

Deportation of the 1987s-1991s

During the twentieth century, Armenians, with the assistance of their foreign accomplices, carried out ethnic cleansing against Azerbaijanis in the territory of present-day Armenia in 1905-1906 and 1918-1920, mass repression in the 1930s, deportations in 1948-1953 and finally, in 1988-1989, they managed to complete the ethnic cleansing.

Regardless of who is in power, the expulsion of Azerbaijanis from Soviet Armenia has always been on the agenda.

In the mid-1960s, anti-Turkish and anti-Azerbaijani propaganda resumed with full force in Armenia. In February 1965, the 100th anniversary of the birth of Andranik Ozanian, who led the murder of hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijani and Turkish civilians, was solemnly celebrated in Armenia. In 1964, with the consent of Moscow, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia decided to mark the 50th anniversary of the fictitious “great massacre” on 24 April 1965 (at that time the term “great massacre” (Meds Yeghern) was used instead of “Armenian genocide”). At that time, as a result of Armenia’s policy of national disunity and discrimination, hundreds of families from Iravan and surrounding areas were forced to move to Azerbaijan. On 24 April 1983, under the pretext of “genocide” day, Armenians attacked the houses of Azerbaijanis in Ulukhanli settlement (Masis (Zangibasar) district centre) and destroyed tombstones in the cemetery of the settlement. The defenceless population was forced to hide in the areas bordering with Turkey.

Official Moscow was concerned about the growth of nationalist sentiments in Armenia. The Central Committee resolution of 17 October 1984 stated that in recent years in Armenia special works have been created that awaken nationalist sentiments among the population, historical reality is distorted, conditions are not created for the development of the language and culture of minorities, their representatives do not participate in party, Soviet and economic structures, etc.

After Mikhail Gorbachev came to the leadership of the USSR in 1985, under the guise of reform programme named “glasnost” (openness) and “perestroika” (restructuring), the atmosphere of nationalism in Armenia and the NKAO heated up every day. In August 1987, Armenians collected 75 thousand signatures in Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia and sent them to the Kremlin. On 18 November of the same year M. Gorbache’s advisor on economic issues, academician Abel Aganbekyan in his interview to the newspaper “L’Humanite” in Paris informed about the expediency from the economic point of view of joining Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia. He also informed about the work of a specially created commission on this issue.

On 13 February 1988, the first rally demanding the annexation of the NKAO to Armenia was held in Khankendi, organised by the “Krunck” (Crane) separatist group acting clandestinely in the NKAO. On 20 February, an extraordinary session of the Council of People’s Deputies of the region was held. Here it was decided to withdraw the autonomous region from the Azerbaijan SSR and incorporate it into the

Armenian SSR. On the same day, representatives of the first batch of Azerbaijani refugees expelled from the Kafan district were admitted to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan.

On the evening of 21 February, the CC CPSU Politburo discussed the incident happened in the NKAO and announced its position stating that the claims of Armenians were a clear and unacceptable attempt to change the existing national-territorial structure of the state. Armenians, dissatisfied with the Kremlin's first official position, began to hold protest rallies in Iravan and Khankendi. On February 21, the Demirbulag Mosque, which was the only functioning mosque in Iravan (there were 8 mosques in the city at the beginning of the twentieth century), the building of the M.F. Akhundov High School, all the equipment of the Iravan State Drama Theater named after Jafar Jabbarli were burnt down. The houses of Azerbaijanis who showed their discontent with the events happened in Iravan were also burnt and looted.

On the territory of Armenia, the deportation of Azerbaijanis became more and more intensive every day. According to official information as of 28 February, about 2,000 people arrived from Kafan district to the neighbouring Zangilan district as refugees. During these days, many refugees from Armenia also arrived in Imishli and Gubadli districts. 200 refugees who fled from Armenia to save their lives and arrived in Absheron district were welcomed by the First Secretary of the Central Committee K. Baghirov and high-ranking officials who arrived from Moscow. Protests against the persecution of Azerbaijanis were held in Ganja and Nakhchivan.

On 24 February in Moscow, the leaders of the Karabakh Committee operating in Iravan, Silva Kaputikyan and Zori Balayan, held three-hour talks with Alexander Yakovlev, a member of the Politburo of the CPSU Central Committee and Secretary of the Central Committee. And on 26 February, accompanied by Gorbachev's assistant Georgy Shakhnazarov and A. Yakovlev, General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee M. Gorbachev received S. Kaputikyan and Zori Balayan. However, Gorbachev did not promise them that Nagorno-Karabakh would be handed over to Armenia. Instead, he promised them a large sum of 400 million roubles for the socio-economic development of the NKAO. On 27 February, the first deputy head of the International Relations Department of the CPSU Central Committee, Karen Bruthents, arrived in Khankendi and held a confidential meeting with the Armenian separatist leaders and advised them to increase pressure and not to back down from their demands.

