

Information

about the Sumgayit events of February 1988 based on the investigative records, testimonies and primary sources

Introduction

The Sumgayit events of February 1988 marked the primary stage of the Armenian policy aimed at justifying further occupation of Azerbaijani territories. By 1988 Sumgayit, which is located about 30 km. away from Baku, was a multinational city since local population made up of fifteen different nationalities. The number of overall population was 258000, out of which 18000 were ethnic Armenians. No any ethnic tensions were recorded in Sumgayit until February 1988. On 26th of February, the central square of Sumgayit was captured by protestors who objected to the killing of 2 Azerbaijanis who had been shot during the clashes between Armenians and Azerbaijanis in the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan on February 22, 1988. Later as it was revealed during the investigation process the agent-provocateurs appeared among the speakers of the rally under the guise of “Azerbaijani refugees from the Armenian town of Kapan”¹ who actively incited people to revenge Armenians for the atrocities perpetrated against Azerbaijanis in Armenia. Soon the protests were upraised to the pogroms against the Armenian residents of the city. The riots claimed the lives of 32 people, 26 of which were Armenians and 6 Azerbaijanis. Among the injured, there were 54 Armenians and 74 Azerbaijanis. To investigate the unrest, the USSR General Prosecutor’s Office opened a criminal case No 18/55461-88. The special investigative group was established under the USSR General Prosecutor’s Office on March 1, 1988. The investigative group consisted of 181 investigators, including Armenian and Azerbaijani lawyers. The group was led by the investigator for the special cases under the USSR General Prosecutor’s Office, Senior Counsellor of Justice Vladimir Galkin. 444 defendants appeared before the court as a result of the investigation. 400 of them were put into the custody for 10-15 days. Several people were sentenced to lengthy imprisonment, and one was sentenced to death.

Armenian allegations

The Armenian official position claims that the Sumgayit riot was an act of ethnic cleansing organized by Azerbaijani authorities against Armenian population, and the Azerbaijanis massacred Armenians “in response to the self-determination claims” of Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians.² According to the Armenian allegations, the aim of Azerbaijanis was to frighten Armenians, and to abstain them from the idea of separation of Nagorno-Karabakh from Azerbaijan. The Armenian side also claims that the real number of Armenian victims was distorted, as since more than 400 Armenians were killed during the riots.³

All these and other allegations of Armenian side were totally refuted by the outcomes of the investigation process held under the USSR General Prosecutor’s Office with the involvement of about 200 professional criminalists, including the representatives of Armenian and Azerbaijani nationalities. The events of those years, which were testified in recent history as incontestable facts, are the best denials against the Armenian accusations.

¹ Newspaper “Sotsialisticheskaya Industriya”, Moscow, March 27, 1988

² www.mfa.am/en/artsakh/#a3

³ Shaxmuradyan S. The Sumgait tragedy. 1989. Yerevan. P.127

The first ethnic tensions in Azerbaijan started not in response to the “peaceful Armenian demonstrations” as claimed by the Armenian side. The strains were launched and further accelerated by massive deportations of tens of thousands of Azerbaijanis from Armenia starting with November 1987. The Azerbaijanis solely because of their ethnic identity were the first to be subjected to violence and abuse. The Azerbaijanis were the first victims of the clashes who have been shot in Nagorno-Karabakh on 22 February 1988. All these outrages against Azerbaijanis were followed by the open appeals of the Armenian leaders to secede from Azerbaijan and join to Armenia, the historical and legal part of Azerbaijan – its Nagorno-Karabakh region.

As to the Sumgayit events, it was validated by the testimonies of the witnesses, including those of Armenian nationalities, as well as other unveiled materials that the Sumgayit unrest was a well-prepared provocation against Azerbaijan. It was masterminded by the leaders of Armenian “Karabakh” and “Krunk” committees to discredit Azerbaijan and pave the way for the separation of Nagorno-Karabakh from Azerbaijan. These conclusions are confirmed by the information below.

Review of the investigative records, testimonies and primary sources

The assessments and analysis of numerous official documents, investigative records, testimonies and primary sources confirm that the Sumgayit unrest was a well-organized provocation against Azerbaijan, which was implemented with high professionalism by the Armenian nationalists and the Soviet State Security Committee (KGB). The key aim of the Armenian nationalists was to present Armenians living in Azerbaijan as the victims of “Armenian genocide”, and, thus, to defend the idea of impossibility of further coexistence of Armenians together with Azerbaijanis within Azerbaijan.

