

Summary

It is crucial to address the historical calamities and genocides that West Azerbaijani Turks have endured, as well as the problems they face in the regions they currently inhabit. These massacres were partially halted with the declaration of independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan on May 28, 1918. An Armenian state was established in Yerevan and its surrounding area of approximately 9,000 square kilometers, without the consent or input of West Azerbaijani Turks, and the administration was left entirely to Armenians.

In the Second Karabakh War, Azerbaijan recaptured its historical lands, namely Karabakh and East Zangezur. Following this, a new era began to protect the rights of West Azerbaijanis, and the West Azerbaijan Association was reestablished. The search for a peaceful solution, not a war, to achieve the return of West Azerbaijanis continues.

Azerbaijan does not desire war in any way. The Baku government desires the peaceful return of West Azerbaijanis to their homeland, their ancestral lands, and their villages, to live there and to continue their lives in peaceful coexistence with existing Armenian citizens. The Return to West Azerbaijan and the Peace Process in the Caucasus

Return to West Azerbaijan and the Peace Process in the Caucasus

Dr. Nagif HAMZAYEV - Member of the National Assembly of Azerbaijan

The brotherhood and strategic alliance between Azerbaijan and Türkiye has enabled Baku to attain a strong position. This does not mean that it can now relax. On the contrary, much more effort is needed in this period to avoid repeating the problems encountered repeatedly throughout history. Historically, genocides have been committed repeatedly against Turks and Muslims living not only in Azerbaijan but also in Türkiye. Unfortunately, in the face of these genocides and massacres, major powers and some states have either remained silent or have completely failed to acknowledge these tragedies.

It is crucial to address the calamities and genocides suffered by West Azerbaijani Turks, and the problems they face in the regions they inhabit today. Furthermore, considering what has been done to protect the rights of these people to date and what can be done in the future will be extremely beneficial for developing successful strategies.

Following the weakening of the Ottoman Empire and the occupation of the Azerbaijani khanates by Russia, an independent state could not be established in Azerbaijani territory. However, Azerbaijan was able to establish an independent republic in 1918. Until 1918, more than 70% of the population in present-day Armenia (80% in some regions) consisted of Muslim Azerbaijani Turks. These lands historically belonged to Azerbaijan. The Irevan Khanate, in particular, was a region largely populated by Turkish-Muslims until the Russian invasion of 1826. Unfortunately, massacres and ethnic cleansings began in these regions from 1905 onwards.

In March 1918, a major genocide was committed not only in Northern Azerbaijan (within the borders of the present-day Republic of Azerbaijan), but also in Southern Azerbaijan, within the borders of present-day Iran, and in the Azerbaijani territories within the borders of present-day Armenia. Russia's withdrawal from World War I in 1917, along with its surrender of all its weapons to the Dashnak, Hunchakian, and other Armenian terrorist organizations, and the crossing of Armenian troops fighting against the Ottoman Empire into Azerbaijani territory, led to these genocides and massacres. These massacres were partially halted with the declaration of independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan on May 28, 1918. During the same period, with the dissolution of the Transcaucasian Federation, Georgia and Azerbaijan established their own independent states, while Armenian efforts to establish a state also came to the fore. The failure to prevent the establishment of the State of Armenia (then known as the Republic of Ararat) during that period laid the foundation for many problems that persist to this day. The Ottoman Empire, however, supported the Armenians, believing that establishing a republic would solve the problems in the region. Azerbaijani intellectuals similarly harbored the hope that "with the establishment of the State of Armenia, they would no longer be able to maintain their claims over Karabakh or other Azerbaijani lands."

The establishment of the Republic of Ararat neither brought peace to the region nor resolved the problem. On the contrary, the beginning of the tragedy experienced by the West Azerbaijani Turks today dates back to this period. An Armenian state was established in an area of approximately 9,000 square kilometers in and around Yerevan, without any approval or consultation from the West Azerbaijani Turks, and the administration was left entirely to the Armenians. Even then, only a small Armenian population existed in certain regions. Later, under the administration of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and with Armenian support, the territory of present-day Armenia was gradually acquired from Azerbaijani territory. Azerbaijani lands were incorporated into Armenia, and the lands inherited from the ancestors of the West Azerbaijani Turks began to be known as Armenia.

