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THE ISSUE OF WESTERN AZERBAIJAN IN AZERBAIJAN'S DIPLOMATIC STRATEGY: HISTORY, LAW AND GEOPOLITICS

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Summary

This article examines the historical and contemporary place of the Western Azerbaijan issue in Azerbaijan's diplomacy. Against the backdrop of deportations in 1905, 1918–1920, 1948–1953, and 1987–1991, the violation of the rights of Azerbaijanis from Western Azerbaijan and the destruction of their cultural heritage are analyzed. Since the 2000s, the issue has increasingly entered diplomatic discourse and international legal frameworks. Through presidential speeches, the "Return Concept", diaspora initiatives, and information diplomacy, the Western Azerbaijan issue has been brought to international attention. The article also evaluates the problem's relevance to regional security and geopolitical dynamics, offering future-oriented recommendations.

Keywords: Western Azerbaijan, deportations, right of return, information diplomacy, diaspora, international law, regional security, cultural heritage, peace process

INTRODUCTION.

The issue of Western Azerbaijan occupies an important place in the historical memory and modern diplomatic agenda of the Republic of Azerbaijan. As a result of the ethnic cleansing policy purposefully implemented by Armenian nationalists since the end of the 19th century, thousands of Azerbaijani Turks were expelled from their native lands in the territory of present-day Armenia. As a result of four major waves of deportations throughout the 20th century (1905, 1918–20, 1948–53 and 1987–89), the demographic presence of Azerbaijani Turks in these territories was practically completely erased. These processes should be assessed not only as a humanitarian disaster, but also as an example of a gross violation of international law.

After gaining independence, the attitude towards the issue of Western Azerbaijan in Azerbaijan's foreign policy has gradually changed, especially after 2020 this issue has begun to be reflected more openly and systematically in diplomatic rhetoric and strategic approaches. The President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev's addressing of this issue in various international forums, the official organization of the West Azerbaijan Community and the "Great Return" Concept are among the main indicators of this new stage.

The aim of this article is to analyze the place of the West Azerbaijan issue in Azerbaijani diplomacy from the perspective of historical retrospective and contemporary approaches. The importance of substantiating the existing approaches in terms of international law, regional security and humanitarian values, and bringing this issue to the attention of the international community will be particularly emphasized. In addition, the role of diaspora diplomacy and information policy in this process will also be considered separately.

Relevance of the topic. The issue of Western Azerbaijan is not only a matter of restoring historical justice regarding the past of a people, but also an important political and legal issue for ensuring long-term peace and security in the region. In the modern system of international relations, the restoration of the rights of peoples subjected to ethnic cleansing is one of the basic

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principles of humanitarian law. In this regard, the right of Azerbaijani Turks forcibly deported from Armenia to return to their homeland peacefully and voluntarily is based on international law and is increasingly central to Azerbaijan's diplomatic strategy. Against the background of new geopolitical realities that have emerged in the region after 2020, in particular, the completion of the main phase of the Karabakh conflict and the formation of a peace agenda, the need to put the issue of Western Azerbaijan on the agenda has increased. On the eve of a possible peace agreement with Armenia, this issue has become an important strategic component in the system of national interests of Azerbaijan. At the same time, the introduction and legal substantiation of the issue at the international level has taken on a more systematic and institutional character, thanks to the initiatives of the Western Azerbaijan Community and the activities of diaspora organizations.

All these factors make it necessary to bring the issue of Western Azerbaijan to the fore in Azerbaijani diplomacy and to form a unified conceptual approach in this direction. Therefore, the topic is relevant from both historical, legal and geopolitical perspectives.

The concept of Western Azerbaijan and its legal and political framework. The concept of "Western Azerbaijan" refers to the historical lands historically inhabited by Azerbaijani Turks and today called the Republic of Armenia. This term is not only the name of a geographical space, but also an expression of ethno-cultural existence, historical memory and legal claims. Regions such as ancient Zangezur, Goycha, Daralayaz, Vedibasar, Shorayel are territories where the Azerbaijani people have lived and created for centuries, forming their religious, historical and cultural heritage.

