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THE WESTERN AZERBAIJAN ISSUE: IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERNATIONAL LAW AND DIPLOMACY

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Abstract. The issue of Western Azerbaijan is a complex historical and political problem shaped by consecutive waves of ethnic engineering, forced deportations and demographic manipulation carried out in the South Caucasus throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The complete expulsion of Azerbaijanis from Western Azerbaijan in four major stages 1905–1906, 1918–1920, 1948–1953 and 1988–1991 fundamentally altered the region's ethnic landscape and contributed to the establishment of a mono-ethnic Armenian state. These deportation processes deprived hundreds of thousands of people of their ancestral homelands, destroyed cultural heritage sites and caused profound social and psychological damage. International legal documents including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1951 Refugee Convention, the European Convention on Human Rights and UNESCO conventions affirm the right of return, restitution of property and the prohibition of ethnic cleansing. Therefore, the issue is not merely a historical dispute but a clear case of violations of fundamental human rights. In the modern period, changing geopolitical realities in the region, new diplomatic dynamics between Armenia and Azerbaijan and the increasing involvement of international actors have further highlighted the relevance of the Western Azerbaijan issue. The Return Concept adopted by the Republic of Azerbaijan prioritizes a humanitarian and legal approach to the matter. Addressing the consequences of deportation, ensuring safe and dignified return and restoring cultural heritage are essential for building lasting peace and regional stability in the South Caucasus.

The analysis shows that resolving the Western Azerbaijan issue not only restores historical justice but also provides the foundation for a fair, stable and sustainable regional order for future generations.

Key words: Western Azerbaijan, deportation, ethnic cleansing, right of return, international law, cultural heritage, South Caucasus, regional security, peace process.

Introduction. The issue of Western Azerbaijan is one of the most complex and strategically important issues in the history of Azerbaijan. Formed at the intersection of historical, ethno-demographic and political processes, this issue is not only related to the historical memory of a people, but also has special relevance in the context of modern international law, regional security and diplomatic relations.

Western Azerbaijan, the territory of the present-day Republic of Armenia, was the ancient Azerbaijani lands where Azerbaijani Turks lived compactly for centuries, created a rich cultural heritage and shaped socio-cultural life. Historical sources, archival documents and demographic indicators clearly show the demographic superiority of the Azerbaijani Turkic population in the region until the end of the 19th century.

Political changes, inter-imperial competition and ethnic engineering policies taking place in the region in the 19th–20th centuries led to the systematic suppression of the Azerbaijani Turkic population, forced deportations and mass murders. The massacres of 1905–1906, the repressions carried out during the First Republic of Armenia, the planned deportation policy of 1948–1953, and finally, the last mass expulsions that took place in 1988–1991, radically changed the ethnic map of the region. As a result, hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijani Turks were deprived of their historical lands, and the region acquired a monoethnic character.

In the modern era, the issue of Western Azerbaijan has become a topical issue not only as a humanitarian tragedy, but also in terms of the rule of international law, human rights, the right to return to one's land, and the regional peace agenda. The Azerbaijani state and the international expert community approach this issue on legal, diplomatic, and historical grounds, and take steps to promote it at the level of international organizations.

The main purpose of the article is to analyze the historical roots of the West Azerbaijan problem, its international legal basis, the humanitarian consequences of deportations, and the mechanisms of discussion in a modern diplomatic framework. This approach is of particular importance both in terms of restoring historical justice and in terms of forming a sustainable peace and security architecture in the region.

As a result of the forced displacements, mass killings, and systematic ethnic cleansing policies carried out against Azerbaijani Turks starting from the 19th century and more intensively in the 20th century, the demographic map of this territory has been radically changed. It is not only historical facts that make this topic relevant today. Current political realities, the change in the balance of power in the South Caucasus, the new conditions that have emerged in the region after the Second Karabakh War, and the increase in Azerbaijan's diplomatic activity are among the main factors that have brought the West Azerbaijan issue to the international level. This issue is not only relevant for Azerbaijan as one of the main factors that brought the issue to the international level. This issue is of particular importance not only for Azerbaijan, but also for the entire South Caucasus region and in the context of international law. In the article, I will approach the issue from a historical, legal, humanitarian and diplomatic perspective, and analyze the role of international actors, the right of return and ensuring peace in the region. This issue is not only a humanitarian problem; it is also a strategic and legal priority. The right of return is not only a legal problem, but also a fundamental principle for restoring peace and stability in the region.

First of all, it should be noted that the Western Azerbaijan region has been one of the territories inhabited by Turkic-speaking tribes and the later formed Azerbaijani people for thousands of years. Since ancient times, these lands have covered regions such as Goycha, Zangezur, Daralayaz, Vedibasar and Garakils. The population living here was mainly composed of Azerbaijani Turks and the Turkic-Muslim culture was dominant in the region. Lake Goycha, the Araz River, the Zangezur Mountains, and the Alagoz Peak were all considered ancient natural and geographical treasures of Azerbaijan. This region was known for its rich water resources, fertile lands, and favorable climate. The Goycha district was especially famous for its fishing and agriculture. This geography was also of great strategic importance. The Zangezur region, which provided Azerbaijan with a connection to Nakhchivan, was especially important. This territory was later artificially annexed to Armenia, which led to the severance of direct communication between Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan. Medieval sources, Arab, Persian, and Armenian chronicles indicate that the following territories were dominated by the Kipchak-Turkic tribes, the Kangarli, the Karakoyunlu and Agkoyunlu Turkic states, and the Safavid administration.