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In 1988, as the USSR began to disintegrate, a third major migration movement took place. The first migration occurred between 1918 and 1920, and the second between 1948 and 1953. These migrations were forced from the lands of present-day Armenia, where West Azerbaijanis lived. The final wave of migration occurred between 1988 and 1991. During this period, the last Azerbaijani Turks, including the village of Nuvadi, were completely expelled from the lands of West Azerbaijan. Thus, not a single Azerbaijani Turk remained within the borders of present-day Armenia. This last wave of migration also coincided with the Karabakh conflict. The First Karabakh War, which began in 1991, limited Azerbaijan's ability to defend the rights of West Azerbaijanis. Azerbaijan focused its full attention on the Karabakh issue. Consequently, the problems of West Azerbaijani Turks were not given sufficient attention between 1991 and 1994.

The USSR administration and the authorities of the Azerbaijan Soviet Republic did not want the West Azerbaijanis expelled from Armenian territory to be settled in Karabakh. Unfortunately, the officials in the administration at the time maintained close ties with the Armenians and were influenced by them. If 250,000-300,000 West Azerbaijani Turks had been settled in Karabakh at that time, the Karabakh conflict today might never have occurred. The presence of such a large population in Karabakh could have prevented Armenians from carrying out massacres or ethnic cleansing there. However, this opportunity was not taken advantage of.

Thus, West Azerbaijani migrants were dispersed throughout Azerbaijan. In this context, they migrated to many other regions, including Ganja, Baku, Shamakhi, Sheki, Lankaran, Barda, and Terter. However, very few West Azerbaijanis were settled in the Karabakh region. The majority of them were displaced to Khojaly. Unfortunately, during the 1992 Khojaly Massacre, these West Azerbaijanis were also massacred, and the survivors were forced to migrate a second time. During that period, no concrete steps were taken to address crucial issues such as keeping West Azerbaijanis united, protecting their rights and legal rights, or granting them international refugee status.

In the Second Karabakh War, Azerbaijan recaptured its historical territories, namely Karabakh and East Zangezur. Following this, a new era began to protect the rights of West Azerbaijanis, and the West Azerbaijan Association was reestablished. The search for a peaceful solution, not war, to achieve the return of West Azerbaijanis continues. Azerbaijan does not desire war in any way. The Baku government desires the peaceful return of West Azerbaijanis to their homeland, their ancestral lands, and their villages, to live there and to continue their lives in peaceful coexistence with existing Armenian citizens.

Azerbaijan has also prepared and presented its own program for coexistence with Armenians. Currently, more than 30,000 Azerbaijani citizens of Armenian origin live peacefully in Azerbaijan in Baku alone. It is expected that Armenia will also display the same humanitarian attitude and tolerance displayed by Azerbaijan. However, not a single Azerbaijani Turk lives in Armenia. Yet, Azerbaijani Turks have historically inhabited entire regions such as Irevan, Gökçe, Basargeçer, Zangezur, Zengibasar, Dede, and Kafan, and have lived in these lands for centuries. Today, it has become imperative to defend the right of West Azerbaijani Turks, the true owners of these lands, to return to their ancestral lands and live there.

Türkiye's political and moral support to Azerbaijan during the Second Karabakh War is invaluable. The Shusha Declaration (June 15, 2021), signed after the war, served as an official and historical document of this solidarity. The historical, spiritual, and cultural unity that already existed between the peoples of Türkiye and Azerbaijan was cemented by the Shusha Declaration. This declaration is an extremely valuable and strategic document. This document has guided Türkiye and Azerbaijan not only as allies but also as a single state. The "Two States, One Nation" mentality has begun to transform into a true "One Nation, One State" alliance. Therefore, Türkiye's support is needed to protect the rights of West Azerbaijani Turks, and Türkiye is providing the necessary support. Unlike Turkish intellectuals and academics, the public is not sufficiently informed about West Azerbaijan.

