

SUMGAYIT 1988

Over the course of 27-29 February 1988 the city of Sumgayit, an industrial city 30 km from Baku, harbouring a population from fifteen different nationalities, experienced an unrest which claimed the lives of both Armenians and Azerbaijanis. A crowd of peaceful protesters were infiltrated by well-prepared inciters and driven to violent and destructive behaviour towards the Armenian residents of Sumgayit. Unrest ensued in the city and lasted for three days without any intervention from Soviet authorities.

Local and international response to these deadly riots ranged from shock to disbelief due to Sumgayit's longstanding reputation of being a home to different ethnicities coexisting in harmony. Of the overall population of 258,200 residents, about 18,000 were ethnic Armenians that had been living in peace with their Azerbaijani neighbours. No one could fathom the idea that such an act could occur in a city where even minor ethnic tensions were unheard of. City residents, regardless of ethnicity, were so close that Azerbaijani residents of the city hid hundreds of Armenians in their homes during the riots.

Even though local and international reporters were denied access to the city by Soviet law enforcement authorities during the riots and news stations refrained from reporting the news from the ground, foreign media ran reports based on materials presented to them solely by Armenian sources. In these reports the unrest was blamed strictly on the Azerbaijani side and the events compared to "genocide" and "massacre" against Armenians in Azerbaijan.

In the immediate aftermath, the Sumgayit events were grossly exaggerated by Armenian diaspora all over the world and at the same time underestimated and dismissed as a simple act of hooliganism by the Soviet leadership. A more detailed look into the unrest reveals many loopholes that exist in both Armenian and Soviet accounts of the riots. The premeditated nature of the riots, active involvement of non-resident agent provocateurs before and during the riots and the unfolding of carefully planned scenario are indications that the Sumgayit unrest was wilfully misrepresented by its masterminds.

The exhaustive evaluation of the numerous investigative materials from the criminal case launched by the USSR General Prosecutor's Office lead us to believe that the unrest of 27-29 February 1988 in Sumgayit was meticulously planned and skilfully executed by Armenian nationalists with support of the Soviet KGB (State Security Committee) to justify the occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh and to weaken liberation movement in Azerbaijan accordingly. The Armenian side was quick to present the unrest as an act of massacre against Armenians in Azerbaijan and immediately demanded that the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) of Azerbaijan should be handed over to Armenia. The Sumgayit events set precedence for the idea that Nagorno-Karabakh, which already had an autonomous status within Azerbaijan and within which Armenians and Azerbaijanis were living side-by-side in peace, should no longer be part of "murderous" Azerbaijan. The KGB, in its turn, in order to prevent Armenia and Azerbaijan from joining forces like in case of Baltic states on the eve of USSR's collapse used the common practice of ancient and modern empires to "divide and conquer" by supporting one against the another. Hence, in preparing and conducting of Sumgayit unrest the KGB participated alongside the Armenian nationalists to completely split and unravel both nations as well as to seize an opportunity of weakening the independence voice of neighbouring Azerbaijan. Needless to say, the Sumgayit events marked a transient

moment from the ideological phase of the Armenian occupation of Azerbaijani lands into the active politico-military phase.

Events prior to the unrest

On 20 February 1988, just a week before the Sumgayit events took place, Armenian members of NKAO Supreme Council adopted a decision demanding the secession of NKAO from Azerbaijan to Armenia. According to both international and national (USSR law) legislation Armenia's claim to Nagorno-Karabakh was denied. Their initial argument hid behind the veil of "self-determination" on the supposed basis that "Armenians were being persecuted in Azerbaijan and that their rights were being violated". However, established as an autonomous oblast by the USSR Constitution, NKAO held rights of administrative autonomy and was represented by five deputies in the Council of Nationalities of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and twelve deputies in the Supreme Soviet of Azerbaijan SSR. NKAO enjoyed self-government in almost all spheres of life and its indicators of social, economic and cultural development exceeded those of Azerbaijan SSR and Armenia SSR. The Armenian language was used widely in government and public affairs as well as in the public television and radio.

