
Azerbaijani Policy and the Karabagh Problem

Below is an excerpt from a press release issued by the Assembly of Armenians of Europe (AAE) on December 10, 2003, which reported on the European Parliament's approach to the Karabagh problem. It gives a detailed history of the deplorable human rights situation which led to the movement for independence, in order to explain why it is unworkable for Karabagh to return to Azeri domination.

The refusal of the Armenians to contemplate a political entity with Azerbaijan is not just a simple matter of difference of language, culture, religion, history and traditions. This is the consequence of the Azerbaijani policy carried out since 1930 aimed at the disappearance of Armenians from the territories separating Turkey from Azerbaijan in order to achieve the unification of the Turkish speaking world from the Mediterranean to western China. Apropos, a similar experiment (the 1915 Genocide) was carried out at the beginning of 20th century by the unconditional ally of Azerbaijan, Turkey, which resulted in the ethnic cleansing of the Armenians from their ancestral lands - 300,000 sq km in Eastern Anatolia.

And now a brief demographic summary of the situation in Nagorno Karabagh under 75 years of Azeri rule: The Armenian population of the Nagorno Kharabakh which was 300 thousand in 1920s (95% of the population) drops down to only 140 thousands persons (75%) by 1979. Meanwhile the Azeris which constituted only 3% of the population in 1923 has a growth of 13% by 1959 and 24% by 1988. The objective of the racist and xenophobic policy of the Azerbaijani authorities vis-a-vis the Armenian population was to impose to Kharabakh the same destiny as it was with Nakhijevan. The population of the said Armenian enclave annexed to Azerbaijan in 1920s - although it had no geographic borders with Azerbaijan - mainly consisted of Armenians (60%) upon its annexation. In 1953 the Armenian population was only 1.5% and quite disappeared in 1980s.

Concerning the economic field, from 1923 to 1988 the Nagorno Kharabakh supplied raw materials (agriculture, viticulture, silk thread) to the Azerbaijani economy, since no industrial or manufacturing plant producing finished goods was built there nor any research centre was established. In the 50s the investment rate per capita in the Nagorno Kharabakh was 10 times less than the average in Azerbaijan - it was 2 times less from 1981-85 and 2.7 times less in 1986 (see the report "National Economy of AzSSR, dedicated to the 70th anniversary of the Great October").

An alienation policy towards Nagorno Kharabakh was implemented by means of infrastructural planning - all roads uniting the regional centres of Nagorno Kharabakh to its capital Stepanakert were necessarily passing through the neighboring Azerbaijani regions. The sector of liberal professions (such as education, high positions, public health, jurisprudence and jurisdiction) as well as the forces of police and KGB were directly administered from Baku and any appointment had to be approved from there.

The academic institutions and professional educational centres were mainly dispensed in Azerbaijani language thus depriving the Armenians from the right to use their mother tongue in everyday life. Nagorno Karabagh Armenians, upon their graduation from higher educational institutions in Armenia, would never quite obtain the approbation from the Azeri authorities for a position in Nagorno Kharabakh corresponding to their competence. Due to persecution, the Armenian intellectuals and young people were leaving Kharabakh. The Azeri authorities also reduced the number of Armenian schools, i.e. 46 schools were closed from 1960 to 1988. Armenian history course was excluded from the curriculum and replaced by the Azerbaijani history presenting Armenians as immigrants whose roots in territory of Nagorno Karabagh go

back only to 1828! (now the Azerbaijani historians back this date to 1878). There were no TV and radio programs in the Armenian language.

The TV and radio broadcasting signals coming from Armenia were completely blocked. The Armenian monuments of great architectural value (more than 1700) among which some are of IV BC were not figuring in the list of the historical monuments protected by the State. On the other hand the Academy of Science of AzSSR classified them among the "dangerous religious centers of past". None of 222 Armenian churches did operate from 1930 to 1988, while in Shushi (second city of Nagorno Kharabakh) mosques were continuously open in order to serve the Muslim population. It is patently clear that there is no resemblance between Nagorno Kharabakh and the Aland Islands.

Concerning the ethnic cleansing of the territory, first of all the operation called "Koltso" (Ring) has to be mentioned which was realized by the joint Azeri and Soviet special police forces at the beginning of the month of May 1991. 24 Armenian villages under pretext of passport control were emptied: 2 in the Azeri region of Khanlare, 3 in Shahumian Region, 15 in Hadrut region, and 4 in Shushi region. The principle point of the "return of refugees", as it is stated by Per Ghar-ton [rapporteur to European Parliament's (EP) Foreign Affairs Committee re: the South Caucasus] in his draft report should not be applied only to one ethnic group, since in this case it will be an instrument of racist discrimination.

At the end, it has to be stated that the Kharabakh war ended only after the taking and destruction of Azeri military bases located in regional centres of Aghdam, Fizuly, Djebrail, Kubatly, Zangelan which were encircling the Nagorno Kharabakh. This demilitarized zone serves as a neutral zone, a guarantee for the security to Nagorno Kharabakh. The drawing back of Armenian forces from these zones, a guarantee for the security to Mountainous Kharabakh. The drawing back of Armenian forces from this zone is possible if only an equivalent guarantee will be offered to the people of Mountainous Kharabakh.