As a result of systematic deportations carried out throughout the 20th century, hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijani Turks were forcibly removed from these territories, their property, temples and cemeteries were destroyed and razed to the ground. This process was accompanied by a gross violation of a number of norms and principles of international law, in particular, the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the UN Resolutions on Internally Displaced Persons, the European Convention on Human Rights, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. According to the official position of the Republic of Azerbaijan, persons deported from West Azerbaijan have the right to return to their homeland voluntarily, in safety and with dignity. This is a universal right supported by the 1946 UN resolution recognizing the right of refugees and internally displaced persons to return and the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. The West Azerbaijan Community, which was reorganized in 2022, has begun serious activities to introduce this legal and political framework in the international community and to bring it to the diplomatic level. The "Great Return Concept" developed by the community includes a strategy based on international law, civil and humanitarian principles, non-violent, peaceful and dialogue-based. Thus, the concept of Western Azerbaijan has become not only a historical memory, but also a symbol of legal and political demand. This approach stands out as one of the main arguments both in the peace negotiations with Armenia and in international forums.

Goals and objectives. The main goal of this article is to systematically analyze the place of the West Azerbaijan issue in the diplomacy of the Republic of Azerbaijan, historical and modern approaches to this issue. The article also intends to assess the legal foundations of the issue, the possibilities of its introduction at the international level, and the strategies formed in diplomatic rhetoric. In the light of known historical processes, the position and directions of activity of Azerbaijani diplomacy in this area are evaluated.

To achieve this goal, the following tasks are set:

To determine the historical and legal foundations of the concept of West Azerbaijan;

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To analyze the causes and consequences of the deportation of Azerbaijani Turks from Armenia in the 20th century;

To examine how this issue was presented at the diplomatic level in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods;

To systematize the approach of the Azerbaijani state and diplomatic bodies to this issue during the period of independence;

To evaluate the activities of the West Azerbaijan Community and the "Great Return" Concept in a legal and political context;

To analyze the role of the Azerbaijani diaspora, international organizations and the media in this direction;

To determine the future prospects of the Western Azerbaijan issue against the backdrop of peace negotiations with Armenia.

The fulfillment of these tasks is important both in terms of restoring historical justice and ensuring Azerbaijan's national interests in modern regional diplomacy.

Historical retrospective: Deportations and the period of diplomatic silence. The basis of the Western Azerbaijan issue was laid by the violence and ethnic cleansing policies perpetrated by Armenian armed groups against Azerbaijani Turks starting from the end of the 19th century. In 1905–1906, Armenian nationalists, taking advantage of the weakening control of Tsarist Russia, launched large-scale attacks against Azerbaijani Turks, which resulted in the burning of hundreds of villages in the Goycha, Zangezur and Iravan regions and the death of thousands of Azerbaijani Turks [2 pp. 89–94]. In 1918–1920, during the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, mass massacres were carried out against Azerbaijanis in the Iravan province, especially as a result of the activities of the Armenian “Dashnak” groups. Although the city of Iravan was given to Armenia as its capital during the same period, the Turkish population living there was reduced to zero within a few years [2 pp. 116–123]. During the Soviet period, this process was continued with more systematic and administrative means. In 1948–1953, by decision of the USSR Council of Ministers, about 100 thousand Azerbaijani Turks were resettled from Armenia to the Kur-Araz lowland of Azerbaijan [7]. Although this resettlement was justified under the guise of “economic necessity”, in reality the goal was the complete ethnic Armenization of Armenia [6 p. 205]. In 1987–1989, as a result of the resurgence of Armenian nationalism, the last Turkish families living in Western Azerbaijan (Armenia) were forcibly deported. During this period, more than 250 thousand Azerbaijani Turks living in Yerevan, Masis, Amasya, Ararat and other regions were forced to leave Armenia [13]. The common feature of these periods was that the facts of deportation and ethnic cleansing were not properly assessed politically either in the international community or within the USSR. During the Soviet period, censorship and pressure from the central government, as well as the impossibility of independent diplomatic initiatives, made it impossible to raise this issue on international forums [9]. After independence, the focus on the Karabakh conflict, the country's weak international influence, and limited political resources kept the issue of Western Azerbaijan in the background in diplomatic rhetoric. However, this did not completely forget the issue. Publications about Western Azerbaijan, public appeals, and the efforts of the diaspora served to preserve this historical memory [15].