In fact, Armenian nationalists eyed Nagorno-Karabakh's rich history, cultural importance and economic potential. In regards to the latter, one of the founders of the Karabakh Committee, the leader of Armenian nationalists Igor Muradyan, petitioned that Nagorno-Karabakh should be annexed to Armenia in order to lessen Armenia's economic dependence. According to his estimation, Nagorno-Karabakh could supply 25-30% of Armenia's demand for fruit, 25% of its meat and dairy production, 1/3 of its wheat and large part of its potato production needs. Karabakh could become the tobacco, wine and silk centre of the Republic of Armenia.¹

Evidently, Armenia's claims over the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan were therefore not about "self-determination" but about the annexation of the region under the Armenian nationalist idea of "Miatsum" ("Unification" in the Armenian language). Even Armenians know that the desire to annex NKAO was more about territory than about the Armenian population. The First Deputy Chief 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".²

When Armenia's claim to Nagorno-Karabakh was proven unconstitutional, Armenians resorted to the idea of taking Nagorno-Karabakh by any means, including use of force. But for fear of facing a response from the international community, a justification was needed to occupy Azerbaijan's territory. In this regard, Sumgayit appeared the most convenient place to provoke ethnic unrest and achieve the objective. To put it clear, the socio-economic, demographic and criminological state of affairs in Sumgayit prior to the events were conducive to a flare-up of unrest in the city. Growth of per capita housing in the city was three times slower than the national average. That is, in the late 1980s, more than 10,000 families were living in buildings without amenities, which were constructed in the industrial areas of the city.

¹ Помпеев Ю. Кровавый омут Карабаха. Баку, 1992. 208 с. С. 36

² Бобков Ф. КГБ и власть. Москва, 2003. 384 с. С. 14

Meanwhile, starting in fall 1987 the massive harassment of Azerbaijanis living in Armenia and their widespread deportations to Azerbaijan intensified greatly. Just only in the period of January-February 1988 more than four thousand Azerbaijanis were forced to flee Armenia. A big number of these refugees deprived of their properties and fundamental rights to decent life were settled in Sumgayit. This factor was ably taken into account as the refugees full of grievances against Armenians could be easily triggered by provocation.



Lastly, the criminological conditions in the city of Sumgayit were largely to blame for the uncontrolled rampage that ensued in the city. Prior to the unrest in city more than two thousand individuals released from prison were settled in the city. They were convicts serving their suspended sentences at the chemical industry enterprises, which comprised the basis of the industrial potential of Sumgayit. So, all these factors were skillfully used by Armenian nationalists as the gunpowder in explosion of the Sumgayit unrest.

Preparations for the Sumgayit unrest had begun long before. What went down as a shockwave through the unsuspecting public, the plan had already been in place. Witness accounts and testimonies reveal that Armenian residents were somehow uneasy and anxious in the days leading up to the riots. Phone records revealed an unusually high volume of calls made between Sumgayit's Armenian residents and Armenia.

One of the most incriminating evidence was bank records that showed that wealthy Armenians had withdrawn large sums of money from their accounts as well as a significant increase in the frequency of money transfers through the post office. Bank data shows that only in period of January-February 1988, 84 Armenian residents of Sumgayit withdrew a total of 143,064 rubles from 14 savings banks.³ Siranush Baranova, who was questioned in regards to her withdrawal operation of more than 5000 rubles on January 21 1988, testified that she had been receiving threatening phone calls demanding her to pay "dues" to the Krunk Committee. Others who were questioned for similar reasons gave similar answers.⁴ Post office workers testified that several money transfers were made by the Armenian customers who had never before used the money transfer services of the post office.

The general anxiety and unusual behaviors brewing among the Armenian residents of Sumgayit could mean that they were perhaps aware or heard on impending riots in the city and were consequently terrified. To their misfortune, these Armenians living in Sumgayit were not fearful of their Azerbaijani neighbors but rather of their fellow Armenians who would stop at nothing to acquire Nagorno-Karabakh. According to witnesses and victims, financial contributions were being demanded in the name of the Krunk Committee was formed by Armenian nationalists in 1987. Testimonies from Armenian citizens of Sumgayit revealed that many people were forced to contribute to Krunk fundraising. They had to pay to avoid repercussions from the radical groups.

³ Mammadov E., Mammadov R. Sumqayit, 1988: Crime and Punishment. Baku, 2014. P. 75

⁴ Ibid. P. 99

Another group called the Karabakh Committee was organized with the principle objective of annexing Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia. Described by the New York Times as “the most influential nationalist group in Armenia,” the Karabakh Committee was known for its ultra-nationalistic tendencies and demonstrated exceptional organizational skills⁵. It was a group that firmly believed in using any means necessary to gain Karabakh, including sacrificing some of its own people. It is namely this Committee that is assumed to be behind the Sumgayit unrest of 1988.