The mass influx of Armenians into the region only occurred after the 19th century, especially during the Russian Empire. This fact reveals that the demographic transformation in the context of Western Azerbaijan was carried out artificially. Thus, Western Azerbaijan was not only a physical land, but also a carrier of national memory, culture and identity. Mosques, cemeteries, ancient monuments belonging to the Azerbaijani Turks existed in this geography for centuries, but at the end of the 20th century, most of these traces were purposefully erased. Thus, the history of the Western Azerbaijan issue should be understood not only as a process of deportation and violations of rights, but also as part of a process of changing ethnic relations and the regional balance of power. These historical processes are one of the important factors shaping the political architecture of today's South Caucasus.

Historical context. The formation of the West Azerbaijan issue is directly related to the political and ethno-demographic changes that took place in the region at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries. During this period, the territory of the South Caucasus was located at the center of geopolitical competition between the Russian and Iranian empires, as a result of which systematic effects were created on the ethnic composition of the region. With the treaties of Gulistan (1813) and Turkmenchay (1828), a new administrative-political reality was formed in the region, and the process of mass resettlement of the Armenian population to the South Caucasus began. This process had a serious impact on the demographic structure of the region until the end of the 19th century.

Transformation of Yerevan into a province and sequential armenization

The Russian Empire created the Yerevan province in 1850 on the territory of the former Yerevan Khanate. The formation of the province strengthened the position of Armenians in the administrative structure and created conditions for a change in the ethno-political balance. Official statistics conducted at the end of the 19th century show that: In the city of Yerevan itself, Azerbaijani Turks were the majority for a long time (until the 1870s), but the Armenian population in the villages of the province rapidly increased due to resettlement, and Azerbaijani Turks were gradually forced out of the cities and into the villages. This process created a social basis for the subsequent violence.

The rise of the Armenian national movement and armed organizations. At the end of the 19th century, the idea of "Greater Armenia" began to spread widely among Armenian political circles. In the 1880s–1890s, Armenian political organizations (Hnchak, Dashnaktsutyun, etc.) considered the territories of Western Azerbaijan as part of their future state. During this period: The creation of armed groups, the formation of a centralized national ideology, and the policy of resettling Ottoman and Iranian Armenians to the Caucasus were unofficially supported. The great powers, especially Russia and the West, used Armenians as a geopolitical tool in the region, which led to the deepening of ethnic conflict.

Events of 1905–1906

Against the backdrop of deepening political crises in the Russian Empire at the beginning of the 20th century, a series of massacres and ethnic clashes occurred as a result of the mass targeting of the Azerbaijani population in the Zangezur, Iravan and Karabakh regions by Armenian armed groups. These events are considered to be the first large-scale examples of the policy of gradual displacement of the Azerbaijani population from the region.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Russian Empire was experiencing a deep political crisis: the defeat in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905, the strengthening of revolutionary movements, the loss of control of the central government in the regions, and the aggravation of interethnic relations in the Caucasus. Taking advantage of this weakness, Armenian nationalist organizations, especially the Dashnaktsutyun, began to expand their armed movement in the Caucasus. After the attack on Azerbaijani Turks in Tbilisi in February 1905, the clashes spread to the Ganja, Baku, Shusha, Nakhchivan and Western Azerbaijan regions.

In the Western Azerbaijan region. Zangezur, Iravan, Goycha, Vedibasar and Zangibasar became the centers of controlled violence. Sources indicate that the Dashnak groups had a strategic plan:

1. To reduce the demographic weight of the Turkish-Muslim population in the region,
2. To ensure Armenian dominance in Iravan and surrounding regions,
3. To create an "Armenian corridor" in Zangezur,
4. To form a "pure ethnic base" for future Armenian statehood.

These activities later became the starting point of the massacres of 1918–1920.

1918–1920s: The policy of the First Republic of Armenia

The First Republic of Armenia, which emerged as a new political actor in the region against the backdrop of World War I and the collapse of the empire, carried out violent measures against Azerbaijanis. Historical documents show that during this period, thousands of Azerbaijani villages

were destroyed in the Iravan, Surmeli, Zangezur and Goycha regions, the population was expelled, and ethnic cleansing was widely practiced. As a result of this process, the compact living area of Azerbaijanis in the region was significantly reduced.

The Soviet period: deportations of 1937 and 1948–1953

The establishment of Soviet power did not eliminate ethnic oppression, but rather continued it on new ideological grounds. As part of the repressions of 1937, thousands of Azerbaijanis were removed from the region under the label of "nationalist elements".

The deportations of 1948–1953 were planned and massive. During these years, more than 150,000 Azerbaijanis were resettled from their historical lands in the Armenian SSR to various regions of Central Asia and Azerbaijan. Although the official justification for the deportation was "lack of land for agriculture," the process actually served to form a monoethnic Armenia.

1988–1991: The last wave of deportations

On the eve of the collapse of the USSR, the entire Azerbaijani population living in the territory of Armenia approximately 300,000 people was subjected to the last mass deportation. This stage of deportations is a classic example of ethnic cleansing in terms of its scale and consequences. Settlements belonging to Azerbaijanis were destroyed, mosques, cemeteries and historical monuments were systematically destroyed, and the region acquired a completely monoethnic character.