Deportations of 1905, 1918–1920, 1948–1953 and 1987–1991: Stages of ethno-political cleansing. The systematic suppression and deportation of Azerbaijani Turks in Western Azerbaijan (present-day Armenia) took place in several stages. Each wave of deportations was planned and carried out in accordance with a specific historical-political context, as a result of which the demographic composition of the region was radically changed.

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Events of 1905–1906: The first systematic attacks. The events of 1905–1906 went down in history as the first large-scale acts of violence against Azerbaijani Turks against the backdrop of Russian-Armenian political alliances in the Caucasus. Hundreds of villages were burned and thousands of innocent people were killed as a result of attacks by Armenian armed groups in the regions of Iravan, Zangezur, Sharur-Deralayaz and Goycha [3]. The events were systematically ignited against the backdrop of religious and national conflict, with the aim of weakening the presence of Azerbaijani Turks in these lands.

1918–1920s: The Republican period and ethnic cleansing. During the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic and at the same time, against the backdrop of the Ottoman-Armenian conflict in Eastern Anatolia, ethnic cleansing against Azerbaijani Turks in Western Azerbaijan (Iravan province) was continued by armed Armenian groups. In parallel with the Guba and Baku massacres that took place in March 1918, dozens of villages were destroyed in Iravan and Goycha, the population was killed and mass deportations occurred [2, pp. 117–122]. It is interesting that when the city of Iravan was declared the capital of Armenia in 1918, the Muslim population in the city constituted about 50% of the population. However, over the next 2–3 years, the vast majority of them were deported or killed [6].

1948–1953: Soviet resettlement policy. Based on the decision of the USSR Council of Ministers dated December 23, 1947, about 100 thousand Azerbaijani Turks were forcibly resettled from the territory of the Armenian SSR to the Kur-Araz lowland of Azerbaijan in 1948–1953. Although this decision was formally explained by “economic reasons” and “agricultural needs in the northern plains of Azerbaijan”, the real goal was to transform Armenia into a mono-ethnic Armenian state [7]. Thousands of people lost their lives during the deportation due to disease, climatic difficulties, and poor conditions.

1987–1991: The final wave and the completion of ethnic cleansing. Events within Armenia during the collapse of the USSR in the late 1980s resulted in the mass targeting of Azerbaijani Turks living in Western Azerbaijan, particularly from late 1987 onwards. More than 250,000 Azerbaijani Turks living in Armenia were subjected to either physical violence or open threats, and all were expelled from their homelands in 1988–1989 [14]. The fact that not a single Azerbaijani Turk remained in Armenia indicates that this phase was a total ethnic cleansing [9]. This four-stage deportation process shows that the Turkish population of Western Azerbaijan was systematically, stage by stage, and consistently expelled from their historical homeland. The aim at each stage was to destroy ethnic and cultural traces, weaken Azerbaijani claims to these territories, and evade the attention of the international community.

Main regions in Western Azerbaijan: Yerevan, Goycha, Zangezur, Vedibasar, Daralayaz, Shorayel, etc. Regions affected in each wave of deportation. Destinations of IDPs (mostly Nakhchivan, Kur-Araz lowland, Karabakh and Baku).

