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# Azerbaijan : Non-free country 'peace and war', with peoples

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Interview with Hayk Kotanjyan

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REGNUM publishes an interview with the head of the Armenian Defense Ministry Institute for National Strategic Studies, Armenian Defense Minister's councilor, Maj.-Gen. Hayk Kotanjyan. It has been agreed to have a more free exchange of opinions, he speaks as an independent expert with highest Russian and US scientific qualification in conflict ethnopolitology and national security political theory.

REGNUM: Dr. Kotanjyan, how could you assess President Aliyev's position regarding the Karabakh settlement?

For the security of Armenia and South Caucasian area, one of the key problems is the one of settling the Karabakh conflict with political democratic means. While analyzing positions of the current Azerbaijani leadership and first of all President Aliyev regarding the Karabakh issue, one must take into account international assessment of the level of democracy in the nation led by him. An overall assessment of the anti-democratic nature of the Aliyev regime is given by the trustworthy US institution, Freedom House; according to its latest report, today's Azerbaijan is 'not a free country.' Evidently, the democratization process does not go on smoothly in its neighbors, here, in Armenia as well as in Georgia, however, the Freedom House considers the countries, despite the 'not free' Azerbaijan, as 'partially free.'

As our Western colleagues note, the Azerbaijani leader's position is anti-democratic in its core. This is, first of all, shown in the anti-democratic inheritance and maintenance of the oppressive rule as well as in Aliyev Jr. totally imposing the Asian-style cult of his father to the people of Azerbaijan. As for the Karabakh settlement, position of the Azerbaijani president reflects the colonialist essence of the anti-democratic attitude of Baku regime towards rights and freedoms of both the Nagorno Karabakh people and his own population, particularly, ethnic minorities. In this context, Baku's refusal to fulfill its commitment to adopt the law 'On national minorities' undertaken while Azerbaijan was joining the Council of Europe is symptomatic.

REGNUM: How is President Aliyev's anti-democratism showing itself in the Karabakh settlement?

President Aliyev's anti-democratism in the Karabakh settlement is seen in the following:

- first of all, in denying the fact of legal democratic suspension of the administrative and hierarchic relations between Nagorno Karabakh and Azerbaijan as parts of the disintegrated USSR. The matter concerns denial of the political and the juridical fact of actualizing the right of the Nagorno Karabakh people for self-determination through a referendum held in Nagorno Karabakh in 1991, while the USSR law 'On procedure of settling issues related to withdrawal of a Soviet republic from the USSR' before the Alma-Ata Declaration on official announcement on suspension of functioning of USSR governmental agencies. It is worth mentioning that a possibility of free expression of the Nagorno Karabakh people's will via an additional referendum on democratic self-determination as a face-saving compromise for the

Azerbaijani authorities, despite legitimacy of the 1991 referendum, under recommendation of the Minsk Group co-chairs was considered at hearing of the Armenian National Assembly as early as in 2005;

- second, in not recognizing the fact of Azerbaijani aggression undertaken against the Nagorno Karabakh Republic in 1991 after the NKR was established by appropriate instruments of direct democracy as a consequence of Baku authorities' denial of legitimacy of establishing two states in the territory of the Azerbaijani SSR during the collapse of the USSR;

- third, in violating fundamental UN principles: global interdependency, progress and democracy in relations with other nations based on the assumption that lasting peace is a premise and democracy is priority condition for secure and sustainable of nations and the region in general. Ignoring those principles, Aliyev has unleashed an arms race and continually calls and mobilizes his population for forceful returning of Karabakh. In connection with reiterated revanchist calls by President Aliyev, the international community is witness to undisclosed political, military and moral psychological preparation of the Azerbaijani Republic to a war against the Republic of Armenia and the Nagorno Karabakh Republic;

- fourth, in blocking and distorting under governmental guidance of true information regarding indigenes of Azerbaijan accompanied by falsification of the history of the Armenian people and other peoples in Eastern Transcaucasia in order to ground territorial claims of the Aliyev regime for Artsakh and justify rehearsal of the Azerbaijani aggression against the legitimately self-determined Karabakh Armenians.

REGNUM: You used to speak about antidemocratic nature of Aliyev's regime towards ethnic minorities in Azerbaijan. What is the gist of it?

