

Western Azerbaijan Community: Why Now and Then What?

Modern states transformed into nation-states at the end of the 18th and early 19th centuries. So, history became national, and belonging somewhere has changed into national. At that time, Iran and Russia signed two peace treaties to end the long-lasting war. Those treaties (Gulustan 1813, Turkmen Chay 1828) divided Azerbaijan into two parts. The northern part of Azerbaijan, including Nakhichevan and Iravan, was ceded to Tsarist Russia. Thus, Azerbaijan started to experience modernity under colonial conditions, and Tsarist Russia brought modern institutions to Azerbaijan. Hence, modern intellectuals of Azerbaijan could not think like Azerbaijanians politically at the beginning of modernization. Because of its colonial background, Azerbaijani intellectuals were subjected to the colonial loyalty policy. For instance, Mirza Fathali Akhundzada is considered the starting point of Azerbaijan's modernization. However, he was not politically Azerbaijani and was the servant of the Tsar.

In the early twentieth century, "small nations" of the Russian Empire got an opportunity for self-determination. Thereby, Azerbaijani leaders of the National Council declared independence on 28 May 1918. Unfortunately, the short-lived republic was occupied by the XXI Red Army, and Azerbaijan lost its independence. However, paradoxically, the developing process of modernization in Azerbaijan happened during Tsarist colonialism, and at the same time, Azerbaijan lost its political sovereignty over the country. During the 20th century, Azerbaijani leaders were suspended from being a part of decision-making processes.

Western Azerbaijan (WA) (Currently the Republic of Armenia) issue is one of them. Azerbaijanis who used to live there were expelled from WA four times (1905, 1918-20, 1948-53, 1988-1991) from their homeland in the last century. After the Second Karabakh

War Western Azerbaijanis started to demand their rights to return to their homeland. Accordingly, they established their community in 2022.

In this sense, the meaningful question is: “Will the western Azerbaijani origin people going to live there where they or their ancestors were expelled?”. First, Azerbaijan is ready to recognize the territorial integrity of Armenia. Furthermore, *Azerbaijan officially declared that Azerbaijan will guarantee the individual rights of Armenian residents in Karabakh and is looking for reciprocity principles for Western Azerbaijanis people who were expelled from their homeland*. Azerbaijan is looking for an appropriate international mechanism for the return of Western Azerbaijanis rather than the implementation of an irredentist nationalist strategy. So, for starting and establishing institutional relations between the two nations, Armenia is supposed to guarantee the safety of hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijanis, who were expelled from Armenia in the twentieth century. Accordingly, Azerbaijan offers an option for the reintegration process of the Armenian residents in Karabakh into Azerbaijani society. An optimum and only option is that ethnic Armenian residents should accept Azerbaijani citizenship. Unlike Armenia, Azerbaijan offer option to Armenian residents of Karabakh/Azerbaijan. As mentioned above, Azerbaijan is ready to cooperate regarding reciprocity principles.

In conclusion, the answer is clear: to assure peace and justice between the two nations. Armenia should be ready for the reciprocity principles regarding the possible return of Azerbaijani residents to Western Azerbaijan (Armenia). Finally, the WA issue should be part of the reintegration process.