On the days of unrest



Peaceful protests in the central square of Sumgayit

On the 26th of February, the central square of Sumgayit was stormed by protesters who objected to the killing of two Azerbaijanis that were shot by Armenians in the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan just four days prior. The raised tension in the city was seen as an opportunity in the hands of Armenian nationalists to carry out their provocation against Azerbaijan. In order to arouse anger and increased stamina, the recent clashes in Nagorno-Karabakh had been intentionally misrepresented to a growing crowd, making them think that

Azerbaijanis had been brutally murdered by Armenians. As it was revealed during the investigation process, about 20-25 agent-provocateurs appeared among the speakers of the rally under the guise of “Azerbaijani refugees from the Armenian town of Kapan [Gafan]”⁶ who actively urged people to revenge Armenians for the atrocities perpetrated against Azerbaijanis in Armenia. They were shouting through loudspeakers that Azerbaijanis were being slaughtered in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. Telling them they had repatriated a vehicle full of Azerbaijani corpses from the clashes in Nagorno-Karabakh, these unknown instigators further triggered rage among the protesters. In high tension situations like this groupthink dominates and people are usually drawn to crowds.

The first instances of violence were reported the next day, on the 27th of February. The city of Sumgayit was in disarray and the instigators had successfully fuelled hate and anger among the protesters. The principle figure of the Sumgayit unrest was a man of Armenian origin, namely Eduard Robertovich Grigoryan, who was born in Sumgayit and had been recruited to incite the Azerbaijani protesters and to assemble the group of criminals.



⁵ Fein Esther B. “Evolution in Europe; Armenia Fighting Levels Off, Toll is 23”. The New York Times. 29 May 1990.

⁶ Newspaper “Sotsialisticheskaya Industriya”, Moscow, March 27, 1988

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
050489*

Sumgayit, March 29, 1989

“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”.⁷

On the days of the riots E.Grigoryan first distributed among protesters narcotic pills and alcohol. It should be noted that along with his brothers Albert and Tigran, E.Grigoryan met with the Krunk agents (those who were described later by the witnesses as “the men dressed in black raincoats”) days before the



rioting and obtained funds for narcotics and alcohol, and a list

of Armenians of the city who denounced the territorial aims of Armenian nationalists and had refused to contribute to Krunk fund. The pills and bottles of alcohol distributed by Grigoryan brothers were meant to alter their state of mind and make them more violent and susceptible to manipulation. Investigation materials reveal that a GAZ-53 model vehicle was used to continually distribute alcohol and drugs throughout the three days of riots. Under the influence of alcohol and drugs, Grigoryan's group of criminals were undoubtedly mentally impaired and were only capable of following Grigoryan's movements and orders.

The group of criminals that were gathered by Eduard Grigoryan took to the streets of Sumgayit, armed with metal rods and sharp objects that had been prepared in advance. The group

⁷ Ismayilov A. Sumgayit — Beginning of the Collapse of the USSR. Baku, 2011, P. 19-33

personally led by E. Grigoryan was associated with the most gruesome crimes of the Sumgayit events.

Tearing down doors, they smashed windows, destroyed furniture, broke dishes and even threw household items out of windows. When they had finished with one home, Grigoryan would refer to his list and determine where the group would move next. The names on this list were of Armenians who were chosen as the subjects of Armenia's justification scheme for Nagorno-Karabakh.



Apartments were looted at the riot



Grigoryan and his entourage of loyal followers entered these victims' homes and committed morbid acts of violence and killing. Women were gang raped repeatedly and some were even dragged outside their homes and into the streets to be humiliated and beaten publicly. Group members who showed sympathy to the victims and refused to sexually assault women with sharp metal objects were threatened by Grigoryan and forced to continue. The criminality and sociopathic tendencies lent E. Grigoryan the opportunity to be the top man in the Sumgayit events. Using Grigoryan by

Karabakh Committee had three main advantages. First, his nonpartisanship would remove any doubt that the events were caused by nationalists. Second, his origin would make investigators doubt that an Armenian would kill other Armenians. The third and perhaps most important - his leadership qualities would allow him to gather around other criminals and incite violence wherever it was necessary. Grigoryan's role in the attack was mostly in the form of causing chaos and leading other criminals on.

According to the investigation materials Eduard Grigoryan personally took part in murdering six and raping three people of Armenian origin. V. Kalinichenko, 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!"⁸ In her testimony, held in Yerevan in the presence of Armenian investigators, victim Lyudmila Mejlumyan gave a detailed yet gruesome account of how she, along with her sister Karina and mother Roza, were raped repeatedly by several men, who were given direct orders by Grigoryan.

