsterville in the South

18 Azərbaycan Xalq Cümhuriyyəti Ensiklopediyası, I Cild, Lider Nəşriyyatı, Bakı 2004, s 323.

19 *aAge.*, p. 238.

20 *aAge.*, p. 235.

Caucasus, the British War Office again re-affirmed this region of their sphere of influence on November 13, 1918. The British government did not want to delay its re-entering the South Caucasus and get consent from the Supreme Council of Antanta to bring the British army to Baku. Meanwhile, political, economic, and interethnic relations in Baku were very sharp, and crimes were steadily rising²¹.

On October 30, 1918, after the Mudros contract between Turkey and the United Kingdom Azerbaijan was declared sphere of influence of Great Britain. The leaders of ADR tried to improve relations with Britain, as there were some British troops in Iran and they were ready to capture Azerbaijan that is why it was necessary to begin negotiations. On November 14, 1918 representatives of the ADR Government met with the British Consul. The delegation asked to protect them from the attacks of the Dashnaks - Bolsheviks and to establish social peace. The Consul stated that he would convey this information to the Commander of the British Army in Anzaly.

According to the agreement of the Allies, the commander of the British military forces - General Thomson - in the Iranian port of Anzaly was ordered to capture Baku. The British general demanded that Ottoman and Azerbaijani military forces had to leave Baku. On November 17, 1918, General Tomson's military forces entered Baku and British governor- general headed by Thomson was created in Baku. Baku and its oil fields were under the control of British and the forces opposing the independence of Azerbaijan, especially the Dashnaks, were again activated.

Prior to departing for Baku, the British General made a statement by explaining the attitude of the allied states towards Azerbaijan. It was particularly noted in the statement that "Baku will be occupied together with its oil industry, but the rest of the country will remain under the control of the Azerbaijani government and its army" and "Azerbaijan will not be excluded from the Paris Peace Conference on the principles of self-determination of nations". The statement also indicated that along with the British armies, L. Bicherakhov's army will also enter Baku, while armed Armenians will not be allowed²². It was noted in the statement of the British general that the final decision on the solution of all issues related to this area would have been accepted at the upcoming peace conference²³.

21 *aAge.*, p. 235.

22 А. Раевский, Английская интервенция и мусаватское правительство. Баку, 1927, p 33.

23 "Заря Востока", Тифлис. (ZaryaVostoka Tiflis) 3 март 1925.

After the negotiation the Azerbaijani Delegation told the British Command that they did not object Allies troops to enter Baku. According to the negotiations, this was not a violation of the territorial integrity of the country, and the British army would assist the ADR government in ensuring peace in the city. British also understood that this mission was not a military intervention or colonial occupation but a new mission of peace. Under the leadership of Thomson, 1000 British 800 Indian soldiers and police arrived in Baku on 17 November and they were met by Behbud Agha Khan Javanshir, the Interior Minister of ADR²⁴.

Despite the intentions of Armenians and the Russians to use situations on behalf of themselves, General Thomson himself, after being acquainted with the situation himself said that he respected the independent Azerbaijan Democratic Republic²⁵.

At the end of 1918, major political changes in the attitude of the English to the Republic of Azerbaijan were manifested. These changes were predominantly related to the opening of the Azerbaijani Parliament, where representatives of all political parties and organizations, representatives of all national minorities were represented and the creation of the Cabinet of Ministers by F. Khoyski's on December 26. On December 28, General Thomson made a new statement that he fully supports the coalition government of Azerbaijan and stated that it is only one legitimate local authority within the borders of Azerbaijan²⁶.

First British seen Azerbaijan as an integral part of Russia, but soon they recognized the independence of Azerbaijani government and Cossak detachment commanded by Bicherakhov from Baku. The main reason why the British government supported the separation of Baku from Russia and remaining the Baku oil in the hands of an independent Azerbaijani government was related with its interests.

On the day General Thomson arrived in Baku, he signed a martial law and according to this law, the military situation was declared in Baku on 12 November 1918, at 12-00²⁷.