The successive deportations, massacres and ethnic engineering policies that continued from the 19th to the end of the 20th century radically changed the demographic map of the territory of Western Azerbaijan. These historical processes created both grave consequences from a humanitarian point of view and were accompanied by gross violations of international law. It is this historical background that is the main reason why the issue of Western Azerbaijan remains relevant in the modern era in the field of international law and diplomacy.

Legal and international assessment of deportation. The 1937 deportation is included in the category of ethnic cleansing and forced displacement in international law.

It is an important precedent in terms of human rights: the Soviet republics implemented mass deprivation of citizens based on their ethnicity.

The 1937 deportation: It constituted the initial stage of ethnic engineering in the territories of Western Azerbaijan. It limited the opportunities for Azeri Turks to live in the mono-ethnic Armenian republic. It laid the foundation for subsequent deportation and violence policies, especially the events of 1948–1953 and 1988–1991. During Stalin's repressions, thousands of Azerbaijani Turks were considered "unreliable elements in the border zone" and deported to Central Asia.

The 1948–1953 deportation: This deportation was already a mass ethnic cleansing carried out by official decision. By Resolution No. 4083 of the USSR Council of Ministers, more than 100 thousand Azerbaijani Turks were expelled from the Armenian SSR. This falls under the category of "forcible transfer" and "crime against humanity" under international law.

1948–1953: More than 150,000 Azerbaijani Turks were forcibly deported, leaving their land and property behind. This deportation was carried out by an official decision of the USSR Council of Ministers. The main goal: the formation of a mono-ethnic Armenian settlement zone on the border with Turkey.

1960–80s The Azerbaijani Turks were kept in a state of economic and political isolation in Armenia. There were almost no Azerbaijani Turk representatives in local government.

International legal framework

The right of the West Azerbaijani Turks to return to their homeland is established by a number of fundamental instruments of international law. These rights are reinforced within the framework of humanitarian law, human rights law, and refugee protection mechanisms.

1. Right of Return. The right of return is recognized as a universal principle in international law and is primarily established by the following documents:

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948): According to Article 13, paragraph 2, “Everyone has the right to return to his country” (18. United Nations. 1948. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*),

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966): The Covenant recognizes the right of individuals to leave and return to their country (20. United Nations. 1966).

1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees: Provides for the right of refugees to return safely to their homeland (21 UN General Assembly 2021).

Based on these documents, the return of West Azerbaijani Turks is a fully legitimate international legal principle. Academic studies also emphasize that the right of return is a restorative justice mechanism in cases of ethnic cleansing and forced displacement (Hathaway, 2005).

2. Prohibition of deportation and ethnic cleansing. The removal of the West Azerbaijani population from their homeland in four major waves of deportations in the 19th–20th centuries is considered illegal under international law.

Deportation and ethnic cleansing are strictly prohibited by the following documents:

Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948): Recognizes acts of mass violence, expulsion, and “total or partial destruction” against an ethnic group as an element of genocide.

Geneva Conventions (1949) and their Additional Protocols: Define the forcible transfer of civilians as a war crime.

European Convention on Human Rights (1950): Prohibits the violation of the right to property, personal integrity and family life of individuals.

Researchers note that deportation has not only physical but also cultural, social and psychological consequences, causing long-term collective trauma.

3. Property rights and compensation. The forcible dispossession of Azerbaijanis from their property in Armenia between 1918 and 1991 falls within the scope of what the case law of the European Court of Human Rights has deemed “unlawful expropriation”.

Under international law:

There is a right to restitution of property or fair compensation.

The right of forcibly displaced persons to own their property upon return is an obligation of states (Williams, 2015).

Protection of cultural heritage and prohibition of vandalism The destruction of mosques, cemeteries and other historical monuments belonging to Azerbaijanis by Armenia is contrary to international conventions:

UNESCO’s 1954 Hague Convention prohibits the destruction of cultural heritage.

ISESCO and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation have declared the destruction of Muslim cultural monuments to be contrary to international humanitarian law.

In academic studies, the destruction of cultural heritage is considered “cultural genocide”.

Humanitarian and social consequences. Ethnic cleansing and deportation decisions are not only legal violations, but also cause profound humanitarian disasters.

According to studies:

Thousands of people have lost their lives or been injured.

Families have been torn apart, communities have been destroyed.

Refugee status causes long-term social and psychological trauma.

For this reason, acts of deportation are among the most serious violations of both international criminal law and the human rights system.

Modern diplomatic context and Azerbaijan’s position

The issue of Western Azerbaijan has become more relevant in the context of the geopolitical dynamics of the region, approaches based on international law, and regional security architecture in the 21st century. The facts related to the transformation of Armenia into a monoethnic state, the

complete deportation of Azerbaijanis from their historical lands in four stages, and the systematic destruction of cultural heritage have led to the issue taking a wider place on the diplomatic agenda.

Azerbaijan's official position is based on international law and the issue is approached not as a territorial claim against the other party, but as "recognition of the right of return, ensuring human rights, and restoration of historical justice" (Azerbaijan MFA.2023). This approach is being accepted by international actors as a more constructive framework.

