THE MIGRATION OF ARMENIANS FROM KARABAKH AND THE CLAIMS OF A NEW 'GENOCIDE'

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This year, as in previous years, Armenians have continued to commemorate April 24 as the anniversary of their "genocide" claims within the framework of their own historical narrative. Türkiye, on the other hand, resolutely opposes these allegations, which in no way align with either the letter or the spirit of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

In the historical process, the Armenian side, which has evaluated conflicts arising from its territorial claims on lands where Armenians lived as a minority as a threat to their very existence and has communicated this situation to the international community through the narrative of "genocide", has recently brought a new allegation to the fore. Within this framework, Karekin II, the Catholicos of Etchmiadzin, has asserted that the Armenians who voluntarily migrated from Karabakh to Armenia following the Second Karabakh War were subjected to "genocide."[1]

The developments on the ground, however, fail to provide concrete data supporting these claims. During both the Second Karabakh War which lasted for 44 days, and the anti-terror operations conducted in Karabakh in September 2023, the Azerbaijani side emphasized its sensitivity toward protecting the Armenian civilian population while issuing official statements to that effect. Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev has also repeatedly stated that the war was directed not against the Armenian people but against armed elements, and that actions were carried out in accordance with international law and moral principles.[2] Conversely, various sources reported that, during the war, Armenia carried out attacks targeting Azerbaijani settlements located far from the frontline,

causing significant damage to civilian infrastructure. Between 27 September and 10 November 2020 alone, 93 Azerbaijani civilians lost their lives and 454 were injured. The presence of 67 children among the wounded further aggravates the civilian dimension of the conflict.[3]

Within this framework, no significant change was observed in the approach adopted by Azerbaijan in the post-war period, and the Azerbaijani administration sustained its commitments regarding the security of the Armenian population in Karabakh. Indeed, during the hearing held on 12 October 2023 within the scope of the case Application of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Armenia v. Azerbaijan) before the International Court of Justice, Azerbaijan once again emphasized that the Armenians of Karabakh were its own citizens and that their rights would be protected on an equal basis with those of all other Azerbaijani citizens.[4]

On the other hand, despite the aforementioned commitments and the applications on the ground, a significant portion of the Armenian population in Karabakh did not accept the opportunities offered by the Azerbaijani administration.[5] Various obstacles were raised against humanitarian aid initiatives and efforts were made to create a perception in the international community that Azerbaijan was depriving the Armenians in the region of access to basic necessities.

Within the framework of this discourse, the majority of the population, who stated that they did not wish to remain in the region and preferred to go to Armenia, left the area safely through the Lachin Corridor, with the exception of a limited group that chose to stay. It is particularly noteworthy that, despite guarantees regarding safety and living conditions, some of the departing groups were observed damaging the settlements they left behind.[6] It should be noted that these settlements are known to have belonged to Azerbaijanis until the 1990s.

The entirety of the developments summarized above has taken place in recent years under the direct observation of the international community and the media. The events experienced throughout this process demonstrate that the departure of the Armenian population from Karabakh was not coerced, but occurred largely in accordance with their own preferences. Indeed, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has also pointed to the voluntary nature of this migration in his various statements.[7] As such, attempts to frame these developments as ethnic cleansing or genocide reveal the construction of a narrative that does not correspond with the observations on the ground.

This situation brings along a broader debate. In recent times, the characterization of a process □□□□□ unfolded in the presence of numerous visual records, witness testimonies, and international observers □□□□ such a grave concept as genocide brings to the fore the question of how credible the claims regarding the 1915 events actually are. In particular, the question of what kind of evidence similar characterizations of different historical events are based upon carries significant importance in terms of international law and historiography. Within this framework, the controversial public interpretation of developments in the context of Karabakh also exerts an indirect effect on the perception of earlier historical claims.

As a matter of fact, numerous events that took place between 1988 and 1994, most notably the Khojaly Massacre committed against Azerbaijani civilians in Karabakh and its surrounding regions, have left deep traces in the regional memory. Despite the continued existence of testimonies and documentation regarding these events, the lack of sufficient consideration given to this history of massacre in contemporary discourse draws criticism that international debates are being conducted through a selective perspective.

In conclusion, the mismatch between the recent developments in Karabakh and the international discourse surrounding them points not only to an ongoing political debate but also to a broader problem regarding the legal and historical application of concepts. Within this framework, a proper evaluation must be based on concrete data on the ground and international legal norms rather than mere discourses.

**Image: The Independent Türkçe*

[1] Спустя столетие после геноцида Арцах был обезлюден новыми геноцидными действиями, May 2, 2026, https://verelq.am/ru/node/172442

[2] Vətən müharibəsi, May 2, 2026, https://president.az/az/pages/view/azerbaijan/karabakh2

[3] 44 gün sürən Vətən Müharibəsi (II Qarabağ müharibəsi), May 2, 2026, https://genprosecutor.gov.az/az/page/azerbaycan/i-ve-ii-qarabag-muharibesi/44-gun-suren-veten-muharibesi-ii-qarabag-muharibesi

[4] Public sitting held on Thursday 12 October 2023, at 4 p.m., at the Peace Palace, May 2, 2026, https://www.icj-cij.org/node/203213

[5] XİN: Azərbaycan Qarabağda yaşayan erməni sakinlərin hüquqlarını ölkə Konstitusiyası əsasında təmin edəcək, 28.04.2026, https://azertag.az/xeber/xin_azerbaycan_qarabagda_yasayan_ermeni_sakinlerin_huquqlarini_olke_kons
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[6] Ethnic Armenian villagers burn houses before Azerbaijan takeover, 28.04.2026, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/11/14/villagers-burn-karabakh-houses-ahead-of-azerbaijan-takeover

[7] Pashinyan calls Nagorno-Karabakh Armenian refugees runaways in argument on metro, 03.05.2026, https://oc-media.org/pashinyan-calls-nagorno-karabakh-armenian-refugees-runaways-in-argument-on-metro/

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