Indeed, after the Sumgayit events the official newspaper of Armenia stated the following idea: "A real genocide was arranged and perpetrated in Sumgayit... Anyone, who thinks that thereafter the Armenians can live under the rule of Azerbaijan, is a betrayer".⁴

Moreover, the famous ideologist of Karabakh movement, Armenian writer Zoriy Balayan claimed on the pages of the same newspaper: "It's well-known for the whole world that Moscow had to solve the Karabakh problem within a few hours after the Sumgayit pogroms. But they did not".⁵

The Deputy General Prosecutor of the USSR, A.Katushev, who signed the aforementioned decree on the establishment of the special investigative group under the USSR General Prosecutor's Office, in his interview to the Russian official newspaper “Izvestia” affirmed the interrelation between the Karabakh problem and the Sumgayit events.⁶

The First Deputy Chairman of the USSR KGB F.Bobkov stated in his communication: "After the terrible days in Sumgayit I talked to female Armenian worker from Sumgayit. The woman said: "Do you think that the élites in Yerevan really think about us - Armenians. No! They think only about the lands. The only thing what they want is Nagorno-Karabakh".⁷

⁴ Newspaper «Коммунист», Yerevan, November 2, 1988

⁵ Newspaper «Коммунист», Yerevan, September 23, 1989

⁶ Newspaper «Известия», Moscow, August 20, 1988

⁷ Бобков Ф. КГБ и власть. Москва, издательство ЭКСМО, 2003. 384 с. С. 14

The secret report, cabled by then Chief of the Sumgayit City Department of Azerbaijani KGB, Lieutenant-Colonel Vladimir Lebedev, to then Chairman of Azerbaijan SSR KGB, Major General Igor Gorelovsky, provided the following information:

*Azerbaijan SSR State Security Committee
Sumgayit City Department
№ 02009, October 17, 1988*

*Confidential
Copy № 2*

".... Our agent "Orlov" during his meeting in Erevan with the activists of the "Karabakh" Committee, namely S.Shakhmuradyan, L.Akopyan and others told them that one of the active participants in the killings of Armenians in Sumgayit was a man of Armenian origin, Eduard Grigoryan who is currently under the arrest. Consequently, the rumours were spread in Sumgayit that the members of the "Karabakh" Committee provoked the February pogroms, and they used Grigoryan in this regard. Those Armenians who had not paid fees to the "Karabakh" Committee were killed. The information of our agent has caused anxiety among the participants of the meeting....

.... During interrogations, Grigoryan's partners testified that before the robberies and murders, he met with people of Armenian origin, from whom he received lists of Armenians and pills, which were later distributed among the rioters, explaining to them that these pills give the strength and up raise the spirits....

.... Located in a special isolation facility of the Azerbaijan SSR KGB, Grigoryan denies his participation in the riots and bears the intention to inform his contacts in Nagorno-Karabakh about his conduct during the investigation....".⁸

The role of the Soviet KGB with regard to the Sumgayit events deserves particular attention. The facts derived from the investigative documents attest that the Armenian nationalists and the Soviet KGB were the true masterminds of the Sumgayit provocation. The KGB's interest was driven from the intention to destabilise the situation in the Soviet periphery in order to cut the intensified centrifugal aspirations and to demonstrate that the Soviet Republics cannot survive alone without the strong centralised power of Kremlin. The similar unrest and provocations were carried out by the KGB in Osh (Kyrgyzstan), Fergana (Uzbekistan), Tbilisi (Georgia), Vilnius (Lithuania) and other peripheral parts of the Soviet Union.