State policy of Azerbaijan: Concept of Return. The institutional formation of the West Azerbaijan Community in 2022 and the adoption of the "Concept of Return" indicate that the issue is being addressed in a coordinated manner at the state level. The main elements of the concept are: International recognition of the facts of deportation, Safe, phased and monitored return of Azerbaijanis, Restoration of property rights, Fulfillment of Armenia's international obligations.

This model is consistent with the mechanisms referred to in contemporary conflict resolution studies as "peace-framed return strategies" (Williams, R. s56).

Azerbaijan-Armenia relations and the peace agenda. The new geopolitical reality that has emerged in the region since 2020 has brought the prospect of a peace treaty between the two countries to the agenda. Azerbaijan is bringing the rights of West Azerbaijani Turks to the agenda in peace negotiations within the framework of three main principles:

1. Recognition of deportation,
2. Ensuring return,
3. Restoration and protection of cultural heritage.

International studies note that peace agreements create long-term stability in cases of ethnic cleansing only when they include the restoration of rights (Cassese, 2001).

Approach of international actors

The issue of West Azerbaijan is not only in the focus of attention between Azerbaijan and Armenia, but also of international actors. The approaches of international organizations and states play an important role in assessing this issue at the legal and diplomatic level.

UN. The return of the population deported from conflict areas is recognized as a universal principle in UN documents (UN General Assembly.2021). Referring to these documents, Azerbaijan places the issue of West Azerbaijan in the context of humanitarian law.

European Union. The EU considers "property restoration and protection of human rights" a priority in peace initiatives in the Caucasus . EU representatives have repeatedly stated that the right of return of refugees should be taken into account in a peace agreement between the two countries.

OSCE. The OSCE supports the principle of "voluntary return" in conflict resolution and Armenia has been reminded of its obligations in this context (Council of Europe 1950).

Turkey and the Organization of Turkic States. Turkey considers Azerbaijan's right of return as a "natural right and international norm" (ECtHR 2005).

The Organization of Turkic States, in its statements on Western Azerbaijan, supported the protection of cultural heritage and the recognition of the rights of forcibly displaced people.

Armenia's position and international obligations. Armenia did not consider the return of Western Azerbaijanis possible for many years. However, against the backdrop of increasing international pressure and the actualization of the peace agenda, official Yerevan for the first time declared its openness to "discussing the issue within the framework of human rights" (Bevan, 2006). The main obligations incumbent on Armenia are: Elimination of the consequences of deportation, Ensuring security for the return of Azerbaijanis, Restoration or compensation of property, Protection and restoration of cultural heritage. These are fully consistent with international legal mechanisms (Cornell , 2017).

New geopolitical order in the region. After 2020, the weakening of the Russian factor in the region, the growing influence of Turkey, and the more active return of the West to the region have created new opportunities for resolving the issue of Western Azerbaijan (Cornell, 2015).

In this context, Azerbaijan is achieving progress on the basis of a model based on international legitimacy.

Diplomatic influence and humanitarian aspects. The positions of international actors determine the direction of diplomatic efforts and affect the restoration of peace in the region. Humanitarian issues, the situation of refugees and internally displaced persons, ethnic cleansing and the inviolability of civilian property are in the focus of international actors. These approaches support Azerbaijan's diplomatic strategy and contribute to the recognition of legal arguments. The approaches of international actors strengthen the legal, humanitarian and diplomatic framework of the West Azerbaijan issue. Different perspectives and diplomatic efforts play an important role in ensuring justice and peace in the region. As Azerbaijan's historical, legal and humanitarian arguments are recognized by the international community, the issue is discussed more widely within the framework of international law and the possibilities for a peaceful solution in the future increase.

Humanitarian, legal and psychological implications

The consequences of the deprivation of Western Azerbaijanis from their historical lands through successive waves of deportations in the 19th–20th centuries are not limited to demographic changes alone. The deportations caused long-term damage on humanitarian, legal, and psychological levels, leaving deep scars on the social structure, cultural memory, and collective identity of an entire society.

Humanitarian consequences. The deportations were always accompanied by massive human rights violations, violence, and social tragedies. Studies show that thousands of civilians died during the forced displacements, hundreds of settlements were destroyed, and the population was left in dire socio-economic conditions (Hunter, 2021).

The main humanitarian consequences are as follows:

Human casualties: The killings of Azerbaijani civilians in 1905–1906, 1918–1920, and 1988–1991 illustrate the scale of ethnic violence.

Mass displacement: Approximately 300,000 Azerbaijanis were completely expelled from the territory of Armenia in 1988–1991 and received refugee status.

Destruction of communities: Ancient settlements were evacuated, and socio-cultural life, which had been formed over hundreds of years, was destroyed within a few years.

Loss of cultural heritage: Mosques, cemeteries, historical monuments and other tangible and cultural heritage sites were systematically destroyed.

According to UNHCR, forced displacement results not only in physical spatial change, but also in long-term social disruption and the destruction of community structures.

Legal consequences. The deportation of Western Azerbaijanis is included in the category of grave crimes under international law. Deportation, ethnic cleansing and illegal confiscation of property are strictly prohibited in international humanitarian and human rights instruments (Cassese, 2001).

