

Deportation of 1988-1989

Anti-Turkish, anti-Muslim propaganda was re-launched in Armenia in the mid-1960s of the 20th century. At that time, as a result of the policy of national discrimination thousands of Azerbaijani families were forced to move to Azerbaijan from Armenia.

Every year since 1965, April 24 has been officially marked as the day of "genocide", so that day was considered a terrible day for Azerbaijanis living in Armenia. Azerbaijanis were beaten and insulted in streets and markets located in cities and region centers.

The program of the undeclared "crusade" against Azerbaijanis living in Armenia was prepared in the highest circles of the republic and carried out through secret decisions and special instructions. After Mikhail Gorbachev was elected General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1985, an annexation plan was developed against Azerbaijan under the guise of self-determination of the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh.

A person who could obstruct the implementation of the annexation plan against Azerbaijan under the guise of self-determination of Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians - Heydar Aliyev was excluded from the membership of Politburo of the Central Committee of the former Soviet Communist Party and from the post of the First Deputy Chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers in October 1987, under the pressure of the Armenian lobby. In late October of the same year, rallies were held in Iravan demanding the annexation of Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia.

As a result of the raids launched by Armenians on the Azerbaijani settlements, the first Azerbaijani refugees from the Gafan and Meghri regions of the Armenian SSR arrived in Azerbaijan by train and took up residence in the Absheron region on January 25, 1988. However, it was kept secret from the public. Mass rallies began in Iravan in early February 1988. Protesters chanted slogans as "Armenia must be cleansed of Turks!", "Armenia is only for Armenians!".

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On February 20, 1988, an extraordinary session of the Regional Council of People's Deputies passed a resolution to separate the autonomous region from the Azerbaijani SSR and incorporate it into the Armenian SSR. The Presidium of the Supreme Soviets of Azerbaijan and Armenia were appealed to show a reasonable approach to the decision, and a petition was submitted to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR for a positive solution to this issue.

On the same day, Ramiz Mehdiyev, Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan, received the representatives of the first group of Azerbaijani refugees expelled from the Gafan region.

The deportation of Azerbaijanis from the territory of Armenia was intensified day by day. According to official information on February 28, about 2.000 Azerbaijani refugees from Gafan arrived in the neighboring Zangilan region. In those days, hundreds of refugee families from Armenia took refuge in Imishli and Gubadli regions. The first secretary of the Central Committee K. Bagirov and high-ranking officials from Moscow received 200 refugees who fled into Absheron region from Armenia. Protests were held in Ganja and Nakhchivan in protest of the cruel persecutions of Azerbaijanis in Armenia. After the

rally on February 27-28 in protest of the violence provoked against Azerbaijanis in Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia, mass riots were committed in Sumgayit with the scenario of the KGB and direct participation of Armenian extremists. After that, a new wave of Azerbaijani refugees fled from Armenia.

Azerbaijanis were attacked, beaten, insulted and blackmailed in Gafan, Meghri, Gorus and Sisyan regions at different times. As early as April, the salaries of Azerbaijani employees working in budget-funded organizations - teachers, as well as workers in industry, mining and other facilities - were not been paid openly, and they were deceived. Threatening calls were made to the homes of Azerbaijanis, and armed Armenians began to appear in the Azerbaijani villages at night. Starting from March, active members of the so-called "bearded" Karabakh organization began to arrive in Zangazur from Iravan in a systematic way and to establish its centers in all four regions of West Zangazur. These centers assumed the task of organizing rallies, attacking Azerbaijani villages, harassing and intimidating them, cutting off their contact with the district center, and forcing them to leave by various means. In May, seeing the impossibility of living in their homeland, the Azerbaijanis of Zangazur started to seek refuge in different regions of Azerbaijan, especially in the cities of Baku and Sumgayit. Terrible rumors were spread among Azerbaijanis. People felt that they were living their last days in their homeland. The Armenian government tried to accelerate the deportation of Azerbaijanis by all means.

For Armenian nationalists, expelling more than 200,000 Azerbaijanis living in the most fertile regions of Armenia was as important as resolving the Karabakh issue.

After a meeting of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on July 18, 1988, which discussed the issue of Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Region and considered it inadmissible to change the borders between the republics, Armenian nationalists started to organize rallies everywhere to expel Azerbaijanis from Armenia.

In October-November 1988, an agreement was reached between the governments of Azerbaijan and Armenia to officially allow to hold exchanges of homes of those who migrated from Azerbaijan to Armenia and from Armenia to Azerbaijan, regardless of where they lived. This agreement once again accelerated the resettlement process. In mid-November 1988, more than 80.000 refugees took refuge in Azerbaijan. During a rally in Baku's Azadliq Square on November 17, a resolution was passed demanding autonomy for Azerbaijanis living in Armenia. Concerned by these demands, the Armenian leadership suspended the session after the attack on the building of the Opera House, where the Supreme Soviet session was held on November 22, and at their request sent deputies and the district administration to "restore order" in the places. In fact, they were instructed to carry out a campaign of cleansing Armenia from Azerbaijanis within a week.