Table: Chronology and consequences of the stages of deportation

Period Main event Estimated number (people) Cause and consequence

1905–1906 Armenian attacks and massacres 10–15 thousand Ethnic clashes, burning of villages

1918–1920 Dashnak armed attacks 50–60 thousand Ethnic cleansing in Yerevan, Goycha and Zangezur

1948–1953 Soviet-ordered resettlement 100 thousand+ Official resettlement order, villages evacuated

1987–1991 Mass violence and expulsions 250–300 thousand Armenia completely cleansed of Azerbaijani Turks

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Brief Notes: In 1918, more than 12,000 Azerbaijani Turks lived in the city of Yerevan; by 1920, this number had dropped to zero. About 10,000 of those resettled in 1948–1953 lost their lives due to road conditions, hunger, and disease [7]. In 1988–1989, the Armenian parliament openly encouraged the transition to monoethnic status.

2000–2020: Cultural Heritage Preservation and Gradual Revival in Political Rhetoric Since the 2000s, the issue of Western Azerbaijan has remained on the sidelines of political rhetoric in Azerbaijan's diplomatic discourse, although not completely silent. During this period, the main focus was on the Karabakh conflict and Armenia's occupation policy, but the issue of Western Azerbaijan was living in parallel on the public and academic level. The main turning point was observed starting in 2008. Since that year, the activities of the Western Azerbaijan Community (former Armenian Turks) have become even more active, and systematic steps have been taken to protect the historical and cultural heritage. At this stage, various state bodies of the Republic of Azerbaijan, in particular the State Committee for Work with the Diaspora, the Ministry of Culture and the Institute of History, have taken certain initiatives to list, map and present to the international community the monuments belonging to the Azerbaijani Turks in the territory of Armenia. Ancient mosques, cemeteries, tombs and place names located in the territory of Armenia have been subjected to the policy of Armenization and destruction, which has been assessed by Azerbaijan as “cultural genocide” [5]. Since the mid-2010s, the idea of returning to Western Azerbaijan has begun to be voiced more openly in the public discourse of Azerbaijan. This was accompanied by President Ilham Aliyev repeatedly addressing this issue in various speeches. In 2018, the new strategy of the Western Azerbaijan Community was approved, which led to the issue becoming relevant both at the political and ideological levels.

The main features observed during this period are as follows: Documentation of cultural heritage: Databases were created based on archival documents, photographs and maps about monuments located in Western Azerbaijan. Expansion of academic research: The National Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan and other research institutes prepared monographs, maps and articles on Western Azerbaijan [14]. Revival in political rhetoric: Western Azerbaijan was included in the state strategy not only as a memory of deportation, but also in the context of the “right of return”.

Thus, the years 2000–2020 were remembered in Azerbaijani diplomacy for the gradual revival of the Western Azerbaijan issue at the rhetorical level and the preservation of cultural memory. This process was continued in the next decade with a more active and institutional approach.

The Heydar Aliyev era. In a number of speeches he made in the 1990s, the national leader Heydar Aliyev assessed the forced expulsion of Azerbaijani Turks from the territory of Armenia as a historical injustice and emphasized that this issue should not be forgotten. In a speech in 1999, he noted: "Our people were deported from their native lands – the territory of present-day Armenia. This tragedy must never be forgotten." [11] This rhetoric at the time was largely aimed at preserving a common national memory, but a concrete "return" plan or program was not yet on the agenda.

Ilham Aliyev era: Formation of the concept of return. During the reign of President Ilham Aliyev, the issue of Western Azerbaijan began to take a more active and strategic place in political rhetoric. Especially in the meetings of the head of state with the West Azerbaijan Community in 2022–2023, this issue was presented within the framework of an independent state and diplomatic position. The President’s remarks during his meeting with the West Azerbaijan Community in December 2022 are noteworthy: “The West Azerbaijani Turks must

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return to their native lands. This is their right. We must ensure this return peacefully, based on international law" [8]. After that, a document called the "Concept of Return" was prepared and adopted as an official document of the West Azerbaijan Community in 2023. This document indicated the 1948 UN Declaration of Human Rights and the 1966 Covenant on Civil and Political Rights as the main legal basis.