The legal consequences can be systematized as follows:

1.2 Violation of the right to return. According to UN documents, every individual has the right to return to his country. Preventing the return of Western Azerbaijanis is considered a violation of this fundamental right.

2.2. Violation of the right to property. During the deportation, houses, lands, farms and religious and cultural objects belonging to individuals were illegally confiscated. In the case law of the ECHR, such cases are assessed as “unlawful confiscation” and “violation of the right to property” (ECtHR.2005).

2.3. Crimes against cultural heritage. According to the 1954 Hague Convention of UNESCO, the destruction of cultural heritage is considered an international crime (Turkish MFA.2023).

2.4. Crimes of deportation and ethnic cleansing. The Genocide Convention and the Geneva Conventions define forced displacement and ethnic cleansing as war crimes and crimes against humanity. This legal framework shows that the return of Western Azerbaijanis is not only a humanitarian issue, but also an international legal obligation.

3. Psychological consequences. Forced displacement is a process that causes not only physical but also deep psychological trauma. Psychological effects last for several generations and shape collective memory.

3.1. Collective trauma. Studies show that communities experience a “collective trauma syndrome” as a result of deportation and violence (Cernea 1997). This trauma causes the following: a sense of insecurity, social fragmentation, moral and psychological damage, and an identity crisis.

3.2. Refugee syndrome. The following psychological conditions were recorded in the hundreds of thousands of Western Azerbaijanis deported in 1988–1991: long-term stress and depression, forced adaptation difficulties, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and social isolation.

3.3. Intergenerational trauma. Forced displacement not only directly affects the generation whose life is changed, but also transmits psychological and social behavioral patterns to subsequent generations. This is one of the main factors affecting the long-term psychological state of an entire society.

3.4. Damage to cultural memory. The loss of historical and cultural spaces leads to a weakening of collective identity. This creates a deep gap in both individual and social psychology.

The Concept of Return and legal diplomacy. The “Concept of Return” adopted by the West Azerbaijan Community in 2023 serves as the main political and legal document of this strategy. The document emphasizes that the mass deportation of Azerbaijani Turks from Armenia is a violation of international law and the right of return should be considered as a redress for this violation (United Nations.1966).

The main legal arguments in the document: Reference to UN resolutions and conventions; The fact that forced displacement on ethnic grounds is contrary to human rights;

recognition of vandalism against cultural heritage as a war crime.

Voice and diplomatic initiatives on international platforms. The Azerbaijani state and the West Azerbaijan Community have begun to raise the issue of West Azerbaijan on the agenda of various international organizations and platforms: The UN in 2023 presented the deportations from West Azerbaijan by representatives of the Republic of Azerbaijan in the context of human rights violations. The OSCE discussed the trend of Armenia becoming a monoethnic state. The OIC condemned Armenia's policy against Muslim cultural heritage. The Council of Europe and PACE presented legally-based documents on the protection of cultural heritage and the right of return. The aim of these initiatives is to influence international public opinion, as well as to keep Armenia's political and legal responsibility on the agenda, and to present the peaceful return of Azerbaijani Turks as an internationally legitimate right.

Azerbaijan's modern approach is built on three main pillars:

Restoration of historical justice, Recognition of the right of return based on international law, Gaining international legitimacy through multilateral diplomatic initiatives. This strategy is supported not only by national ideological memory, but also by real legal and diplomatic mechanisms.

Formation and Organization of the Azerbaijani Diaspora. The establishment of the State Committee for Work with the Diaspora after 2001. One of the most important steps for the systematic formation and organization of the Azerbaijani diaspora was the establishment of the State Committee for Work with the Diaspora in 2001. The main task of this committee is to strengthen the ties of Azerbaijani communities living abroad, unite them in the spirit of national solidarity and patriotism, and at the same time carry out coordination work to protect the interests of the Azerbaijani state at the international level. As a result of the committee's activities, cooperation between diaspora organizations has expanded, and information exchange and propaganda work have become more systematic.

Western Azerbaijan Community and other key diaspora structures. The Western Azerbaijan Community is of particular importance as a leading actor of the diaspora in bringing the issue of Western Azerbaijan to the international agenda. This community, established in 2022, works to pro-

tect the rights of our deported compatriots, convey historical truths to the world community, and ensure the right of return. The community's participation in international platforms and strengthening ties with Azerbaijani communities in various countries increase its influence. In addition, other diaspora organizations operating in various countries, such as the Congress of American Azerbaijanis, the Congress of European Azerbaijanis, and the Azerbaijani Diaspora in Canada, include the issue of Western Azerbaijan in their programs and play an active role in protecting national interests.

The position and diplomatic initiatives of the Republic of Azerbaijan regarding Western Azerbaijan, The Republic of Azerbaijan has kept the issue of Western Azerbaijan on the agenda for many years in the context of the humanitarian crisis and deportation, but after 2020 it began to approach this topic more openly and strategically. In particular, in the speeches of President Ilham Aliyev, this issue has begun to be expressed as "restoration of historical justice and peaceful return of Azerbaijani Turks". The Azerbaijani state approaches the issue from legal, historical and diplomatic aspects and addresses the international community with real facts and documents.