Conclusion

West Azerbaijan does not only refer to West Azerbaijanis living in Azerbaijan. There are also thousands of West Azerbaijanis who were displaced from present-day Armenia and settled in Türkiye between 1918 and 1920, during the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Today, many West Azerbaijanis live in provinces such as Kars, Iğdır, Erzurum, and Erzincan in Türkiye. They also have the right to return to the lands inherited from their ancestors and live there.

West Azerbaijanis living in Türkiye must also do their part to demonstrate unity under the umbrella of the West Azerbaijan Association and to make their demands on this issue more clearly known to the world. At the same time, the international community must also support the West Azerbaijani Turks. The West Azerbaijan Association currently organizes conferences around the world and works to strengthen ties between West Azerbaijanis living in various countries and the Azerbaijani diaspora. In the scientific field, it is crucial for universities to conduct academic studies to defend the rights of West Azerbaijani Turks. There has never

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been an Armenian state in Karabakh or the territory of present-day Armenia throughout history. However, Armenia occupied not only Karabakh but also seven surrounding provinces. Azerbaijan, however, succeeded in reclaiming its own lands from occupation during the Second Karabakh War. At this point, West Azerbaijanis have united as one fist under the umbrella of the West Azerbaijan Association. However, to convince Armenians and the Armenian state, it is essential for the leadership and officials of the West Azerbaijan Association to meet with the officials of the Republic of Armenia.

President of Azerbaijan, Mr. Ilhan Aliyev, has repeatedly called for this. West Azerbaijanis must be accepted in Armenia by Armenian political leadership. For West Azerbaijanis to return to their ancestral lands, the Armenian state must establish a will and facilitate this process. Armenia must provide assurances that will ensure the peaceful coexistence of West Azerbaijanis. If the peoples of the Caucasus are to live in peace, the return of West Azerbaijanis to their ancestral lands is inevitable. If this is achieved, a lasting peace can be achieved not only in Karabakh but throughout the entire Caucasus region. Following the signing of the peace agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia, the Armenian side is expected to take the necessary steps to restore the rights of West Azerbaijanis. The Azerbaijani side is doing its part in this regard. It is desired that the West Azerbaijanis return to their ancestral lands without war, without problems, and for a lasting peace.

About the Author

Dr. Nagif HAMZAYEV - Member of the National Assembly of Azerbaijan

Dr. Nagif Hamzayev, a Member of Parliament from the New Azerbaijan Party in Ganja, the National Assembly of the Republic of Azerbaijan, was born on May 24, 1983, in the village of Narimanlı, Basarkehcher region, Armenia. He earned a bachelor's degree from the Faculty of History at Baku State University and a master's degree in Near and Middle Eastern History. He also completed a master's degree in Chinese Politics at Renmin University of China and a doctorate at the Institute of Social Sciences at Firat University in Türkiye. He holds a doctorate in history and is the author of two books. He is also a founder of the public association "World Azerbaijanis."

He completed his military service between 2007 and 2008. In 2009, he worked as a lecturer at Azerbaijan State Agricultural University, a specialist in the Department of International Relations, and director of the Information and Communication Technologies Center. In 2012, he became Head of the Innovation Department at the Center for Information Technologies and International Relations. He served as Deputy Chairman of the Executive Board for the Kapaz region of Ganja city between 2013 and 2014, and became First Deputy Chairman of the Executive Board for Ganja city in 2015. He served as Chairman of the Ganja city branch of the New Azerbaijan Party between 2013 and 2022. Since 2022, he has been continuing his academic activities at the Faculty of History at Baku State University and the Faculty of International Relations at Azerbaijan University of Languages.