Key official documents and initiatives. The Concept of Return of the West Azerbaijani Community (2023): It envisages the recognition of the right of deported persons to return to their homeland peacefully and its communication to the international community [13]. Letters and statements addressed by the Republic of Azerbaijan to the UN and other international organizations: These documents express Armenia's ethnic cleansing policy in legal language and state that it bears legal responsibility. The content and direction of the current rhetoric. The main elements that stand out in Ilham Aliyev's speeches are:

The justification of the right of return of West Azerbaijani Turks by international law;

The presentation of the destruction of cultural heritage as "cultural genocide";

The exposure of Armenia's monoethnic policy;

The importance of implementing the return process within the framework of peace and law.

Contemporary approaches: Legal bases and voicing on international platforms. The presentation of the issue of Western Azerbaijan in the international legal arena at the contemporary stage shows that the Azerbaijani state has formed an approach to this issue based on strategic and legal bases. The goal at this stage is not only the preservation of historical memory, but also the recognition of the rights of deported people and the legitimization of the possibilities of return at the international level.

Legal bases and provisions of international law. The position put forward by Azerbaijan regarding Western Azerbaijan refers to several key international documents:

UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 Article 13: "Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within each country. Everyone has the right to return to his country."

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1966 Article 12: "No one shall be arbitrarily expelled or deprived of the right to return to his country." The 1998 Rome Statute recognizes the deliberate destruction of cultural heritage as a war crime (art. 8). Azerbaijan uses this legal basis to justify the right of return of deported persons and expose Armenia's policy of creating a monoethnic state. In particular, concepts such as ethnic cleansing and cultural genocide are justified within the framework of international law [7].

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 remedy for this violation [14].

The main legal arguments in the document: Reference to UN resolutions and conventions; The violation of human rights by forced displacement on ethnic grounds;

Recognition of vandalism directed 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: UN – 2023, the presentation of deportations from West Azerbaijan by representatives of the Republic of Azerbaijan in the context of human rights violations. OSCE The tendency of Armenia to become a monoethnic state was brought up for discussion. The OIC condemned Armenia's policy against Muslim cultural heritage. The

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Council of Europe and PACE presented legally sound 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.

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 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. Azerbaijani diaspora organizations have been engaged in campaigns and awareness-raising activities aimed at bringing the issue of Western Azerbaijan to the international agenda since the 2000s. 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 Armenian Azerbaijani Turks at various panels, conferences and in the press. They have sent letters 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 [13].

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 [16].

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:

Documentary films 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 [1].

Establishment 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 symposia: International scientific conferences and forums on Western Azerbaijan have been held since 2023. For example, ADA University and the Western

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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, the right of return and the international legal framework is increasing, and their publication in international scientific journals is encouraged [5].

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 issue of Western Azerbaijan. This is of strategic importance both in terms of the recognition 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 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.

The future of the issue in the context of the peace process with Armenia. In the context of the peace negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan starting after 2020, the official introduction of the West Azerbaijan issue to the agenda implies a transition to a new stage. However, this is accompanied by a number of risks and difficulties:

Armenia's position: Official Yerevan denies deportations from West Azerbaijan and continues to de facto maintain the status of a "monoethnic state". This complicates the prospects for the return of West Azerbaijani Turks.

Risk of not being included in the peace agreement: The West Azerbaijan issue has not been included as an independent item in the negotiations so far, and the main focus has been on the Karabakh and border issues. This may delay the regulation of this issue at the level of international law.

The problem of "double standards" for peace: International mediators, especially the European Union, demonstrate selective approaches in the field of human rights and sometimes ignore the West Azerbaijan issue. However, the speeches of Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev demonstrate political will towards "the realization of the right of return within the framework of peace" [1].

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

The legal framework exists, but the enforcement 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 enforcement instruments to ensure their implementation.

The problem of double standards: Although the same legal principles apply to other peoples (e.g., Kosovo Albanians, Palestinians), the international community is passive when it comes to Azerbaijani Turks [7].

