

Deportation of the 1948s-1953s

Despite the genocide of Azerbaijanis in Armenia in 1918-1920, mass repression and deportations in the 1930s, Azerbaijanis still lived along the borders of Armenia, Turkey and Iran, as well as Azerbaijan and Georgia. The settlements surrounding the city of Iravan were considered to be the most fertile lands, and Azerbaijanis constituted the majority of the population in these areas.

The mass deportation of Azerbaijanis from the historical and ethnic lands of the Armenian SSR in 1948-1953 was the next stage in the policy of Armenians and their protectors to take advantage of the dominance of the Soviet Union at the end of World War II.

By the end of World War II, the Armenian claim to Turkish territory coincided with the USSR's plans to attack Turkey. Joseph Stalin wanted to restore the 1914 borders between Russia and Turkey, i.e. to separate the provinces of Kars and Ardaghan from Turkey again. However, there was a problem of settling the territories that were planned to be separated from Turkey. This problem was supposed to be solved at the expense of the Armenians of Turkey living abroad. The campaign for the election of the Catholicos of All Armenians was about to begin. Taking advantage of this moment, Stalin summoned to Moscow Archbishop of the Echmiadzin Church Gevorg Chorekchyan, who was a real candidate for the post of Catholicos. On 19 April 1945, G. Chorekchyan met with Stalin. At the conclusion of their meeting, Stalin said that the Soviet government wanted to return the lands given to Turkey in 1921, and it was desirable that these lands be settled by Armenians who had fled Turkey and were now living abroad. Stalin promised Gevorg Chorekchyan that a decree would soon be passed to organise the immigration of some 100,000 Armenians and stressed that he wanted the Church to help him in this matter. It was after this meeting that preparations for the resettlement of Armenians from abroad to Armenia and the simultaneous deportation of Azerbaijanis begin in earnest.

On 15 May 1945, Grigory Arutyunov, First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia, addressed a letter to Stalin, asking him to solve the issue of "the return" of Armenians living abroad to Soviet Armenia. On 6 June 1945, Stalin receives G. Arutyunov in the Kremlin. He hands Stalin a letter requesting the restoration of the borders between Armenia and Turkey, corresponding to the borders between these countries in 1914.

On 27 October Stalin again receives Arutyunov and tells him that the Soviet government's territorial claims to Turkey are still in force. G. Arutyunov informs Stalin that more than 300,000 Armenians aspire to Soviet Armenia and asks him, primarily to "eliminate the glaring injustice", i.e. to solve "the question of Nagorno-Karabakh and Nakhichevan". At the end of the meeting, G. Arutyunov hands Stalin a document stating that the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia submits for consideration by the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks a proposal to include the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region in the Armenian SSR.

On 21 November 1945, the Council of People's Commissars (SNK) of the USSR adopted a resolution "On measures to return foreign Armenians to Soviet Armenia". A week later, the Second Secretary of the CC of the CPSU (B) G. Malenkov sent a telegram to the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan M. Baghirov, outlining Arutyunov's petition to Stalin for the annexation of Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia in order to learn his opinion on the matter. On 10 December 1945 Baghirov wrote a reply telegram to Malenkov. The letter states that he has no objection to the inclusion of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region, except for Shusha, into the Armenian SSR, provided that the issue of the inclusion of the Azizbeyov, Vedi and Karabakhlar districts of the Armenian SSR, adjacent to the Azerbaijan Republic and populated predominantly by Azerbaijanis, into the Azerbaijani SSR is considered. Soon this issue was closed, and the attention of Armenians shifted to the problem of deportation of Azerbaijanis from Armenia.

According to the decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR of 19 October 1946, persons of Armenian nationality returning from abroad to Armenia acquire citizenship of the USSR from the moment of their arrival in the Soviet Union. In 1946 alone, 50,900 Armenians immigrated to Armenia from Syria, Greece, Lebanon, Iraq, Bulgaria and Romania. In 1947, 35,400 Armenians arrived from Palestine, Syria, France, USA, Greece, Egypt, Iraq and Lebanon and settled in Armenia. The Armenian leadership explained the decrease in the number of Armenians resettled in 1947 compared to 1946 by the fact that Armenians who moved from abroad were mostly urban dwellers and it was impossible to settle them in mountainous areas. The immigrants wanted to live only in Iravan and its neighbouring areas. A total of 96,000 Armenians were resettled to Armenia from foreign countries in 1946-1949, most of whom settled in Iravan and neighbouring districts.