The British Police Commission was also authorized to control oil and oil products

24 Scotland Lidell, "Hopes and fears of the young Azerbaijan Democratic Republic", *Vision of Azerbaijan Newspaper*, 2008, Volume 3.2., p. 54.

25 Musa Gasimly, "Azerbaijan Democratic Republic", *Vision of Azerbaijan Newspaper*, 2006, Volume 1.2., p. 47.

26 Azərbaycan, qəzeti, 29 dekabr 1918.

27 Lidell, *age.*, p. 54.

exported from Baku. For this purpose, on 24 November 1918 the Baku Oil Producers Congress was established by the decision of the Police Commissariat. A security zone has been declared around oil fields.

The British army was not only guarantee of peace in Baku; also, they did a lot of charity work here. With the support of British commissariat, an orphanage was opened for orphans at the beginning of 1919. The Police commissar Col Cockerel managed this work and he was assisted by Baku millionaires.

It must be mentioned that during the war time there were a lot of social problems in Baku. Lack of food, shelter and mainly the rapid spread of epidemics and diseases were the main obstacles in social welfare of people. For overcoming these hinders the British and Azerbaijani soldiers worked together and did their bests in struggling against these problems. The establishment of Public Health Center with the control of the British doctors on January 11, 1919 was one of the substantial works realized in the health sphere²⁸.

Although there was declared a martial law in Baku, the city continued to live its calm and modest life, the intense trade was carried out. The sole indicator for martial law was the existence of the military posts controlled by British and Azerbaijani soldiers.

The de-facto diplomatic relations existed between Azerbaijan Democratic Republic and the British Empire during this period. These relations were conducted by High Commissar of the British Empire in the Caucasus Oliver Waldrop, who carried out his duty from Tbilisi.

While leaving Baku general Shatelvort noted that “we were so sorry that we have to say goodbye to many friends and acquaintances of us, we wish them peace and happiness”²⁹

The ADR Government together with the British police had begun returning the old properties to their owners. Especially In this field there were a lot of problems, and unresolved issues.

Even poor people were assisted by the British troop's food storage under the leadership of General Thomson. Free and paid canteens were opened in the city and the very poor people were given vouchers to eat in these canteens.

²⁸ Lidell, *age*. p. 53.

²⁹ N. Ə. Maxwell, *Azərbaycan Xalq Cümhuriyyəti - Böyük Britaniyanın arxiv sənədlərində*, Bakı, 2008 , 39.

Although the relations of local people to British were not heart-warming when they came to Baku, they gained authority among the people thanks to works they realized here and the attitude towards them took a term to better.

The Role of The British Empire in Recognition of The Independence of ADR and Great Britain - ADR Relations

ADR government decided to closely cooperate with Britain taking into an account the interests of Great Britain in the region. This can be seen in interviews and correspondences of ADR officials preserved at the archives.

In an interview given to British journalist Scotland Lidel by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of ADR Muhammed Yusif Jafarov in 4 of October, 1919 he noted that “To protect the independence of the Southern Caucasus countries is in Great Britain’s own interest. The Southern Caucasus countries would play the security zone between India, the Middle East and the Northern countries and would keep India save from any danger which previously was the British colony. Azerbaijani government hoped that the destiny of Azerbaijan would be resolved by Allie Powers³⁰.

The most successful step of young Azerbaijan Government in foreign policy sphere was sending the delegation to Paris Peace Conference headed by Alimardanbey Topchubashov. The delegation conducted some meetings with the officials of great powers. The most significant event during the visit was the meeting with Woodrow Wilson and presentation of the memorandum of Azerbaijan to him. On 23 of May, 1919 Azerbaijan delegation met with the representative of British delegation L. Mannet and discussed political, military and economic issues³¹.

Either the U.S. delegation headed by Woodrow Wilson, or the British delegation didn’t tender to recognize the independence of Azerbaijan and other Southern Caucasus countries. The main reason was their discontent in fragmentation of the world into small pieces. Three Caucasus countries were recommended to unite in the Confederation and thus they would get a guarantee to protection from League of Nations³².