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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.

Regional security and geopolitical implications of the Western Azerbaijan issue. The Western Azerbaijan issue is not only a humanitarian and legal issue, but also part of the new geopolitical realities in the South Caucasus. The implications of the issue in this regard are as follows:

The issue of ethnic balance within Armenia: The demand for return may undermine the monoethnic structure of Armenia, which will lead to domestic political reactions.

Turkey and Iran's position: Turkey supports the West Azerbaijan issue within the framework of pan-Turkic humanitarianism. Iran, on the other hand, takes a more conservative position on the issue of Armenia's territorial integrity and borders.

Russia's dual role: While Russia is allied with Armenia on the one hand, it tries to maintain a balanced position in the South Caucasus on the other. This creates uncertainty regarding the West Azerbaijan issue.

The West's selective approach: The European Union and the United States are reluctant to express an open position on the West Azerbaijan issue, which creates disappointment among the Azerbaijani public in the region.

General perspective. The following strategic directions can be proposed for the future resolution of the West Azerbaijan issue:

Strengthening institutional diplomacy: Keeping the issue on the agenda of permanent diplomatic missions at the UN and other platforms.

Activation of legal activity: Preparing international lawsuits, supporting legal clinics and networks of lawyers.

Multilateral lobbying: Strengthening lobbying mechanisms using the experience of the Jewish and Armenian diasporas.

Conclusion

The issue of Western Azerbaijan has become one of the strategic directions occupying an important place in the foreign policy and diplomatic rhetoric of Azerbaijan in recent years. Previously, this issue, which was more in the public memory and historiographical discourse, has now become an integral part of official state policy, and has begun to be consistently expressed in the speeches of the President, in the programs of the Western Azerbaijan Community, and in documents addressed to international organizations. This indicates that the issue of Western Azerbaijan in the system of national interests of Azerbaijan has increased not only in symbolic, but also in real legal and diplomatic weight.

The growing importance of the issue of Western Azerbaijan in Azerbaijani diplomacy. Azerbaijani diplomacy has entered a new stage in relation to the issue of Western Azerbaijan, at this stage the issue is presented not only as the historical fate of the deported people, but also as a matter of their right to return, ownership of cultural heritage, and recognition in international law. The expansion of diplomatic activity not only at the level of official negotiations and statements, but also through diaspora, information, and legal diplomacy has turned this issue into a multifaceted policy area.

The unity of historical justice, legal struggle, and strategic diplomacy. The issue of Western Azerbaijan also stands at the intersection of three main principles: restoration of historical justice, protection of human rights and ensuring geopolitical stability. The concept of historical justice is related to the recognition of the traces of the Azerbaijani-Turkish communities in the territory of Armenia and the restoration of memory. The legal struggle

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includes systematic work carried out in the UN, the ECHR and other international platforms to confirm the right of return. Strategic diplomacy is carried out by making this issue relevant at the regional and international levels, presenting it as part of the agenda of common security and cooperation.

Recommendations for the future

In order to keep the topic on the agenda continuously and achieve real results, systematic activity in the following directions is important:

Strengthening the legal basis Harmonizing the documents protecting the rights of West Azerbaijani Turks with international law and activating judicial mechanisms;

Shaping international public opinion Creating an environment of understanding and support in the international community through media, documentaries, social campaigns and lobbying;

Strengthening diaspora networks Coordinated activities of diaspora organizations operating in the USA, Europe and Turkey;

Using regional cooperation opportunities Bringing the issue to the agenda within the framework of the Organization of Turkic States and the Organization of **Islamic Cooperation;**

Preservation of national memory and education of the younger generation Systematically including the topic of Western Azerbaijan in educational programs.

The issue of Western Azerbaijan is not only about the history of a people, but also about its future rights, the concept of justice and sovereignty. This issue is a test of both national responsibility and international law for Azerbaijan. The main task facing Azerbaijani diplomacy is to implement this historical mission with peace, law and a strategic vision.

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