The anti-democratic nature of the Aliyev regime is shown not towards the Nagorno Karabakh Republic, but at the domestic level as well. The ethnic consciousness that appeared by some elites of Azerbaijan's indigenous population after the collapse of the Soviet Union has been trying to find an answer to the really life-determining question: shall they follow the way of full Turkization or promote democracy in order to establish a mechanism of federative cooperation between all nation-building ethnic groups in control over Azerbaijani resources preserving the ethnic and civilization diversity brought through thousands years?

Forceful blocking of rights of ethnic minorities in Azerbaijan makes their ethnic nationalism liberated from the Soviet ideological taboos putting on the mask of imposed from above tribal and regional forms of the clannish inlay. In reality, under the disguise of regional clans that preserved rudiments of Central-Asian `Zhuz-style' control over territories of nomads' camps traditional for Turk tribal organization, there are transformed manifestations of ethno-nationalism by indigenous peoples of Azerbaijan more advanced in terms of their civilization level. (The Zhuzes are tribal regional clans of Central-Asian steppe Turks that continue to promote their clans by tribal principle and privately influencing the system of state control over ethnic resources. There are `minor,' `medium,' and `senior' Zhuzes in Kazakhstan - REGNUM).

The matter concerns ethno-national communities of indigenous bilinguals, who being deprived of a democratic choice in using another language in public activity apart from the Azerbaijani-Turk one, in family communication, most often remaining discreet, use types of Persian (Talysh, Tat or Mountain Jews

languages) as well as Caucasian languages (Lezgin, Avar, Tsakhur, Udin, Ingiloy, Kryz, Budug, Khynalyg languages) and others. Such situation is typical even for bilingual Kurds.

A symptomatic example of the Aliyev regime non-democracy towards collective rights of ethnic minorities that declared independence after collapse of the Soviet Union was routing of Talysh Mugan Autonomous Republic within Azerbaijan in 1993 by Heydar Aliyev with arresting its leader Alikram Gummatov and his ethno-political companions.

REGNUM: How would you assess freedom of ethnic and political self-determination at personal level in the context of the Freedom House report?

Aliyev regime's anti-democratic nature towards non-Turk peoples of Azerbaijan is shown in restricting their free ethnic self-expression not only at the level of collective but of individual rights for free democratic self-determination. The subject is quite sensitive because of the policy established as early as in the Soviet-time Azerbaijan of Turkization of numerous ethnic minorities and absorbing their leaders in the Azerbaijani-Turk elites. The policy has taken a more complicated shape with nomination of KGB head Heydar Aliyev to the post of the leader of the Azerbaijani Communist Party in 1969. It was under his rule, when children from a Talysh father and a Talysh mother were registered as Azerbaijanis. The same thing happened to many Tat, Lezgin, Avar and Mountain-Jews families.

The purposeful policy towards Turkization of indigenous people of Eastern Transcaucasia while involving them into the history of Turks, who came to South Caucasus, under the disguise of the proletarian internationalism imitated for the Kremlin turned into ethnic policy of the Azerbaijani Communist Party Central Committee. It was carried out, first of all, by secret preferences in social and professional promotion of Tat, Talysh, Lezgin, Avar, Kurd aboriginals, who publicly gave up identification of their true ethnic origin. Quite often, apart from Turks members of the ethnic minorities, who got into the elites, also participated in managing this process. By their own example of using preferences, successful careers and wealth as a reward for their renegade hyper-nationalism showed and are showing profit of Azerbaijanization-Turkization to their not yet Turkized compatriots.

REGNUM: Could you provide examples for your opinion?

The means of voluntary-coercive rejection of their ethnic identity of their parents under discreet pressure of the nation-building ethnic group in Azerbaijan can with some reservations be compared to the mechanism of personal voluntary-coercive ethno-confessional self-determination of proponents of other religions and ethnic groups 'denme' that was active in the Ottoman Turkey (under 'denme' they in Turkey meant first of all the process of Jews converting from Judaism to Islam - REGNUM). The mechanism secured returning of a 'wayword' among proponents of other religions and ethnic groups to the 'true roots' - Islam and the Ummah - under encouraging surveillance of the state. It is worth mentioning, the confessional aspect instead of the ethno-political one in converting a proponent of another religion. Further, following secularization of Turkey, the mechanism of 'denme' also secularized.