The main initiatives are as follows. The activities of the West Azerbaijan Community have been expanded and began to continue their activities in a new structure in 2022. The community addresses appeals to international organizations and states, submits documents related to deportations and conducts public diplomacy. The "West Azerbaijan Charter" was adopted, establishing the legal framework for the right of Azerbaijani Turks to return to these territories. This document was prepared with references to UN documents, the European Convention on Human Rights and the Geneva Conventions. Within the framework of the "Great Return" concept, the goal of the right-based, non-coercive and peaceful return of Azerbaijani Turks to their historical homeland was set. Azerbaijani diplomatic missions and diaspora organizations raise the issue of Western Azerbaijan at international events, disseminate information about it in the media and academic platforms. Azerbaijan's position is not revanchist, but rather rights-based and humanitarian. This issue has become an important element of the diplomatic agenda for the recognition of the right of return, Armenia's compliance with international obligations and the establishment of peace in the region.

World Congresses of Azerbaijanis and the Place of the Western Azerbaijan Issue There The World Congresses of Azerbaijanis, which are an important platform for the unity and coordination of the Azerbaijani diaspora, constantly keep this issue in the spotlight. The issue of Western Azerbaijan has been repeatedly raised at the Congresses held since 2001, and its legal and political aspects have been widely discussed. A number of decisions, calls and recommendations have been adopted through the Congresses, and contributions have been made to diaspora organizations in terms of mutual activity and information exchange. These platforms also play a key role in statements and appeals addressed to the international community, especially political and humanitarian institutions. The documents adopted at the congresses demand that the facts of deportation and ethnic cleansing be firmly condemned under international law and that solutions be found.

The Role of the Azerbaijani Diaspora and Information Diplomacy. The role of Azerbaijani diaspora organizations and information diplomacy in the process of raising the issue of Western Azerbaijan to the international level is becoming increasingly important. Diaspora organizations, which act as a complement to the official position of the state, have become an important tool in conveying both legal and historical facts to the world community.

Activities of diaspora organizations: The example of the USA, Europe and Turkey. Since the 2000s, Azerbaijani diaspora organizations have been engaged in campaigns and awareness-raising activities aimed at raising the issue of Western Azerbaijan to the international agenda. The activity is mainly manifested in the following regions:

USA: Azerbaijani diaspora organizations operating in the USA, especially the US Azeris Network and the Assembly of Friends of Azerbaijan, have raised the issue of ethnic cleansing of Armenia against Azerbaijani Turks at various panels, conferences and through the press. They have sent let-

ters to the US Congress, submitted petitions, and documented the stories of families deported from Western Azerbaijan.

European Union countries: Diaspora organizations operating in Germany, the Netherlands, and France, especially the European Azerbaijanis Congress (EAC), have held lobbying and public events to raise the issue of Western Azerbaijan in the European Parliament and PACE. The event titled "Forgotten Deportations" held in Brussels in 2023 was an important step in this direction (Hathaway, 2005).

Turkey: Diaspora organizations in Turkey have presented the issue of Western Azerbaijan both in Turkish society and internationally, taking the slogan "one nation, two states" as a basis, and have played an active role, especially in media and expert platforms.

Media and communication policy: Information strategies for the restoration of historical justice. The issue of Western Azerbaijan is conveyed to an international audience through the media, which is an important tool of information warfare, in various ways:

Documentaries and graphic materials: Short films and animations depicting deportations from Western Azerbaijan in 2022–2023 were produced and published on YouTube and other platforms. At the same time, deportations are presented visually through interactive maps and timelines.

Additional communication channels: Statements are made to the international media through diplomatic missions, embassies and consulates, and press conferences are organized. This information both exposes Armenia's policy of creating a monoethnic state and justifies the right of return (Akçam, 2015).

Creation of academic and expert networks. In order to present the issue of Western Azerbaijan not only on an emotional and political basis, but also on an academic basis, networking activities have been strengthened in the following areas:

Conferences and symposiums: International scientific conferences and forums on Western Azerbaijan have been held since 2023. For example, ADA University and the Western Azerbaijan Community jointly held a scientific conference entitled "Deportations and International Law".

Formation of an expert base: Relations have been established between local and foreign lawyers, historians and political scientists, and groups such as the Western Azerbaijan Legal Advisory Group have been established in this direction.

Publications and scientific articles: The number of academic articles on topics such as deportation, destruction of cultural heritage, right of return and international legal framework is increasing, and their publication in international scientific journals is encouraged (Barakat, 2010).

General conclusion. Strengthening the activities of the Azerbaijani diaspora and basing information diplomacy on institutional foundations makes a significant contribution to the international recognition of the West Azerbaijan issue. This is of strategic importance both in terms of the promotion of cultural genocide and the acceptance of the idea of peaceful return by the international community.

Problems and Prospects. The West Azerbaijan issue at the modern stage acquires relevant geopolitical and legal shades in both the regional and international context. The future development trajectory of the issue depends on the interaction of a number of complex factors. Chief among these are the peace process with Armenia, the mechanisms for the application of international law, and changes in the regional security architecture.

Diaspora and the West Azerbaijan Community

The Role of the Azerbaijani Diaspora and Information Diplomacy. The role of Azerbaijani diaspora organizations and information diplomacy in the process of raising the issue of West Azerbaijan to the international level is becoming increasingly important. Diaspora organizations, which act as a complement to the official position of the state, have become an important tool in conveying both legal and historical facts to the world community.