However, Supreme Council of United Forces declared the de-facto recognition

30 Tahir Behbudov, “British Police in Azerbaijan”, *Vision of Azerbaijan Newspaper*, 2006, Volume 1.2., p. 28.

31 Gasimly, *age.*, p. 46.

32 Həsənlı, *age.*, s. 329.

of independence of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia in 11 January 1920. The main reason for recognition of independence was the fear of Entente Forces of the danger that Soviet Union could create for Transcaucasia. The general situation in Transcaucasia countries was discussed in Supreme Council of Paris Peace Conference Paris. The initiative was proposed in 10 of January by Great Britain³³.

The initiative to discuss about the recognition of independence of these states by Great Britain Prime Minister Lloyd George was offered by Great Britain Foreign Minister lord Curzon. Taking into an account the emerged dangerous situation Lord Curzon suggested an initiative to help the South Caucasus countries and to recognize de-facto their independence as these countries resorted to Entente Forces for help³⁴.

To the question about “when the independence would be given to Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia and would be the exchange of diplomatic representations in case of independence?” the representatives of Foreign Affairs Secretary of House of Commons of Great Britain Parliament Sir Grinvude noted that “the instruction about de-facto recognition was sent by Entente Forces to Great Britain Supreme Commissariat, but the exchange of diplomatic representations wouldn't happen, because, Britain established Caucasus Britain Supreme Commissariat with headquarters situated in Tbilisi and all three countries had representative in Great Britain.”

The main reason of de-facto recognition of independence of the South Caucasus states directly connected of the fear from Bolsheviks. But promised about the de-jure recognition was only promise, not more.

In late June 1919 Britain made a decision to withdraw troops from Azerbaijan. But the substitution of British mandate with Italian was impossible. The independence of Azerbaijan was de-facto recognized by Supreme Council of Paris Peace Conference in 11 January upon to proposal of Lord Curzon who was Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of the United Kingdom. Following this, several foreign countries opened their diplomatic representations in Baku.

During this period some significant steps were taken to establish economic relations between France, Great Britain and ADR. The treaty signed between ADR government and “Cosmos” company of Great Britain can be presented

33 Həsənlı, *age.*, s. 329.

34 Ə. Həsənov, *Müasir beyməlxalq münasibətlər və Azərbaycanın xarici siyasəti*, Bakı, 2005, p 78.

as a sample. According to this agreement British company would organize the transportation and sale of Azerbaijan oil from Black Sea ports to Europe.

Since the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan, Great Britain has been turned into one of the most student-dispatched European countries. So, in 1919, about 10 of the 100 students who were sent to study for the state-financed European countries were sent to Great Britain to study in their specialties³⁵

Conclusion

The period 1917-1920's is the most turbulent, significant and also most bloody period of Azerbaijan history. Actually, the British-Azerbaijani relations had a very complicated way of development. Historically formed good trading relationships have led British companies to invest in the oil industry at the end of XIX century.

Later, during the first detachment of Great Britain sent to Azerbaijan, the British government's support for the Dashnak's led to the deterioration of relations. However, relations improved since the creation of the ADR and after the second detachment sent to Azerbaijan. The main reason for this was the correct policy implemented by the ADR Government. In this regard, the UK had invaluable contributions to the de facto recognition of ADR's independence in the Paris Peace Conference.

It should be noted that during the World War I Britain did not want the British to overthrow the enemy forces, but at the end of the war, the arrival of the Bolsheviks in Russia revealed a new British interest. In order not to spread Bolshevism to the Middle East and India, the UK recognized de facto independence of Azerbaijan and helped the ADR government stabilize the situation in the country.

The existence of the English Governor-General in the Azerbaijani capital has played a temporary role in the development of democratic processes in the country, strengthening the institutions of state power, and, most importantly, to liberate the independence and territorial integrity of Azerbaijan from the Russian imperialist forces. The withdrawal of British troops from Baku in August 1919 and subsequent failure by the decrease the interest of Britain became one of the reasons for its collapse.

35 Ədalət Tahirzadə, Oğuztoğrul Tahirli, *Azərbaycan Cümhuriyyəti tələbələri*, Bakı 2015, s 104.

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