According to a number of sources, the well-known founder of the new Turkey Kemal Ataturk is listed among eminent Turks-"denme." His canonized political biography describes his ancestors as Muslim Turks from the Greek part of Macedonia, however, one of proofs of his true ethnic and religious identity is still in the Greek territory. In the territory of a former ghetto in

Thessaloniki, the house of his parents is still there, which means that Ataturk was born in that community.

There a lot of persons of Kurd, Talysh, Tat, Lezgin, Avar, Jewish origin among Azerbaijani leaders, particularly, in the military, political, financial and economic, religious, scientific elites, who self-identified them as Azerbaijani Turks under the `denme' principal modified in the Azerbaijani way. Azerbaijani leaders, self-identified as Azerbaijani Turks, included a man, who was remembered by people of his generation as a son of Kurd parents from the village of Jomartly, Sisian District, Armenian SSR. Political manipulations between the presidential elections in Azerbaijan by this very fact were a cause of scandalous reports in Baku press in 1998, including the ones co-authored by former president Abulfaz Elchibey. The scandal was put to an end by an action at law against unmaskers of the true ethnic identity of Heydar Aliyev.

Former Azerbaijani leaders Mirdzhafar Bagirov, Ayaz Mutalibov are also known as `denme' from ethnic Tats. The list of `denme' from the Lezgins constitutes a substantial part of the Azerbaijani military commandment and so on.

REGNUM: From the point of view of moral and ethnic values and democratic principles, how is such ethnic policy reflected in interpreting the history of the Azerbaijani peoples?

As for protection or undermining moral and ethnic values and democratic principles, such ethnic policy in the Azerbaijani society is reflected by the Aliyev regime blocking the human right for access to true information. Falsification and censorship of ethnically relevant information is carried out by the government as both a way of pressing the media and perverted ethnical political interpretation and modification of the scientific history of Azerbaijani peoples, deriving from contemporary time-serving interests of the ruling regime. The problem could become a subject of a separate study for a non-engaged democratically-oriented part of Azerbaijani researchers, who are concerned with the moral and psychological well-being of the Azerbaijani nation and ethnic minorities.

To cut it short, I can say that in some certain instances we have to do with a tradition of political encouragement of falsification of a personal story by leading representatives of ethnic elites, including social researchers, with rejection of inheriting ethnic roots of the close ancestors, their parents: the trend was shaped in depths of the Heydar Aliyev regime. This ethno-political phenomenon of bringing tergiversation to the ranks of Azerbaijan's state policy as early as in the Soviet times psychologically helps creating a morally pathological basis for manipulating historical-cultural identities not only of the parents, but of more distant ancestors as well. In other words, the Azerbaijani state promoting the cynicism of renegades overcoming the ethnic threshold of their parents and ancestors' history lowers the level of moral obligations regarding history if people being far away in time and their ethnic kinship.

A sample of such personifying ethnic pathology is Academician Ziy Buniyatov, who worked on the order of the Communist Party and was not long ago killed in a politicized mafia shootout. Being a son of a Talysh father and a Molokan mother, he demonstratively determined himself as an Azeri Turk. His moral choice towards his ancestors was typical. Being Vice President of the Azerbaijani Academy of Sciences in charge for historical studies, he did not only took effort for fundamental research and making public the hushed-up history of the Talysh people sharing the civilization achievements and fame of the ancient Iran, but encouraged Turkization of the Talysh by his

tergiversation. It was proved by a comparative historical linguistic analysis of Buniyatov's texts that the falsifier founded his research and political career of a courtier history quill driver not only on ignoring the history of Talyshistan, but in cynical distortion of ancient Armenian manuscripts and fraudulent juggling by facts of history of indigenous peoples in East Transcaucasia.

REGNUM: Last year, the Armenian Academy of Sciences, in response to President Aliyev's report, warned about danger of the scientific community becoming engaged in re-writing the history of peoples in East Transcaucasia. What are the dynamics of the process?

As early as last year, the Armenian National Academy of Sciences warned about danger of engaging the scientific community of Azerbaijan to time-serving re-writing of the history of South Caucasus aimed at political serving to interests of the despotic ant-democratic state. The fact of total distortion and oppression of the truthful information in Azerbaijan is reflected in Freedom House assessments as a significant signs of ant-democratic nature of the regime in that not free country.