The activities of diaspora organizations: the example of the USA, Europe and Turkey. Since the 2000s, Azerbaijani diaspora organizations have been engaged in campaigns and awareness-raising

activities aimed at putting the issue of West Azerbaijan on the international agenda. The activity is mainly manifested in the following regions:

USA: Azerbaijani diaspora organizations operating in the USA, especially the US Azeris Network and the Assembly of Friends of Azerbaijan, have raised the issue of ethnic cleansing of Armenia against Azerbaijani Turks on the agenda at various panels, conferences and through the press. They have sent letters to the US Congress, submitted petitions, and documented the stories of families deported from West Azerbaijan.

European Union countries: Diaspora organizations operating in Germany, the Netherlands and France, in particular the European Azerbaijanis Congress (EAC), have held lobbying and public events to raise the issue of Western Azerbaijan in the European Parliament and PACE. The event titled "Forgotten Deportations" held in Brussels in 2023 was an important step in this direction (Əliyeva. 2021).

Turkey: Diaspora organizations in Turkey have presented the issue of Western Azerbaijan both in Turkish society and internationally, taking the slogan "one nation, two states" as a basis, and have played an active role, especially in media and expert platforms.

Media and communication policy: Information strategies for the restoration of historical justice. The issue of Western Azerbaijan is conveyed to the international audience through the media, which is an important tool of information warfare, in various ways:

Documentaries and graphic materials: Short films and animations depicting deportations from Western Azerbaijan in 2022–2023 were produced and published on YouTube and other platforms. At the same time, deportations were visually presented through interactive maps and timelines.

Additional communication channels: Statements are made to the international media through diplomatic missions, embassies and consulates, and press conferences are organized. This information both exposes Armenia's policy of creating a monoethnic state and justifies the right of return (Akçam, 2015).

Creation of academic and expert networks. In order to present the issue of Western Azerbaijan not only on an emotional and political basis, but also on an academic basis, networking activities have been strengthened in the following areas:

Conferences and symposiums: International scientific conferences and forums related to Western Azerbaijan have been held since 2023. For example, ADA University and the Western Azerbaijan Community jointly held a scientific conference entitled "Deportations and International Law".

Formation of an expert base: Contacts have been established between local and foreign lawyers, historians and political scientists, and groups such as the Western Azerbaijan Legal Advisory Group have been established in this direction.

Publications and scientific articles: The number of academic articles on topics such as deportation, destruction of cultural heritage, the right of return and the international legal framework is increasing, and their publication in international scientific journals is encouraged.

General conclusion. Strengthening the activities of the Azerbaijani diaspora and basing information diplomacy on institutional foundations makes significant contributions to the international recognition of the Western Azerbaijan issue. This is of strategic importance both in terms of the promotion of cultural genocide and the acceptance of the idea of peaceful return by the international community.

Problems and Prospects. The issue of Western Azerbaijan at the present stage acquires relevant geopolitical and legal shades in both regional and international contexts. The future development trajectory of the issue depends on the interaction of a number of complex factors. The most important of these are the peace process with Armenia, the mechanisms for the application of international law, and the changes taking place in the regional security architecture.

Application of international law and normative bases. Although the process of the return of Western Azerbaijani Turks is based on a number of fundamental documents of international law, the real application of this right requires serious mechanisms and international political will:

The legal basis exists, but the implementation mechanisms are weak: the UN Declaration of Human Rights, the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Convention on the Status of Refugees recognize this right, but there are no coercive instruments to ensure their application.

The problem of double standards: Although the same legal principles apply to other peoples (for example, Kosovo Albanians, Palestinians), the passivity of the international community is observed when it comes to Azerbaijani Turks.

The need for lobbying and legal campaigns: It is necessary to prepare individual and collective claims in international courts (European Court of Human Rights, International Court of Justice), and strengthen the portfolio of claims on the legal basis

Challenges and Prospects. Competition with the Armenian diaspora and information warfare. While the Azerbaijani diaspora, especially in the issue of Western Azerbaijan, is trying to be influential at the international level, the opposing side the Armenian diaspora – has been operating for a much longer period of time and with wider networks. The Armenian diaspora, especially in the USA, France, Russia and other countries, plays an active role in the information warfare by creating powerful political-lobby structures. This reduces the effectiveness of the Azerbaijani diaspora to a certain extent and makes it difficult for them to compete on international platforms. Within the framework of the information warfare, different, sometimes contradictory narratives are formed between the parties on issues of history, human rights and regional security. This competition both expands the scope of diaspora diplomacy and requires strategic planning to be carried out at a more professional level.

Conclusion. The Western Azerbaijan issue is a multidimensional historical-political problem that emerged as a result of geopolitical conflicts, imperial policies, ethnic engineering processes, and successive forced displacements in the South Caucasus during the 19th–20th centuries. The ethno-social structure of the region had a stable demographic environment dominated by Azerbaijanis for many centuries. However, the mass displacements carried out in the region after the Russo-Iranian wars, especially the transportation of the Armenian population to the Caucasus in 1828–1830, systematically changed this balance and laid the foundation for future conflicts.