He is a member of the Inspection Commission of the New Azerbaijan Party. He served as a Member of Parliament in the 5th and 6th terms of the National Assembly of the Republic of Azerbaijan and is currently a Member of Parliament in the 7th term. He is a member of the Human Rights Committee, the Natural Resources, Energy and Ecology Committee, and the National Assembly Census Commission. He is also the Chairman of the Azerbaijan-South Africa Parliamentary Working Group and a member of parliamentary working groups on relations with Chile, China, Ethiopia, Italy, Korea, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Poland, Türkiye, and Venezuela. Dr. Hamzayev served as a member of Azerbaijan's delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) from 2015 to 2020 and as a member of the Inter-Parliamentary Union from 2020 to 2024. He also continues his work as a member of Azerbaijan's delegation to the Asian Parliamentary Assembly. Dr. Hamzayev, who

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Throughout history, shaping the perceptions of societies has been one of the most fundamental elements of domestic and foreign policy. As the nation-state structure became widespread and nation-states emerged as the main actors in international relations, public diplomacy along with traditional diplomacy began to play a crucial role in shaping these relations.

Diplomatic relations between states are conducted by diplomats, including ambassadors and consuls. These diplomats also engage in public diplomacy, which serves a vital function in interstate relations. Public diplomacy activities have a significant impact not only on the citizens of a state but also on its leaders. Public diplomacy plays a pivotal role in shaping the relations between states alongside other diplomatic activities.

The aim of the project Public Diplomacy in Foreign Policy conducted in collaboration with Cappadocia University and Ankara Center for Crisis and Political Studies (ANKASAM) is to discuss the principles for implementing public diplomacy, identify key activities and highlight public diplomacy efforts undertaken by foreign diplomats in Türkiye. The ultimate goal is to contribute to shaping Turkish Foreign Policy and influencing decision-making processes.

For detailed information about the project;
<https://commonhorizon.kapadokya.edu.tr/> You can reach us from the address.

Prof. Dr. Şafak OĞUZ

Prof. Dr. Şafak OĞUZ became an Associate Professor in 2019 and a full Professor in 2024. He retired in 2021 after 23 years of service in the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF). During his time there, he also worked for the United Nations (UN) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). His expertise lies in Weapons of Mass Destruction, Terrorism (WMD), International Security, International Organizations and Peace and Conflict Studies. Prof. Dr. Şafak OĞUZ currently serves as the Acting Dean of the Faculty of Economics, Administrative and Social Sciences at Cappadocia University. He is fluent in English and German.

Prof. Dr. Mehmet Seyfettin EROL

Prof. Dr. Mehmet Seyfettin EROL graduated from the Department of Political Science and International Relations at Boğaziçi University (BU) in 1993. After completing his Master's Degree at BU in 1995, he was accepted to the PhD program at BU in the same year. After completing his PhD at Ankara University in 2005, Prof. Erol became an Associate Professor in 2009 in the field of "International Relations" and a full Professor in 2014. His areas of expertise are "Geopolitics", "Crisis Management", "Security", "Turkish Foreign Policy" and "Central Asia".

Prof. Erol has published numerous scientific articles and books on these subjects. He is the author and editor of various journals such as Eurasia File, Black Sea Studies, Gazi Akademik Overview, Journal of Regional Studies, International Crisis and Political Studies and contributor for national radio-television programs such as TRT, A HABER, TV NET, CNN TÜRK and HABERTÜRK.

Prof. Erol, whose opinions have been published in Turkey's leading magazines and newspapers has been deemed worthy of many awards, including Writers and Artists Foundation of the Turkic World (TÜRKSAY) in 2007, "Turkish World Service Award" in 2015 and Writers' Union of Turkey (TYB) "Press-Intellectual Award".

Prof. Erol has lectured at Ufuk, Ankara and Gazi Universities. As a faculty member in the Department of Relations at the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences at Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli University, he served as an expert, coordinator and founder president in Türkiye's leading think tanks (ASAM, SDE, GSAM, USGAM). He has been the founding chairman of Ankara Crisis and Politics Research Center (ANKASAM) since 2016.