A.Yakovlev, member of the Politburo and Secretariat of the Central Committee of the USSR Communist Party, asserted: "The special services themselves provoked the unrest and conflicts to prove their necessity. So it was the case in Alma-Ata, Fergana, Sumgayit, Vilnius, and Riga".⁹ In the organization of these provocations, A.Yakovlev indicates the names of two senior state officials - V. Kryuchkov, Chairman of the Soviet KGB and D. Yazov, Minister of Defence of the USSR.¹⁰

V.Kalinichenko, senior investigator for the special cases under the USSR General Prosecutor's Office, who was a member of the investigative group on Sumgayit case, also affirmed: "The analysis of the events of those years give me a ground to come to the conclusion that behind those events was

⁸ Mammadov I. The Secrets of the Soviet Empire. The Sumgayit Provocation against Azerbaijan. Baku, 2014. P.251

⁹ Яковлев А. Сумерки. М.: Материк, 2005. — 672 с. С. 537

¹⁰ Яковлев А. Избранные интервью: 1992–2005. 1992–1993 годы [Документы №№ 1–24] Документ № 14

M.Gorbachev, and he managed the processes through the Soviet KGB, and personally the Committee Chairman V.Kryuchkov".¹¹

It should be noted that despite the fact that the criminal case was opened under the USSR General Prosecutor's Office, only the KGB investigators were entrusted to identify the organizers of the riots and bring them to the court. This process was under the personal control of the First Deputy Chairman of the USSR KGB F.Bobkov.

It is noteworthy that the Chief of the investigative group, investigator of the USSR General Prosecutor's Office V.Galkin was transferred to the KGB upon the completion of the Sumgayit case, and was promoted to the rank of KGB Major General.

The numerous data taken from the investigative materials confirm that that the Sumgayit events were provoked and pre-arranged. Colonel V.Krivopuskov, then Chief of the Staff of the USSR Interior Ministry's investigative-operation group in Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast of Azerbaijan SSR, stated: "My colleagues, Colonel Tkach and Colonel Gudkov, were involved into the solution of crimes committed in Sumgayit on the 27-29th of February, 1988. Both of them conducted numerous interrogations of witnesses. There was a lot of evidence presented by the country's best detectives to the investigation, which revealed that the pogroms and killings had been pre-arranged. On the eve of the city riots, a list of apartments, where Armenian families lived, had been obtained and metal rods had been specially manufactured in a local enterprise for the extermination of Armenians".¹²

The similar idea is traced in the research of the well-known British expert on the Caucasus, Thomas de Waal who is also points out that the "violence was planned".¹³

In his notes Colonel V.Krivopuskov recalled a Sumgayit resident Lyubov Ismailova. "I heard about her many times from the employees of the Ministry of Interior and the Armenian refugees. Khanum Ismailova has become almost a legend; she was compared with a woman from the epic, from the Bible, even with the Mary Magdalene. In the terrible days of the pogroms, Khanum Ismailova saved the lives of thirteen Armenian women, elders and children by hiding them in her small apartment".¹⁴

In her own testimony the eyewitness of the Sumgayit events Lyubov Ismailova noted the following:

Protocol of eyewitness interrogation

Criminal case № 60206

*May 19, 2010
City of Sumgayit*

Interrogation started at 14.55

¹¹ Кадырова С. О сумгаитских событиях из первых уст. Ваку. Р. 27

¹² Кривоусков.В. Мятежный Карабах. Из дневника офицера МВД СССР. М., 2007. — 384 с. С.192

¹³ De Waal Thomas. Black garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through peace and war. New York University Press. 2003. P.50

¹⁴Кривоусков.В. Мятежный Карабах. Из дневника офицера МВД СССР. М., 2007. — 384 с. С.191

Interrogation ended at 16.05

*Investigator for the special cases under the General Prosecutor's Office of Azerbaijan:
S.Shamsiev*

Eyewitness: Lyubov Vladimirovna Ismailova

"I can conclude that the preparation of the Sumgayit unrest had been prepared well in advance. During a rally some non-residents of Sumgayit appeared among the protestors who actively incited people for revenge and handed round the pills and the alcohol. They had the list of addresses of Armenians who had not left Sumgayit. Right from the beginning they knew where the pogroms would take place therefore sent their people to those places to take video recordings of all what was going around. I would like to point out that on the eve of Sumgayit events I heard a lot about the fund-raising in favour of the Karabakh movement named "KrunK" which had branches in Sumgayit. Many Armenians contributing money to the fund, some because of the solidarity while others out of the fear. Those who did not pay, later "paid the heavy price". The "kinsmen" gravely crackdown on them later, while entire Azerbaijani people was found guilty. I also knew that there were people of Armenian origin among the offenders, and even one of them named Grigoryan was tried. If a poor Armenian girl did not recognize this ferocious rapist, he would also have evaded the responsibility".¹⁵

