

Anti – Armenian propaganda and hate dissemination carried out by Azerbaijan as a serious obstacle to the negotiation process

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I

Anti-Armenian propaganda and hate dissemination as a violation of international obligations assumed by Azerbaijan and national legislation of the country

In contradiction to the spirit of the Minsk Group negotiation process as well as contrary to basic international documents such as UN Charter and CSCE/OSCE Helsinki Final Act, the Azerbaijani Government for many years has been developing and implementing large-scale propaganda campaign, disseminating racial hatred and prejudice against Armenians. Such behaviour of the Azerbaijani authorities creates a serious threat to regional peace and stability.

This is evidenced by the fact that Azerbaijani officials were using every opportunity to remind about growing military budget of their country. War propaganda by Azerbaijan is voiced at various levels, including explicit calls of high level officials for a military aggression against the people of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Such actions of Azerbaijani authorities have international – legal consequences and are considered as violation by Azerbaijan of its obligations assumed under international instruments, including main provisions of the UN, OSCE and Council of Europe basic documents prohibiting war propaganda and aggression. In particular, in accordance with the UN Charter and the Declaration on Principles of International Law “a war of aggression constitutes a crime against the peace, for which there is responsibility under international law. In accordance with the purposes and principles of the United Nations, States have the duty to refrain from propaganda for wars of aggression”.

At the same time Azerbaijan fails to implement its national legislation. The militaristic statements of Azerbaijani officials can be qualified by Azerbaijan’s national law as “solicitation to commitment of genocide” (Article 104 of the Criminal Code of Azerbaijan) and “public appeals to implementation of aggressive war” (Article 101 of the Criminal Code of Azerbaijan) and “public appeals to implementation of aggressive war” (Article 101 of the Criminal Code of Azerbaijan).¹

In other words, these are criminally punishable acts to which state should react irrespective to whoever the victim is. Therefore, in the case of Azerbaijani leadership we deal not only with the threat of force from the state, but with the state terrorism as ideologies and practice of intimidation.

¹ Article 101 – Public appeals to implementation of aggressive war
101.1 – Public appeals to implementation of aggressive war – shall be punished by restriction of freedom for the term up to three years or imprisonment on the same term.
Article 104 – Solicitation to commitment of genocide
Direct and obvious solicitation to commitment of any acts provided by article 103 of the present code (article 103- genocide) shall be punished by imprisonment for the term from five up to ten years.

II

The main directions of Anti-Armenian propaganda

Azerbaijan disseminates anti-Armenian propaganda through all possible means – abusing its human and financial resources. The civil society is largely executing Government’s political orders and commands by directly engaging into anti-Armenian propaganda, while the Azerbaijani state distributes special grants for so-called “dissemination of truth about Azerbaijan” and other related activities. Government of Azerbaijan also actively uses academic circles, which have launched systematic work on distortion and re-writing of historic facts. Last but not least, at the instigation of the Azerbaijani Government, spiritual leaders of Azerbaijan are also involved in anti-Armenian campaign, despite that under their status they should reconcile, not breed strife.

In the meantime, additional concerns are raised by the fact that the Azerbaijani authorities made it clear that they are not going to change their above-mentioned approaches, on the contrary – the anti-Armenian propaganda is becoming more and more the essential part of Azerbaijan’s official policy as it has been declared by President Aliyev on 14 April 2008 during his speech before the Cabinet of Ministers.

It is a commonly known fact that crimes against humanity – such as genocide and ethnic cleansing – are often accompanied or preceded by dissemination and propaganda of intolerance and hatred spread through the mass media. “Such forms of expression may have a greater and more damaging impact when disseminated through the media, and believing that the need to combat such forms of expression is even more urgent in situations of tension and in times of war and other forms of armed conflicts” (The Council of Europe recommendation No. R (97) 20 of the Committee of Ministers to member States).

Currently, Azerbaijan’s anti – Armenian propaganda extends to the following main directions:

- the formation of the image of Armenians as enemy and aggressor, and self-assuring the right of Azerbaijan towards Armenian territories;
- deliberate policy on distortion of the fact of the Armenian Genocide in the Ottoman Empire. To this end, the Azerbaijani authorities invented the idea to declare their own people as “victims of genocide”, and with this in mind President Heidar Aliyev signed in 1998 a Decree “On genocide of Azerbaijanis”. This document, which is full of false accusations, not supported by any reliable sources, credible research or even a single historical document, had another purpose as well, namely to render support in a form of diversion to Azerbaijan’s ethnically kin Turkey in the latter’s attempt to deny the Armenian Genocide;
- to create enmity between Armenians and Jews; in this regard efforts are made to prove the “anti-Semitic nature” of Armenians;
- searching for Armenian traces and blaming Armenians for virtually all internal failures of Azerbaijan;
- resonating to every single negative event in Armenia, in particular when the question is under the attention of the international community.

One cannot but draw parallels with the largely similar anti-Jewish hysteria in the Third Reich in the 1930s and early 1940s, where all the above-mentioned elements of explicit racial hatred were also evident.

III

Response by international organizations to Azerbaijan's actions

On a background of all these events, Azerbaijan has begun real witch-hunt in relation to persons of Armenian origin. With regard to this behaviour of Azerbaijan, deep concern has been expressed by well-known human rights organizations and first of all by watchdogs monitoring the implementation by Azerbaijan of its obligations assumed in the field of human rights.