The massacres of 1905–1906, the ethnic cleansing of 1918–1920, the Soviet totalitarian repressions, the deportations of 1948–1953, and finally the mass expulsions of 1988–1991, which continued throughout the 20th century, created a profound humanitarian tragedy for Western Azerbaijanis. As a result of this process, hundreds of thousands of people lost their connection with their native lands, entire villages and cities were evacuated, cultural and spiritual heritage was destroyed, and social tissues were broken. Each wave of deportations was not just a physical change of location these events were large-scale attacks targeting fundamental values of people such as identity, memory, lineage, and social cohesion .

From the perspective of international law, the right of Western Azerbaijanis to return to their native lands is not only a humanitarian demand, but also a legal obligation confirmed by international documents. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenants, the 1951 Refugee Convention, ECHR precedents, and UNESCO conventions establish the return of deported people, the restoration of property, and the protection of cultural heritage as absolute obligations of states. From this perspective, Armenia's failure to ensure the return of Western Azerbaijanis should be assessed as a violation of international legal norms.

On the psychological level, the consequences of the issue are deeper and longer-lasting. The trauma of deportation is not limited to the first generation, but creates collective psychological trauma that is transmitted across generations. This trauma leads to consequences such as fear of identity, homeland loss syndrome, social adaptation difficulties, and damage to historical memory. This requires that the return process be accompanied not only by political and legal, but also by psychosocial support mechanisms.

In the modern era, the changing geopolitical landscape in the region, the weakening of the Russian factor, the growing regional influence of Turkey, and the active return of the West to the South

Caucasus have created conditions for the West Azerbaijan issue to be more seriously raised on the international agenda. Azerbaijan's official position prioritizes discussing the issue in the context of the right of return and humanitarian justice, not territorial claims. This approach is both consistent with international law and creates a constructive framework for peace negotiations.

At the same time, the attitude of international actors the EU, OSCE, UN and the Organization of Turkic States to the issue shows that the return of refugees is a universally recognized right and that Armenia has an obligation in this context. Conflict studies also confirm that peace in cases of ethnic cleansing can only be sustainable if rights are restored, property restitution and the safe return of forcibly displaced people are ensured.

In this context, a just solution to the West Azerbaijan issue should be based on the following components:

- Recognition of deportations and restoration of historical justice;
- Phased, controlled and safe return of West Azerbaijanis;
- Restoration of property rights, compensation mechanisms;
- Protection and restoration of cultural heritage;
- Psychological rehabilitation and community building;
- Implementation of Armenia's international legal obligations;
- Coordination of regional actors on peace and security platforms.

All this shows that the issue of Western Azerbaijan is not only a heavy burden of the past, but also has a decisive importance for the future security of the region. The resolution of the issue is the main condition for long-term peace between Azerbaijan and Armenia, a necessary element of the formation of a reliable security architecture in the South Caucasus. The restoration of historical justice, the elimination of the consequences of deportation and the return of people to their homelands are a necessary process from both legal and moral points of view. Ensuring return creates a strategic basis for the formation of a more inclusive, just and sustainable future order in the South Caucasus. The analysis based on the historical context and international law-diplomacy analysis shows that the issue of Western Azerbaijan, as a multifaceted and long-term problem, is of great importance for Azerbaijan from a historical, humanitarian and legal perspective. The following main conclusions should be emphasized:

1. Sequence of historical processes and demographic changes .

From the end of the 19th century to the end of the 20th century, the Turks of Western Azerbaijan were subjected to ethnic oppression, massacres and deportations at various stages. Starting from the massacres of 1905–1906, the policy of the First Republic of Armenia against Azerbaijanis, planned deportations during the USSR period and the recent mass resettlement of 1988–1991 radically changed the demographic presence of Azerbaijanis in the region. As a result of these processes, the compact living spaces of Azerbaijanis in historical lands were fragmented, villages were evacuated and hundreds of thousands of people became internally displaced persons.

2. Assessment from the point of view of international law.

Historical events and deportations can be assessed as ethnic cleansing, forced displacement and human rights violations from the point of view of international law. The UN Human Rights and Genocide Conventions, as well as other international normative acts, support Azerbaijan's legal claims.

3. Perspective of diplomacy and international relations

The Azerbaijani side strengthens its diplomatic position by presenting the issue of Western Azerbaijan on international platforms with historical and legal facts. International organizations and regional mediators assess the legal and humanitarian aspects of the issue. Diplomatic strategies aim at both legal recognition and the restoration of peace and justice in the region.

4. Humanitarian and social consequences

The forced expulsion and ethnic cleansing of the Turks of Western Azerbaijan resulted in human losses, displacement, and socio-cultural losses. The memory and humanitarian consequences of these processes are still preserved in the collective memory of the Azerbaijani people and play an important role in ensuring regional peace.

Overall conclusion

The issue of Western Azerbaijan is directly related to the national interests and legal position of Azerbaijan in both historical, legal, and diplomatic aspects. The ethnic, political, and demographic processes that have continued from the 19th to the end of the 20th centuries show that the changes taking place in the region cannot be explained solely by modern political conflicts.

In modern times, this issue: forms the basis of Azerbaijan's international legal claims, is one of the priority directions of diplomatic activity, is of strategic importance in terms of preserving humanitarian and historical memory.

Therefore, a comprehensive analysis of the West Azerbaijan issue should not be limited to the study of historical events, but should also be continuously examined in the context of international law and diplomacy. Such an approach creates a scientific and legal basis for ensuring regional peace and justice.

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