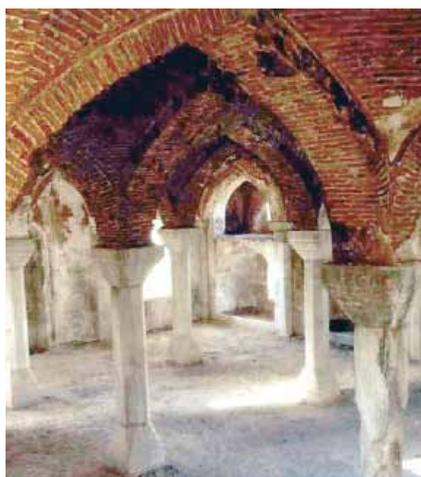


CERTAIN TOUCHES TO THE KARABAKH ANNEXATION POLICY

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THE POLICY OF AGGRESSION ARMENIAN NATIONALISTS HAVE BEEN PURSUING AGAINST AZERBAIJANIS AND TURKS HAS LONG MANIFESTED ITSELF THROUGH THE OCCUPATION OF TERRITORIES, GENOCIDE, ETHNIC CLEANSING AND DEPORTATION, EMBEZZLEMENT OF CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL PROPERTY, AND FALSIFICATION OF HISTORY. YET ANOTHER STAGE OF THIS POLICY WAS LAUNCHED IN THE LATE 1980s WITH THE ESCALATION OF AGGRESSIVE SEPARATISM IN AZERBAIJAN AND THE ENSUING MILITARY AGGRESSION.



In the early 20th century and in subsequent decades, Azerbaijan was repeatedly confronted with Armenian aggression in the form of terrorist and subversive activities. Shortly before the break-up of the USSR, Armenia, taking advantage of the opportune moment, occupied 20 percent of Azerbaijani territory (recognized by the UN and the international community), killing tens of thousands of Azerbaijanis and turning over a mil-

lion people into refugees and IDPs. After a ceasefire agreement was reached in 1994, Armenia's policy of aggression has continued in other forms.

The current stage of the aggression is characterized first of all by the destruction and embezzlement of cultural and historical values of our people, environmental terror and illegal settlement which are intended to strengthen the process of an-

Current state of the Govhar Aga Mosque in the Armenian-occupied Azerbaijani town of Shusha



Current view of Shusha

nexation. The key objective of this article is to expose the said aspects and examine Armenia's aggression against Azerbaijan from a different perspective.

The policy of the Republic of Armenia, accompanied by the destruction of material culture and aimed at justifying the myth of the historical, national and cultural property of the occupied territories being of Armenian origin, is carried out with flagrant breaches of fundamental norms and principles of international law.

It is worthy of note that the legal norms pertaining to the conduct of subjects of international, such as the 1899 and 1907 Hague conventions and the 1935 Washington Pact, started emerging in the early 20th century and continued to de-

velop after World War Two. During this period, the Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (Hague, 1954), the Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (Paris, 1972) and other instruments were adopted to regulate the activities of states and establish fundamental international legal standards in this sphere.

From the standpoint of provisions of these documents, the actions of Armenia aimed at destroying and embezzling the cultural and historical property on occupied territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan run counter to the norms and principles of international law.

The 1954 Hague Convention is

the most fundamental document applicable to Armenia's actions in the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict with respect of the cultural and historical property belonging to Azerbaijan. This Convention applies only to breaches in the event of armed conflict. Since the armed conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan is still ongoing despite the ceasefire agreement reached in 1994, according to the 1954 Convention the Armenian side is responsible for the crimes it has committed since 1994. The Convention requires its signatories to respect cultural property situated within their own territory, as well as within the territory of other states, refrain from any act directed by way of reprisals against cultural property, prohibit, prevent and put a stop to any form of theft, pillage



The Agdam mosque

or misappropriation against cultural property.

The preamble of the Convention indicates that the damage to cultural property belonging to any people whatsoever means damage to the cultural heritage of all mankind, since each people makes its contribution to the culture of the world. It also emphasizes that the preservation of the cultural heritage is of great importance for all peoples of the world and that it is important that this heritage should receive international protection. The Convention says further that such protection cannot be effective unless both national and international measures have been taken to organize it.

The Convention explicitly requires its signatories to respect cultural property situated within their own territory, as well as within the territory of other countries by refraining from any use of the property and its immediate surroundings for purposes which are likely to expose it to destruction or damage in the event of armed conflict.

The article "Respect for cultural property" of the Convention defines responsibilities to respect cultural property situated within their own territory, as well as within the territory of other countries, to prohibit, prevent and, if necessary, put a stop to any form of theft, pillage or misappropriation of property. The Armenian side consistently violated these provisions of the Convention both during the hostilities and in the post-ceasefire period.

According to article "Occupation" of the Convention, any country in occupation of the whole or part of the territory of another country shall as far as possible support the competent national authorities of the

occupied country in safeguarding and preserving its cultural property. However, Armenia has not done anything at all in this direction to this day.

The 1972 Paris Convention highlights that “the deterioration or disappearance of any item of cultural or natural heritage constitutes a harmful impoverishment of the heritage of all the nations of the world”.