⁸ Video archive of Azerbaijani Television and Radio Company (AzteleRadio CJSC). Documentary Secrets of the Soviet Empire - Grigoryan's case, part I. Folder 301099, roll 4500

Although E. Grigoryan led the rioters to organized killing and rape during the unrest he was in fact carrying out instructions and fulfilling his duties to an unknown people, the so-called “men in raincoats”. Several pieces of evidence lead the investigative group to believe that men in raincoats had participated in the days prior to and during the Sumgayit events. Witnesses and victims recalled that these men were not Sumgayit residents and showed strange suspicious mannerisms. Because Sumgayit is a fairly small city, many city residents could detect an increased number of strangers in the streets before and during the riots. Although their identities were not known to investigators, their presence was corroborated by several city residents, both Azerbaijani and Armenian. The wife of Eduard Grigoryan, Rita Grigoryan later testified that in the days leading up to the events, he had begun to meet some strange persons in secret.



One of the few photos available from the Sumgayit events

These men, as she recalls, wore black raincoats similar unnamed and unidentified males in black raincoats were reported by several witnesses during the riots. Others had testified that Grigoryan met with these men several times during the riots.

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

*August 29, 1988
City of Baku*

*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 after the raid began, a 25-30 year old, clean-shaven young man, came into the room I did not see any memorable marks on his face; he was wearing a black raincoat. Underneath the raincoat, he wore a white shirt.... In his hand he had a folder, I guess, for paper. When he came into the room, all the others (I mean those who had broken into our house) fell silent; Muradov Vadim approached him and

*called him by his name, which I do not remember. He took our gold things which they had stolen and said to him: "See what I took from them." That man took some of the gold and said: "Enough, much blood was spilled here already, let's move out." Without any other word, immediately, people started to exit the apartment. He also left. Three men stayed in the room, I hadn't 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. You should find a hammer and nails to hammer in the door. They can return." He helped me to dress, as I could not do this myself- my whole body was in pain, hands were shaking."*⁹



It becomes obvious from this 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.

Lyudmila Mejlumyan positively identified Eduard Grigoryan in the course of investigative process as the man who raped her and her sister Karina Mejlumyan

Notwithstanding the gravity of the crimes committed by Eduard Grigoryan during the Sumgayit unrest, he was sentenced to only twelve years imprisonment by the USSR court. It is worth noting that three years later in 1991 he was transferred to Yerevan by Moscow to serve out the remainder of his sentence and shortly after, pardoned by Armenian authorities. After his release, he spent a brief period of time in Armenia before moving to Russia, where he is currently living. Grigoryan's speedy acquittal clearly demonstrates to which extent he was backed by the masterminds of the Sumgayit unrest.

It was discovered in the aftermath that only selected Armenian apartments had been targeted during the riots. In fact, a detailed inquiry into the victims of the attacks as well as into the apartments that were burned or vandalized has raised more questions than answers. 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 illustrates that in many cases the pogroms were guided by already prearranged scenario, and the victims of these pogroms were just those, who refused to contribute to Krunk Committee.

⁹ Mammadov E., Mammadov R. Sumqayit, 1988: Crime and Punishment. Baku, 2014. P. 181-184.

Furthermore, investigative data show that some of the apartments that were burned down were actually empty. Household items and furniture had been moved in some of the homes that would later be burned. In many of these burned out apartments, empty plates were found in the middle of the room. Firefighters explained to investigators that placing a candle in a plate with fuel was a tactic used to easily burn a house down. These empty apartments were indications that destruction was not simply the outcome of riots or pogroms but an outcome of a skillfully planned provocation. If the main aim of the riots were to kill Armenians, it is unlikely that rioters would take the time to burn down empty apartments.



Sumgayit building attacked by raiders

One of the most destructive weapons used during the Sumgayit events was the information blockage leaving Azerbaijanis defenseless in the aftermath. There were numerous reports that cameras had been installed strategically to later pin the attack on Azerbaijanis. Given that the local media resources were scarce at the time and that information took days to reach foreign media, it was unlikely that the Sumgayit events would be reported so soon. However, the events were reported almost immediately worldwide. Local and foreign media were denied access to the city but news of Sumgayit riots travelled very smoothly.