The protocol of a criminal case of Eduard Grigoryan signed by the Chief of the investigative group V.Galkin states the following:

*USSR General Prosecutor's Office
Investigator for the special cases
under the General Prosecutor's Office of the USSR*

Criminal case №18\55461-88

*Vol: №31 15/545
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"Grigoryan Eduard Robertovich, was born on 16 December, 1959, native of the city of Sumgayit of Azerbaijan SSR, Armenian, nonpartisan, with secondary education, married.... E.Grigoryan perpetrated a deliberate murder with a particular brutality as well as committed rape....

Taking an active part in unrest on 28 February 1988 in the city of Sumgayit, E.Grigoryan incited a group of hooligans to commit pogroms against the Armenian residents of the city. He assaulted in a demonstrative way only the people of Armenian nationality to provoke national enmity and hatred between the citizens of Armenian and Azerbaijani nationalities".¹⁶

Sumgayit, March 29, 1989

*Investigator for the special cases under the
General Prosecutor Office of the USSR, senior legal advisor*

(signed)

¹⁵ Mammadov. Eyruz, Mammadov R. Sumqayit, 1988: Crime and Punishment. Baku, 2014. P. 91

¹⁶ Ismayilov A. Sumgayit — Beginning of the Collapse of the USSR. Baku, 2010, P. 59

According to the investigation materials Eduard Grigoryan took part in murdering of six and raping of three people of Armenian origin. V.Kalinichenko, the senior investigator for the special cases under the USSR General Prosecutor's Office, interrogated two sisters of Armenian nationality, Karina and Lyudmila Mejlumyan, who were raped by E.Grigoryan. According to the testimony of Mejlumyan sisters, Grigoryan smashed the door of their apartment with an axe and was the first to rape both of them. Lyudmila Mejlumyan said that afterwards, Eduard Grigoryan raised his hand and shouted: "Death to the Armenians!".¹⁷

Vladimir Nikitin, member of the USSR General Prosecutor's Office investigative team, who conducted investigation of the Sumgayit events, stated: "The most serious crimes were committed against Armenians. And who did all of this?! Representatives of the same nationality! It surprised all of us. I repeat, we were all very surprised".¹⁸

The information about the list of Armenian apartments which was compiled well in advance and that these apartments belonged to the Armenians who refused to contribute to the budgets of "Krunk" and "Karabakh" committees has reiterated many times by the witnesses during the investigation process.

This was also confirmed by the selectivity of the pogrom victims. In the course of investigations conducted at the most affected areas of the riots it was identified that the apartments of certain Armenian families located on the lower floors of the buildings remained intact and untouched, while the other Armenian families living on the upper floors were attacked. The members of these families were killed, their apartments were ransacked and furniture and other property were destroyed. If the aim was to kill all Armenians in the buildings, then the apartments on the lower floors were expected to be assaulted as well. It demonstrates that in many cases the pogroms were guided by already prearranged plan and scenario. The victims of these pogroms were just those, who refused to contribute to the general treasury. Nothing happened to the Armenians, who had paid their duties.

The fact that the majority of wealthy Armenians withdrew all their savings from the city's saving banks and abandoned the city just before the Sumgayit pogroms is also noteworthy.¹⁹ According to V.Lebedev, then Chief of the Sumgayit City Department of the KGB, the majority of wealthy families in the city were members of the "Krunk" organisation.²⁰

The following testimony of the Armenian victim Lyudmila Mejlumyan is very indicative in the light of the aforementioned:

Protocol of victim's interrogation

Criminal case № 18/55461-88

¹⁷ Video archive of Azerbaijani Television and Radio Company (Azteradio CJSC). Documentary *Secrets of the Soviet Empire - Grigoryan's case*, part I. Folder 301099, roll 4500

¹⁸ Video archive of Azerbaijani Television and Radio Company (Azteradio CJSC). Documentary *Secrets of the Soviet Empire - Grigoryan's case*, part II. Folder 301100, roll 4506

¹⁹ Only in January 1988, i.e. one month before the pogroms, the wealthy Armenian residents of Sumgayit withdrew 7,326,000 rubles from the accounts of 14 saving banks of Sumgayit.

