



## 1988-1994: THE LAST YEARS OF THE SOVIET UNION

### AN ESCALATING HUMAN RIGHTS AND HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

#### The Nagorno-Karabakh crisis as described by the European Parliament

The Karabakh crisis escalated over a period of four years, between 1988 and 1991. In late 1991, the Soviet Union was dismantled and the Nagorno-Karabakh war broke out.

We recount below the crisis, as reported by successive resolutions adopted by the European Parliament. In summarizing the Parliament's statements, we have sought to reflect fairly the Parliament's representation of the situation as well as its assessment of it.

**Summary:** Between 1988 and 1991, Parliament repeatedly reports on, and condemns, the pogroms and violence against Armenians in Soviet Azerbaijan and on the blockade which Azerbaijan imposes on Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. It calls for the blockade to be lifted and the violence to stop.

Parliament also repeatedly and unambiguously states that the arbitrary incorporation of the Armenian-populated territory of Nagorno-Karabakh into the Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan was a root cause of the conflict and affirmed the territory's right to self-determination.

At the onset of the war, from early 1992, Parliament reports a massive attack on Karabakh and bombings of the territory by Azerbaijani forces, urges on the peace process and calls upon all parties, particularly Turkey, to end the blockade.

#### 7 Resolutions, from March 88 to February 94

**On March 10, 1988**, the European Parliament adopted its first resolution regarding "recent events in Soviet Armenia"<sup>1</sup>. Adopted just weeks after the first signs of a crisis, this resolution merely notes "*the scale of the mass demonstrations [...] in Soviet Armenia and the disturbances in Azerbaijan*", alerts

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<sup>1</sup> Joint European Parliament resolution adopted on 10/3/1988 [replacing Docs. B2-39, 47 and 67/88 11.4.88 Official Journal of the European Communities No C 94/117]

the Soviet rulers to the need for political reform and calls on Member States to **“adopt a common stand on these events”**.

In July of that year, Parliament returned to the issue with more specifics<sup>2</sup>. It refers to the **“the deteriorating political situation, which has led to anti-Armenian pogroms in Sumgait [in February 1988] and serious acts of violence in Baku, [a situation which] is in itself a threat to the safety of the Armenians living in Azerbaijan”**

Parliament accordingly **“support[ed] the demand of the Armenian minority for reunification with the Socialist Republic of Armenia”** and called upon the Soviet Union to **“ensure the safety of the 500 000 Armenians currently living in Soviet Azerbaijan, and to ensure that those found guilty of having incited or taken part in the pogroms against the Armenians are punished according to Soviet law”**.

Parliament next adopted a resolution on the subject six months later, in **January 1989**, immediately after an earthquake devastated the west of Armenia<sup>3</sup>. In this resolution Parliament condemns the imprisonment of the leaders of the Karabakh Committee (which led peaceful demonstrations in Armenia in solidarity with Karabakh Armenians), welcomed the new status granted to Nagorno-Karabakh by the Soviet Union, and **“asked the Soviet Government to ensure the effective protection of Armenians living in Azerbaijan, where further acts of violence have occurred despite the earthquake”**.

A year later, in **January 1990**, Parliament adopts its fourth and most extensive resolution on the escalating crisis<sup>4</sup>. This resolution focuses on new violence against Armenians in Baku and in the villages of Shaumian and Getashen, on the reinstated blockade of NK by Azerbaijan and on a new change in the status of NK by the Soviet authorities, which it disapproves of. Parliament further recalls that **“the conflict now taking place is largely the result of the dividing up of the territory imposed by Lenin in Transcaucasia, and particularly the forced integration of the Autonomous Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, mainly populated by Armenian Christians, into the Muslim Republic of Azerbaijan in 1923”**; Parliament this time calls upon the Commission and Council to make representations to the Soviet authorities so that: (1) **“they impose the full and immediate lifting of the blockade imposed on Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh”**; (2) **“[the Soviet authorities] find a lasting solution to the problem of NK”**; and (3) **“[they] guarantee real protection for the Armenian people living in Azerbaijan by sending forces to intervene”** and **“the circumstances surrounding the pogroms perpetrated against the Armenians, in particular, in Sumgait and Kirovabad, Azerbaijan, are brought fully to light”**.

Parliament further calls upon the EU Commission to grant emergency aid to Armenia and Karabakh and calls on the authorities in Armenia and Azerbaijan to **“seek the means of achieving a peaceful settlement”**. It calls on neighbouring countries [of the Soviet Union, i.e. Turkey and Iran] **“to avoid all interference”**.

Two months later, in **March 1990**, Parliament briefly returns to the issue, recalling that Karabakh is **“administered by Azerbaijan against the will of the majority of its inhabitants”** and expressing concern about the human rights situation in Nagorno-Karabakh. It also expresses concerns **“that**

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<sup>2</sup> Resolution on the situation in Soviet Armenia, adopted on 7 July 1988. [Joint resolution replacing Docs. B2-538 and 587/88, published on 12.9.88 in the Official Journal of the European Communities No C 235/106]

<sup>3</sup> Resolution on the Repression in Soviet Armenia, adopted 19/1/1989. [Joint resolution replacing Docs. B2-1262, 1296 and 1304/88, published on 27.2.82 in the Official Journal of the European Communities No C 47/130.