Finding no way to stop the deportation of Azerbaijanis from Armenia, on 1 March, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan under the leadership of Secretary of the Central Committee Hasan Hasanov set up a republican commission to work with Azerbaijanis arriving from Armenia.

On 27 February, there was held a rally as a protest against violence towards Azerbaijanis in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. And this has led to mass riots held in Sumgait under the KGB scenario and with the direct participation of Armenian extremists. After that, a new wave of Azerbaijani refugees from Armenia began.

For Armenian nationalists, the issue of deporting more than 200,000 Azerbaijanis living in the most fertile regions of Armenia was as important as resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh issue in their own favour. And the Azerbaijani government, sending back refugees from Armenia in lorries, considered its mission accomplished.

According to official data, as of 21 March 1988, from 28 February to that day, 16900 refugees arrived from Armenia, of whom 8600 returned. Despite all this, the flow of refugees continued along the mountain roads from Vardenis (Basarkechar), Masis (Zangibasar), Hrazdan (Akhta), Krasnosel, Yeghegnadzor, Ararat (Vedi) regions of Armenia. These refugees found shelter mainly in the cities of Ganja, Mingachevir, Nakhchivan, as well as in Sharur, Zangilan, Gazakh, Salyan, Khanlar (Goygol), Zhdanov (Beylagan) districts of Azerbaijan.

On 11 May 1988, Armenians attacked the village of Shirazli in Ararat (Vedi) region, as a result of which two people were killed, many were wounded, and houses were burnt down. The population, having moved to the Soviet-Turkish border, was forced to live in tents for a long time.

In order to study the situation of Azerbaijanis living in Armenia and solve their problems, a delegation led by Ramiz Mehdiyev, Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan, was sent to Iravan. The delegation, which arrived in Armenia on 13 April 1988, met twice with Karen Demirchyan, First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Armenia. However, despite the promises made, violence against Azerbaijanis and their deportation continued.

On 15 May 1988, a large protest rally against the expulsion of Azerbaijanis from Armenia was held for the first time in the former Lenin Square, now Azadliq Square.

On 15 June 1988, the session of the Supreme Soviet of the Armenian SSR adopted a decision on the annexation of the NKAO to Armenia and requested the consent of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. After the Supreme Soviet of the Azerbaijan SSR rejected this illegal demand on 17 June, the situation of Azerbaijanis in Armenia significantly deteriorated. On 17-20 June, violent Armenian groups gathered in Theatre Square in Iravan and attacked Azerbaijanis living in the centre of Masis district and in the villages of Zangilar, Zakhmet, Demirchiler, Dostlug, Nizami and Sarvanlar by bus. More than ten thousand defenceless Azerbaijanis were forced to gather at the Soviet-Turkish border and stay there day and night. More than 20 Azerbaijanis were wounded in those days. In the district centre, in Ulukhanli settlement, 3 thousand Azerbaijanis were evicted from their own houses. During all these disturbances, the forces of the USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs, located in the centre of the district, played only the role of observers.

On 9 July 1988, by order of the new First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan Abdurahman Vezirov, Azerbaijani refugees sheltered in their relatives' houses in Shusha and other districts of the NKAO were removed from the territory of the autonomous republic and sent to other regions.

On 18 June 1988, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, having discussed the situation in the NKAO, adopted a decision on the unacceptability of changing the borders between the republics,

after which Armenian nationalists began to hold widespread meetings with the aim of expelling Azerbaijanis from Armenia.

In mid-November 1988, more than 80 thousand refugees arrived from Armenia to Azerbaijan. On 17 November, during a rally held in Baku on Azadliq Square, a decision was made to demand autonomy for Azerbaijanis living in Armenia. Armenian television, showing reports from the rally held in Baku on that day, repeatedly stated in the air the demands of the resolution. On 22 November, an extraordinary session of the Supreme Soviet of the Armenian SSR was held without the participation of Azerbaijani deputies. After the participants of the rally, who gathered in front of the theatre where the session was held, were attacked, the Armenian leadership suspended the session at their request and sent deputies and district leaders to localities under the pretext of "restoring law and order". The district leaders were instructed to stop the action to expel Azerbaijanis from Armenia within one week, i.e. until 28 November.

Russian historian Yuri Pompeyev described the deportation of Azerbaijanis from Armenia in the autumn of 1988 as follows: "Defenceless and unarmed Azerbaijanis, driven out of their homes usually undressed and barefoot, were told: "Damn Turks, get out of Armenia!".

On the night of 25-26 November, Armenians carried out an armed attack on the village of Shaumyan (former name was Vartanli) near the town of Kirovakan (present-day Vanadzor), resulting in the death of 14 Azerbaijanis. The surviving population of the village hid in the snowy and cold days in the mountains and forests during the day, and at night started to move on. Thus, people could reach Azerbaijan only after 13-14 days.