By the highest standards, the danger is that the distortion personally led by the leader of the country of facts regarding the relations of the Armenian and Azerbaijani peoples is taking the shape of systematic destruction of foundations for mutual trust. Both modern and ancient history of the Armenian people known by publications of respectable global scientific theories are subjected to falsification. Meanwhile, the 'overturers' of the truths that were confirmed long ago in order to undermine trust in any valid sources in the Armenian history accuse in fraud not only modern trustworthy schools, but generations of historians and public figures, who have been working in many countries in the process of thousand-year-long relations with the Armenian people.

>From those very manipulative positions, the Aliyev regime assigns to Armenians crimes against 'the Azerbaijani people' even in the periods, when the Turk ancestors of current Azerbaijanis had not even penetrated into South Caucasus from Central Asia. Those vulgar distortions of the past are run through by manipulation of the concepts of 'Azerbaijan' and 'Azerbaijani' with their anti-scientific usage for the periods that by many centuries forestalled usage relating to Baku and Elisavetpol provinces in the Russian Empire as late as since the beginning of the 20th century. At the same time, juggling with the facts is used for Turk identification of the population known as Turks, or Caucasus Tatars and Indo-European and Caucasian peoples living in East Transcaucasia long before intrusion of the hordes of Turk invaders.

Thus, the Aliyev regime canonizes as the Azerbaijani-Turk the whole generality of results of activity of the thousand-year-long culture and historical activity of Midian, Persian, Armenian, Tat, Talysh, Lezgin, Avar, Udin peoples and others. Aliyev's political order is trying to spoil the centuries-long good neighborhood between Armenians and offspring of their historical neighbors - ethnic minorities of Azerbaijan - via vulgar transfer of today's conflict relations between Armenians and Azerbaijanis.

REGNUM: The Baku propaganda by words of President Aliyev has been trying recently to impose the opinion of Armenians as aliens in East Transcaucasia to the Azerbaijani public. What is the campaign aimed at?

It is true, by being parasitic on the fact of repatriation under results of the 1828 Russian-Persian war of a limited number of Armenians ousted before to Persia by Shakh Abbas, some of Baku researchers are trying to impose upon

the Azerbaijani public the idea that all Armenians are strangers in East Transcaucasia. Lately, the scientifically tailored propaganda is being conducted by President Aliyev. Such despotic violence against the human rights for free access to truthful scientific information is aimed at zombiing the Azerbaijani people by the belief that Artsakh is allegedly a historic homeland of Turks, and Armenians in Karabakh and Armenia are mostly re-settlers or not Armenians at all. Members of Baku, Gyandj and Shemakhin city elites note that the lies is most frequently cultivated by newcomers of the Aliyev establishment, Turks-"raionlu", offspring of nomads that after arriving from remote places are still adapting to the city order in the eyes of our contemporaries.

History quill drivers by falsifying facts under direct order by the Aliyev regime sometimes come up to curious things, announcing that primitive artists of the Gobustan prehistoric age were ancestors of the Azerbaijani Turks. Although either in France or in Spain a none of sober-minded researchers or politicians cannot think of identifying petroglyphs made by a Cro-Magnon man, probable contemporary of a Gobustani primitive artist, as a belonging of the French or Spanish culture.

The origins, including a work of 19th-century historian of the Karabakh Khanate Mirza Adigezal-bek's Karabag-name, demonstrate that nomads from the Turk tribe of Saridjalli led by Panakh penetrated Artsakh in the middle of the 18th century. Those Turks that became settled in Artsakh ruled Karabakh as local vassals governing on behalf of the Persian throne within only 50 years. A gross number of Armenian and foreign-language written documents as well as thousands of historical architectural installations by their symptomatic attributes identified by world science as Armenian are evidence that within thousands years Armenians were true masters of Artsakh that covers, apart from Nagorno Karabakh, the territories that are now included into the NKR security zone.

Azerbaijani falsifiers that ignore norms of scientific ethics did not dare to call Albanian (which, as they believe, means Azerbaijani-Turk) only Armenian monuments in the so-called Armenian Vatican - the Holy Echmiadzin that date back to start of propagating Christianity in Armenia and Artsakh as well by Apostles Bartholomew, Thaddeus and his follower Eglise in the 1st century A.D. Deriving from this, the Cristian community unanimously recognizes the Armenian Church as one of few apostolic churches in the world. An evidence of this recognition is the fact that relics of the Holy Apostles Enlighteners were granted by the Vatican to the Holy Echmiadzin throne. However, under Aliyev's order, politicians in science serving to revanchism and territorial claims of the undemocratic regime started denying this oracle.