<sup>4</sup> Joint resolution replacing Docs. B3-137, 139, 145, 156, 157 and 162/90 [19.2.90 Official Journal of the European Communities No C 38/81]. Vote on 18/1/1990

**500 000 people in Armenia are homeless and some 100 000 Armenians are travelling in the Soviet Union in search of homes and jobs**” as a result of the combined effect of the earthquake and the outflow of refugees from Azerbaijan<sup>5</sup>. Parliament calls upon the Soviet government, the EU and the UN to address the crisis and resolves to send a delegation to the region.

Parliament adopts one more resolution in **May 1991**, its last before the breakup of the Soviet Union and the outbreak of actual war in Nagorno-Karabakh<sup>6</sup>. In it, it deplures **“the continual aggravation of violence in the Caucasus, particularly against the Armenians in the autonomous region of Karabakh”** and **“condemns unequivocally the violence by the Soviet armed forces and the ‘Azerbaijani forces’ which has once more been inflicted on the Armenian population”**. Parliament also calls on Soviet authorities to guarantee Karabakh Armenians **“physical safety, freedom of movement to Armenia, the raising of the blockade by Azerbaijan and the return of people driven away from their homes”**. Parliament also calls for cooperation from all, including the populations concerned, to help preserve, or restore, the peace.

### **1992-1994: The war**

By **February 1992**, it has come to the attention of the parliamentarians that the conflict has reached a new phase<sup>7</sup>. On 13 February, Members of the European Parliament note that **“at the end of December 1991 Azerbaijan launched a huge and unprecedented offensive against Armenians living in Nagorno-Karabakh”** and recalls that the Armenians there have been subjected to a **“constant blockade and aggression for the last three years”**. Parliament **“recognizes Nagorno-Karabakh’s right to self-determination”** and recommends that assistance be sent to the region, and decides to send a mission to report on the crisis<sup>8</sup>.

Parliament returns to the issue a year later, in **January 1993**, to paint a grim picture: the continued blockade, the large number of Armenian refugees (300.000), the series of pogroms since 1988; the consequences of the earthquake and the profound energy crisis in Armenia resulting from the blockade<sup>9</sup>. In view of the situation, Parliament **“gives its full backing to the CSCE peace process and calls for an immediate ceasefire between the parties to the conflict”**. It once again denounces the blockade and **“takes the view that the relentless blockade carried out by Azerbaijan constitutes a violation of international law and insists that the Azerbaijani Government lift it forthwith”**.

The final war-time resolution is adopted in **February 1994**, just months before the May 1994 ceasefire that put an end to the fighting<sup>10</sup>. The war has escalated in phases over the previous two years,

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<sup>5</sup> Resolution on the situation in Armenia, adopted March 15, 1990 [Resolution B3-556/90, published on 17.4.90 in the Official Journal of the European Communities No C 96/260]

<sup>6</sup> Joint resolution replacing B3-0747, 0754, 0767, 0781, 0795, 0816, 0824 and 0827/91 [17.6.91 Official Journal of the European Communities No C 158/243]. Vote on 16/5/1991

<sup>7</sup> Resolution on aid to Nagorno-Karabakh B3-0155/92 [16.3.92 Official Journal of the European Communities No C 67/145]. Vote on 13/2/1992

<sup>8</sup> The visit was turned down by the bureau of the Parliament on budgetary grounds. A visit to the three South Caucasus Republics did take place in early 1993 however.

<sup>9</sup> EP Resolution on Armenia, adopted 21/1/1993. [B3-0049/93, published on 15.2.93 in Official Journal of the European Communities No C42/165]

<sup>10</sup> EP Resolution on the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan adopted on 10/2/1994. [Motions B3-0181,0186,0188,0197 and 0204/94, published on 28.2.94 Official Journal of the European Communities No C 61/171]

causing a large number of casualties. In this last war-time resolution, Parliament notes that ***“the Azerbaijani air force has resumed its bombing of civilians, particularly in the town of Stepanakert”*** and regrets that ***“the negotiating proposals made by the CSCE have come to nothing and have in particular been rejected by Azerbaijan”***.

Fearing further escalation, including an internationalisation of the conflict, Parliament now ***“calls on the Union and its Member States to exert pressure on Armenia and Azerbaijan in order to persuade them to seek a peaceful solution to the conflict”***. Along with the EU Presidency, it calls for restraint and respect for the civilian population among the opposing parties and ***“reaffirms its support for the principle of the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan”***. It also calls upon all parties involved to comply with the resolutions of the United Nation’s Security Council. Finally, in reference to the blockade, Parliament once more ***“calls on all the neighbors of Armenia and Azerbaijan and, in particular, on Turkey, to allow the free passage of goods to both countries”***.