On 28 November 1988, in Spitak district (Hamamli) there were also attacks on Azerbaijanis. Three people were killed, seven were seriously injured.

Before the Spitak earthquake of 7 December 1988, Armenian armed groups committed mass riots, killings and looting in all districts where Azerbaijanis lived on the territory of Armenia.

Armenian bandits in Kuibyshev village of Stepanavan (Jalaloghlu) district mercilessly killed 3 more Azerbaijanis with cold weapons. And in the village of Gerger they burnt a woman alive and threw her corpse into a rubbish dump.

The newspaper "Communist", which was the body of the Supreme Soviet, Council of Ministers and Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Armenian SSR, in an article entitled "The moment of disaster, the moment of responsibility", published in the issue of 13 December 1988, wrote that the leaders of Kalinin, Spitak, Gugark, Noyemberyan, Krasnosel, Vardenis, Yeghegnadzor, Azizbeyov, Ararat, Massis, Sisian and Meghri districts were particularly active in completing the deportation of Azerbaijanis within the set timeframe.

In November-December 1988, on the one hand, the population of Armenian villages inhabited by Azerbaijanis was oppressed, villages were not provided with food, electricity supply was cut off, suffered continued attacks, on the other hand, families who left their homes were attacked on the roads, their property was looted and Azerbaijanis themselves were brutally killed.

Most of the nationalist crimes that took place in Armenia were mainly committed during the period of forced displacement of the Azerbaijani population from their homes. Armed Armenian bandit groups were located on all roads from Armenia to Azerbaijan. Most of the bandits wore police uniforms and set up unauthorized checkpoints. They stopped all cars, checked the documents of passengers, and as soon as they learnt that Azerbaijani passengers were travelling in the car, they threw them out of the cars, looted their property and brutally beat and killed them.

According to the list of refugees compiled in 1990 by the Refugee Society of Azerbaijan on the basis of relevant documents and witness testimonies, 216 Azerbaijanis were brutally killed or died by stirring up inter-ethnic strife in Armenia during the 1988-1990s. Pursuant to the said list, 52 people died from injuries, 34 people were killed as a result of torture, 20 people were killed by firearms, 15 people were burned, 8 people were hit by a car, 9 people were involved in road accidents, 7 people died as a result of doctors' encroachment, 9 people died of heart attacks, two people committed suicide, one person was hanged, two people died in a car explosion, one person died from electric shock, another one was strangled in water, six people went missing, 20 people disappeared from hospitals, 48 people were caught in a storm in the mountains and died.

According to the Office of Public Procurator of the USSR, in 1988-1989, 675 criminal cases were initiated in the Armenian SSR on ethnic grounds, of which 283 were sent to Azerbaijan for investigation. At the same time, 138 criminal cases were sent from the Azerbaijan SSR to Armenia for investigation. As of 31 December 1989, out of 530 such criminal cases pending before the law enforcement bodies of Armenia, 200 cases were not initiated and the investigation was terminated.

The former Soviet authorities indifferently observed the deportation of Azerbaijanis from Armenia. After the expulsion of all Azerbaijanis from Armenia, i.e. on 6 December 1988, the Central Committee of the CPSU and the Council of Ministers of the USSR adopted a resolution on impermissible actions of individual officials of local bodies of the Azerbaijan SSR and Armenian SSR, forcing citizens to leave their permanent places of residence.

To eliminate the damage caused by the earthquake and restore Armenia's economy, more manpower was needed. It was for this purpose that on 4 January 1989 the Azerbaijani leadership, at the "request" of the Armenian leadership on behalf of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet and the Councils of Ministers of both republics, appealed to the refugees to return to their places of permanent residence.

On 15 December 1988, in order to create an illusion of guaranteeing the return of Azerbaijanis to Armenia, the leadership of Armenia, having discussed the implementation of the above-mentioned decision of the Central Committee of the CPSU and the Council of Ministers of the USSR of 6 December, expelled 13 executives from the Party, and 68 officials were reprimanded.

As a result of Moscow's support, during 1988-1989, there were devastated 170 Azerbaijani and 94 mixed Azerbaijani settlements in the territory of present-day Armenia. The village of Nyuvadi, the last

Azerbaijani village remaining in the border region of Armenia's Meghri region with Zangilan region, was devastated on 8 August 1991.

On the whole, as a result of the last ethnic cleansing, about 250 thousand Azerbaijanis from 22 villages, districts and 6 cities of Armenia were expelled from their historical-ethnic lands.

After the completion of the ethnic cleansing of Azerbaijanis, the Armenian leadership started renaming the names of their villages. Till today, the names of 702 Azerbaijani villages in Armenia have been renamed and Armenianised. At present, a mono-ethnic Armenian state has been established on the historical Azerbaijani lands.

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