REGNUM: What is the situation in Azerbaijan with falsifications in the modern history?

Attempts of political 'counterpoising' of the 20th-century genocide crimes against the Armenian population and non-existent 'genocide against Azerbaijanis' thought out by historians under order of the Aliyev regime can be cited as examples of gross falsification in the modern history of East Transcaucasia. On the basis of those falsifications, under an initiative by Heydar Aliyev, a law on the genocide against the Azerbaijanis was adopted in the Azerbaijani Republic in 1998. Denial of the Armenian Genocide is supplemented by provocative invitation to Armenians to get involved into futile denial of the absurd fabricated by the regime. The tragedy of the Azerbaijani people not having free access to the historical truth is based here on the fact that every spring the Aliyev regime dupes them by engaging them in official commemoration of the genocide that has never taken place. Members of Baku intelligentsia are mocking at this unfair and dangerous way

of consolidating the people. They know that in the beginning of the 20th century, massacre of Armenians took place and their resistance to the massacre, like later it was in response to pogroms of the Armenian population in Sumgait in 1988 and in Baku in 1990.

Together with the pseudo-scientific politicized manipulations by the historical truth, the Aliyev regime does not shun from special propaganda lies of low quality being presented as scientific material. The noisy recent campaign to commemorate victims of the 'genocide' allegedly organized by Armenians against Mountain Jews serves to immoral political tasks of knocking together Armenians and Jews. Aliyev's manipulators brought the blasphemous trampling of the historical truth to such a grade of scoffing when mass graves of Armenians killed by gangs of Caucasus Tatars in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are now presented by the media as 'victims' of the genocidal actions of the Armenians. Their goal is to destroy the centuries-long good neighbor relations between Shirvan Armenians and Mountain Jews hoping to push Israel and Jewish lobby organizations to anti-Armenian positions.

REGNUM: Some experts note that Azerbaijan's information activity has come into the stage of information war. Are there practical grounds for such conclusions?

Unfortunately, it is reality. The Freedom House was certainly negative about the internal aspect of the Baku authorities' information policy. As for the external component of the policy, the Aliyevs clan is engaging the Azerbaijani public into the information war against Armenia. In the range of such works belonging to Baku information war promoted by the Aliyev experts in propaganda under the pretext of protecting human rights, the fact of falsifying authorship of outrage against bodies of victims in the Khodjaly tragedy deserves special attention. Details of this provocation as a dirty tool in the fight for power in Baku were given close in the tracks by Azerbaijani President Ayaz Mutalibov to Czech reporter Dana Mazalova in April 1992. The Armenian side has all evidence that bodies of the victims were in the Azerbaijani authorities' responsibility zone and physical contact of Armenians with the bodies in order to abuse them was impossible.

REGNUM: What prospects of free democratic self-determination do you see for indigenous peoples as autonomous subjects inside Azerbaijan?

The persistent purposeful deformation of ethnic and cultural identity of indigenous peoples in East Transcaucasia by the Aliyev regime taking place now is aimed at monopolizing power due to ethnic homogenization of the population and manipulation by clan mechanisms of the despotic Unitarianism in the long run. Thus, the Baku regime's forceful pressure blocks ethnic and political resources of safe and sustainable development of Azerbaijan not through the despotic way, but through the way of democratic federalization of the governance. Ways of transforming those ethnic resources from oppressed by the regime, Medieval in their essence clan and tribal forms into modern state-building political processes and institutions needs to be thought over by elites of those Azerbaijani peoples.

REGNUM: In case of a hypothetical democratic federalization of Azerbaijan, what indigenous ethnic groups, do you think, could hope for their self-determination in autonomy?

Of course, if we ground upon human rights and freedoms recognized by progressive circles in the international communities, all of them could. However, to resolve such tasks presence of the appropriate democratic political and legal culture, including political freedoms formulated as constitutional or legal acts, as a premise for legitimate expression of their

will is expected to be in a poly-ethnic society. With such reservations, in the process of democratic federalization of Azerbaijan, to my mind, most numerous indigenous peoples could claim for autonomy, ethnic groups that traditionally within thousands of years have been playing a significant role in the fates of East Transcaucasia, first of all, Persian-speaking Tats, Mountain Jews and Talysh people and Caucasian-language Lezgins and Avars.

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