In the course of three days unrest 32 people (26 Armenian, 6 Azerbaijanis) were killed and over 400 were wounded, over 200 apartments were looted, 40 cars were damaged or burned and over 50 public facilities were vandalized. Nevertheless, Soviet authorities did not intervene. Given that Sumgayit is only 30 km. from Baku and that the riots continued for three straight days, it is unlikely that the troops were simply late. According to Svante Cornell, General Director of the Research Institute on Central Asia and Caucasus at the John Hopkins University, lack of troops by the Soviet Army and of the Ministry of Internal Affairs was not a factor in the decision to refrain from intervention. He concludes that the Soviet army simply stood on the sidelines and even “deliberately sought to create a conflict between the two communities”.¹⁰ It seems as if the troops had clear order not to intervene. This would generally be uncharacteristic of the Soviet army, which often even reacted violently to peaceful protests. However, given what we know about Armenian nationalists’ collaboration with the KGB, the practice of non-intervention in Sumgayit stands in line with the goal of the organizers.

¹⁰ Cornell Svante. *The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*. Uppsala University, Department of East European Studies. 1999. P. 17

Outcomes and impacts



Trial of Sumgayit case

To investigate the unrest, the USSR General Prosecutor's Office opened a criminal case and the special investigative group was established under the USSR General Prosecutor's Office on March 1, 1988. The investigative group consisted of 231 investigators, including Armenian and Azerbaijani lawyers. 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.

Despite the fact that the investigation process uncovered a large volume of information regarding the unrest it did little to shed light to the truth about the Sumgayit events. Anyone who wanted to dig deeper into the investigation was told to simply let it go. The officials of city authorities who made remarks on activities by Armenia's agent provocateurs and the cameras that had been installed on the roofs of the buildings were sidelined from the investigation. Several requests made by Azerbaijani government later to get a number of material evidence as well as the recorded tapes from the installed cameras seized by the Soviet law enforcement officers had been consistently rejected. However, cameras and other visual evidence would help in identifying the perpetrators as well as prove that they were placed previously and purposely.

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 in 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".¹¹

The assessments and analysis of numerous official documents, investigative records, testimonies and primary sources confirm that the majority of those who committed crime and murder of Armenian residents of the city admitted at the interrogation that they were affected by the narcotic 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.

V.Пыухин, 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, attests to the skilful orchestration of the Sumgayit unrest. In his interview to the Russian Vesti,

¹¹ Кривопусков.В. Мятёжный Карабах. Из дневника офицера МВД СССР. М., 2007. — 384 с. С.192

V.Ilyukhin highlighted the following: "The events in Sumgayit were provoked by Armenians. This proved to be beneficial for Armenia. They played "Sumgayit card"... **They played a grand performance on a great tragedy**".¹²

Armenians were highly determined and the Soviet KGB was fully competent. Leaving behind little trace, they recruited and utilized an enthusiastic criminal of Armenian origin, namely Eduard Grigoryan who deliberately manipulated, radicalized and maneuvered local protesters and criminals. Under Grigoryan's guidance improvised weapons such as metal rods, pipes and sharpened metal were used to hunt down Armenians in their homes, to injure, kill, and rape them in a show of chaos that lasted from February 27 to February 29. Soviet authorities and troops were given orders not to intervene, and as a result, 26 Armenians and 6 Azerbaijanis lost their lives. A certain scenario had been written and played out and news reports had been transmitted to worldwide with exceptional speed. However, the premeditated, organized nature of the unrests was never fully recognized or further investigated. One consequence of such impunity was that the true masterminds and organizers of those events were neither revealed nor brought to responsibility.

Once the Sumgayit events were over and order was re-established in the city, Armenians' outcry for Nagorno-Karabakh reached new heights. With the help of the Armenian diaspora and lobbies abroad, Armenian nationalists demanded that Nagorno-Karabakh should be annexed to Armenia. The implications of this isolated incident were strategically used. Claiming that Armenians were no longer safe in Azerbaijan, Armenians intensified their policy of ethnic cleansing of Azerbaijanis from Armenia and the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan and thus, paved the way for its military occupation. Lobbying efforts have been so successful that despite the many atrocities and brutal killings committed by Armenia against Azerbaijanis in the annexation of Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding regions of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Sumgayit events seem to carry more weight and continue to be the object of Western perception of Azerbaijan. This false perception has been established and well-maintained by Armenia even today to justify its military occupation and exploitation of Azerbaijani territories for over 25 years.

¹² Ilyukhin, V (2010) "Interview with Vesti". <http://vesti.az/news/52580>