

Years of repression and deportation

After the establishment of the Soviet government in Armenia, 3.637 square versts of 6.742 square versts (1 verst = 1.06 km) of Zangazur district, i.e., the territory of Western Zangazur, were given to Armenia as "present" at Russia's insistence.

Dashnak bandits, mostly disguised as Bolsheviks, held high positions in the leadership of Soviet Armenia. Hakop Kamari, who was appointed head of the Military-Revolutionary Committee of Zangazur district, was also a staunch Dashnak in the guise of a Bolshevik. The Armenian government decided to resettle 25.000 Armenians fleeing from Turkey in Western Zangazur.

In April 1921, after the decision of the Armenian Revolutionary Committee to return the refugees to their homes, the process of the return of Azerbaijanis had begun. Within a year, local structures of the Soviet government began to form in most settlements in Zangazur.

Beginning in early 1922, peaceful life in Zangazur slowly began to flow.

Only about one-fifth of the 50.000 Azerbaijanis who fled from Zangazur in 1918-1920 were able to return. When Azerbaijanis returned to their villages in Zangazur, they faced a number of difficulties and problems. Because most of the houses in the villages were burned and razed to the ground. The orchards were destroyed, and the fruit trees were cut down and burned. Surviving houses belonging to Azerbaijanis were occupied by Armenian refugees. Returning Azerbaijanis were rebuilding their homes and reconstructing the ruins.

Some of the houses belonging to Azerbaijanis in Zangazur were once occupied by Armenians who had moved from Iran and settled in the mountain villages of Sisyan. In the villages of Vagudi, Sham, Darabas, Dastagird, Sheki, Garakilsa of the Sisyan region, Armenians began to live together with Azerbaijanis.

The part of population in the villages of Baharli, Irmis, Darabas and Darakand of Sisyan region, settled in the village of Vagudi and the other part settled in the village of Aghdu. The part of population of Ilizin, Bahluli, Irmis villages, as well as Sham village settled in Urud village, the other part settled in Vagadi and Aghdu villages. During these years, the Azerbaijani villages of Sisyan region Bozkend was merged to Agudi village, and Pusak, Givrag, Alishar villages was merged to Sofulu village.

Aralig, Akhtakhana, Baydag, Gatar, Oxchu, Pashakend, and Pirdavdan villages of Gafan region were occupied by Armenians after the establishment of the Soviet government, and later destroyed or turned into Armenian villages.

Shamsiz village of Gorus region was merged with Shimukhu village, and Maj and Shahverdilar villages inhabited by Azerbaijanis were abolished merging with Armenian villages Yerisatum and Basharajur.

On February 18, 1929, the Transcaucasian Central Executive Committee decided to cede the villages of Nuvedi, Ernazir and Tughut to Armenia. As a result, a 42 km long corridor, now called the Meghri Corridor was established, which not only cut off communication between Nakhchivan and the rest of Azerbaijan, but also provided Armenia with access to international territory. This corridor still plays the role of communication between Iran and Armenia. The decision of the Presidium of the Transcaucasian Central Executive Committee to transfer these 3 villages to the Armenian SSR was approved by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Azerbaijan SSR only after 40 years - on May 7, 1969.

In the 1930s, Banovshapusht village of Meghri region was destroyed, Varhavar, Amrakar, Duzgishlag villages were liquidated, and under the name of enlarging the collective farms, Eynazir village was merged to Nuvedi village, Tugut village was merged to Shivanidzor (Armenian village), Taghamir village was merged to Lichk (Armenian village) village, Tey village was merged to Lehvaz village.

At the beginning of the first period of collectivization in the early 1930s, mass repressions started in the territory of present-day Armenia, including Western Zangazur, against more or less affluent and educated Azerbaijanis who had once joined the fight against Dashnak gangs. On January 3, 1930, the Transcaucasian Country Committee decided to conduct a sanctioned mass operation to disarm the anti-Soviet elements. The Armenian government used this decision as an opportunity to launch a machine of repression against Azerbaijanis. The "all together collectivization" measures implemented throughout the USSR were the most severe against the Azerbaijanis living in Armenia. First of all, the wealth of the Azerbaijanis was confiscated, and they were exiled to the steppes of Kazakhstan and Siberia under the label of "golchomag" (rural bourgeoisie). In particular, residents of Azerbaijani villages along the border with Turkey and Iran were more likely to be punished.

Jabrayil Ganjaliyev, a resident of Urud, Sisyan region, who received a higher spiritual education, and Mullah Abdulsalam, from the village of Kurud of Gafan region, were arrested, deported and did not come back simply because they had religious books written in the Arabic alphabet in their homes.

Hashim Hajiyev, one of the prominent intellectuals of Western Zangazur, was a victim of Armenian terror. Hashim Hajiyev was born in 1897 in Shikhlar village of Sisyan region and graduated from Kazan University. In the first years of Soviet rule, Hajiyev returned to his homeland, became chairman of the Executive Committee and head of the education department in Gafan region, and then headed the construction of the Minjivan-Gafan railway. Thanks to Hajiyev, dozens of young people from Zangazur received higher education. Armenians poisoned and killed H. Hajiyev in 1931.

