
Interview: Professor Mehdi Mamedov

'Tell the truth about Azerbaijan'

The following interview took place between Mehdi Mamedov, a representative of the Azerbaijan Popular Front, and EIR correspondent Joseph Brewda on April 17 in Virginia. Dr. Mamedov is a professor of history at the University of Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan. He is now on tour in the United States to increase Americans understanding of the current situation in Azerbaijan following the Russian invasion on Jan. 16. That invasion was approved by the Bush administration as a reasonable effort to restore public order, purportedly because of Armenian-Azerbaijani riots.

EIR: Could you characterize the current situation in Azerbaijan, now, after more than three months of Soviet military occupation?

Mamedov: Today we have a military dictatorship which is ruling Azerbaijan. There is no place in the Soviet Union where human rights are being violated more than in Azerbaijan today. Groups that claim that they are concerned about human rights have to become concerned with Azerbaijan.

There were pogroms against Azeri people in Azerbaijan. Armenians in Baku did not want to kill or be killed. No one wanted to kill. The pogroms were organized. The Soviet troops came into Baku under the screen of pretending to defend the Armenians. What then occurred was a massacre organized by Soviet troops and Soviet intelligence agencies with tanks and automatic weapons.

It's a tense situation. It's not good at all. All the fighting will not conclude in anything in favor of anybody. Both Armenia and Azerbaijan have been progressing toward democracy; the situation is slowing down that progression.

However, the situation in the three Baltic republics has now created a situation which Gorbachov does not want to face. It's very difficult for Moscow. Gorbachov does not want to face a similar situation in the Caucasus.

The central government fears the unity of the three republics in the Caucasus which would be a threat to its rule. The unity of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia is not in Moscow's interest, so Moscow is not really interested in stopping ethnic violence.

This violence could continue because Azerbaijan is not going to give up Nagorno-Karabakh [the autonomous Armenian region within Azerbaijan] and Armenia is not going to stop wanting it. This conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan on this issue is not good for Georgia, which doesn't know what its position on the conflict should be. Some Armenians who know the situation is not good for Armenia want to talk. Azerbaijan doesn't want any territory from Armenia, and it also does not want to give up any territory. So the borders should stay the way they are.

My conclusion, after reviewing this conflict, is that all the problems we see in the region are caused by a third party.

EIR: Most Western press portrayed the Russian invasion of Azerbaijan as required to put down ethnic strife. Many papers even claim that the Azerbaijan Popular Front is Islamic fundamentalist and supports Iran and Khomeini. What do you have to say about this characterization?

Mamedov: I'll tell you one fact. For the past 10 or 20 years, there has been a growing emigration out of Iran to Europe and America. About 4 million people have left, and out of these 4 million, 3 million are from southern Azerbaijan, now held by Iran. These Azeris of Iranian citizenship have been fleeing the Khomeini regime; they have been fleeing Islamic fundamentalism, leaving it behind.

I have been speaking to southern Azeris of Iranian origin in the United States. They curse Khomeini. If the southern Azeris from Iran curse Khomeini and flee fundamentalism, what do you think the northern Azeris in Russia think?

What is the real issue? What is the relation of northern and southern Azerbaijan? The Araks River divides one people. When two brothers want to see each other, that is normal. Is that fanaticism or fundamentalism? What Khomeini is for southern Azerbaijan, Gorbachov is for northern Azerbaijan. We say we need a relation to Iran—which means southern Iran. Azerbaijan is part of two states: Iran and the Soviet Union. The border which divides Azerbaijan is called the Soviet-Iranian border. When American newspapers wrote that the Azeris are violating the Soviet-Iranian border, they forget it is our border. The American press cries, "My God, they're violating the Soviet-Iranian border!" So when Americans read these newspapers, they then say "blood is flowing," "The Azerbaijanis are killing the Armenians," "They're terrorists, butchers."

You see, this type of propaganda and disinformation is a kind of poison.

As far as supposed religious conflict goes, the problem in Azerbaijan is not a problem between Christians and Muslims, as it is often portrayed. In Azerbaijan, a Christian-Muslim problem simply does not exist. That is absurd; that is a screen.

EIR: What should the U.S. do?

Mamedov: First of all, tell the truth.