In ECRI's second report on Azerbaijan which was made public in May 2007, the Commission among various forms of discrimination against Armenians in para.110 indicates: "Another problem is the oral and written inflammatory speech on the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. These statements do not only target Armenia and Armenian citizens. It also portrays Armenians living in Azerbaijan as enemies and traitors. ECRI is concerned to learn that some media, and particularly certain TV channels, some members of the general public, some politicians and even some authorities at local and national levels apparently fuel negative feelings among society towards Armenians in general, and ethnic Armenians living on Azerbaijani territory in particular. At present, ECRI notes that no steps have been taken to use the relevant criminal law provisions to prohibit material inciting to racial hatred against Armenians. As already described in ECRI's first report, the mere attribution of Armenian ethnic origin to an ethnic Azerbaijani may be perceived as an insult. Thus, there have continued to be trials for slander and insult opened by public figures against persons who had publicly and falsely alleged their Armenian ancestry".

Further in its recommendation in para.114 and 115 ECRI "strongly recommends that the Azerbaijani authorities contribute more actively to generating a climate where Armenians do not feel threatened when exposing their identity publicly. ECRI once more urges the Azerbaijani authorities to ensure an adequate response to all instances of discrimination and hate-speech against Armenians, including through the use of the relevant legal provisions".

CoE Commissioner for Human Rights in the report on his visit to Azerbaijan on 3-7 September 2007 stated that "Armenians should not have to live in an atmosphere of fear. The authorities should raise awareness campaigns to avoid social prejudice against Armenians. They should provide proper training for law enforcement agents to avoid any tendency towards discriminatory conduct".

Azerbaijan's anti-Armenian policies also manifested themselves in the form of vandalism against Armenian cultural monuments and cemeteries in the lands historically inhabited by Armenians, as well as against Armenian Genocide memorials throughout the world. The most horrific case was the ruthless destruction of the famous medieval cemetery of ancient Armenian town of Julfa in the present-day Autonomous Republic of Nakhichevan (Azerbaijan), which was started by Aliyev-father and finalized by Aliyev-son. In 2005, the Azerbaijani soldiers by the direct command of the Government in Baku and in blatant violation of internationally assumed obligations demolished the medieval cemetery of Julfa. Thousands of Armenian medieval cross-stones (khachkars), each one of them being unique, were demolished by the Azerbaijani Army in a deliberate attempt to erase Armenian traces and memories from this sacred Armenian historical site.

IV

Consequences of hate dissemination

Such long hate propaganda will surely leave destructive consequences. In the past, such hate

propaganda resulted in the brutal slaughter of Gurgun Margaryan, an Armenian officer attending NATO's Partnership-for-Peace program in Budapest. He was hacked to death while asleep with an axe by a fellow participant from Azerbaijan Ramil Safarov. Apparently, the reaction to this cold-blooded hate-motivated racist murder in Azerbaijan was even more shocking as the murderer was venerated as a "hero" in the Azerbaijani society.²

Anti-Armenian racial hatred in Azerbaijan also affected sport. On November 9, 2007, while commenting his attitude towards Armenian chess players, Azerbaijani chess player Teymur Rajabov in interview to APAsport said:"The enemy is the enemy. We hate Armenians". No reaction was followed on the part of the Azerbaijani Chess Association, the Government of Azerbaijan or the Azerbaijani public.

While further escalating anti-Armenian hatred and hysteria, the Azerbaijani authorities refused to allow Armenian soccer players to travel to Baku for the qualifying matches between Armenia and Azerbaijan, despite the fact that their Armenian colleagues stated their readiness to secure Azerbaijani team's visit to Yerevan. As a result, the Union of European Football Association (UEFA) has ruled that the qualifying matches between Armenia and Azerbaijan for the Euro 2008 soccer championship will not take place, which in itself means yielding to Azerbaijan's attempt to mix politics and sports.

The other regrettable "achievement" of hate dissemination by Azerbaijan is the fact that for a long time Azerbaijani authorities stopped and prohibited any contacts with Armenians, including those between civil society and representatives of non-governmental organizations. This effectively shuts the last few remaining bridges between ordinary Azerbaijanis and Armenians, thus making the much-desired reconciliation between two our peoples even bleaker.

² Elmira Suleymanova, the Ombudsman of Azerbaijan, stated:"R.Safarov must become an example of patriotism for the Azerbaijani youth". (Source:"Zerkalo", 28 February, 2004).Agshin Mehdiyev, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to the Council of Europe stated that he "does not advise Armenians to sleep safety until Karabakh conflict is settled. Incidents like in Budapest cannot be ruled out". (Source:Zerkalo, 23 February, 2004).An Azerbaijani businessman Nadir Aliyev established a special fund for Safarov.Siyavush Novruzov, ruling "Yeni Azerbaijan"party:"If the conflict is not solved in the near future, then the incidents similar to the one happened in Budapest may happen everywhere where there are Armenians and Azerbaijanis, including the Council of Europe". (Source:"Zerkalo", 27 February, 2004).The young members of the Azerbaijani terrorist "Organization for Liberation of Karabakh" marched in the downtown Baku holding banners with the words "Well done Ramil".Over 50 Azerbaijani government-sponsored NGO's organized a "Committee for the Defense of Ramil Safarov". One of the members of this committee unfortunately suggested to name new-born babies after him.