From this standpoint, Armenia’s repressive attitude to the historical and cultural property situated in occupied territories must be viewed as a desire to cause irreparable damage not only to Azerbaijani cultural assets but also to the historical past and the present day of civilization. In this context, we would like to focus on Armenia’s actions in respect of cultural and historical assets of the Azerbaijani people.

The Armenian side attaches special importance to the items of cultural heritage of the Caucasian Albania which belong to the history of Azerbaijan and Azerbaijanis. For instance, attempts are being made to embezzle such ancient Alban religious sites as the Khotavank monastery (6-12th centuries) in Kalbajar, more than 10 temples (5-12th centuries) in Lachin, churches in the Kengerli village of Agdam District. **Inscriptions, wall engravings and crosses on Alban monuments located in Azerbaijan’s occupied territories are being destroyed, while Alban signs are being replaced by Armenian.** Ancient Alban temples Amaras in Khojavend, Ganzasar in Kalbajar, Arzu Khatun in Agdam and Agoglan in Lachin Districts have been “renovated” and Armenianized by the occupiers, while the mosques of these territories are



The destroyed mausoleum of Vagif in Shusha



Shusha after occupation

being used as warehouses.

Unfortunately, such action, explicitly classified as aggression against cultural heritage of all mankind, is not being met with an adequate response of the international community. The absence of resistance to the plans to artificially create “one’s own history and culture” and then, on the basis of falsified history, lay claims to other territories (in the 20th century this policy led to the loss of over 20,000 square kilometers of Azerbaijani territory) creates an atmosphere of impunity which encourages the aggressor to become even more impudent. The activities consistently organized by the Armenian side in foreign countries in support of its unfounded claims on Nakhchivan, a territory the Azerbaijani origin of which is not causing any doubt, is a graphic

example of that.

Yet another direction of Armenia’s policies in occupied Azerbaijani territories is **the active replacement of original Azerbaijani names with Armenian ones**. Occupied Azerbaijani district centers of Lachin, Gubadli and Zangilan have been renamed into Kashatag, Sanasar and Kovkasan respectively. This represents an attempt to create a “foundation” for their subsequent annexation. Apparently, this falsification will then be used by Armenian “scholars” as a starting point for pretentious “scientific” conclusions. The renamed residential settlements and other geographical locations will serve as a “trump card” in further Armenian expansion. These methods have been used by Armenia for centuries.

The ongoing removal of differ-

ent material and relics attributed to different historical periods of the Azerbaijani people from the occupied Azerbaijani territories is another form of aggression against the cultural and historical heritage of the region. These assets are taken to Europe and portrayed as “showpieces of Armenian culture”. The historical and regional museums with exhibits of tremendous cultural and historical value and other artifacts have been destroyed and new “museums of Armenian culture” established instead. According to the 1970 Paris Convention, in combating such crimes as theft, clandestine excavations and illicit exports of cultural property all states must become increasingly alive to the moral obligation to respect their own cultural heritage and that of all nations. This is exactly why the con-



Desecrated Azerbaijani graves in Armenian-occupied territories

cept of “obligation” in respect of historical and cultural property knows no boundaries. It is worth indicating that the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Azerbaijan has all inventory documents on this cultural property.

Another consequence of Armenian expansion is **the pillage and illicit use of natural resources on occupied Azerbaijani territories**. There are two major gold deposits there, Zod in Kalbajar and Vejnali in Zangilan, which have been illegally developed by Armenia jointly with foreign partners since 1993. These deposits serve as an economic incentive for Armenian aggressors. Other spheres of capital investment in occupied territories include agriculture, refining and processing of mineral and other natural resources, production of construction materials, pharmaceuticals.

The destruction of natural resources in the occupied territories, in particular forests, gardens and plantations, is causing an irreparable damage to the local flora and fauna. The demolition of the plane-tree grove in Zangilan District, the biggest in Europe and second biggest in the world, valuable orchards and vineyards in Lachin and Kalbajar Dis-

tricts, their use in furniture-making form only a small fragment of the damage inflicted to Azerbaijan’s nature. These, along with systematic arsons, have brought the region’s eco-system to the brink of a disaster.

The plunder and embezzlement of the Azerbaijani people’s material, spiritual and natural



property are accompanied by a campaign of illegal Armenian settlement in occupied territories. The unlawful settlement is encouraged by economic activity. The attraction of the population without an economic stimulus would be of temporary nature and is unlikely to produce the desired effect. **It is the successful settlement of occupied territories that represents**

exceptional importance to the completion of Armenia’s annexation of Karabakh (which is confirmed by statements of Armenian officials). Since occupation, Armenia has been bending over backwards to preserve the status-quo, prevent the return of Azerbaijanis to their homes and destroy the evidence of the true origin of these territories.

Therefore, Armenia’s crimes perpetrated on occupied Azerbaijani territories are not of accidental nature and do not pursue the goal of “capturing the trophies” typical of all occupiers. They are part of a carefully thought-out and organized campaign which has specific goals. After destroying the evidence of Azerbaijani history and conducting total Armenianization of occupied territories, Armenia wants to accomplish its main objective – complete annexation of Karabakh. ♣

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