

Fact Sheet #2

Changing Armenia: 1988-1991

- Conflict with Azerbaijan:
 - o As the Soviet Union weakened, nationalism among its component parts rose. Nagorno-Karabakh, a region within the Soviet republic of Azerbaijan, contained a majority of ethnic Armenians. In February 1988, the regional government passed a resolution in favor of uniting with Armenia.
 - o Violence broke out between Azerbaijan and Armenia and massacres took place.

- Earthquake
 - o On December 7, 1988, just before noon, a massive earthquake (6.9 on the Richter scale) hit the northern part of Armenia. At least 25,000 people were killed, 140,000 injured, and between half a million and one million people were left homeless throughout northern Armenia.
 - o The epicenter was near the town of Spitak, and Armenia's second largest city, Leninakan (today's Gyumri) also got the worst of it. Kirovakan (today's Vanadzor) wasn't much better.
 - o 564 residents of Kirovakan died in the quake. Many were injured, traumatized, and/or left homeless.
 - o 50% or more of the buildings were so severely damaged that they couldn't be used. School #5 in Kirovakan was completely destroyed as teachers and students barely escaped with their lives.

- Decline of the Soviet Union
 - o By 1989, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev was faced with a disaster in Afghanistan and begins pulling troops out. Within the Soviet Union (including Armenia), people were demanding more political freedom and a more open economy.
 - o In 1989, Gorbachev allowed the disintegration of the Warsaw Pact (the Soviet alliance) – Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, etc. were becoming fully independent.
 - o Now national minorities within the Soviet Union were demanding independence.
 - o People in Armenia were shaken by Soviet economic and foreign policy issues. Many began to demand independence too. They achieved it in 1991.