As a result of long diplomatic negotiations between the Soviet Union and the United States and Great Britain, the Soviet Union finally gives up its intention to attack Turkey. Thus, although the Armenians did not succeed in getting their hands on Kars and Ardaghan with the help of the Soviet authorities, they did achieve the deportation of Azerbaijanis from their historical and ethnic lands.

In early December 1947, Stalin received a letter from the First Secretaries of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan and Armenia, which stated a request that the USSR leadership should solve the issue of resettlement of 130 thousand Azerbaijanis living in Armenia to Azerbaijan. The letter, kept in the Archive of Political Documents of the Republic of Azerbaijan, has no signatures, no date or dispatch number.

On 23 December 1947, the USSR Council of Ministers adopted the Decree "Resettlement of Collective Farmers and Other Azerbaijani Population from Armenian SSR to Kura-Araz Lowland of Azerbaijan SSR". The decree stated that 100,000 collective farmers and other Azerbaijanis living in the Armenian SSR in 1948-1950 should be resettled to the Kura-Araz lowland of the Azerbaijan SSR on a voluntary basis. According to the first paragraph, 10,000 people were to be resettled in 1948, 40,000 in 1949 and 50,000 in 1950. Paragraph 11 stated that the Council of Ministers of the Armenian SSR should

be allowed to use the buildings and houses vacated by the Azerbaijani population in connection with the resettlement of the Azerbaijani population in the Kura-Araz lowlands of the Azerbaijan SSR to accommodate Armenians arriving in Armenia from abroad. Under the undefined category of “other Azerbaijani population” were meant Azerbaijanis living in the city of Iravan and surrounding settlements.

On 2 February 1948, the Council of Ministers of the Azerbaijan SSR adopted a secret resolution. This resolution explained the provisions for the reception and accommodation of the 10,000-strong population resettling from the Armenian SSR in 1948.

According to the resolution the State Planning Committee, certain ministries and republic institutions, regional executive committees were to develop plans relating to resettlement on special activities and submit them to the Council of Ministers for consideration.

On 10 March 1948, in addition to the resolution of 23 December 1947, the Council of Ministers of the USSR adopted the second resolution “On relocating collective farmers and other Azerbaijani nationals from the Armenian SSR to the Kura-Araz lowland of the Azerbaijan SSR”. In the 14-point resolution, the Councils of Ministers of the Azerbaijan SSR and the Armenian SSR were charged with the implementation of specific measures related to the resettlement.

The resettlement plan was finalized in the text of the resolution of the Council of Ministers of the Azerbaijan SSR dated 13 May 1948. According to this resolution, it was planned to resettle to the Azerbaijani population of Spandaryan and Stalin districts of Iravan city to the Azerbaijan SSR along with collective farmers.

On 9 July 1948, Teymur Guliyev, Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Azerbaijan SSR, sent a letter to Georgy Malenkov, Deputy Chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers, containing a report on the implementation of the decree of 23 December 1947. The letter stressed the lack of all necessary conditions in the Kura-Araz lowlands: buildings for housing, areas appropriate for farming and sanitary-prophylactic institutions.

Taking all this into account, the USSR Council of Ministers was proposed to amend the plan of resettlement of Azerbaijanis from the Armenian SSR, not exceeding 15 thousand in 1949 and to allow the placement of forced migrants from the mountainous regions of Armenia to the mountainous regions of Azerbaijan.

In response to such letters, the USSR Council of Ministers stated that the approved resettlement schedule could not be violated.

Resolutions on resettlement of Azerbaijanis adopted by the USSR leadership gave the Armenian leadership free reign. Thus they took all measures to erase the names of Azerbaijani settlements around Iravan and along the borders of Armenia from geographical maps once and for all through resettlement. The Armenian authorities spread various rumours to psychologically prepare Azerbaijani population for resettlement. The statement named “the mood of the Azerbaijani population of Armenia over the forthcoming resettlement to the Azerbaijan SSR” of 3 May 1948, signed by Major-General Khoren

Grigoryan and addressed to Mir Jafar Baghirov inscribed remarks not only of the inhabitants of the districts included in the resettlement plan, but also the statements of Armenians interested in this matter and wishing to annex Nagorno-Karabakh and Nakhchivan to Armenia.