In November-December 1988, on the one hand, the population of Azerbaijani villages in Armenia was oppressed, food was not sent to the villages, power lines were cut and armed raids were carried out. On the other hand, families leaving the villages were robbed on the roads, their property was looted, and they were killed. Most of the crimes committed on national grounds in Armenia took place at a time when the Azerbaijani population was forced to leave their homes. Armed gangs were stationed in several places on all roads from Armenia to Azerbaijan. Most of the bandits wore police uniforms and set up checkpoints. They stopped all the cars, checked the documents of the passengers, and as soon as they found out that there were Azerbaijanis in the car, they took them out of the car, emptied and looted their property, and brutally killed or beat them.

By early December 1988, there were almost no Azerbaijanis left in West Zangazur. The latest attack began in the last days of November, and within a week, the rest of the Azerbaijani villages were savagely and brutally emptied. People were not allowed to take their property, there were even villages where Azerbaijanis were not allowed to take their clothes.

During the first three days of December 1988, buses and dump trucks were sent to Azerbaijani villages in all Zangazur in a state-organized manner. Armenian militants with machine guns accompanying the cars demanded that all Azerbaijanis leave their villages within an hour. The Azerbaijanis were boarded the PAZ buses and escorted out of the village by armed Armenians. When the bus convoy reached the last Armenian village on the road, they were all dropped off and searched. Their money and jewelry were forcibly confiscated, and the items they took in their handbags were dumped on the ground in an Armenian village and distributed among local Armenians. The part of Azerbaijanis living in the Sisian region were dropped off the buses at the foot of Mount Arikli, in the snow and ice, under a severe storm, and crossed the Bazarchay pass on foot within 12 hours and took refuge in Shahbuz. Almost all the visitors were hospitalized with colds and frostbite. Among these people, 4 people died of the disease, and 2 people died of frostbite on Mount Arikli. Some Azerbaijanis of Sisian (people of Giziljig and Sheki villages) crossed the snowy Sariyal pass on foot on December 2-3, crossed the Uchtapa and took refuge in Minkend village of Lachin region. Azerbaijanis from Gafan and Meghri regions arrived in Azerbaijan by rail.

Azerbaijanis living in West Zangazur lost their houses, belongings, livestock, as well as the wealth of the collective farm.

In 1988-1991, Armenians savagely deported the Azerbaijanis from 7 settlements of Meghri district of West Zangazur, 11 settlements of Sisyan district, 41 settlements of Gafan region, 4 settlements of Gorus region and completed the policy of ethnic cleansing against Azerbaijanis. As a result of Moscow's support for the Armenians, 170 only Azerbaijani and 94 mixed settlements inhabited by Azerbaijanis in the territory of present-day Armenia were emptied in 1988-89. The last remaining Azerbaijani village in the Meghri region, Nuvedi, was vacated on August 8, 1991.

In general, in 1988-1991, about 250.000 Azerbaijanis from 22 villages, regions and 6 cities of Armenia were savagely expelled from their historical and ethnic lands.

List of Azerbaijani settlements deported from West Zangazur in 1988-1991:

Meghri district

1. Nuvedi, 2. Aldere, 3. Lok.

Mixed settlements:

4. Maralzami, 5. Lehvaz, 6. Mehri, 7. Astazur.

Sisyan (Garakilsa) region

1. Giziljig, 2. Sofulu, 3. Murkhuz, 4. Shiklar, 5. Aghudu, 6. Urud, 7. Arafsa, 8. Jomardli.

Mixed settlements: 9. Dastakirt, 10. Vaghudi, 11. Sheki.

Gafan region

1. Gighi, 2. Kirs, 3. Kurud, 5. Mahmudlu (Chaykend), 6. Payhan, 7. Acibaj, 8. Hajati, 9. Kehpashin, 10. Ashaghi Purulu, 11. Yukhari Purulu, 12. Govshud, 13. Zeyva, 14. Musallam, 15. Yukhari Giratagh, 16. Ashagi Giratagh, 17. Achaghu, 18. Davrus, 19. Garadigha, 20. Khalaj, 21. Okhdar, 22. Jibilli, 23. Yukhari Godekli, 24. Ashaghi Godekli, 25. Beydash, 26. Shabadin, 27. Siznak, 28. Garachimani, 29. Baharli, 30. Ashaghi Dashbashi, 31. Ashaghi Dovruz, 32. Yukhari Dovruz, 33. Hunud, 34. Novruzdar, 35. Gatar, 36. Atgiz.

Mixed settlements: 37. Gafan, 38. Saridare, 39. Piriman, 40. Sunuk state farm, 41. Shaharjik village.

Gorus region

1. Shurnukhu, 2. Aghbulag, 3. Gurdgalag.

Mixed settlement: 4. Shahverdiler.