²⁰ Video archive of Azerbaijani Television and Radio Company (Azteradio CJSC). Documentary *Secrets of the Soviet Empire - Grigoryan's case*, part II. Folder 301100, roll 4506

August 29, 1988
City of Baku

Interrogation started at 16.25
Interrogation ended at 20.35

Investigator of investigation group Under the General
Prosecutor's Office of the USSR: S.Kamygin

Victim: Lyudmila Grigoryevna Mejlumyan

".... It passed about 15-20 minutes since all happened in our apartment. A man, approximately of 30 years old, entered the room. His face was clean. He was dressed in a black coat. There was a white shirt under the coat with a narrow black tie. In his hand he had a leather folder for papers. When he came into the room, all the others, those who had broken into our house, fell silent. People passed him our gold things which were stolen from the apartment. That man took some of the gold and said: "Enough, much blood was spilled here already, let's move out". Without any words, people immediately started leaving the apartment. He also left. Three men stayed in the room, I had not seen them before. One of them approached me and spoke in Armenian: "Sister, I myself came from Armenia not long ago, I hate them too. We are now going to the 3rd block of the building. You should find a hammer and nail the door from the inside. They can return". He helped me to dress, as I could not do it by myself because of the pain in the whole body, and the shaking hands".²¹

It becomes obvious from the above testimony that the Sumgayit unrest was not merely act of spontaneous hooliganism; it was well-thought-out, guided and controlled action. The dispatched emissaries whom the residents of Sumgayit had never seen before controlled and guided the actions of the main group of the rioters headed by Eduard Grigoryan.

Later on, the majority of those who committed murder of Armenian residents of the city admitted at the interrogation that they were affected by the special pills and alcohol spread out before the pogroms started. It means that the organizers of the unrest could manage to intoxicate the rioters before the pogroms, deprive them of self-control, and direct them by the predetermined people. In its term the criminal elements of the city also easily joined to the organized violence and lootings. It should be stressed that 2812 recently freed criminals were settled in the city before the events took place. So, the city of Sumgayit with the tens of thousands of destitute and embittered Azerbaijani refugees forcibly expelled from Armenia and as well as with a big number of criminals became a proper place for the orderers of the provocation.

Conclusion

As it was mentioned the Sumgayit unrest cost the lives of 26 Armenians. Back in 1919, the British reporter Robert Scotland Liddell presciently noted: "The killed Armenian is very valuable for

²¹ Mammadov E., Mammadov R. Sumqayit, 1988: Crime and Punishment. Baku, 2014. P. 192

Dashnaks. If to use this case properly, it can bring many advantages”.²² In fact, after 70 years the party of Dashnaksyutun backed by the Soviet KGB played the same performance in the case of Sumgayit provocation.

It is of particular interest that according to German researcher Dr. Volker Jacoby who got a PhD on the politics of Armenia and spent quite a long time in Armenia, the Dashnaksyutun after a long-term lull started collaboration with the Soviet KGB just in 1988 under the pretence to “prevent anti-Soviet tendencies in the Karabakh movement”.²³

V.Ilyukhin, Deputy Head of the Chief Investigation Department under the USSR General Prosecutor’s Office, who led the special group of the USSR Prosecutor’s Office to investigate the events in the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast of Azerbaijan SSR in 1988-1989, concluded: "The events in Sumgayit were provoked by Armenians. This proved to be beneficial for Armenia. They played “Sumgayit card” since the time they started raising the issue of separation of Karabakh from Azerbaijan. As if, they are oppressed, and so on. In fact, they played a grand performance on a great tragedy”.²⁴

Consequently, the Sumgayit events presaged the bloody war imposed by Armenia against Azerbaijan with subsequent occupation of Azerbaijani territories. By the Sumgayit provocation the Armenian nationalists succeeded in achieving their ultimate aim - to discredit Azerbaijan before the world community and to separate the Nagorno-Karabakh from the control of Azerbaijan.

²² Robert Scotland Liddell. War with Muslims, Armenians attack again. 1919. Central State Archive of Azerbaijan Republic reserve 894, inventory 10, folder 81, page 9

²³ Volker Jacoby. Die Konturen der innenpolitischen Konflikte in Armenien. Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität, 1998. P. 153

²⁴<http://vesti.az/news/52580>