The facts of deportation of Azerbaijanis from the city of Iravan are reflected in archival documents. For example, according to the documents, 64 families (253 people) were resettled in December 1948 and 400 families were supposed to be resettled in 1949.

Deported Azerbaijanis were resettled primarily in such districts as: Zardab, Ali Bayramli, Kurdamir, Goychay, Mirbashir, Salyan, Imishli, Sabirabad, Zhdanov (Beylagan), Yevlakh, Ujar, Saatli, which did not correspond to the climatic conditions of the areas they lived in Armenia. And this contributed to the fact that many settlers died of infectious diseases.

All deported people were accommodated in the private houses of local residents, in public buildings, as well as in uninhabitable buildings and barns. Of the 8,110 families resettled from Armenia in 1948-1950, only 3,232 were provided with housing. In 1950, it was decided to build 3,500 houses for the resettled, but in total only 470 houses were built. Only 1,488 families were provided with homestead farms. Although 5,000 houses were planned for 1951, a total of 3,074 houses were built and commissioned. In 1952, it was planned to move 600 households from the Armenian SSR to the Kura-Araz lowlands, and this plan was even exceeded (124.6 per cent).

In 1948-1950, more than 1000 households of Azerbaijani families were forced to leave Armenia and resettle in different regions of Azerbaijan. And this happened as a result of pressure on the inhabitants of the predominantly Azerbaijani districts of Armenia.

Since 1951, the process of return to Armenia of a part of refugees of Azerbaijanis who remained homeless in Azerbaijan began. After Stalin's death in 1953, there was a steady decrease in the intensity of the process of resettlement of Azerbaijanis from their historical and ethnic lands and the process of repatriation of the population with harsh living conditions to their former homeland accelerated.

In total, in 1948-1953, along with Azerbaijanis officially resettled from 24 districts of Armenia and the city of Iravan (more than 200 settlements), the total number of people who left their homes and moved to Azerbaijan unofficially was about 100,000 people. As a result of the deportation, the Armenian leaders completely cleared the districts of Ashtarak, Martuni (Ashaghi Garanliq), Karabakhlar, Abovyan (Eller), Echmiadzin and Hoktemberyan from Azerbaijani population.

After the deportation of Azerbaijanis from Armenia was completed, Azerbaijani personnel holding particular positions at the district and republican levels were replaced by Armenians, motivated by the reduction of the Azerbaijani population living there.

The first secretaries of the Party Committee in Karabakhlar, Vedi, Zangibasar, Krasnoselsk districts, and in other 10 districts, as well as the second and third secretaries were dismissed from their positions because of being ethnic Azerbaijanis. Armenians were appointed in their places. The

Azerbaijani language newspapers were closed down in all districts except Amasya, Basarkechar and Krasnoselsk districts.

Iravan State Drama Theater named after Jafar Jabbarli was moved to the centre of Basarkechar district in 1949 and closed in 1952 due to lack of funding. The Iravan theatre resumed its activity in Iravan city only in 1967.

To ensure that Azerbaijanis were not able to get higher education, the departments of the Kh. Abovyan Pedagogical Institute of Iravan – Linguistic and Literature, History, Geography, Physics and Mathematics, which had been taught in Azerbaijani since 1930, as well as the faculties of the State Correspondence Pedagogical Institute of Armenia with the same name, were transferred to the corresponding faculties of the institutes of Azerbaijan. The faculties of the Iravan Azerbaijan Pedagogical Technical College, established in 1925, were transferred to the Khanlar rural area.

As a result of deportation in 1948-1953, the Azerbaijani population of Iravan was halved. In 1939, 6569 Azerbaijanis were registered during the census in Iravan, and in 1959, the number of registered Azerbaijanis was only 3413 (the census was not conducted in 1949).

Along with the deportation of Azerbaijanis from Armenia, an operation was carried out to rename settlements. In 1947-1953 alone, the names of more than 60 Azerbaijani settlements were Armenianised.

In order to give a legal assessment of this situation, which is considered a historic crime against our people, and to convey it to the international community, on December 18, 1997, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Heydar Aliyev signed a decree “On the mass deportation of Azerbaijanis from historical and ethnic lands in the Armenian SSR.”

However, in publications published abroad, the deportation of Azerbaijanis from Armenia in 1948-1953 is still assessed as a fact of “resettlement”, according to the wording of official documents of that time.

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