Peasant uprisings in Zangazur became widespread as a sign of protest against spiteful punitive measures of the Armenians. The detachments of Shahverdi brothers from the village of Kurud of Gafan region and Gachag Gardashkhan from the village of Sheki of Sisyan fought an armed struggle against the cruel repressions and biased actions carried out against the Azerbaijani population by the Armenian rulers.

At the end of the Second World War, the USSR made a territorial claim against Turkey. The Armenians' territorial claims against Turkey coincided with the USSR's plans to attack. Joseph Stalin wanted to restore the borders of 1914 between Russia and Turkey, that is, to seize the Kars and Ardahan provinces from Turkey. However, the problem arose of settling the territories that the USSR wanted to take away from Turkey. They wanted to solve this issue by temporarily relocating the Armenians to Armenia from abroad. Based on the request of the Armenian government, the USSR Council of Ministers adopted a resolution on November 21, 1945, "On measures for the return of Armenians from abroad to Soviet Armenia." Already in early 1946, 130.000 Armenians expressed their desire to move to Armenia from abroad. In return, on December 23, 1947, the USSR Council of Ministers adopted a resolution "On the resettlement of collective farmers and other Azerbaijani population from the Armenian SSR to the Kur-Araz lowland of the Azerbaijani SSR". The decision provided for the resettlement of 100.000 Azerbaijanis from 22 regions of Armenia. Paragraph 1 of the decision provided for the relocation of 10.000 people in 1948, 40.000 in 1949 and 50.000 in 1950. During the implementation of this decision, the existing rules of repression of the authoritarian-totalitarian regime were carried out by force.

Although the USSR's desire to seize the territory from Turkey for Armenians did not materialize as a result of protests from Western countries, instead, Azerbaijanis were forcibly deported from their historical and ethnic lands in Armenia.

The "Information about the mood of the Azerbaijani population of Armenia in connection with the forthcoming resettlement to the Azerbaijani SSR" signed by the Minister of Internal Affairs of the Armenian SSR Major-General Khoren Grigoryan and addressed to Mir Jafar Bagirov on May 3, 1948, the statements of the people that they do not want to leave their ancestral lands are reflected. The statement also reflected the mood of the population of Zangazur region.

A secret letter sent by Kh. Grigoryan to M. Bagirov states that Isgandarov, a resident of Urud village of Sisyan region, said in a conversation with his comrades that as a Soviet citizen he had the right to live anywhere in the Soviet Union and was not going to leave his home, his property, his homeland, or go anywhere.

The reference quotes Jalal Gurbanov, a resident of Jomardli village of Sisyan region, from a conversation with his fellow villagers after a meeting of collective farmers: "Many people do not know how hot it is in Azerbaijan. In 1918-1919, we Azerbaijanis fled from Zangazur to Nakhchivan. There were 14 of us then, and two years later we were just the three of us. The remaining 11 died of fever and illness. This is Nakhchivan, and it's even worse in Mingachevir. We will have many victims".

Asli Ganiyeva, a resident of the village of Arafsa of the same region, said: "If I change my nationality and write myself as Armenian, I wonder if I can stay in Armenia and not be relocated to Mingachevir?"

Bashir Tagiyev, chairman of collective farm of Sznak village of the Gafan region, said in a conversation with his fellow villagers: "It is better to die in my native village than to move to a new place".

Allahverdi Mammadov, chairman of the Afsarli collective farm, stood up at the plenum of the Gafan region party committee on the resettlement of Azerbaijanis in Mingachevir and strongly opposed those ugly policies of the Armenians and said that if someone tried to force me out of my ancient homeland, he would see my death. The population of this village, which was evading deportation, was relocated to Musallam village in 1960 and the village was abolished.

When Armenian officials insisted on the relocation of the village of Nuvedi to Azerbaijan, the people of Nuvedi said that since the village was part of the Zangilan region until 1929, they should annex it to Zangilan and the population should not go anywhere. Thus, the issue was closed, and the people of Nuvedi were left out of the deportation schedule.

As a result of the resolute resistance of the Azerbaijanis of Zangazur to the Armenian government, in 1948-53, fewer of our compatriots were deported from this region than from other regions. Archive documents show that in 1948-1950, the Azerbaijani population of Shurnukhu, Aghbulag, Gurdgulag, Shahverdiler and Shamsiz villages of Gorus region, Khalaj, Godekli, Garadigha and Dovruz villages of Gafan region and Gafan city were deported to Azerbaijan.

The decisions of the USSR government on the resettlement of Azerbaijanis gave the Armenian government an opportunity to erase from the map many Azerbaijani settlements located along the borders with Iran, Turkey and Azerbaijan by deporting their population.